

SECTION IV
Best Practices

The Gallaudet Writer's Handbook: Responding to Student Writing

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Abstract

Postsecondary teachers who teach English to deaf and hard-of-hearing students often find themselves with few applicable teaching tools. Likewise, deaf and hard-of-hearing students can't find reference texts that address the specific problems with written English that they deal with all the time. The *Gallaudet Writer's Handbook* was developed to address this deficiency. The *GWH*, like any college handbook, includes sections on English grammar and usage, common writer's errors and guides to punctuation and documentation. But the *GWH*, unlike other college handbooks, pays special attention to grammatical constructions and matters of English usage that plague deaf and hard-of-hearing writers. The *GWH* can be used as a reference or a teaching text. Its primary purpose is to enable students to become self-correcting writers. The *GWH* is available in hard copy online versions.

The 'Responding to Student Writing Workshop' introduced teachers of deaf and hard-of-hearing postsecondary students to the *Gallaudet Writer's Handbook*. The *Handbook* is a tool for integrating grammar into the writing process and for aiding students of all levels to become self-sufficient writers.

Designed as a usage and rhetoric guide for deaf and hard-of-hearing writers—including those from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds—the *GWH* provides a clear outline of English grammar and easy-to-access charts, tables, and dictionaries which enable students to correct their own writing. In addition, the *GWH* includes expanded sections on grammatical constructions that deaf writers find particularly troublesome such as active/passive voice, articles, and ed/ing. The *GWH* also provides teachers and students with a common grammar vocabulary and system of error identification and correction.

The principles underlying the *GWH* are:

- **Content can't be divorced from its grammar:**

Clear written communication requires organized ideas expressed in standard English.

- **Student writers need to become independent writers:** The responsibility for correct writing must shift from teachers to students.

- **Becoming an independent writer takes time:** When students take responsibility for correcting their own papers, the positive effects are cumulative.

- **No-Nos:** Ignoring grammatical errors gives students a false confidence in their writing. Correcting errors for students keeps them from learning from their mistakes.

- **There are many ways to mark errors on a student paper.** Different instructors with different approaches can use the *GWH* effectively.

The key to the *GWH* is its Correction Chart containing symbols for various grammatical constructions including ones not found in other symbol systems (ed/ing; it/there). Students need to learn to navigate this correction system. In an ideal world, students would simply check or click on the appropriate correction chart symbols and correct all their mistakes. In the real world, students need time to learn the system. The more familiar they become with the *GWH* the more useful they will find it. In the hard copy version the Correction Chart is keyed to page numbers in the book where students can find explanations and examples. In the online version, a student clicks on a particular symbol and links to explanations, examples, and, in some cases, concept exercises.

The *GWH* is available in hard-copy and online versions. The hard-copy version is sold by the Gallaudet Graduate Research Institute at cost. (Contact Russell Perkins, GRI, Gallaudet University, Washington DC 20002). The online version is free, accessible to all, and includes student and teacher tutorials as well as grammar exercises. It is available at <<http://academic.gallaudet.edu/handbook>>. Workshop participants received the hard-copy version.