

FRIDAY FREEBIE

KATHY PATERSON

THE
HOW
AND



OF
TEACHING



How-to-Wow Marking

Quick ideas for mastering any
classroom situation effectively, efficiently,
and enthusiastically

Marking Basics

How-to-Wow Marking

- Use the same place, a positive attitude, and a timer.
- Chunk the marking and choose a strategy.
- Skim first.
- Focus (avoid interruptions).
- Set realistic goals for yourself.
- Record both marks and your time goal.

Marking will never go away, but you can make it more time-efficient and yet still effective. Attack marking the same way you teach students to attack homework. Marking and homework are so similar that teachers often refer to their take-home marking as homework. Here are a few tips to keep it as simple as possible.

- *Mark in the same location as much as possible.* Whether it's the kitchen table or a quiet desk somewhere, try to keep the venue the same. Not only does this trick our brains into getting ready, it also helps to establish a positive habit.
- *Set a timer.* This may seem silly but it really works. You need to ask yourself how much time you can spend, right then and there, on marking. Be realistic. If it is more than 30 minutes, set the timer for a 30-minute chunk, then take a five minute break before setting it again. The use of a timer, like the choice of a specific marking spot, trains our brains and bodies, and creates a good habit. Try it. It really works. If at the end of the time period, or several time periods, you are not finished, leave the rest of the marking for another time. When you know you are going to work for just 30 minutes, it's amazing how much you can get done.
- *Assume the marking stance.* Rather than feeling annoyed, grumpy, or even angry that you have to spend a chunk of your precious time marking, think positively! You are fortunate to be able to share the growth of young people. You have an extremely important role in their lives. You are lucky to be the one to give them valuable feedback and direct their lives. Mentally applaud yourself and smile.
- *Avoid interruptions.* Tell others around you not to disturb you. Don't bring a phone or any other device to your marking corner. Put everything on hold for a little while. (Remember, you are only working in 30-minute chunks!)
- *Choose a marking strategy.* If this has not been established ahead of time (e.g., using a rubric), quickly decide how you are going to mark (see pages 132 and 135). Stick to your decision and mark all papers/projects/tests the same way.
- *Be realistic.* Know how much you really can accomplish at one sitting. Pushing yourself past this point doesn't help you or the students, so learn to establish your personal boundaries.
- *Divide and conquer.* Divide the marking into manageable bundles. Use a file system or baskets and divide the papers/projects/tests into bunches. It is easier to attack a small bundle than an enormous pile. This is a sort of brain trick, because eventually you will have to mark the enormous bundle, but attacking it in smaller piles really does make it seem like less work.
- *Do a quick skim:* Start with a quick skim of all or several papers to get a feel for overall class level of performance. This could mean skimming (and then marking) one question at a time, the same question on each paper.
- *Keep a grade book:* Keep a book or spreadsheet specifically for grades and comments, and record as you go, not when all the marking is finished. Keep notes of common errors to return to at a later date.

- *Use points comments:* Consider using a set of comments attached to numerical points. This allows for speedy marking and provides a bit more than just a check or an X. The comments might look like this:

5 – Excellent

4 – Very good

3 – Good but needs some work

2 – Some problems to work on

1 – Some difficulties. Please see me.

Obviously you would not use this system all the time, but for speedy, once-in-a-while marking, it can be effective.

- *Use a Comments Bank:* Find and use a good comments bank. There are many online. My only suggestion is to remember that, even when students' names are entered into the comments bank, it still feels a bit impersonal. You can supplement the bank comments with a short personal comment of your own.