The responses that instructors write on student essays are a subject of much discussion in academic circles. The varied purposes for writing such comments, their short- and long-term efficacy, their tone and length, and their emotional impact on students as developing writers are all worthy and well-explored topics of inquiry, as a review of the relevant literature quickly demonstrates. Much less attention has been given to more concrete, yet equally important questions: How can an instructor’s written comments, whatever their nature, be most effectively communicated to students? How can we best expedite students’ efforts to act on our suggestions for revision? And what methods for exchanging and managing documents best enable students and teachers to locate and work with the drafts that provide the forum for this discourse?

The average college student today has grown up with computers and now uses them for communicating with friends and family, playing games, shopping, downloading music, checking the news and weather, surfing the Web, conducting research, and writing papers for school. These days, it’s the rare student who turns up in one of our classes needing instruction in basic computer functions, and most are quick to master the campus email system. Most of our students at Landmark College, all of whom have diagnoses of language- and/or attention-based disabilities, are quick to embrace assistive technologies such as voice recognition and text-to-speech software and incorporate them, as appropriate, into their writing processes.

At the same time that most writing instructors expect students to be willing to try new computer-based writing process strategies, many of these same instructors continue to use the print-based marking techniques they used when they themselves were college students. For many, these habits date from an era that now seems distant almost to the point of quaintness, when the typewriter was still the most effective tool for producing clear text, and handwriting was the most convenient and effective method for marking papers, because paper was literally the only medium available for turning in written work.

In the current academic setting, in what might be viewed as a transitional period between print and electronic media, students are required to adapt to
the preferred submission and revision modes of each of their instructors. Some instructors will only accept printed drafts; others request (or grudgingly accept) electronic submission via email attachment, shared folder, or drop-box, and then print the drafts themselves and return them with their handwritten comments; still others have come to use the fully electronic process for marking and exchanging work that we advocate. As a result, students may use three or four different processes for managing their written work in the course of a semester. As we hope to show, this lack of consistency needlessly complicates the academic lives of our students, particularly the growing number of college students whose writing processes are hampered by language- and/or attention-based issues.

Although it is beyond the scope of this article to delve into a detailed discussion of the symptoms and educational outcomes for college students with learning disabilities and attentional disorders, it is important to begin with some basic understanding of these diagnoses, their frequency on college campuses, and their impact on many of the writers we see in our classrooms and writing centers.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines a Specific Learning Disability (LD) as “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written” (IDEA 101-476). In part because of this law and the support that it gives students with disabilities, more and more students with a diagnosed LD are now going to college. Indeed, “learning disability” is the fastest growing category of reported disabilities among college students today (Henderson 5). Similarly, students with Attention Deficit Disorder (AD/HD), which manifests as “a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity” (DSM4tr 78), are another large and increasing population on college campuses (Byron and Parker 341; Farrell 50). Some studies indicate that students needing services for AD/HD are growing in such numbers that they may soon equal those with learning disabilities (Byron and Parker 341).

Attention disorders are not considered learning disabilities in the strictest sense of the term, but the two conditions frequently coexist (Katz 39; Pliszka 192) and both can profoundly impact a college student’s academic performance (DuPaul, et al.) Given that 65% of students with AD/HD suffer from a written expression learning disability (Brown, “New Understandings”), and that writing problems are believed to exceed the other academic challenges faced by students with learning disabilities (Li and Hamel 29), we have chosen to focus our article on the overlapping groups of LD and AD/HD college students and the ways in which widely-available electronic processes can support their writing.

Other researchers have explored the impact of computer-assisted feedback (Jansen, et al.) and electronic mail (Hawisher and Moran) on students’ writing, but most of the work to date seems to have focused on second language writers (Tuzi), peer response (Tannacito and Tuzi; Hishesher and Moran), or response as part of an online composition course (Blair). Although research has documented the importance of certain generic features of word processing programs (e.g.,
storing, copying, pasting, and spell check) for people with writing difficulties (Li and Hamel 34), the distinct advantages of the easily mastered and widely available technologies of electronic commenting and electronic exchange of documents have yet to be explored for students with LD and/or AD/HD and their instructors. What follows is a brief introduction to each of these processes, and then arguments for their advantages for this student population.

**PROCESS #1: USING THE REVIEWING TOOLBAR TO MARK STUDENT WORK**

Our description of electronic marking in this piece is based on using the Reviewing toolbar in Microsoft Word. Our purpose here is not to promote Microsoft products. Rather, we are describing this feature of a widely utilized word processing program to elucidate the general advantages of commenting electronically over continuing to use handwritten comments. We have sampled various software programs designed exclusively for marking and grading, and although most offer more bells and whistles than Word, we feel that Word’s Reviewing toolbar provides all of the features necessary to digitally represent what we used to do when marking papers by hand. (Basic instructions on using these features are contained in an appendix at the end of this article.) Its functions are easy to master and, perhaps most importantly, it is virtually ubiquitous, so neither our departments nor our students need to buy additional software. Our descriptions are drawn from Microsoft Office® Word 2003; earlier versions have slightly different functionality, but are still perfectly adequate.

The feature that we consider the best for commenting on students’ work, and on which we will focus in this article, is “Balloons.” This option places the instructor’s comments in sequenced “balloons” in the right margin, a format easily recognized by anyone who is used to working with traditional handwritten comments (see figure 1). The balloons are also linked to the referenced text by dotted lines that become solid when the student clicks on the balloon, and by brackets around the text.

Another useful markup feature in the Reviewing toolbar is the “Highlight” tool, which allows the user to select from a palette of fifteen colors for marking (without comment) words or passages in the student’s text or in the commenting balloons. This can be employed in useful ways. One might, for example, mark all instances of a particular error (run-on sentences, misspellings) in one color, adding a comment to the first instance with instructions to correct the rest.
When anyone is going back to school, it is very difficult no matter what age you are. It is very different for both but there are significant things one desires versus the other. If you went back as an older student, one must really see major differences then if he or she went straight out of high school. The things that are stated in the easy are from my perspective going back to school as an older student compared to me going to school as a younger student.

There are many different wants or desires to a younger and older student, which I will state for you.

**Figure 1. Format of electronic “balloon” comments**

**Advantages of Electronic Commenting**

1. **Advantages for Students: Reading and Understanding Instructor Comments**

   As anyone who has helped students work with marked “hard copy” essays in a writing center can attest, the notes written on them can be difficult to decipher. The difficulties posed by variably legible handwriting styles tend to be worsened when instructors attempt to squeeze the commentary into the limited white space available. The result is often a tiny script that spills from the margins into the spaces between the lines, and sometimes even onto the back of the page. Moreover, penciled comments, thought by some to be less harsh than the traditional red ink, have a way of smudging into an illegible morass after bouncing around in a student’s backpack. For students with dyslexia, whose diagnosis is defined by their challenge with decoding letters on the page (graphemes) into sounds in a word (phonemes), the struggle to render meaning from the resulting amoebas of text can be readily appreciated. But even for a high-decoding ADD student whose resources of concentration are limited, the effort involved can only detract from the attempt to resolve any of the problems or questions his or her teacher has attempted to convey.

   Text-to-speech software such as Kurzweil 3000® is among the assistive technologies used on college campuses to help college students with learning disabilities that manifest in writing difficulties (Li and Hamel 35). This same technology has also been shown to be helpful for students with ADD (Hecker et al.). If the patterns that we see on our campus are any indication of larger trends, increasing numbers of students with both learning disabilities and attentional...
disorders will be using text-to-speech software in the future. Besides being legible in the more traditional sense of the word, electronic comments have the added advantage of being easily “read aloud” by the computer. (The Reviewing toolbar even provides the capacity to record and insert “Voice” comments into a draft, providing a virtual conference for the student, although this has the drawback of creating very large files.)

The superior legibility of electronic comments is obvious and cannot be overstated. If our goal in writing on student work is to communicate our responses—be they questions, praise, or suggestions for improvement—as clearly as possible, this implies using the best means available to minimize barriers to their comprehension. Electronic comments present the most accessible medium for this interaction.

Current research indicates that students benefit most from written responses to their writing that are elaborate, specific, and explicit (Edington 288; Straub 93; Wong et al.). Comments should be clearly stated and thorough. In a meta-analysis of how students respond to different types of instructor comments, teachers and researchers have identified the following as a foundational principle: Teachers should write out their responses in full statements and text-specific comments (Straub 92). The practice of writing comments on printed drafts, however, can thwart an instructor’s best intentions. Either, as previously mentioned, one must cram the commentary into the limited space available, or one is forced to use the terse lexicon of obscure phrases, words, and abbreviations (e.g., “Awk”) passed down from generation to generation of English teachers. Richard Straub, summarizing a group of studies that looked at students’ views of traditional teacher responses, found that editing symbols, abbreviations, cryptic marks, and comments cast in these specialized terms (e.g., “Frag,” “Not clear,” “Tighten,” “Generalization”) were ineffective. He found that “students resoundingly do not find these comments helpful. . . . They find it difficult to understand such commentary and consequently are put off by it. They want comments that are fully stated, clear, and specific” (93).

While the time pressures posed by the need to mark stacks of printed student drafts certainly play a part in limiting a teacher’s comments, the lack of space (and attendant writer’s cramp) is at least equally to blame. In a study of his students’ reactions to his comments, Anthony Edington reported that almost all of them mentioned that his handwritten marginal comments hindered or prohibited elaboration, because they were “brief” or “vague” (289). Using electronic means to comment on drafts eliminates this problem. The text balloons that appear in the right margin expand to fit the comments of even the most effusive instructor, and sequence themselves automatically near the referenced text. Unlike with handwritten comments, it is also easy to go back and add to, delete, or revise previous commentary before returning the paper to the student. The balloons also serve to visually distinguish each comment from those before and after it. The result is an annotated draft that is graphically much “cleaner” than its hand-marked
predecessor, and therefore, especially for easily distracted and frustrated ADD students, more likely to result in thorough revision.

Finally, the range of methods teachers use to signify the specific passage or word to which a comment refers can present yet another layer of challenge for a student writer saddled with language and/or attentional deficits. These markings typically include parentheses, marginal brackets, underlining, circling, arrows whose long looping tails meander or slice through the text, and other idiosyncratic symbols developed by creative (or graphically challenged) instructors. A paper that has been carefully read and thoroughly marked can end up looking like a garden overun with vines, the “weeding” of which can be a discouraging prospect. It’s not surprising, then, that in a study focusing on how students react to the format of writing instructor feedback (i.e., marginal, letter/end comment, conferencing), “marginal comments were often seen as the most confusing response format. When describing their reactions to handwritten marginal comments, students often used terms such as ‘random,’ ‘confusing,’ [and] ‘scattered’” (Edington 289).

As noted above, the linking cues provided by the “Balloons” option in the Reviewing toolbar are graphically explicit: the selected text is highlighted and bracketed, and connected to the margin note by a dotted line. When the student clicks on the note, the highlighting and brackets intensify and the dotted line becomes solid, making the passage in question stand out from those around it. This frees the student to focus on the content of the teacher’s note, rather than working to decipher its specific relationship to the nearby text.

By eliminating the need to decipher suggestions embedded in a range of handwriting styles and flagging devices, we can help students with LD and/or AD/HD focus their mental energy on the important work of improving their writing by acting upon their instructors’ questions, corrections, and comments.

2. Advantages for Students: The Revision Process

The benefits of electronic comments go beyond their legibility, however. Their use can greatly streamline the student’s revision process, freeing up cognitive working space that would otherwise be devoted to nonessential tracking tasks imposed by the need to shuttle their visual and mental foci between the marked hard-copy draft and their computer screens. To use the hybrid methods that are still common in many classrooms, students with LD and/or AD/HD must first parse the teacher’s handwriting, shorthand, and/or editing symbols and then, holding this information in mind, follow the flagging marks to find the passage the comments address. After rereading that passage, they must shift their focus to the computer screen and locate the same section, which can be difficult if the text has shifted laterally, as it does when text has been added or deleted. Finally, they must remember the import of the teacher’s comment and attempt to revise their text in response to it. While this multi-tiered activity may come naturally to some,
it makes significant demands on active working memory, which is impaired in many students with LD and AD/HD.

As acknowledged by both composition theorists (Hayes 8) and learning disability theorists (Brown), working memory, which refers to one’s capacity to retain pieces of information long enough to weave them into a larger fabric of meaning (e.g., a written sentence), plays a crucial role in the act of writing. According to Dr. Mel Levine, one of the foremost experts in the field of learning disabilities, “Writing requires more memory than just about anything else a student is asked to do. Writers need to simultaneously retrieve spelling, punctuation, capitalization and letter formation rules, vocabulary and content information, transitions and connections, and all the other ingredients of written output” (Levine). Even under the best conditions, working memory has a limited capacity, and it can easily become overloaded if a student tries to comprehend and implement too much information.

Levine asserts that many students with LD and/or AD/HD “have writing difficulty that stems from weaknesses related to active working memory, the part of the memory that allows them to keep track of immediately relevant information while doing a task. These students tend to forget aspects of the writing tasks while they are writing” (Levine, emphasis added). Thus, memory impairment is not just a complicating factor, but a root cause of their written output problems. Anyone who has used an oral process to help students with LD engaged in composition has seen evidence of these deficits: a student speaks a well-formed complex sentence that would fit perfectly into the piece at hand and then, upon being eagerly cued to “write that down,” stares blankly and asks, “What did I say?” Or, unless they literally cross out the handwritten comments as they work through them, they struggle to remember where they left off.

This tendency to forget can only be exacerbated by the use of the circuitous, hybrid revision process described above. By contrast, the use of electronic comments creates a single milieu—the computer screen—for the student’s efforts. Comments are right there on the screen, clearly linked and in close proximity to the text he or she will be revising. Even if the text shifts as a result of prior revisions, each comment remains linked to its “target.” Perhaps best of all, in terms of students’ revising experience, once they have dealt with a particular comment, they simply right-click on the balloon and delete the comment, leaving clean, revised text on the screen.

Additionally, using the highlighting tool to “color-code” recurrent errors allows students to address each type of error systematically, rather than simply taking them on individually as they crop up in the course of the draft. The value of this approach is supported by research showing that students with LD and/or AD/HD should begin their final writing stage with explicit purposes and plans as they reread their texts. It allows them to deal with one specific type of error at a time, thus achieving more efficiency and effectiveness (Li and Hamel 39).
Finally, for instructors whose goal in providing comments is to start a written dialogue with the student, electronic comments can help by providing the space to do just that. Students can easily reply to a comment with a comment of their own, offering an explanation or asking for clarification. They do this by simply highlighting the text within the comment and clicking the “Insert Comment” icon. A new balloon appears underneath the original comment with the designation “R” in the bracketed identification tag and the student then types his or her reply into this space. Depending on which computer setting the student uses, this comment can contain his or her initials and appear in a different color from that of the original comment.

3. Advantages for Instructors

For instructors working with writing students with LD and/or AD/HD, the use of electronic means for commenting has several advantages over handwritten comments. As we have already mentioned, the fluid nature of the comments allows the instructor to express ideas fully and explicitly, without the fear of running out of margin space. While some, feeling overburdened with grading, may question whether the ability to write more on their students’ drafts is a desirable option, such comments have proven to be the most useful to developing writers: “Only by elaborating one’s comments in a way that opens up the matters under discussion for a mutual investigation by writer and reader can a teacher make his comments conversation” (Straub 389). The ability to write full sentences rather than pithy, stripped-down remarks couched in the imperative mood enhances the quality and clarity of this dialogue, and also allows instructors to model proper syntax and the unique possibilities of tone and voice. These nuances can be difficult for our students to pick up, but when they know the author and can “hear” him or her in the writing on their draft, the effect is both more personal and more comprehensible.

For fast typists, using electronic comments is apt to save time in the marking process; those less dexterous have the option of using voice recognition software to dictate their remarks to the computer. Another time-saver is to use the Autocorrect feature to set up personal codes for common responses. For example, “ts” can be automatically replaced by a brief review of the typical elements in a clear topic sentence, which saves a lot of keyboarding. This feature should not be overused, however, as identical “scripts” soon lose their impact on students. All of the features of Microsoft Word (spelling and grammar checks, automatic capitalization, font styles and colors, etc.) are also available for text inside the comment balloons. Employing the Highlighting tool, already described, provides a more graphic view of error patterns than purely textual markings. This can be very helpful when identifying error patterns and planning for their remediation, and it can facilitate more focused discussions during conferences.

Another notable feature of using comment balloons, in situations where students have access to the Internet, is the ability to paste live links into one’s
comments. This allows the instructor to give students direct access to websites relevant to the specific comment, such as further sources for research, or one of the several excellent grammar sites that provide tutorials and interactive practice tests. Such ready, one-click access to Web-based learning opportunities, in our experience, greatly increases the likelihood that students with LD and/or AD/HD will explore them, since it eliminates the need for them to type complex URLs copied from a handwritten note.

**PROCESS #2: ELECTRONIC EXCHANGING OF WORK**

The case for using an electronic marking process when working on writing with students with LD and/or AD/HD is predicated, of course, on the assumption that drafts will be exchanged digitally, rather than by using printed copies. This can be accomplished in several ways. Some teachers like to set up a “shared folder” on their campus intranet or on a class web page, which allows students to drag and drop their work into a desktop folder whose contents are then available to anyone with permission (as configured by the IT department) to view them. This arrangement works well for writers’ workshop situations where the entire class needs to be able to read one another’s drafts before class discussion. Another option is to exchange work by attaching it to emails. In our experience, this method can be easily taught even to students who have limited experience with computers. Beyond simple necessity, however, electronic exchanging of work can simplify document and file management in significant ways that benefit both students—particularly those with AD/HD—and their instructors.

**ADVANTAGES OF EXCHANGING WORK ELECTRONICALLY**

1. **Advantages for Students**

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders- Fourth Edition (DSM4), a reference guide published by the American Psychiatric Association, contains diagnostic criteria, statistical information, and treatment options for a wide range of mental health disorders. Its criteria for the diagnosis of AD/HD include difficulties in the following areas: keeping track of details, sustaining attention (frequent shifts from one uncompleted activity to another), following through on plans, organizing tasks and activities, and maintaining control of materials necessary for tasks or activities. These impairments in executive function often translate, in the whirlwind of a young adult’s physical environment, into what one might conservatively call chaos. The fate of a marked hard-copy draft that has been released into this maelstrom is far from certain: the draft can always be printed again, so the “My dog ate it” gambit is now anachronistic, but the instructor’s handwritten comments may be lost forever. Some of our colleagues solve this
problem by photocopying every draft they mark, but this practice results in an unnecessary waste of time and paper.

A fully electronic process eliminates the problem of lost papers. Even if a student loses a marked electronic draft, by deleting or mismanaging files or dropping a laptop, a copy remains on the teacher’s computer and/or university-drive, and it can easily be sent again. Some might argue that this is an “enabling” behavior that avoids the real issue of teaching effective organization of materials. However, we live in an age of digital text, and we might as well teach our students to use its tools to their fullest potential. Besides, this is the way drafts of documents—such as letters, reports, articles like this one, or the next best-selling novel—are modified and exchanged in the larger world (Writing in Digital Environments Research Center Collective).

That said, it must be noted that the tendency toward disorganization can apply as much to students’ electronic desktops as it does to their literal desktops, which means that file management skills should be taught explicitly and then evaluated on a regular basis. These include the development of systems for saving and naming documents, creating and organizing folders, and backing up files on a university-drive or CD. Again, these are all vital skills for working effectively in a digital environment.

Electronically-marked text also presents more options for retrieval when students work away from their rooms, whether in a writing center, an instructor’s office, the library, or anywhere with access to the intranet. If students retain a copy of the email in which the instructor returned the marked draft, they can even open and revise it on an off-campus computer, and send the revision back to the instructor or to themselves for further work.

This easy access to the materials they need to do schoolwork is a good fit for the impulsive tendencies of students with AD/HD. More than typical students, they express the need to be “in the zone” or “in the mood” in order to work productively on writing tasks. Using a fully electronic process increases their ability to strike before the moment passes.

2. Advantages for Instructors

To facilitate managing and exchanging student drafts, most of the above-mentioned benefits apply equally to teachers. By clearly marking each submission with a name, assignment, and process stage indicator (e.g., “SmithNarrDM” for the marked rough draft of Mr. Smith’s narrative essay), an instructor can quickly review a student’s development of a piece of writing. This becomes particularly useful when assessing the thoroughness of revisions made to a marked draft. Rather than relying on their fading memories of comments made a week earlier, instructors can compare the two versions in a simple, graphic format. By opening both documents, one “behind” the other so that the texts are aligned, it’s possible to toggle between the two, so that changes to the draft are easy to notice and focus upon. As the
semester progresses, the instructor can quickly scan sequentially through several of a student’s marked drafts to see if he or she is making progress in areas such as sentence structure and paragraph organization, gaining solid diagnostic information. For the purpose of providing the kind of clear and concrete feedback most helpful to students with LD and/or AD/HD, instructors can copy and paste from several drafts into a new document to use when conferencing.

An electronic process can also simplify collecting and returning student work. Students can no longer use printer problems, real or imaginary, to plead for extensions. Granted, networks sometimes go down, but this situation is easily verifiable and usually quickly corrected. Clear deadlines are easy to enforce, since the emails to which the students attach their work are stamped with the time and date when they were sent. And students who are not in class when a draft is returned need not wait until the next meeting to continue their writing process, because they can simply retrieve their drafts electronically.

**Conclusion**

In a discussion about using computers as a tool for responding to student writing, Geoffrey Sirc, who has written extensively and insightfully about the subject, expressed legitimate concerns about their potential for automating, and thus depersonalizing instructors’ responses: “The computer . . . so far can only serve effectively, in terms of a general pedagogical tool, as a medium for response rather than as a respondent” (187). The best uses of computer response, according to Sirc, are those that facilitate communication between the instructor and the student, with the goal of improving the student’s ability to communicate with his or her audience: “Computers per se have nothing to tell my students. But I have much to tell them, and they have much to tell themselves; if computers can aid in this endeavor, so much the better” (203).

When our colleagues who still mark papers by hand are pressed to explain why they do so, they most often point to “quality of life” reasons. Some are tactile: they like the heft of a stack of student essays, and the palpable sense of progress that comes from working their way to the bottom of it. Or they feel that handwritten commenting is more personal and creative, and reinforces an ineffably deeper link between teacher and student. Others resist the increasingly dominant presence of the computer in their daily lives. They cite the ability to grab some papers and a pen and do their grading in the back yard, at a child’s soccer game, or on the beach, if they so choose. And still others admit frankly that they lack the time or interest to learn a new method for a professional activity that they feel they already perform quite well.

None of these reasons are compelling arguments for maintaining the status quo. Computers have inalterably changed the writing process. Some argue that it hasn’t changed for the better, but the point is now moot. The vast majority of the text generated by our students is, in origin at least, digital, and as such it
lends itself to modes of response and exchange that have distinct advantages over print and handwriting, especially for those who struggle with reading, spelling, ideation, memory, attention, or combinations of these processes. By making good use of these digital modes, we can enhance the legibility and thoroughness of our comments, simplify our students’ revision processes, and facilitate the storage and exchange of their work, thereby helping them to become more efficient and effective writers.

**Works Cited**


APPENDIX:
BASICS OF ELECTRONIC COMMENTING VIA THE REVIEWING TOOLBAR

To bring up the icons for the Reviewing toolbar, right-click anywhere in the visible toolbar icons and select “Reviewing.” You can also select “Customize” in this menu in order to remove any icons that aren’t useful.

To insert a comment about a word or passage, simply highlight the passage and click on the “Insert Comment” icon (a yellow “sticky note”) on the toolbar (see figure 2).

![Figure 2. Reviewing toolbar and “Insert Comment” icon](image)

Each balloon is numbered and contains the initials of its author. The text to which the comment refers is highlighted (the instructor can select from a range of colors). Clicking on a comment balloon intensifies the color, making the passage in question stand out from the rest of the text.

Once a student has revised the passage in question, he or she simply right-clicks on the comment itself, and selects “Delete Comment” from the pop-up menu.

Microsoft Word provides two options other than “Balloons” for viewing comments which we have found to be decidedly less useful when providing electronic feedback to students with or without learning disabilities. The first of these, the “Reviewing Pane,” shows all of the comments, keyed to numbered footnotes with the reviewer’s initials, in a separate window at the bottom of the screen. This view is graphically less familiar to students who have been receiving handwritten comments, and has the added disadvantage of decreasing the space available for their original text on the screen.

The other option for viewing comments appears when the Reviewing Pane is turned off, and “View>Normal” is selected in the Toolbar. In this case, the numbered footnotes remain in the text. When one holds the cursor over one of them, the instructor’s comment appears in a text box above or below the passage in
question and disappears when the cursor is moved. This makes for an uncluttered view of the draft, but this can be a negative feature for LD and/or AD/HD students who are more prone to overlook—for reasons related to visual processing or attention—the less obvious “insertion points” provided by this setting.

The third Reviewing toolbar option that we would discourage is the “Track Changes” option, which indicates specific revisions a reviewer might make in the course of marking a draft and gives the original writer the option of accepting or rejecting changes, individually or as a group. Although its usefulness is easy to appreciate in environments where collaborative writing is common, in the context of the typical college classroom, this device is the functional equivalent of a teacher adding (or crossing out) punctuation, words, or passages on the hard copy of a student’s draft. Such “rewriting” may be common, but it is clearly contraindicated for instructors whose goal is to improve students’ writing ability, not just a particular piece of text. The ease with which the student can, at a single keystroke, accept all of his or her instructor’s emendations—making the revision look a lot like something the instructor might have written and thus more likely to receive a higher grade—is particularly problematic for students with learning disabilities, who tend to overlook content and coherence revisions in favor of mechanical changes that have little or no impact on the overall quality of their writing (Graham et al. 237; Li and Hamel 39).