Four blue pencils are arranged diagonally on the right side of the image, pointing towards the top right. The pencils have blue painted barrels and natural wood-colored tips. The background is a solid teal color.

Grading grading: Training for consistency, efficiency and effectiveness in marking linguistics writing

Lisa Sullivan, Erin Vearncombe &
Nathan Sanders

CLA 2021

Introduction

- Achieving consistency in grading and providing students with effective feedback are important outcomes of evaluating student work; however limited time and resources can make this difficult
- On-going, practical, discipline-specific training can help TAs achieve efficiency, consistency and effectiveness while also building their confidence in their roles as instructors (Bale & Moran, 2020; Becker et al., 2017; Haque & Meadows, 2020; Rodrigue, 2013; Sandi-Urena & Gatlin, 2013)

Introduction

- We present an approach to training TAs for consistency, efficiency and effectiveness in grading
- We implemented the approach through UofT's Writing-Integrated Teaching (WIT) program in general-interest linguistics courses through a variety of short essay assignments
- We also provide guidelines for how this can be effectively implemented in linguistics courses more generally

Outline

1

What is WIT?

2

Courses &
Assignments

3

TA Training in
WIT Courses

4

Guidelines for
Implementation

Benchmarking

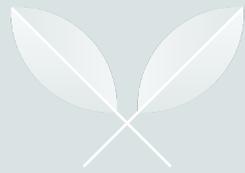
Feedback on
Feedback



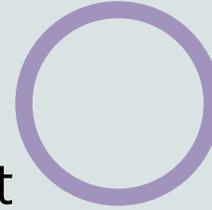
What is WIT?

Writing-Integrated Teaching (WIT) is a Faculty of Arts & Science program that integrates writing instruction into disciplinary courses in collaboration with course instructors and TAs

WIT Team



Department Contact
(Chair, UG Coordinator)



WIT Faculty



Instructors



TAs



Lead
Writing TA
(LWTA)

Students



WIT Goals in Linguistics

01

Help students learn how to write in the humanities/linguistics

02

Integrate more writing into the curriculum in targeted courses

03

Provide additional training & support to TAs in teaching writing instruction

Courses & Students

Structure

- Large general-interest courses intended for non-majors
 - Intro to Language
 - English Words
- 2 hour lecture + 1 hour tutorial each week
- 2+ short writing assignments
- 200-300 students; 8-9 TAs

Students

- Typically, unfamiliar with linguistics and unlikely to pursue it further
- Large variation in academic backgrounds and writing experience
- Student from diverse multilingual contexts

Types of Assignments

2-3 page essay-style
writing assignments

Revision assignment

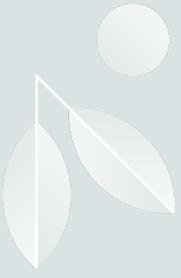
Revise a partial essay on syntactic constituency tests and write a suitable final paragraph

Letter writing assignment

Write a professional letter to a non-specialist audience on a commonly misunderstood linguistic topic (e.g. linguistic diversity)

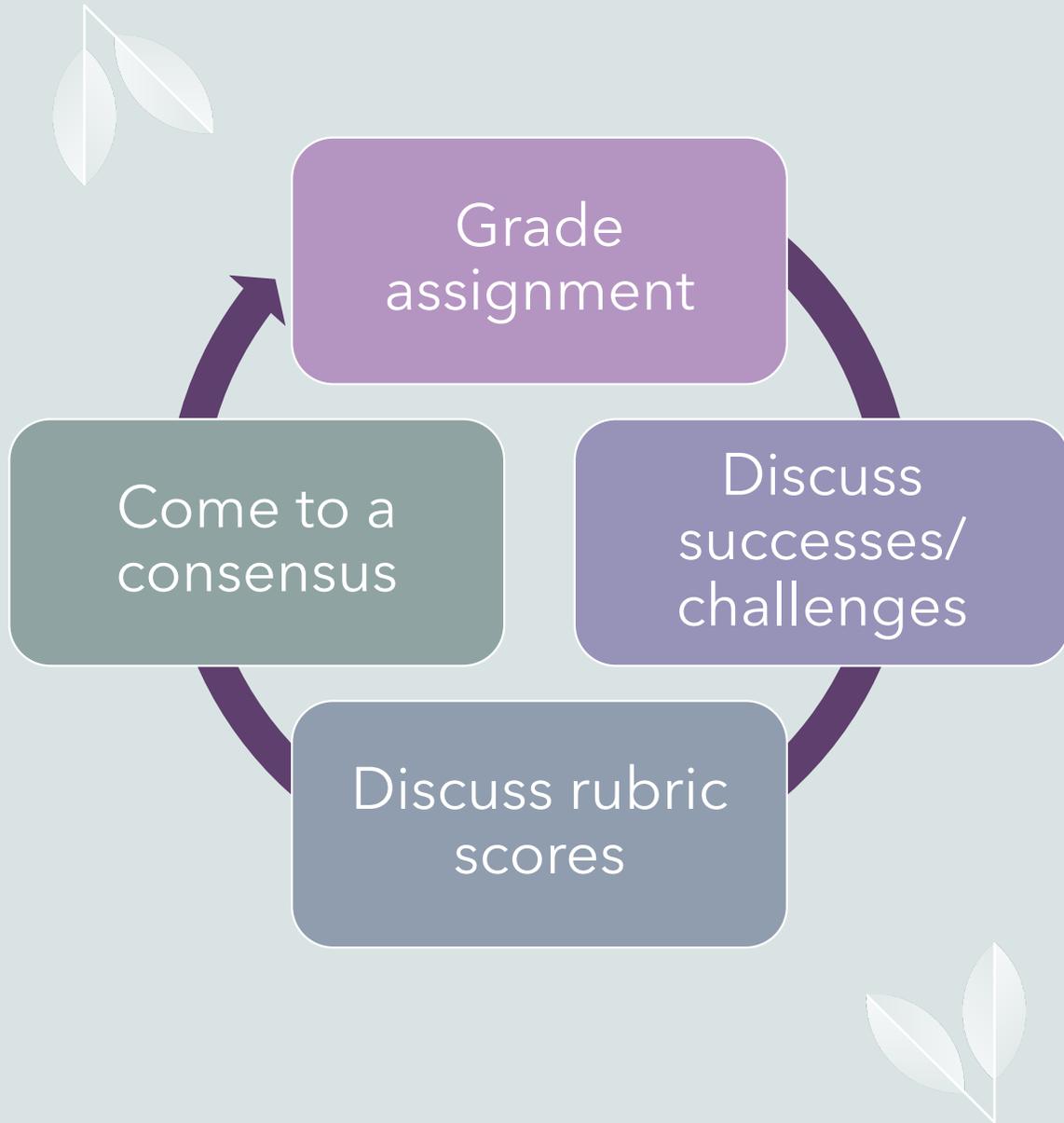
Short essays

Apply knowledge learned in class to a novel problem using academic and other reliable sources



How WIT supports these courses

- TA Training
- Assignment & Rubric Design
- Tutorial Activities
- **Benchmarking**
- **Feedback on Feedback**



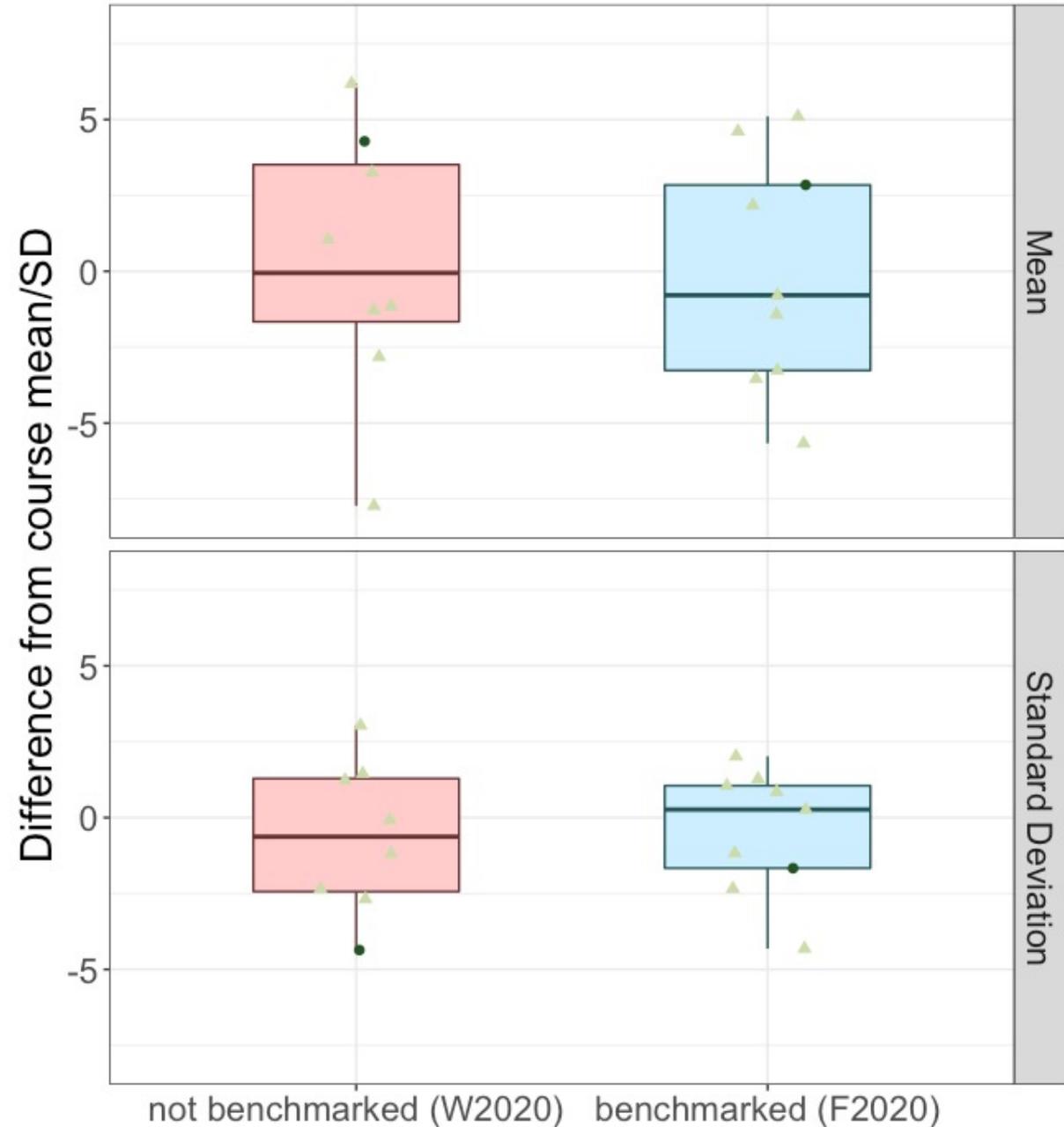
Benchmarking

- Guided graded sessions to clarify rubric/grading scheme and align grading practices
- Focus on C-B grade papers, but the LWTA selects assignments for the session which span the range of grades

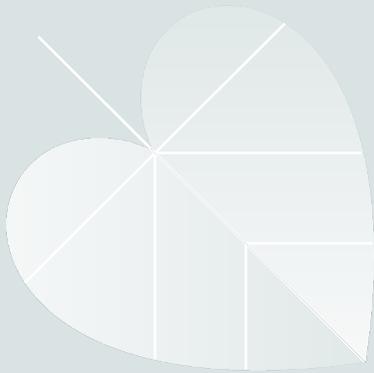
Outcomes

- **Consistency:** Get TAs on the same page as instructor; standardize grading practices
- **Efficiency:** address common grading questions in a group setting (vs individual emails)

Deviation of TA Mean and SD from class Mean and SD



Feedback on Feedback



- Individual feedback to improve TAs' comments on student work
- LWTA provides feedback on 3 assignments

High Grade (B+ to A+)

Mid Grade (C to B)

Low Grade (F to C-)

- Written Comments + Rubric Scores

Feedback on Feedback Template

(Based on materials
developed by Julie
Doner & Sam Athey)

An assignment with a low grade

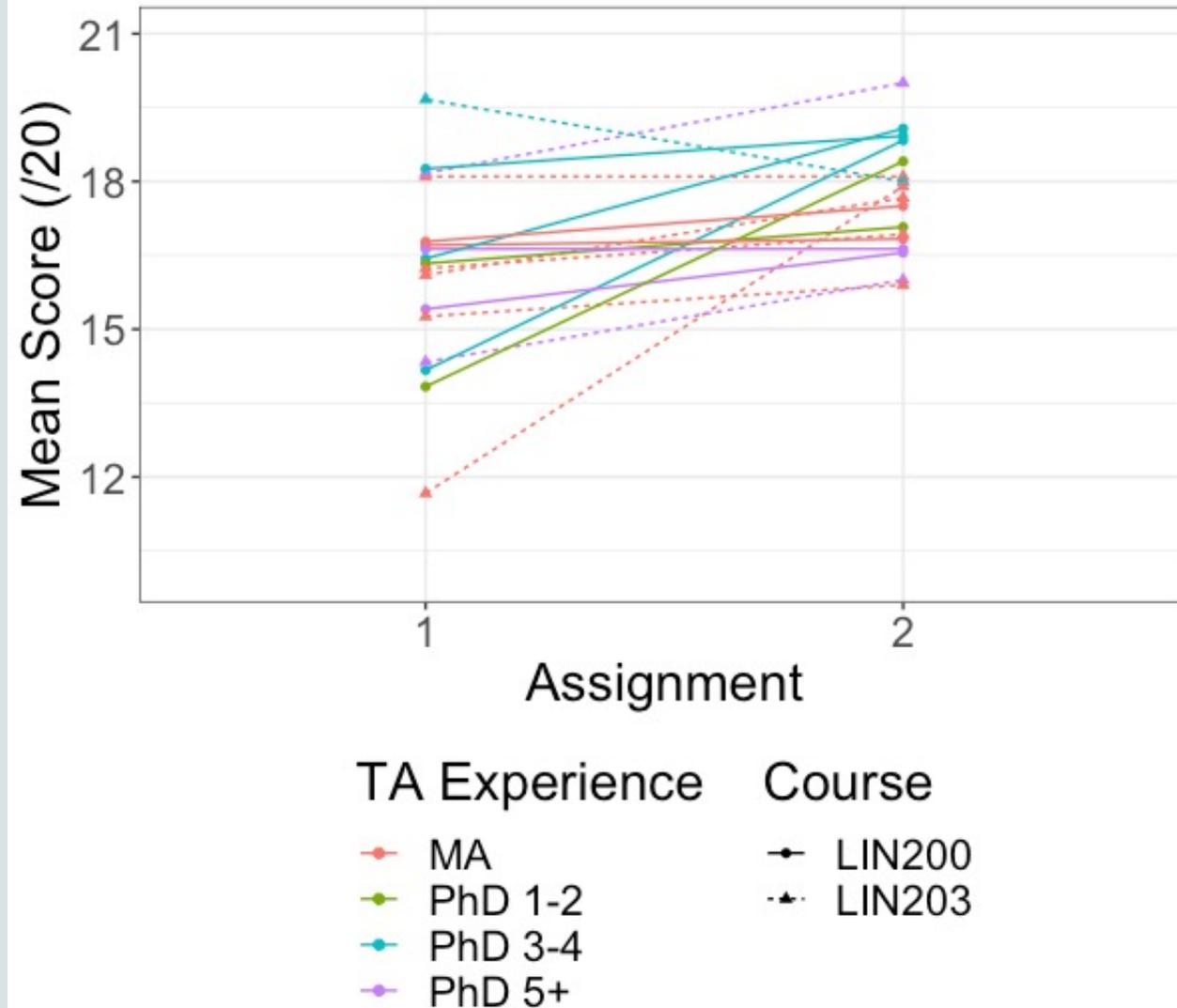
Student Name		Student Grade	
Time-saving tips			
Other comments			

	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Adequate (2)	Needs Work (1)	Score
Identifies an issue	Clearly identifies a major issue in student work that needs to be improved in future work	Clearly identifies an issue to improve, though other major issues would have been better to highlight	Weak issue identified (there are other major issues that should have been highlighted), somewhat unclear	Unclear what the issue <u>is</u> or no issue identified	
Suggests a solution	Clearly suggests a solution that the student can implement in future work	Could be clearer, but is good	Unclear how the student can improve	Does not suggest a solution	
Specific to student work	Very specific to student work	Somewhat specific to student work	Weakly relates to student work	Not specific to student work at all, comment is unrelated to student work	
Positive or neutral tone	Positive or neutral tone; conversational	Tone is acceptable, though could be more conversational	Could be interpreted as negative by the student, grammatical issues impair reader understanding	Obvious negative tone	
Comment structure	Clearly includes something the student did well and something to improve on	Structure could be improved (more focus on improvement, too lengthy/overwhelming)	Structure needs improvement (elaboration on what the student did well)	Does not include something the student did well, or something the student could improve	
Total					

Outcomes

- **Effectiveness:** Improves feedback quality, regardless of course, grader experience, grade point outcome
- **Efficiency:** Encourages more efficient methods of feedback
- **Consistency:** Encourages TAs to provide the same type of feedback

Improvement in Feedback Quality after Feedback on Feedback



Main Takeaways

01

Benchmarking
and feedback on
feedback work

02

Even 1 session of
feedback on
feedback is
effective

03

Improvement
regardless of TA
experience, class
type, grade point
outcome

Bonus

- Demystifies the hidden curriculum (Gives TAs a chance to have conversations around grading)
- Builds confidence & community; reduces isolation

Implementing Benchmarking and Feedback on Feedback

Benchmarking

- *Prep*: 1 hour
- *Session*: 2 hours
- *Follow-up*: 15 minutes

Total Time:

- *Facilitator*: 3h 15 min
- *TAs*: 2 hours

Feedback on Feedback

- *Prep*: 5 minutes
- *Providing Feedback*: 10-15 min/TA
- *Follow-up*: 10-15 minutes

Total Time:

- *Facilitator*: 20 min + 10-15min/TA
- *TAs*: 15 min

Who can facilitate benchmarking & feedback on feedback?

Benchmarking

1. Instructor or an experienced TA
2. Instructor should be present for the session to talk about the assignment and answer questions

Feedback on Feedback

1. If resources permit, an experienced TA can be trained to provide feedback on feedback
2. The instructor, especially if there are a small number of TAs
3. TAs can provide each other with peer feedback on feedback

How often do you do benchmarking & feedback on feedback?

As much as you can, as often as you can, regardless of experience level; within resources and timeline

- **Benchmarking:** 1 session per assignment, grading at least 1 sample of student work
- **Feedback on Feedback:** 1 session (per course) is sufficient to see results, though more sessions may result in more improvement

Ideas for Saving Time

Benchmarking

1. Integrate it into regular TA meetings
2. Grade only 1 sample of student work (most discussion occurs with the first sample anyway)

Feedback on Feedback

1. Spot check assignments & give feedback as necessary
2. Give group-level feedback on feedback
3. Do peer feedback on feedback
4. TAs send a summary of feedback to instructor for comments

All TAs should receive training: Learning to give effective feedback is a life-long process. Even experienced TAs can benefit from additional training

Where can you implement this?

Benchmarking and feedback on feedback can be applied in all types of linguistics courses and assignments

Examples:

**Short answer technical
analysis &
interpretation**

Phonetics, statistics

**Problem set-based
argumentation**

Phonology , syntax,
semantics

Term papers

Sociolinguistics, field
methods & advanced
research courses

Why provide TA training?

TA training takes time up front, but it pays off in consistency, efficiency, effectiveness & long term professional development, as well as time saved later



References

- Bale, R., & Moran, H. (2020). Reflections on peer facilitation of graduate teaching assistant training. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice* 8(1): 157-162.
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- Rodrigue, T. K. (2013). Listening across the curriculum: What disciplinary TAs can teach us about TA professional development in the teaching of writing. *Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education* 2(2): 5.
<https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/wte/vol2/iss2/5/>
- Sandi-Urena, S., & Gatlin, T. (2013). Factors contributing to the development of graduate teaching assistant self-image. *Journal of Chemical Education* 90(10): 1303-1309.

Appendix



Courses

LIN 200 - Introduction to Language

Students: 275
TAs: 9

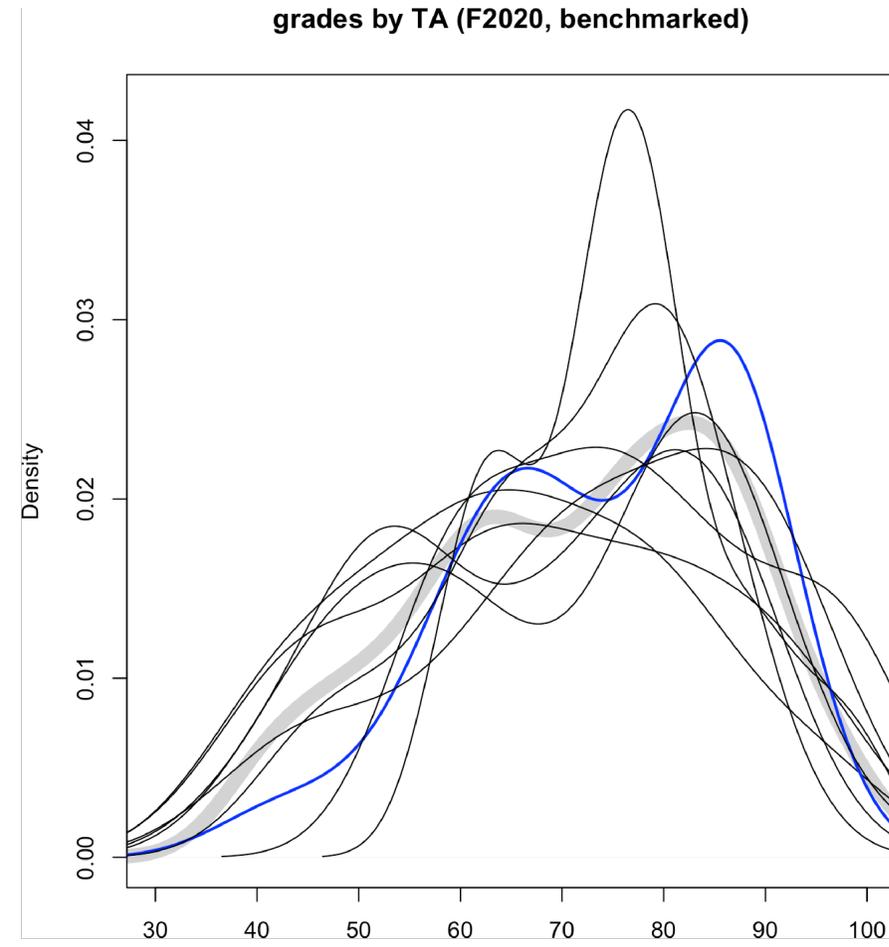
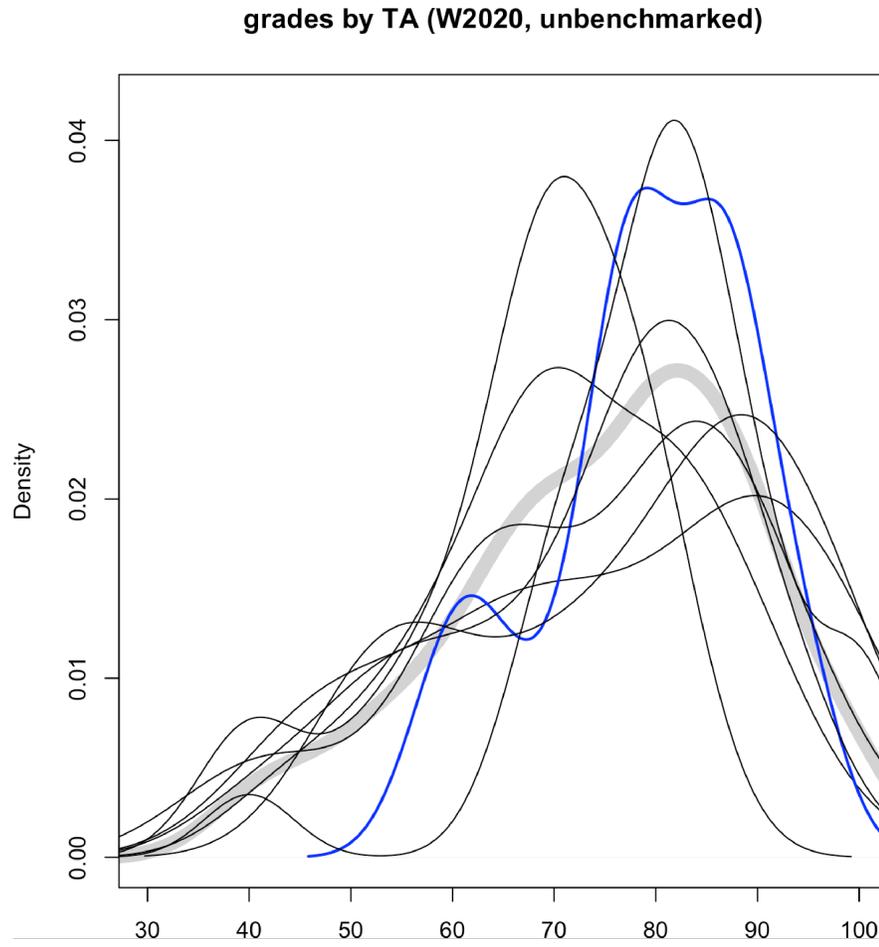
A general-interest course on language. Possible topics include: the structure of language; how language changes over time, the social and psychological aspects of language, language and culture, the origin of language, writing systems, and language acquisition.

LIN 203 - English Words

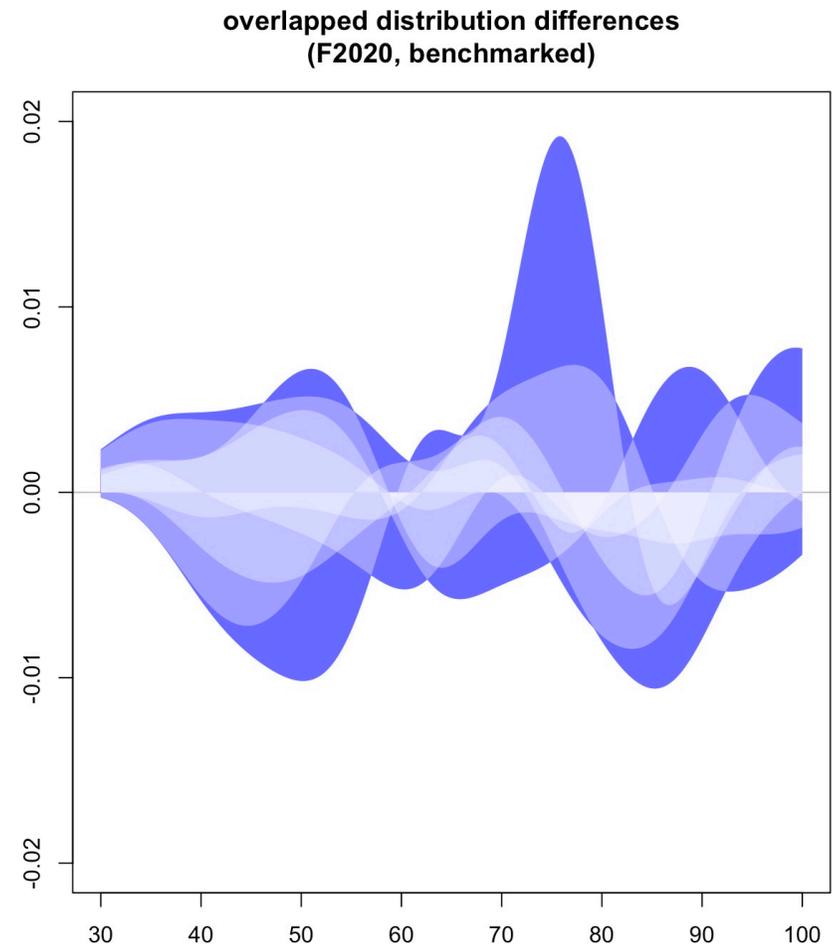
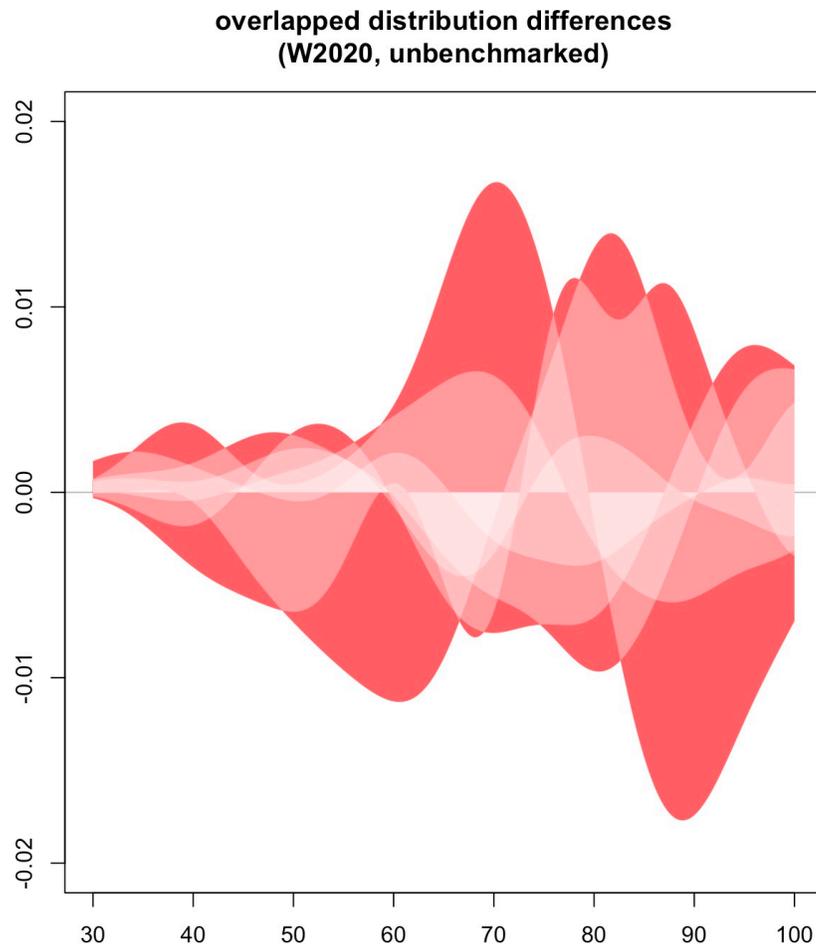
Students: 229
TAs: 8

English has a rich vocabulary. We will learn how it has developed over time and investigate aspects of the meaning and pronunciation of words. Most of all, we will study how words are put together, so that students will be able to recognize and analyze unfamiliar words.

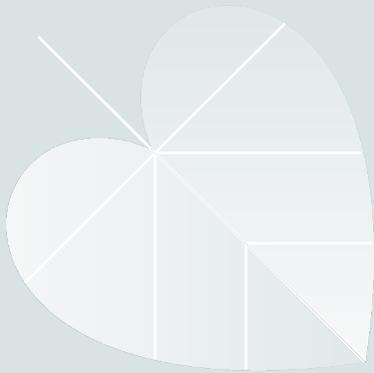
Grade Distributions by TA: Unbenchmarked vs Benchmarked



Grade Distributions by TA: Unbenchmarked vs Benchmarked



Feedback on Feedback

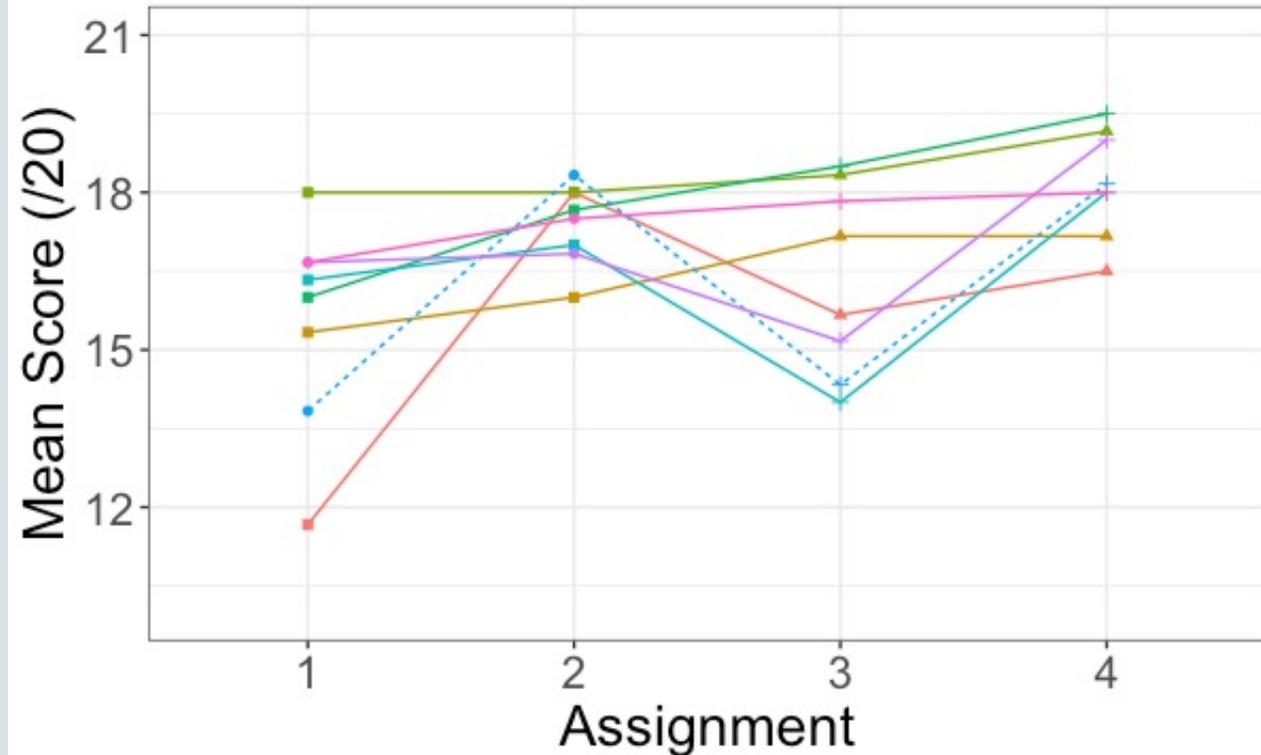


- **Time Management Tips**
- **4 Components of Effective Feedback**
 1. Identify an Issue
 2. Suggest a Solution
 3. Specific to Student Work
 4. Positive or Neutral Tone
- **Comment Structure**

Outcomes

- 1 session is enough to improve effectiveness of feedback
- But feedback improves even more with multiple sessions, even across courses

Improvement in Feedback Quality after Feedback on Feedback



TA Experience

— MA
.... PhD 1-2

Course

• LIN200
▲ LIN200W
■ LIN203
+ LIN204

How long does it take?

- Initial Training 2 hours
- Benchmark 2 hours/assignment
- Grade Assignment & provide feedback --> Specified by instructor (e.g. 10 minutes/assignment)
- LWTA provides Feedback on feedback (10 minutes/TA per assignment)
- Review feedback on feedback (15 minutes)

What's involved in benchmarking?

Prep Work (1 hour)

- Schedule session
- Select 4 assignments
- Email materials to TAs

Session (2 hours)

- Review assignment, marking guidelines & rubric
- Grade assignments
- Ensure all TAs contribute to discussion

Follow Up (10-15 minutes)

- Follow up email with resources and answers to questions/concerns

Total Time

Facilitator: 3 hours, 15 minutes

Participants: 2 hours

What's involved in feedback on feedback?

Prep work (5 minutes)

- Identify grade ranges for high, mid, low grades

For each TA (10-15 minutes)

- Identify high, mid & low grade student work
- Read TA feedback on each assignment, score TA on rubric and provide written feedback
- Provide general feedback on trends

Follow up (15 minutes)

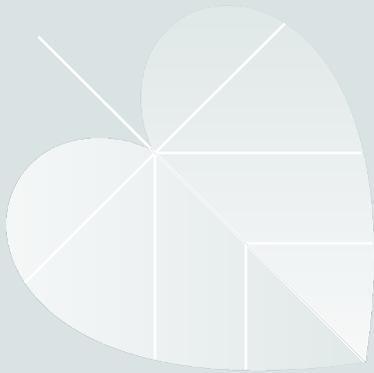
- Email feedback to TAs
- Email a summary of feedback and any concerns to instructor

Total Time

Facilitator: 20 minutes + 10-15 minutes/TA

TAs: 15 minutes

Benefits of TA Training



For the instructor

- More consistent, effective feedback leading to less grade disputes = time saved

For TAs, training helps with

- Limiting feedback to big picture issues, rather than commenting on everything
- Identifying which issues are most important
- Understanding the difference between editing and providing feedback