

The Writing Intensive Course: FSEM Workshop

August 15, 2011 ** LBC 220 ** 1-4 p.m.

WI Courses

- Use writing to help students learn the material
- Use writing to introduce and reinforce basic concepts and skills for first year college
- Ultimately challenge students to think and write with more care and forethought

Where to Start

1. Think about what you want your students to be able to do for your class: identifying terminology, applying ideas from reading, reflecting on observations, comparing experiences, and so forth.

2. Remember how you learned to do the things you want them to do. Can you use those techniques to teach your students?

3. Think about how to get students to write. If you want them to use the proper terminology, ask them to work in groups to develop a written definition. If you want them to apply ideas from reading, assign them one idea from the reading (to start with), discuss the idea in class to give them some ideas about what they can say, and then send them off with the assignment.

4. Build in class time to discuss the writing assignments. Then, build in some more to talk about the writing you're getting from them: show students what you like and what you don't.

5. Look at the examples on the Writing Program website: <http://www.stetson.edu/artsci/writingprogram/facresources.php#samplesyllabi>. You can also Google "writing intensive syllabus" and see what you get.

Rethink Your Preconceptions

Since many faculty seem to have a “mental model” of how writing must be taught that is extremely labor-intensive, we offer here a few examples of how professors can offer opportunities for revision with no extra demands on their time—and perhaps with the added bonus of having better papers to read:

- Students use in-class exploratory writing as a basis for a more polished essay.
- A professor assigns one-page response papers every week. Skimming them, the professor marks each with a plus, check, or minus. Students then choose one of these to revise and expand.
- A professor gives two due dates for an essay, one for the first draft and one for the second. Along with the final draft, students hand in a cover sheet from an outside reader (writing tutor, classmate, other) and a paragraph describing improvements made in the second draft. The professor does not read or comment on the first draft.
- A professor returns papers marred by mechanical errors ungraded (and unedited), asking the student to fix them and resubmit.
- A larger paper is divided into smaller steps. After each step, the professor discusses common problems, which students then incorporate into the final version of the paper.
- After students have submitted their first papers, the professor shows examples of strong and weak introductory paragraphs. Students revise and resubmit their introductions based on what they have learned.
- A professor invites students to revise and resubmit a paper, but does not give detailed feedback on the revised version.

Adapted from Carleton College's Writing Program website

<http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/writingprogram/writingrichguidelines/>

Break the larger paper into smaller steps:

Reading summary → written response → one idea from response for class discussion → summary of class discussion incorporating quotation from the reading → use as basis for essay

What to Remember

1. Writing about it works. Your students will learn more through writing than through almost any other kind of assignment.
2. Don't read everything they write. In fact, giving students assignments that they know you won't provides them with a place to think in peace. Particularly for first year students, that peaceful space is critically important.
3. Explain in detail. Spend time in class discussing with the students the writing you want them to do. It isn't time "taken away" from content--it's part of how the students will process what you're teaching. Give them the time they need.
4. Teach what you know. When it comes to writing, this oldie is still a truism. So, if you don't consider teaching grammar, punctuation, or sentence structure as strengths of yours, then don't "teach" these things. (However, you're obligated to remind the students that standards and expectations are important at Stetson and hold them accountable to what you decide is an acceptable level of error.) Conversely, if you're going to really stress the importance of the mechanics, then be prepared to spend class time teaching the students what they need.
5. You know what you want. Take the time to talk about your assignments and what you want them to look like. (What is important to you? Paragraph structure? Documentation? Reflection and introspection? Organization? Placement or structure of a thesis?) It's normal to have some unarticulated ideas and expectations, and it is completely okay if you're figuring it out along with the students. Writing happens best after classwide discussion about what you want to see.
6. Model it. Show your students models and examples, and take the time to discuss them in class. Why are they good (or bad)? What are the techniques and "moves" of your own professional writing? If you don't have any examples ready to hand, write some yourself. One last thing: it is very helpful to discuss how you would revise any problems in your examples. The examples don't always have to be excellent, in other words.
7. Learning happens in stages. Be patient, and consciously build those steps into your course design.
8. Help is available. Incorporating writing into the teaching process can raise a lot of questions, big and small. Ask your fellow FSEM teachers, ask the Director of the Writing Program, ask a Writing Center tutor, ask the Director of FSEMs, and ask anyone else who teaches. There's a wide range of expertise at Stetson: take advantage of it.

Three Recommendations for Ungraded Writing

1—Two minutes (or five, or ten) at the beginning or end of a day or a section in the course:

- students write three questions they hope the section will cover;
- students write responses to preliminary reading assignments;
- students write a quick summary of their preliminary reading assignment;
- students write a brief answer to a question you pose at the outset
- students write two or three questions they hope you will answer

2—Journals

- An ongoing daily or weekly system of reading and course responses
- A record of questions that the course raises, with answers or speculation about answers
- A compilation of the semester's writing, with a check sheet (a blank TOC) for record keeping
- A record of ways students make sense (or attempt to make sense) out of course concepts (research, testing questions and answers)
- Need only be graded on quantity of pages, not quality of ideas or writing

3—Reading Responses

- Summaries of content, with questions that result
- Comparisons of (content, audience, style, coverage) between two readings
- Strongest/weakest argument, with explanation

Recommended Assignments

1. The summary. Teaching students how to summarize a reading or a passage or an argument is essential: if they can't summarize what someone else has said, they can't build from it very well to build their own ideas. Assign summaries of readings and then, before you start grading those summaries, talk about their strengths and weaknesses with the class. Once you've spent time talking about what you want to see more of, and what you want to see less of, you can start grading them. Take some time to read the *Guide to Writing at Stetson*; there's some very basic discussion of summary.
2. The reading response. Asking students to reflect on what they're reading is one of the best ways to ensure that they're getting it. Students retain concepts they've written about much more than concepts they've only scratched the surface of. Ask the students to identify one idea that resonates with them and to explain why. Assign a brief writing in which students compare the ideas in one reading to a set of contrasting ideas in another reading. No need to grade these assignments, but you probably want to read them, to see which students are making reasonable progress and which students need a little more help from you. Assign at least three reading responses over the semester.
3. The "minute" essay. Asking students to write briefly about a specific question teaches them to focus and process in a short period of time. These minute essays shouldn't be graded, but they're invaluable to get a sense of the class and also give the students practice at quick response. Assign them at the end of each section of your course, or after a particularly lecture- or experience -heavy day. Try these: What are you hoping to learn from this class? what was the most important concept you got out of today's class? What elements of today's discussion do you want to spend more time discussing next time? What do you already know about this topic?
4. The second draft. Sure, the need for a first draft is obvious. But many of our incoming students will rely on only the first draft's work to put together their final draft, and as a result, some of their graded writing will be weaker than it has to be. Two revisions forces extended time with an essay's idea. If you comment mostly on the big issues of content, clarity, adequacy of the research, or comprehension on the first draft, you can save comments about editing, word choice, and other important surface conventions for a second revision. Students are often quite good editors of each other's work, but they may not benefit from peer comments about the global or 'big ticket' items like clarity of thought. So give them your professional response to the core elements of their writing in a first draft; later, when they've sorted out the big problems, you can often ask peer groups to work on the details of editing. Don't grade drafts--that isn't fair to the student who is still learning what you want. But do offer some sort of measurement of the quality as you see it.
5. The portfolio. An end of term portfolio collects all (or a specific sampling) of a student's writing over the course of the term. Students should be asked to introduce the portfolio with some reflective writing on what they've written, how they've grown, what they've learned, and so forth. The advantage for the professor is that it demonstrates the students' growth, all at once. It's a final demonstration of their best stuff. Even better, because portfolios should be given one holistic grade--one grade that captures the student's performance in that portfolio--grading is easy. The students will not be revising the portfolios, so formative commentary isn't necessary; portfolios also save time. Be sure that you provide very clear instructions and a set of criteria on which the portfolio will be graded.

Make the Assignment as Detailed as Possible

General	Specific and Purposeful	Explicit Goals/Criteria
Discuss the causes of the Civil War.	Write a detailed letter of about three pages to the author of our primary text about the Civil War OR Write a review of our text's chapter on the causes of the Civil War. Explain the ways in which you agree or disagree with the text, and offer suggestions for the next edition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --demonstrate nuanced understanding of material --identify separate elements involved in notion of "cause" --use quotation where appropriate --show awareness of audience --demonstrate critical thinking and reading comprehension
Discuss the significance of Stanley Milgram's experiments with obedience and authority.	Based on your understanding of Milgram's experiments, summarize for a high school Psych course the ethical issues raised by his work and their consequences for the field of psychology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --understand summary --demonstrate awareness of cause and effect --use diction appropriate to intended audience --observe conventions of documentation
Describe the key differences between Hinduism and Buddhism.	Drawing from the assigned reading, prepare a study sheet: compile a one-page table that organizes the author's explanation of Hinduism and Buddhism. Be ready to discuss your reasons for the order in which you've listed the differences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --summarize reading --identify key differences --a skill for handling ambiguity --quotation and documentation technique --awareness of organizational options
Describe the relationship between competition and cooperation.	Write to a local business owner to recommend that they replace their current "teamwork" training with a model that you know about. Be ready to describe the possible benefits based on your understanding of the relationship between competition and cooperation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --use diction appropriate to intended audience --demonstrate ability to compare --demonstrate ability to use claim and support --ability to research: what business would be appropriate audience?

About Grading

- Grade on what you have taught (not what you think they should already know).
- Grade the writing, not the student
- Comments and questions on revisions; grades on final drafts
- Grade analytically to direct students to problem areas (content, structure, clarity, thesis, organization....)
- Grade less. Comment more.

About Commenting

1. Save yourself time by reading all the assignments at once and only then separating them into three stacks ("good," "not good," and "excellent"). Don't start commenting until this stage, when you've got a sense of the range of the class performance.
2. Comment on what is most important to you. Commenting on every single thing you see is not only frustrating for you but confounding for the students, who can't tell what is most important to take care of. Aim at a maximum of four comments per page of student writing.
3. On the first draft, comment on “big ticket” items: content, research, focus, etc. On the second draft, comment on questions of form: sentence structure, grammar, word choice, punctuation.

Assignments with Major Mechanical Problems

- Recognize patterns of error (not just the number of errors)
- Mark only a few examples of the error
- Distinguish between “error” and “mistake” (errors are misunderstandings; mistakes are accidents)
- Create a checklist of common problems to use to guide student work
- Reduce the grade **ONLY** if the mechanical issues are so serious that they impede your understanding

Students Who Speak Other Languages

- Remind students to check for articles, plurals, verb shifts; offer to help
- Distinguish between “error” and “mistake” (errors are misunderstandings; mistakes are accidents)
- Don’t penalize students for writing with an accent

Use a Rubric to Help Grade

Categories	Weak	Acceptable	Strong
Thesis and support	Missing or vague; no relevant evidence	Clear thesis, adequate supporting evidence	Insightful or thought-provoking thesis, multiple and varied evidence
Organization	Paragraphs seem randomly arranged	Paragraphs follow a logical order	Paragraphs move the reader easily through the assignment
Technical accuracy	Errors too many to read easily; comprehension is delayed by number of mistakes	Several errors, none delaying comprehension or conveying inaccuracies	Few if any mistakes in spelling, sentence structure, conventions

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is about the documentation of information, and that is increasingly challenging to understand because information is everywhere and our students are encouraged to soak it in uncritically. It's relatively rare to see a student actually lift an essay off the web or put together a bunch of paragraphs that someone else wrote--and sure, they all know that's wrong.

But it's pretty common to see awkward attribution of ideas or misunderstandings about where the documentation goes or what "paraphrasing" really means--and those things are not universally agreed upon. A teacher needs to talk about these things, and then talk about them more. Time spent in class talking about who owns information and how to acknowledge the intellectual footsteps is time spent teaching our students to think about what they're doing.

Students who are inclined to cheat are more inclined to do so when they think you don't care and when they think you're not paying attention. They're also more likely to cheat if you provide them with opportunities to do so. Poorly written assignments, generally broad topics, and no written guidelines about the kinds and types of sources to use all contribute to plagiarism.

Preventing plagiarism is not all that difficult. Prevent it by educating the student about it. And then, take it seriously when it happens.

What Can the Writing Center Do to Help?

The Writing Center is an eager partner for your teaching needs. This year, student tutors from English, Biology, Chemistry, and Business are forming a team of multidisciplinary excellence to help you and your students.

1. Take advantage of the one on one tutoring in Flagler 209. Students in your FSEM can visit (by requirement or recommendation) for individualized assistance at all stages of their writing processes, from brainstorming to revision to editing and polishing. The tutors do not make any changes to the student's writing; the tutors help the student learn to be a better writer. While this means that a single visit to the Writing Center may not be enough to earn that student an A on his or her essay, it also means that repeated visits will help that student understand and navigate the differing demands of the writing assignments he or she will encounter here. After each visit from a student, faculty are offered the chance to chat with the tutor about the specifics of the session; in this way, faculty have the opportunity to finetune the help being offered to the students. The hours are Monday-Thursday, 3-9 p.m., with additional hours on Sunday.
2. We offer faculty the option of workshops in your classes. You can arrange for a tutor (or a team) to visit your course and help your students learn the skills of revision, documentation and formatting, assignment reading, and so forth. Workshops can be 30 minutes to 90 minutes, depending on your needs and the tutor schedules. Contact us at writingprogram@stetson.edu and we'll talk about what you need.
3. We offer the campus workshop opportunities, to which you can direct your students. In coordination with Student Success, we'll be assisting in student workshops on documentation, essential genres, distinctions between humanities and sciences, and so forth. Keep an eye on your email for when these workshops will be offered, and please join us yourself. The Writing Center tutors are the core of writing assistance for your students, and you are the ones who know best what you want. Help us help your students and join us at the workshops.

Resources for Teaching WI courses

Plagiarism:

“Anti-Plagiarism Strategies for Research Papers”: <http://www.virtualsalt.com/antiplag.htm>

Portfolios:

Bogart, “Writing Portfolios: What Teachers Learn From Student Self-Assessment”
<http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/resources/acl/e2.html>

Writing to Learn:

“What is Writing to Learn?” Colorado State University: <http://wac.colostate.edu/intro/pop2d.cfm>

“Write to Learn: Strategies and Assignments” University of Richmond:
<http://writing2.richmond.edu/wac/wtl.html>