

A top-down view of a wooden desk. In the upper left, a small white mesh pencil holder is filled with various colored pencils. To the right of the holder is a spiral-bound notebook with a white cover. The notebook is open to a blank page with the text 'Compose eloquent, tactful comments in half the time!' written in a green, sans-serif font. To the right of the notebook is a small, rectangular eraser with a blue top half and a white bottom half. Below the notebook, a single black pencil lies horizontally. The background is the natural wood grain of the desk.

Compose
eloquent, tactful
comments in
half the time!

Angela Watson's

Stress-free system for
REPORT CARD COMMENTS

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

It's easy to spend hours generating report card comments, obsessing over every word and trying (in vain) to tactfully describe problems and accurately describe the success and struggles of each student.

This resource is a complete system designed to help you compose tactful and compassionate commentary for progress reports and report cards in the most effective, efficient way possible.

Simply read over the initial tips for conveying difficult information and the time-saving tips to help you get in the right mindset for composing excellent comments as quickly as possible. Then use the easy system described for batching your report card work, and generate comments by working through your class list according to student similarities rather than alphabetically. Follow the 5 step formula for each student's comments, pulling from the sample wording suggested in the doc.

The end result? A positive, empathetic, and truthful set of comments that will be helpful for parents and facilitate their cooperation as you work together to help their children succeed ... and you can accomplish that in half the time it would take for you to do this on your own!

My suggestion is that you use this resource in digital form rather than printing it out: This will allow you to use the search function in your PDF reader to look for a specific problem or phrase when needed.

I also recommend that you listen to the 20-minute audio version of the pages that follow, rather than reading them. This will help you get in the right mindset so it's faster and easier for you to work.



**Want to listen instead of read?
Click here to launch the audio player.**

You can listen while in the car or doing things around the house, and then sit down with the sample comments when you're ready to start working on your report cards. The audio version will not only save you time but also get you motivated and inspired to write your comments.

So, press play on the audio and listen in, or make yourself a hot cup of tea (or beverage of your choice!) and take your time reading through the tips on the next few pages. Whatever you do, don't skip straight to the sample comments!

Being in the right mindset will make the job 10 times easier and faster. Invest a few minutes into getting yourself geared up, and you'll be in the flow of creating comments easily and quickly.



The biggest pitfall that most teachers face with report card comments is overcomplicating the task, which creates overwhelm. We're going to keep this super simple by staying focused on what really matters. **The purpose of report card comments is simply to convey the big ideas and most important information parents need to know. Most important, not everything.** You do not need to share EVERY success and EVERY problem in your report card comments.

Focus on using the comments to give a bit of context to the grades. The comment section should align with students' grades. If a student has earned below a "C" in any area, I recommend explaining that briefly in the comments so there's no confusion about why the student isn't performing better. For some parents, it might be smart to explain the "C" grades as well. (No worries, the comment system I'll outline will show you exactly how to do this.)

However, you do not normally need to write paragraphs of detailed information in report card comments. Parents are just as busy and overwhelmed as you are, and most don't have time to read an essay about everything their kids are struggling with.

When there are problems, parents should hear about them through conferences, emails, voicemails, and other ongoing, proactive communication measures, so there's no need to say everything again on a report card. Put simply: Your comments need to be true and accurate, but not all-encompassing. There is always more you COULD say, but focus on only the most necessary and helpful information.

Think about what you really need to document. What do you need to have proof that you have expressed in writing? For example, it's generally important to state in report card comments if a student has excessive absences, or is in danger of being retained. When that's the case, stay focused on the big picture and don't get caught up describing every single problem the student has.

For kids who are on or above grade level, there probably isn't anything you NEED to document, so focus on simply giving context to the report card grades, sharing positive anecdotes and achievements, and thanking the parent for his/her support.

It's also important to remind yourself that most of what you write can be adapted for other students. **It's extremely rare that a student has none of the same strengths or weaknesses as any other child in the class. Therefore, you should plan to re-purpose and re-work a few basic comment templates over and over again.** YOU are the only person who will read every single comment, so you don't need to create extra work by trying to generate completely original comments for every child.

Report card comments can be massively time-consuming for the teacher but ultimately not super impactful on student learning. The return on your investment of time and energy just isn't that great, so that's why you want to streamline and keep it simple. **Put your effort into helping students grow rather than laboring endlessly over just the right phrasing for a report card**

The sample comments I've provided here should cut your report card comment time AT LEAST in half, as you'll be able to use my wording (instead of coming up with your own) for the majority of info you need to convey about your students. **The only thing you MAY need to add to what I've written is something specific to your grade level/subject area/curriculum.** I encourage you to compose any curriculum-specific info once, and then re-use for each student with slight changes in word choice as needed (ie "has a deep understanding of" vs "has a limited grasp of").

The majority of what you write in your report card comments can be pulled directly from this resource. Even if every comment I suggest is not a perfect fit, I think you'll see the value in starting with this system rather than a blank page. Use my words as a springboard, and it will be much easier to tweak what I've done already than to write from scratch.



TIPS FOR CONVEYING DIFFICULT INFORMATION

One of the hardest parts of writing report card comments is figuring how to phrase bad news. The following tips will help you get in the right mindset so you can determine the most tactful and compassionate way to write about tough topics in your report card comments.

- ✓ **Keep it simple and avoid jargon.** This isn't a doctoral thesis: Parents are tired and busy just like you and want the bottom line, so don't overcomplicate things. Avoid intentionally using vocabulary words that parents may not know just so you sound knowledgeable or professional. The best way to convey your credibility is by explaining what you know to be true in a plain and compassionate way. (Don't worry – I'll give you lots of sample wording in a bit!)
- ✓ **Don't drop a bomb in a report card comment.** *If there are major issues (bullying, failing, etc.) then the parent needs to know that well before the end of the quarter.* No one wants to find out about a problem after it's already spiraled out of control for weeks on end. The problems you discuss in report card comments should not be a surprise to parents: Comments are simply formal documentation of things you have already shared via email, phone calls, etc.

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]



Now that we've addressed one of the biggest slow-downs in generating report card comments (tactfully conveying bad news), we're ready to tackle some general time-saving tips. Here are a few suggestions for hacking the report card comment process to make it easier and faster:

✓ [REDACTED]

■ [REDACTED]

■ [REDACTED]

■ [REDACTED]

■ [REDACTED]

■ [REDACTED]

✓ **Be authentic and write how you speak.** Don't waste time trying to come up with the most formal terms possible, especially if you wouldn't normally use those words in conversation. It's much faster to create comments if you write the same words you would speak if you were talking to the parent in person, rather than trying to craft a different persona for report card comments.

✓ **Collect resources that address the most common problems so you can simply give parents the link or send a copy of them home.** For example, you might have a website/handout that shows parents how to help their kids with math homework, a list of websites for practicing reading comprehension, etc. That way you don't have to type everything out in detail: Just write, "I am attaching a list of ideas for how your child can work on these topics at home" or "visit this URL for resource recommendations."

✓ **Use a formula for your comments (the same format each time).** I created a formula with the anagram B.A.N.D.S. which will make it super simple to generate comments for any child. I'll explain that in detail on the next page.



Next, I'll share how to create report card comments using the stress-free system I've designed that takes all the guesswork out. If you think about report card comments in terms of 5 key elements, figuring out what info to plug into each element is much easier, and you're less likely to find yourself stuck staring at a blank screen or page.

I'm using the anagram B.A.N.D.S. to explain the formula. Hopefully, that will be easy for you to remember if you think about the goal of your comments, which is to help the student, parents, and teacher band together to help the student get where s/he needs to be.

1) Best attributes

Begin by making a positive comment(s) about the student's best attributes and/or accomplishments. Try to be specific about the student if possible. This will convey to the parent that you really know the student and care about him/her.

2) Areas of success

Share at least one area in which the child is doing well. If you need to share significant problems with the parent, try to lead into that by sharing a success related to that area (i.e., if there are behavioral issues, share something positive about the students' behavior first; if the student is reading below grade level, share something positive about his/her reading habits, effort, or growth in reading.)

3) Needs improvement

I recommend choosing no more than three areas of improvement in most instances. Report card comments are not the place to dump every minor issue on a parent and discourage/overwhelm him or her. You will not be in the room when the parent reads your words, and s/he won't know your tone/intentions. No one wants to read a lengthy list of everything that's wrong with his/her child. Instead, think about just a couple areas in which it's most imperative that the student improves in order to be successful, and focus on articulating those areas clearly. Ideally, these are issues the parent is already aware of from your more informal ongoing communication.

4) Do this to help

Share specific things the parent/child can do to improve: It's frustrating to parents when they hear their child is having problems and they have no idea how to fix it. Pre-empt this problem (and avoid tons of follow-up questions) by giving the parent simple actionable steps to take right away. Because you're likely dealing with the same types of issues over and over (tardiness, lack of attention in class, working below grade level, etc.), you can write out one set of suggestions for each problem in advance, and then just copy/paste for each student who has that issue.

5) Supportive statement

End by sharing an optimistic outlook and expressing a belief that the student can and will be successful. Obviously, this is easier to write for some kids than others, but it's imperative that you leave the parent with the impression that you will never give up on the student and no situation is completely hopeless. You can also share specific things you are doing/will do in order to support the child: This may not be necessary in every instance, but when a child is really struggling, it's helpful to articulate this so the parent knows you are doing everything in your power to ensure success for the student. This also conveys that you are on the same team and working together for the child, rather than just explaining a problem and saying "you need to fix it." Again, it is easy to misunderstand the intended tone when we communicate via writing, so ending with a supportive statement is a great approach for ensuring parents do not feel attacked.



Simple example

Here's what the B.A.N.D.S. formula might look like if you're writing about a student who is doing well but reading below grade level. This is the simplest possible format for comments (5 sentences, one for each element of B.A.N.D.S.). Obviously, you can add more info or talk about other strengths/weaknesses if needed.

- (B) James is a happy, outgoing student who always has entertaining stories to share with me and the rest of the class.
- (A) He has made great strides in math so far this year, excelling in our fractions unit and explaining his thinking well during problem-solving activities.
- (N) James is still working on improving his reading comprehension: As we discussed in our conference last month, he is currently a year below grade level in reading and will need to progress significantly prior to our end-of-year exam.
- (D) Please continue to read with James at home nightly, and encourage him to set aside two evenings a week to work on his choice of the reading comprehension websites I've suggested in a list attached to this report card.
- (S) Thank you for your help – with all of us working together as a team, James has incredible potential and I am confident he will continue to grow in all areas as the year progresses.

More detailed example for a student who is in danger of not passing

Here's what the B.A.N.D.S. formula might look like if you're trying to convey bigger issues. In this example, Sara comes to class with the intention of chatting and hanging out with her friends and puts very little effort into her school work. As a result, she's not likely to pass and is demonstrating below-grade-level work.

- (B) Sara gets along well with her peers and really enjoys the collaborative activities we do in class.
- (A) I was pleased that she put forth a lot of effort for the unit test last month, and her hard work paid off, raising her average grade to a D+.
- (N) I have not observed that same level of effort over the rest of the quarter, and unfortunately, that did impact her grades. As I shared via email, she's missing quite a few homework assignments and has some incomplete class work as well. My concern is that these choices could result in her repeating the class/grade level next year.
- (D) Would you be willing to help by checking the class web portal weekly and following up with Sara when you see incomplete/missing work or an opportunity for a re-do that she hasn't taken advantage of yet?
- (S) I will be speaking to Sara about this as well and suggesting that she make use of the study hall/extra support I offer during lunchtime on Thursdays. Thank you so much for your help in holding Sara accountable for her work – even though she is not currently mastering the curriculum standards, I believe she can raise her average by a full letter grade or more by attending class regularly and completing her assignments on time.



THE MOST EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT SYSTEM FOR COMPLETING REPORT CARDS

Now that you understand the B.A.N.D.S. formula and you've got yourself in the right mindset for generating meaningful comments in the simplest, most efficient way possible, you're ready to begin doing your report cards!

Here's the process I recommend. You'll notice a big emphasis on batching: Grouping similar tasks together and doing them all at once. This will allow you to get into a state of mental flow instead of forcing your brain to switch back and forth between different types of tasks. When you're in a state of flow, the work goes faster and feels much easier.

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

- [Redacted list item]
- [Redacted list item]
- [Redacted list item]
- [Redacted list item]
- [Redacted list item]
- [Redacted list item]
- [Redacted list item]

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

In the rest of this document, you will find specific phrases and wording you can use for your comments.

Begin with your first student – the one who is typical or similar to many other kids in the class – and choose a “best attribute” from the statements on the next page. Then move on to the next section and choose a “success,” and so on, until you have copied/adapted one or two statements from each of the 5 elements of B.A.N.D.S. for that student.

Use that comment compilation as a template to help you write comments for another child who is similar, referencing the sample comments to help you change anything as needed. Continue through your entire class list, copy/pasting and adapting as you go.



Begin by making a positive comment(s) about the student's best attributes and/or accomplishments, choosing from the options below if needed. Try to be specific about the student, if possible. This will convey to the parent that you really know the student and care about him/her.

Choose one of the following, based on if the student...

Excels academically

[Redacted]

Is enthusiastic and engaged

[Redacted]

Tries hard

[Redacted]

Has a strong work ethic

[Redacted]

Is responsible/mature

[Redacted]

Is very social/outgoing/popular

[Redacted]

Is extremely kind and thoughtful

[Redacted]

Is very likeable and a pleasure to teach

[Redacted]

Has a great sense of humor

[Redacted]

Shows leadership

[Redacted]

Is creative or quirky

[Redacted]

Is super talented in one specific area/passionate about a specific subject

enjoys sharing his/her passion for ___ with me and the rest of the class; we love hearing his/her stories

[Redacted]

None of the above

[Redacted]

More Descriptors

delightful
caring
kind
studious
inquisitive
creative
polite
fun-loving
thoughtful
focused
hard-working
studious
outgoing
friendly
well-liked by peers

Feeling stuck?

Pick the category here that *best* describes the student – whichever one sticks out to you the most or was your first instinct when reading. Some kids are harder to describe than others, and certain kids you might not have gotten to know very well yet. The important thing here is to have SOMETHING to start off your comment that conveys to the parent that you like his/her child and believe that she has some positive traits.



Next, share at least one area in which the child is doing well. If you will need to describe significant problems, try to lead into that by sharing a success of the student related to that area. For example, if there are behavioral issues, share something positive about the students' behavior first. If the student is reading below grade level, share something positive about his/her reading habits, effort, or growth in reading.

Choose one of the following, based on if the student...

Is extremely strong in a skill set

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Is doing well in a skill set

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Is making some progress in a skill set

continues to improve in ----

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Has made solid academic improvements

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Has made solid behavioral improvements

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Has been working harder

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Has had a good or improved attitude toward school/growth mindset

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Has good or improved work habits

[Redacted]

Has demonstrated self-advocacy

[Redacted]

Has been getting along with others

[Redacted]

Has been participating in class

[Redacted]

Has had improved attendance

[Redacted]

Has been thinking critically

[Redacted]

Feeling stuck?

When choosing a strength to mention, stay focused on the categories of characteristics. Go with your gut instinct – when you think about a particular student, which characteristic listed here jumps out at you the most? If none of the comment suggestions for that characteristic quite fit, create a variation on what I've written here by reworking or combining the phrases. Be sure to save your adaptation so you can re-use it for other students if needed!



I recommend choosing no more than 3 areas of improvement in most instances. Report card comments are not the place to dump every minor issue on a parent and discourage/overwhelm him or her. Remember, you will not be in the room when the parent reads your words, and s/he won't be able to know your tone/intentions. No one wants to read a lengthy list of everything that's wrong with his/her child. Instead, think about just a couple areas in which it's most imperative that the student improves in order to be successful, and focus on articulating those areas clearly. Ideally, these are issues the parent is already aware of from your more informal communication.

Lead with one of these sentence starters to document your ongoing parent communication...

[Redacted]

Then complete the sentence by choosing one of the following, based on if the student needs to improve in....

Any subject/skill set

[Redacted]

Reading

[Redacted]

Math

[Redacted]

Attendance

[Redacted text block]

Critical thinking and problem solving

[Redacted text block]

Paying attention

[Redacted text block]

Following directions

[Redacted text block]

Effort

[Redacted text block]

Incomplete/missing work

[Redacted text block]

Struggles due to special needs or language barriers

[Redacted text block]

Cooperation with others

[Redacted text block]

Shy/withdrawn

[Redacted text block]

Disrupting class

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Attitude/respectfulness

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

More descriptors

reluctant, seems unmotivated, often unenthusiastic, struggling with, not yet mastering, working hard to develop, continuing to work on

Feeling stuck?

Remember that you do not need to describe EVERY issue in a report card comment. In fact, a parent is likely to find it overwhelming and discouraging if you do so, and that can damage your rapport. So, stay focused on the MOST IMPORTANT area of improvement, and list a second or third area only if necessary and very briefly. Refrain from going into excessive detail, and instead use the report card comment to formally document past communication in which you have already established the problem to the parent:

As we discussed in our most recent conference, ___'s scores on the benchmark test and classwork indicate s/he is working below grade level.

You'll recall from our email exchange last month that ___ has not been turning in homework/did not pass the unit test/etc

As you've seen from the mid-term report and daily classwork that has been returned over the past few weeks, ___ has not yet mastered the standards related to ___.



Share specific things the parent/child can do to improve: It's frustrating to parents when they hear their child is having problems and they have no idea how to fix it. Pre-empt this problem (and avoid tons of follow-up questions) by giving the parent actionable steps to take. Because you're likely dealing with the same types of issues over and over (tardiness, lack of attention in class, reading below grade level, etc.), you can write out one set of suggestions for each problem in advance and then just copy/paste for each student who has that issue.

Choose one of the following, based on if the student needs to...

Read more

[Redacted text block]

Practice in math

[Redacted text block]

Other academic improvement

[Redacted text block]

Pay attention in class/put forth more effort

[Redacted text block]

Needs to be challenged

[Redacted]

Complete classwork/redos

[Redacted]

Attend class/be on time

[Redacted]

Complete homework

[Redacted]

Cooperate with others

[Redacted]

Be more respectful

[Redacted]

Be allowed by parents to take responsibility

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Conference needed

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Additional resources provided

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Multiple issues too numerous to list

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

More phrases

I feel confident that ___ can improve by...

The most important thing ___ can do to improve...

The best way to support ___ in improving is ___

Thank you for continuing to...

Please continue to...

Your support in this area is so appreciated...

Let's continue to work together to...

I would love to meet with you to discuss these areas in more detail...

Feel free to schedule a phone call or conference if you'd like to discuss this further

Feeling stuck?

Avoid listing every possible thing the parent/child needs to do, and instead focus on the MOST IMPACTFUL action they should take. You can always expand or offer more ideas later through other forms of communication. The purpose here is to make sure the parent does not finish reading your comments feeling at a loss about how to improve the situation. (If that happens, you may get total disengagement, a harshly punished student, and/or frantic messages from desperate parents.) Simply offer support and further resources as needed.



End by sharing an optimistic outlook and expressing a belief that the student can and will be successful. Obviously, this is easier to write for some kids than others, but it's imperative that you leave the parent with the impression that you will never give up on the student and no situation is completely hopeless. You can also share specific things you are doing/will do in order to support the child: This may not be necessary in every instance, but when a child is really struggling, it's helpful to share your interventions so that the parent knows you have not given up on the child and are doing everything in your power to ensure success for him/her. It also conveys that you are on the same team and working together for the child, rather than just explaining a problem and saying "you need to fix it." Again, it is easy to misunderstand the intended tone when we communicate via writing, so this is a great approach for ensuring parents do not feel attacked.

Choose one of the following, based on if the student...

Has behavioral issues

[Redacted]

Has academic issues

[Redacted]

Has motivation/effort issues

[Redacted]

Above-grade level student: General message of next steps and support

[Redacted]

On-grade level student: General message of next steps and support

[Redacted]

Below-grade level student: General message of next steps and support

[Redacted]

Has a parent who has been uncommunicative

[Redacted]

Has a very "on the ball" parent who provides great support

[Redacted]

End-of-year closing statement

[Redacted text]

Feeling stuck?

Choose a statement that reinforces the rapport you have built with the parent. You want to convey that no matter how many problems the student is experiencing, his/her situation is not hopeless. Reinforce that you intend to work with the parent as a team, and you have ideas, resources, and a plan for things to improve.

If you are writing about an issue that the parent has likely heard about from every teacher who's worked with the child, optimism is the most important thing to convey. The parent is well aware there is a problem, but may have lost faith in the ability to help his or her child. A bit of encouragement to a stressed out, overwhelmed parent can go a long way in breaking out of unhealthy patterns so the student can begin to make more progress.



When the problem is mostly effort-related...

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

When the problem is mostly related to behavioral issues, including disruptive behavior and counterproductive choices/attitude toward classwork...

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

When the problem is organization and preparedness...

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

When the problem is due to the student working below-grade-level for any reason...

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

OPTION 1

[Redacted text block]

OPTION 2

[Redacted text block]

DESCRIPTORS FOR STUDENT PROGRESS

shows a deep understanding of
has worked hard to develop his/her skills in
is progressing in his/her understanding of
has a limited/emerging grasp of



I hope this resource has truly helped you create more eloquent, tactful comments in far less time!

Though I can't predict every scenario every teacher could possibly need to document for every student, I plan to this resource for years to come, and improve it over time based on what you need.

If you have a situation that's not covered in this doc, let me know anytime via this quick Google form.

[ADD YOUR SUGGESTION](#)

I will then review the form periodically and add additional comments to the resource based on your suggestions.

You'll be able to re-download the updated resource from TeachersPayTeachers (or from the All Printables for the Year page, if you're part of the graduate program for the 40 Hour Teacher Workweek Club).

Thank you for your help in making this resource as useful as possible!



BUT WAIT! THERE'S MORE...

I'm **Angela Watson**, the creator of this resource. I'm a National Board Certified Teacher with a masters degree in Curriculum and Instruction, and have 11 years of classroom teaching experience and over a decade of experience as an instructional coach. I currently work as a Productivity and Mindset Specialist in the area of educational consulting. In practical terms, this means I author books, design curriculum, and provide professional development services. Everything I do is centered on sharing more effective, efficient, and enjoyable ways of teaching and learning!

I founded my website ([TruthforTeachers.com](https://www.truthforteachers.com)) in 2003 to connect with other educators. You can now find thousands of ad-free articles and resources there from me and our K-12 teacher-writer's collective.

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