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Edited by Ken Hyland and Fiona Hyland
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Feedback in Second Language Writing

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This book is for our parents, Barbara, Gwen,
Les, and Mac.
For so many things.

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Series editors' preface

Approaches to second language writing pedagogy have traditionally attributed a primary role to feedback, whether generated by the learner, a peer, a computer, or a teacher and whether occurring through error correction, self-editing, peer feedback, or conferencing. However, as the field of second language writing instruction has changed its focus from skills to process and then to genre, and most recently to sociocultural considerations, issues related to the nature, form, and value of feedback have had to be reexamined. The papers in this book provide the basis for such a reexamination by presenting a variety of research-based perspectives on the status and practice of feedback in second language writing.

Research into the role of feedback in L2 writing reveals that there are no simple answers to questions such as which activities merit feedback, how and when to give feedback, and what the benefits of giving feedback are. These questions are examined from different perspectives in this book, particularly in relation to writing in academic settings. The nature of feedback and revision, the effects of feedback on student writing, strategies for the delivery of feedback, the role of teachers' and learners' beliefs and expectations, as well as the influence of social, cultural, and contextual factors, are shown to be relevant to our understanding. The contributors draw on an extensive body of research to clarify the issues involved in understanding the nature of feedback and to draw implications for the teaching of L2 writing. This book provides a valuable source of information for researchers, teachers, and others interested in the role of feedback in the development of composition skills and confidence for second language students.

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Preface

Providing feedback to students, whether in the form of written commentary, error correction, teacher-student conferencing, or peer discussion, has come to be recognized as one of the ESL writing teacher's most important tasks, offering the kind of individualized attention that is otherwise rarely possible under normal classroom conditions. Teachers are now very conscious of the potential feedback has for helping to create a supportive teaching environment, for conveying and modeling ideas about good writing, for developing the ways students talk about writing, and for mediating the relationship between students' wider cultural and social worlds and their growing familiarity with new literacy practices.

However, despite the major part feedback plays in modern writing classrooms and in the lives of all teachers and learners, book-length treatments of the topic are rare, and much of the research published in journals fails to find its way to teachers. This volume sets out to address these gaps by providing readers with a clear synthesis of theory and practice, highlighting what is conceptually and pedagogically significant and offering a clear picture of the key issues in feedback today. We attempt to bring together theoretical understandings and practical applications of feedback for teachers, researchers, and others working in the fields of second language teaching and literacy studies.

We do this by focusing such key issues through three broad lenses. The first situates feedback in the context of the wider institutional, social, political, and cultural factors which have been found to influence how feedback is received and given. The second looks more closely at the "how" and "what" of feedback – the ways it is shaped through its modes of delivery and its form. The third is concerned with the negotiation of feedback in the relationships between providers and receivers, addressing issues that arise in the social interactions around feedback itself. These three lenses are not meant to imply divisions among context, delivery, and interaction, as it is evident that every act of feedback will involve a complex interaction among all three. They do, however, allow the authors to focus on one or another salient feature of the process and what each means for participants.

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Another important feature of the book is that it takes a broad view of feedback on writing. In the following chapters, distinguished figures in the field of second language writing go beyond discussions of grammar and error correction to look at responses by peers, teachers, computers, and the self; to explore modes such as oral, written, computer-modeled, and electronically mediated feedback; to examine the kinds of commentary given on form, organization, academic conventions, and meaning; to study the preferences students have for different kinds of interaction and commentary; and to analyze the kinds of comments that are given and the issues that teachers consider when framing them. While the book provides no clear-cut, unequivocal answers to many questions raised by the practical use of feedback in second language writing classrooms, it nevertheless poses the most interesting of those questions and shows that there is a vast array of *potential* answers that we might explore.

Finally, we have tried to make the volume as useful to teachers and researchers as possible. Rather than dwell on the abstract benefits of various feedback practices, the authors take care to link research with practice, highlighting what the research tells us about feedback and exploring its relevance for the classroom. The volume goes a long way toward answering questions that researchers and teachers have been asking for some time. These questions include: "What shall I give feedback on?," "How shall I express it?," "What mode should I use?," "How will this affect my relationship to this student?," and "Will this make a difference to students' writing?" Thus, each chapter gives teachers and researchers a clear, complete perspective on current issues that can provide a basis for classroom practice or research into this fascinating and fundamental area.

Ken Hyland and Fiona Hyland

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