Kinds of Comments to Make on Student Papers:

Brooke Horvath, a poet and teacher/trainer from the Midwest, constructed a taxonomy of faculty comments on student papers, breaking them into seven categories, each with a different function in the students’ papers.

1. **Comments that emote**: “Nicely put; I think you have captured the essence of Othello’s dilemma as he contemplates the hardest thing he has ever done.”

2. **Comments that correct student writing**: “You have a comma splice here; be careful to avoid these.”

3. **Comments that describe back to students what they have written**: “This sentence seems to contradict what you said in paragraph 2; which position do you want to stick with?”

4. **Comments that suggest new ideas for revising a paper or look to the next assignment**: “For the next draft of your paper, expand the argument in paragraph 4, which I believe will give you the ending you wanted. Pay special attention, for example, to the role of irony.”

5. **Comments that question a student’s logic or claim in the paper**: “Why do you think that Desdemona invited her death at Othello’s hand? Is there another possibility, given what Emilia has said to her about Othello?”

6. **Comments that remind students of part of the assignment or discussion**: “Don’t forget what we said in class; I think we had suggested that this interpretation of the action was too simplistic and restrictive.”

7. **Comments that assign a task for the next step in the assignment**: “For the next draft of your paper, expand the argument in paragraph 4, which I believe will give you the ending you wanted. Pay special attention, for example, to the role of irony.”

The penultimate comment, obviously, is the final one, in which we are obligated to “justify” the final grade for the paper. There should be some consistency between what you wrote in the body of the paper and the final comment/grade, otherwise students will no doubt have questions about how or why they received the grade you assigned to the paper.