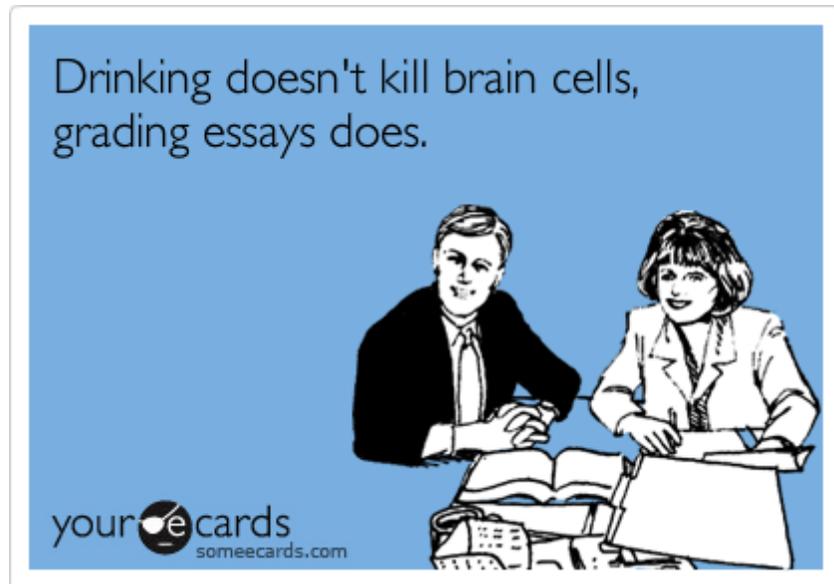


# Fall 2013 FSEM Faculty Development

## Handling the Paper Load



### 1. DESIGN AN EFFECTIVE ASSIGNMENT

**Clear, appropriate writing assignments include guidelines for completing them and criteria on which the writing will be evaluated.** By including on your assignment sheet a statement of your objectives in making that particular assignment and an explanation of the criteria on which you will judge the results, you will reduce the students' anxiety about the assignment ("I just didn't know what the teacher wanted") and will increase their chances of success. A little more time spent in designing an assignment can significantly reduce the time spent in grading the assignment.

**Require fewer graded writing assignments and give more time to and guidance for the ones you keep.** If you've been grading five or more writing assignments per course, you might try reducing the number to three or four. You can have the students do as much writing as before by substituting informal, preparatory writing for some of the previous graded writing.

**Require fewer pages.** Short papers can be just as effective learning experiences as long ones. Save the long paper for a capstone course in the major; and even then, you might find that the task is more manageable for teacher and student – and the

learning enhanced-if you have the student complete the paper in stages, as smaller assignments and/or through multiple drafts.

**Consider collaborative writing assignments.** Not all writing assignments can be converted from individual writing tasks to group writing tasks, nor should they all. But at least some of the writing students do works best in collaborative groups Collaborative writing assignments across the curriculum can meet many of the theoretical and practical goals of WEC:

- Collaborative writing assignments usually entail **much less grading** time for the instructor.
- Collaborative groups **draw upon the strengths of all their members.** Although one student may be stronger in critical thinking skills, another may excel in organizing. By working in groups, students learn from each other while they complete assigned tasks.
- More and more **workplace activities involve project teams.** Giving students opportunities to work collaboratively on academic projects can help prepare them for the advantages and pitfalls of collaborative work on the job.
- Students working in collaborative groups can take advantage of group members for **built-in peer review** as they complete writing projects.

## II. TRAIN YOUR STUDENTS TO RESPOND TO EACH OTHER

- **Small group workshops**
- **Peer review activities**

<http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/teaching/activities/index.cfm>

## III. RESPOND EFFECTIVELY TO STUDENT WRITING

**On the first draft, comment on “big ticket” items:** content, research, focus, etc. Ignore everything else. On the **second draft**, comment on questions of form: sentence structure, grammar, paragraphing, word choice, punctuation.

**Save yourself time** by reading all the assignments at once and only then separating them into three stacks ("good," "not so good," and "excellent"). Don't start commenting until this stage, when you've got a sense of the range of the class performance.

**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.

**Use a grading sheet.** Grading comment sheets or check sheets give teachers and students two advantages over free-form grading:

- Grading sheets of some sort assure that teachers will give students feedback about all the major criteria they set out on the assignment sheet.
- Grading sheets, particularly check sheets, typically save teachers time. Even composition teachers don't comment exhaustively about each criterion for each assignment; so, too, disciplinary teachers should be aware that they can comment at some length on just one or two points (typically the major strength and the major weakness) and then rely on the check sheet to fill in for less crucial areas of the draft. If students are concerned about getting more feedback than the check sheet provides, you can encourage them to come to your office hours or send you an e-mail query.

#### Special considerations: assignments with major mechanical problems

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- 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 genuine misunderstandings; mistakes are accidents like inadequate proofreading)
- 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

#### Special considerations: students who speak other languages

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- Offer to help in your office hours
- Don't penalize students for writing with an accent. They are learning.
- Very often, students writing in English as a second language will not acquire the ability to handle articles (a, an, the) and plurals until much later; some will never acquire it.
- Mark patterns of error, NOT every single example. Students learn the details of second and third languages by recognizing patterns (plurals, tense shifts, irregular verbs).

## SAMPLE Science Project checksheet

### GENERAL 50 POINTS

1. Correct form (15)

Reference list (3)

Citation of sources(2)

Mechanics (order, table of contents, list of tables, list of figures, cover) (5)

Layout (5)

2. Composition skills (10)

Spelling (5)

Grammar (5)

3. Log book used to record experimental data, ideas, etc. (10)

4. Abstract (10)

5. Acknowledgments (5)

**TOTAL GENERAL:** \_\_\_\_\_

### EXHIBIT 50 EXTRA CREDIT POINTS

1. Summarized project well (30)

Problem and hypothesis easy to understand (5)

Experimental method clearly stated (10)

Results summarized in graphs/tables (10)

Conclusion presented (5)

2. Eye appeal (10)

Neat lettering (3)

Pleasing placement of parts (2)

Good use of color (3)

Sturdiness (2)

3. Creativity (10)

**TOTAL EXHIBIT POINTS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL PROJECT:** \_\_\_\_\_