Respond!
It is important to pay attention to students and their writing.

Work to make your response focused, clear, and communicative.
Fewer, more meaningful comments usually work better than numerous comments that communicate little.

Respond early and often. Grade late.
It is easier to teach (and to respond constructively) when work is in progress.

Recognize variability: Work to articulate the grounds of your response.
Readers, even expert readers, don’t always agree on what a text means, much less on how to value a text. Acknowledge that your response and your grades are reasoned, careful, expert interpretations and assessments, not universal judgments. Writers need to understand the variability of audiences. On the other hand, there are many good pedagogical reasons for attempting to articulate the grounds of your response (and to do so as a group when you are part of team teaching a course).

Vary response.
Comment on content and form. Vary the type of response (interlinear, marginal, and end comments). Respond to what students are doing well and what students are having trouble with. Vary who responds.

Explain your response.
Tell students what your goals are as a respondent, what you are responding to and what you aren’t responding to, and how you expect students to use that response.

Work to have students assume greater responsibility for response.
Whether with their own texts or responding to others’, you should work to have students assume responsibility for response, to have them internalize the knowledge you use to read and evaluate their work. Peer response, response sheets, and self-assessments are all examples of activities that encourage students to assume these responsibilities.

Response is teaching. Teaching is response.
You should always ask how best to teach a particular point (i.e., through individual commentary on a text, through a general response to the class, through some other teaching activity). Response happens throughout the process.

Remember.
Whenever you look at student writing, you are not looking at a pure representation of the student’s knowledge or effort, but at a complex blend of that knowledge and effort with the contexts of writing, including the contexts you have set up as the instructor. Sometimes the most appropriate response to problems with student writing is a change in the way you structure the task, communicate the content, or support the students’ work.