



**WRITING
INTENSIVE
COURSES**
*Strategies and
Resources*

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First Edition, Spring 2008

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Introducing...

Writing Intensive Courses

To strengthen the quality of writing and learning at Finger Lakes Community College and better prepare our students for their endeavors following graduation, the Write Place Project strives to encourage and support faculty in all disciplines to engage students in challenging writing assignments that help to build content area knowledge as well as improve general composition skills. Courses developed and approved with a Writing Intensive (WI) designation emphasize writing in a variety of ways, through a variety of activities and assignments, throughout the semester. While content remains the primary focus of WI courses, writing is incorporated as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. This guide is intended to provide faculty with a variety of strategies and resources that can be used to develop WI courses and effective writing assignments.

Basic Principles of Writing Intensive Courses

Writing skills are vital for success in academic endeavors, in the workplace, and in broader civic settings. At FLCC, students are required to complete English 101 and 102. To ensure that our students get enough practice in writing and give our students all possible opportunities to improve their writing skills, we integrate writing into the curriculum both to improve student writing and as a strategy to promote more effective learning in all disciplines. Writing clearly promotes basic analytical skills and enhances learning as students actively engage with the subject matter of the various disciplines we teach. In the same ways we integrate information literacy and critical thinking into our curriculum, we also emphasize writing as a fundamental part of the learning process.

Improving students' writing skills is a critical institutional goal that requires greater efforts made to “teach” writing more deliberately throughout our curriculum. As students write more often in their coursework, writing becomes normalized, so to speak, and this “practice” leads to the improvement of student writing skills. Students ultimately will reap the benefits of WI courses, as learning in general is enhanced and learning to write is given the institutional priority it merits.

Writing in various forms promotes active engagement with course content, enhances the ability to think critically and clearly, and enables students to demonstrate knowledge in discipline-appropriate ways. Broadly accepted in the academic community, these conceptions of writing within and across disciplines are based on the following principles:

- ◆ Writing is a complex cognitive and linguistic process that is essential to learning.
- ◆ Writing is active and recursive; with emphasis on directed writing activities and revision, writing is a learning (and teaching) process as much as it is a product.
- ◆ Writing, as well as thinking and reading, is contextual and therefore is approached according to the disciplinary and pedagogical situation.

- ◆ General writing skills are retained and improved when writing is practiced beyond required English courses and reinforced throughout the college curriculum.

What Does a Writing Intensive Course Look Like?

The criteria for WI courses represent a broad consensus across many colleges and universities and among faculty here at FLCC. In a WI course, writing in its various forms is a “normal” and recurring activity throughout the semester. Faculty have leeway in the type of writing assignments offered, yet an emphasis on the **writing process** is fundamental. This entails directing students through **pre-writing** (informal, exploratory/generative, writing-to-learn activities), **drafting** (shaping, organizing, providing evidence), and **revision** (instructor feedback, peer review, self-assessment) strategies. In this way, writing assignments are given with guidance, assessment criteria, and feedback prior to students’ completion of any finished “product.”

Criteria for Writing Intensive Courses

WI courses maintain content as their primary focus but also reinforce writing skills by using writing as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. WI courses also contain one major assignment that must include an emphasis on the writing process and include opportunities for revision.

In addition,

- ◆ The syllabus of a writing intensive course will list “the improvement of student writing” among the course objectives. The syllabus will also include an explanation of grading criteria and how writing will be evaluated.
- ◆ Writing is emphasized throughout the semester through a variety of writing activities and assignments.
- ◆ Informal (ungraded) writing is also emphasized throughout the course. (Examples include in-class reflective writing on lectures or reading topics, journals, reading logs, brainstorming, free-writing, and concept mapping.)

- ◆ The course includes at least one significant writing assignment that involves an emphasis on the writing process including opportunities for drafting, feedback, and revision. Feedback on student writing during the revision process is provided through peer response, collaboration with the writing center, and instructor feedback.
- ◆ A minimum of 12 typed pages of graded writing is required. The 12 pages of graded writing do not include writing on examinations. Examples of graded writing are case studies, laboratory reports, structured journals, letters, essays, research papers, proposals, and summaries of scholarly articles.
- ◆ At least 50% of the course grade is based on the grades on written assignments.
- ◆ ENG 101 is a pre-requisite or co-requisite.

Process for Designating WI Courses

The director of the writing center can get you information and application materials, as well as connect you with faculty from **The Write Place** who can assist you in designing and sequencing assignments that will best fit course goals and maximize student learning. The College Writing Committee (comprised of two faculty from Humanities, one faculty at-large, one faculty from Curriculum Committee, and the director of the writing center) reviews the applications and syllabi of interested faculty using the WI course criteria and also provides feedback and recommendations. When applications are approved, the college's course listings and student transcripts will carry the WI course designations. In Fall 2002, the Curriculum Committee endorsed course policy, criteria, and a formal process for designating WI courses. Faculty who are interested in designating a WI course are encouraged to participate in workshops, seminars, and conferences on writing across the curriculum and writing to learn.

design



In WI courses, writing is emphasized throughout the semester through a variety of informal and formal writing assignments.

Formal vs. Informal Writing

Both formal and informal writing assignments promote critical thinking and active engagement with course subject matter. Formal writing usually requires multiple drafts and is thus distinguished from equally important informal, exploratory writing aimed at generating, developing, and extending thinking on a subject.

Informal Writing

Informal writing is done both in preparation for, and quite independently of, formal writing assignments in a course. It is “freewriting,” unconstrained by any need to appear correct in public. It is not yet arranging, asserting, arguing. It is still reflecting and questioning. This is probative, speculative, generative thinking that is written in class or at home to develop the language of learning. It may not always be read by a teacher. Generally, it is not graded. Parts of it are often heard in class, but as a means of collaborative learning, not of individual testing. Its basic purpose is to help students become independent, active learners by creating for themselves the language essential to their personal understanding.

Specifically, informal written language serves

to develop abilities

the abilities to define, classify, summarize, and question; to deconstruct complex patterns, generate evaluative criteria, establish inferences, imagine hypotheses, analyze problems, and identify procedures

to develop methods

methods of close, inquisitive, reactive reading; of observing, recording and reporting data; of organizing and structuring data into generalizations; of formulating theories; of recognizing and applying the “methods” themselves

to develop knowledge

knowledge about central concepts in a course as well as the broad aims and exact methods of the discipline; about one’s own problem-solving, thinking, learning, and language

to develop attitudes

attitudes toward learning and knowing; toward oneself and one’s work; toward one’s own and others’ mistakes and errors; toward the knowledge and opinions of others

to develop general capacities for learning

the capacity to question, to create problems (as well as solutions), to wonder, to think for oneself while working with others

to develop communal learning

learning that encourages open exploration and discovery in a community of inquiry, rather than isolated competition; that promotes connected rather than separated, active rather than passive, teaching and learning; that supports teaching and learning through tasks, rather than through data alone; that locates the motivation for learning — not in the relevance of the subject or in the performance of the teacher, but in the social dynamic of the learning community

to stimulate and focus class discussion

discussion that is rooted in students’ inclination and confidence to contribute after they’ve had the opportunity to collect thoughts on paper

to provide feedback

regular feedback for students and instructors on the learning process

List adapted from the Institute for Writing and Thinking, Bard College

Informal Writing Activities

Freewriting. *Unstructured, uninhibited writing that allows us to become centered, present for the learning that is about to begin, grounding out the static we bring to class; time to breathe, hear oneself think; writing quickly, without stopping to ponder, editing, or self-correcting; to discover what we know, think, or feel*

Focused freewriting. *All reflective, probative, speculative writing, freewritten yet focused, that explores a term, problem, issue, or question open-endedly; first thoughts on a subject, casting a wide net of inquiry; may be used to initiate or conclude a class discussion or, mid-class, to focus a discussion that is confused or lacks energy to help students digest, apply, and challenge their thinking, and achieve enough confidence to contribute fruitfully to class discussion*

Attitudinal writing. *Focused freewriting that aims at expressing the attitudes that influence aptitudes for learning*

Metacognitive, process writing. *Examining how and why we act (or will act) in a situation - done after (or before) reading an assignment, taking an exam, working on a problem, writing a paper, thinking about an issue; anticipating and observing one's own learning behaviors in order to become more autonomous, less passively reliant on the information and authority of teachers and texts*

Narrative writing. *Stories, related to what one is thinking about or of one's thinking itself; collecting all that one thinks - thoughts, feelings, memories, associations, biases; personal, subjective, particular writing and holistic thinking, done prior to organizing linear discourse*

Explaining errors. *On a test or homework, a form of meta-cognitive process writing that helps students and instructors recognize where, how, and why learning went off-course*

Listing questions. *Another form of meta-cognitive process writing that allows students (and teachers) to recognize doubts, reservations, uncertainties, and confusions while doing homework or toward the end of a class*

Recognizing problems. *Defining one's own problems and issues in the class*

Quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing. *What was noticeable in a reading or class? What passages or concepts made an impression?*

Defining. *One's own definitions, however imprecise initially, created to develop conceptual understanding in a way that memorization of textbook terms cannot*

Writing to read. *Double-entry (dialectical) notebook, recording and reporting what a reading says and, in a facing column or page, responding to the text; noticing what both the reader and the author of a text think; integrating attitudinal writing, questioning, summarizing, and meta-cognitive process writing*

This list, adapted from the Institute for Writing and Thinking at Bard College, only begins to suggest the possibilities. Other informal writing activities include learning logs, microthemes, letters, and collaborative problem solving. For a thorough exploration of this topic with ample models, see Chapter 6 in John C. Bean's Engaging Ideas, as referenced in the Resources Section (pages 42-3).

Integrating Informal Writing into Coursework

While writing activities are valuable in and of themselves, careful planning can maximize their impact on student learning. Assignment sequences, at least initially, build from informal to formal writing and from simpler to more complex rhetorical tasks, enabling students to practice and build their writing and thinking skills. The following suggestions offer advice for successfully integrating informal writing into coursework:

- ◆ Informal writing tasks should build skills and engage students in thinking toward formal writing tasks. For instance, informal work can guide students to engage in critical thinking, personal reflection, careful reading, clear summarizing, and in-depth analysis that will expand their understanding of course material and develop skills toward improved formal writing.
- ◆ Informal writing tasks can be implemented throughout formal writing assignments to encourage students to stay engaged in the writing process and give them opportunities for feedback on their work in progress.

- ◆ As with all assignments, clear and explicit instructions and goals for students are essential to success. When introducing the activity, give students your rationale for assigning it. If you're using a prompt, present it both orally and visually. Before students write, describe next steps: will the writing be collected? discussed? included in an assignment portfolio? graded? If students are going to be able to be truly informal, they need to know that they aren't going to be judged on the quality of their informal, exploratory writing. Be clear about time limits, and when time is almost over, give a one-minute or 30-second warning.
- ◆ Whenever possible, do the activity yourself before presenting it to students and/or do it along with them in the class. This makes a significant impact on student motivation.
- ◆ Be sure to allow students a few moments after the completion of the assignment to read over what they've written, highlighting useful and interesting ideas that may be glittering from amidst the verbal rubble. These insights might then be contributed to discussions, further developed into formal writing assignments, and can deliver quick, valuable feedback to instructors.
- ◆ If you collect student writing, summarize, or at least highlight and comment on your findings during a subsequent class.

Formal Writing

Formal writing refers to assignments that are written with a specific audience and purpose in mind. These assignments are written in accordance with particular style conventions, are consciously revised, and are submitted for evaluation. Formal writing requires that all claims are supported by evidence and that writers demonstrate an understanding of the source texts used. As such, a standard form of documentation is expected in formal writing. While formal writing depends on the adherence to a number of conventions, they do not necessarily carry equal weight with all professors; for example, not all professors object to the use of contractions, while others may prefer that they are avoided. These kinds of stylistic details should be made clear to students when assignments are given.

Carefully designed formal writing assignments promote active, critical learning of course material. When first formulating formal writing assignments for your courses, it is helpful to clarify answers to some basic questions:

- ◆ What is the purpose of this assignment?
- ◆ What specific course goals will this assignment meet?
- ◆ How will this assignment relate to course readings and lectures?
- ◆ What are the skill levels of students?

In the pages that follow, you will find descriptions of several formal writing activities as well as suggestions for shaping formal projects that will help you develop effective writing assignments.

Types of Formal Writing Assignments

There are several examples of formal writing assignments that can enhance students' learning processes and help meet your curricular goals. The following list suggests ways of generating ideas and building skills toward larger projects and offers ideas for breaking down larger projects into manageable steps to encourage students to take the time to think, research, draft, and revise before submitting final drafts.

Letters & Memos

personal, business, applications, letters to the editor, e-mails

Critical Reviews

restaurants, plays, concerts, films, books

Profiles

individuals (biographies), corporations, places, plants, animals

Memoirs

narratives of personal experiences, reflections

Proposals

business plans, grant applications

Imaginative writing

poetry, plays, fiction, films, screenwriting, lyrics

Research papers

thesis-driven arguments, abstracts, annotated bibliographies, summaries, literature reviews

Process descriptions

instructions, manuals

Script writing

skits, scenes, plays, broadcasts

Electronic multi-media writing

web design writing, script writing, photo essays, power point presentations

Dialogs

discussions, conversations

Journalistic modes

columns, reviews, interviews, press releases, editorials

Critical Analysis

literary, historical, political

Reports

lab reports, descriptive, informative

Case studies

analysis of a condition, person, business, or community in context

Direction Words

Direction words help to clarify your expectations. The following list has been adapted from Fulwiler, Toby, and Alan R. Hayakawa. *The Blair Handbook*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1994.

Define or Identify asks for the distinguishing traits of a term, subject, or event, but does not require an interpretation or judgment.

Describe may ask for a physical description, or it may be used more loosely to request an explanation of a process, phenomenon, or event. Such questions generally do not ask for interpretation or judgment but require abundant details and examples.

Summarize asks for an overview or a synthesis of the main points without too much detail.

Compare and Contrast asks that students point out both similarities and differences, generally between two subjects but sometimes among three or more. Note that questions using other direction words may also ask for comparison or contrast: “Describe the differences between ...”

Analyze asks that students write about a subject in terms of its component parts. The subject may be concrete or abstract. In general, student responses should look at one part at a time.

Explain asks what causes something or how something operates. Such questions may ask for an interpretation and an evaluation.

Interpret asks for a definition or analysis of a subject based on internal evidence and the writer's own particular viewpoint.

Evaluate or Critique asks for a judgment based on clearly articulated analysis and reasoning. Judgments are not always completely one-sided, and students are often asked to cite more experienced judgments to back up their own.

Discuss or Comment On is a general request, which allows student writers considerable latitude in demonstrating what they have learned in your course.

The Research Paper

The next several pages are dedicated to the rethinking of the assignment most familiar and often most challenging to students and faculty alike — the traditional research paper.

A PHILOSOPHY OF RESEARCH

“Scholarship is to be created not by compulsion but by awakening a pure interest in knowledge.”
Ralph Waldo Emerson

A significant number of both students and instructors have come to dread the research assignment as a tedious and archaic chore. Yet, regardless of these feelings, the research paper is a traditional mode of academic inquiry and an assessment tool, even though we anticipate that the product may be little more than the mechanical accumulation of facts, figures, and quotations regurgitated as a patchy assemblage. In the halls, instructors moan to one another about the arduous grading sessions looming on the horizon, wondering why we even assign such projects at all anymore. Meanwhile, the students agonize over dense, cerebral texts, which they must in some way incorporate into their “reports,” as they sometimes quite accurately refer to them. This often leads them to confess – however indirectly – that they feel trapped in a process made seemingly arbitrary by the exclusion of their personal voice: “I’m just

plugging in facts, and it doesn't flow, but my teacher says I'm supposed to keep 'I' out of it." So both students and instructors are bored. And here lies the problem: "We" are out of it.

The research paper, as envisioned by those of us in English, rhetoric and composition, and associated disciplines, must encourage human presence in the writing. It is our belief that stronger writing comes from the sense that one's work is part of a genuine, non-threatening dialogue that breaks out of the stiff academic boundaries that are, frankly, alien and not easily approachable by the largest number of our students (and, for that matter, by many instructors, though we are slow to admit it). This is especially important to consider if we want our students to respond favorably to a broad liberal arts/general education core. If we sincerely hope to teach a sense of the interrelationship between all of the disciplines that our students are expected to sample, then we should also introduce the writing strategies that inspire a synthesis of interdisciplinary inquiry with a broad range of expressive techniques and styles. This deepens the context of the students' education and helps to unburden the notion of arbitrary and unanchored research assignments.

Subsequently, research assignments should challenge students to respond to the connections identified throughout the spectrum of courses they are taking. This is the sort of active learning that motivates students to believe they can be part of the process, as contributors to the scholarly dialogue, rather than mere hoop-jumpers. After all, we want them to develop the skills and confidence to seek knowledge rather than have it bestowed upon them from very narrow, specialized platforms. To do this, it seems wise to offer research as a way to interpret one's own relation to contemporary issues. This is an early step in defining oneself not only within the academic community but also – and perhaps more importantly – within the broader civic body. Therefore, it seems prudent to insist that students develop their own questions from within their own experiential framework and to then assist them in pursuing the answers. Of course this may invite rather naïve questions at first, but when permitted the opportunity to do so in a creative and uninhibited fashion, the thoughts will mature and refine themselves under the guidance of instructors willing to entertain alternative approaches to research assignments.

These seem to be the first steps toward *wanting* to know rather than being told to know. Research is, after all, a way to understand the particularities of the world. However, these particularities are meaningless without contextualization. So, one place to start is with the encouragement of self-reflection in relationship to the research topic at hand, no matter what the academic discipline may be. Next, research assignments should foster the exploration of how one relates and responds to how *other voices* address the topic. Finally, research should challenge one to trust how the idiosyncrasies of individual voice and vision can have an impact upon the entire gamut of ideas studied. This human presence hopefully rekindles the passion to learn. This is something richer than rote, mindless patchwork. It is finally “I” and “we.”

APPLYING THE PHILOSOPHY

Although many of us assign a research paper in our courses, this is not always a project we eagerly anticipate for various reasons:

- ◆ topics are bland, uninspired, and unoriginal
- ◆ writing is disjointed, lacks overall cohesion
- ◆ papers too short
- ◆ papers too long
- ◆ papers apparently written by someone we have never met

Our response after a few semesters may be simply to type a due date on the syllabus and see what we get. “It’s an independent project, gosh darn it!” Other times, we require so many criteria that we beat the creativity out of the thing. We may even ditch the assignment altogether.

Wouldn’t it be nice to look forward to reading student research papers?

You may be surprised, but there are some ways to give students more of a chance to enjoy working on these papers. And it is no surprise that such papers are a lot more enjoyable to read.

STEP ONE

Why are you asking students to write the research paper? What do you believe can be gained from the experience of student research? Below are some possibilities. Pick one or, better yet, create your own.

1. to deepen knowledge of a strand covered briefly in the class
2. to hear what students think about an important issue that was emphasized often in class
3. to require students to read a variety of views on a controversial topic
4. to apply a concept to a real situation
5. to encourage students to initiate a discussion on any topic in the field
6. to teach students how to read and interpret professional articles in the discipline

STEP TWO

Once we have our philosophy in our heads, employing a few preliminaries can also lead to more successful papers.

PRELIMINARIES TO INCORPORATE FROM THE GET-GO

Student Engagement in the Topic

Let them choose their own topics from a general list or out of the blue. Be wary of topics that smell like high school leftovers. To help them embrace authentic topics, show them some interesting sample papers; do group brainstorming; look at the newspaper; search the web. Let personal experience infuse the inquiry process. Be open to their discovery of what they really want to know.

Let Students Know How the Paper will be Evaluated

Provide a rubric or a list. Be as specific as possible.

Spread Out the Due Dates

You can, for example, require a preliminary Prospectus (a percentage taken off final paper if not completed on time), which forces students to tentatively commit to a topic in the form of a question; require another part of the assignment due on another date. For example, have them prepare an annotated bibliography. Maybe your students need the chance to hand in 1-2 pages of their drafts for some quick comments from you or their peers. Yes, such sharing takes some time, but it can deter procrastination and keep students focused.

Clarify Audience and Point of View

Are you the students' audience, is a particular discourse community, or can they choose an audience, say, a member of their town board? Can they use "I"?

Consider a non-traditional research assignment. Would your purpose be more aptly served if students wrote a profile of a leader in the field, or do you want them to write a 5-page persuasive research paper?

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND ONCE THEY GET GOING

Finding a Topic

Contrary to what many students expect, research papers are not intended to be encyclopedic reports on a topic. Rather, research is thesis-governed in response to an engaging question or problem. Curiosity and wonder are the driving forces behind an inquiry-based approach to research and the research paper provides the format for sharing discoveries. Motivate and guide students toward asking discipline-appropriate questions that are interesting, significant, and pursuable at the undergraduate level.

Conducting Research

Access to search engines that deliver thousands of hits in twenty seconds has sped up the access of the goods, but what hasn't changed is the need to evaluate the credibility of sources, to distinguish primary sources from secondary. Students need instruction on how to use the FLCC databases. And whether they Google or Ask Jeeves, they still need to read, to take notes, to create a thesis, and to outline. However, if the teacher does not ask to see notes and/or sources, many students take short cuts. After all, "This isn't English class!"

The Drafting Process

The best papers result from a thorough thrashing around of ideas within the writer's head and upon the writer's keyboard. While we cannot force such activities, we can help students by reminding them that they have options for bringing together their ideas. Do they want to go inductive or deductive? Do they want to organize by section or sub-headings? What have they found that will grab the reader in the introduction? Would some storytelling or a metaphor best make a point? Should they try to argue the other side? Would the incorporation of hypertext solidify a point? How will they conclude?

Handling and Mis-handling of Sources

Do they really know when they are plagiarizing? Most students need to be shown this again and again. And, yes, again. While recent high school graduates have learned MLA documentation, which is required in GST 102 and English 101 and 102, they can use some review but can adapt to other styles too. Communicate the style your discipline requires and show students the rules. Show them examples of direct quoting and citing. Remind them to use those facts and statistics they have discovered to support their claims. Last, demonstrate the beauty of a smoothly integrated quote by use of an introductory ("signal") phrase.

Opportunities for Revision

*Revision means having to finish a draft before the paper is actually due. Provide the opportunity for students to revise through peer review and/or instructor feedback. Also, walk the class to **The Write Place** and show them the listing of open hours. Students and teachers will be more satisfied with student papers if the writers do what all good writers do: revisit the original question and thesis; rewrite the introduction after the draft is complete; further develop weaker points; make clearer connections between paragraphs; delete unnecessary sections; correct spelling and grammar.*

implementation



Communicating Assignments to Students

Carefully constructed assignments safeguard against, what writing theorist Peter Elbow calls, “bamboozling” students (that is, inadvertently withholding our expectations and agendas from them). It is therefore essential to clearly communicate exactly what students are expected to do in an assignment, how they can do this successfully, and why they are asked to do it. To this end, provide written instructions that address the following concerns:

- ◆ **Your expectations**

Describe the writing form using explicit **direction words**, (p. 16) to help clarify and define your assignment expectations to students.

- ◆ **The intended audience and reader for the assignment**

Discuss how that information relates to the rhetorical context and voice.

- ◆ **The required format**

Expect students to follow discipline-specific Modern Language Association (MLA), American Psychological Association (APA), or Council of Science Editors (CSE) formats — ask students to refer to a writing handbook and communicate that you will expect them to cite sources correctly.

- ◆ **Any special requirements**

Communicate page length, number of sources — note sources that students should or should not use, etc.

- ◆ **How the assignment will be evaluated**

Explain the assessment criteria and provide a copy of the scoring guide — also explain the value of the assignment toward the overall grade for the course.

- ◆ **When the assignment will be due**

Establish manageable due dates for stages of the writing process, i.e. proposals/ prospectuses, annotated bibliographies, preliminary drafts, final drafts, revision time schedules.

- ◆ **Policies**

State your late policy clearly.

In addition to a written instruction sheet, set aside adequate class time to sufficiently introduce students to the assignment. Use Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs), such as allowing time to field student questions, to ensure that students understand your expectations.

It can also be helpful to make a model of student work available in class or reserve a sample of the completed assignment in **The Write Place** and/or library.

Writing Process Strategies

The following list, while not exhaustive, provides tried and true suggestions for successfully integrating formal writing assignments into coursework.

- ◆ Early in the semester, explain major writing assignments.
- ◆ Use in-class invention strategies – start conceptual work on a paper with freewriting prompts. Have students share their initial ideas/writing during class discussions to help them develop a focus.

- ◆ Writing the assignment along with students allows you to anticipate their needs and better understand potential stumbling blocks.
- ◆ Build papers in segments. Connect smaller assignments into a larger writing project.
- ◆ Establish a schedule for completing the stages of the assignment. You may want to have students submit sections of their papers in stages.
- ◆ Use the library; continue to connect information literacy skills (locating and evaluating sources) with building familiarity with the literature of the discipline.
- ◆ Encourage students to visit **The Write Place**. Provide specific instructions about how they should prepare and what should be expected and accomplished during a visit. You can arrange for faculty from **The Write Place** to meet with your class.
- ◆ Check interim progress on student work in subsequent class sessions. Have students submit drafts via e-mail to you in advance.
- ◆ Have students submit progress letters mid-way through their work on the assignment.
- ◆ Assign student peer response projects.
- ◆ Schedule individual conferences with students on final drafts.
- ◆ Have students submit cover letters with their finished papers, explaining and discussing their writing and revision process.
- ◆ Have students compile their best work in a portfolio.

Peer Response Strategies

Most students are experienced with a peer review process from English 101 and 102; however, they rarely experience the structured practice for writing in other courses. While the process may have its pitfalls, and it may not always be effective with all groups of students, the experience can be greatly constructive and valuable.

Peer reviewing is a realistic aspect of personal and professional writing that has reflexive benefits. Both the writer and the peer-review reader have something to gain. The writer profits from the feedback they get, and, in the act of reviewing, the peer-review reader further develops his/her own revision skills. Critically reading the work of another writer enables a reader to become more able to identify, diagnose, and solve some of their own writing issues. By focusing the writer's attention on readers' responses, peer review provides an opportunity for the writer to gather feedback and make revisions on early drafts.

An effective peer review process requires careful management. You will need to set the tone and model the process for your students. As peer reviews generally deal with early drafts of student writing, it is especially important to create a supportive environment. Always start peer review sessions with positive, constructive comments. Tailoring a peer response work sheet for the specific assignment with two or three guiding questions is helpful. Students may also hand in these peer response sheets with their papers.

EXAMPLES OF GUIDING QUESTIONS

- ◆ *What do you like about this paper?*
- ◆ *Do you hear a main idea or thesis?*
- ◆ *Is there supporting evidence?*
- ◆ *Are there examples of especially vivid language?*
- ◆ *Is the paper organized?*
- ◆ *Are transitions from one idea to another abrupt or smooth?*
- ◆ *Does it seem like the writer cares and is committed to the topic?*
- ◆ *Is there any place where you would like more detail?*

- ◆ *Does the beginning grab your attention and set the tone for the piece?*
- ◆ *At the end, do you feel a sense of closure?*
- ◆ *What does the paper make you think about?*
- ◆ *What did you learn from the paper?*
- ◆ *What would you like to know more about?*

Peer response sessions work best in pairs or in small groups of three or four students. Students should provide copies of their papers to their peer response group. Writers may read their work aloud or it can be read quietly by the response group. It is important to leave enough class time for peer reviewing, but not too much!

assessment



The broad topic of assessment encompasses everything from statewide accountability measures to internal program review to everyday classroom analysis. For the purposes of this guide, our concerns focus at the classroom level on the complementary roles formative and summative assessment play in gathering accurate information on student learning.

Formative assessment is an ongoing part of the instructional process that provides timely information about what students do and do not understand about the skills and concepts they are learning. Used not to assign grades, but rather to gauge and improve the learning process while it is happening, formative assessment provides feedback to instructors about teaching effectiveness and offers insight for students into their progress as learners. Although formative assessment strategies appear in a variety of formats, short, in-class writing and sharing tasks, like those covered in previous sections of this guide, can be among the most valuable. For more information on formative classroom assessment techniques, refer to the Resources section on page 41.

Summative assessment is a means to gauge, at a particular point in time, student learning relative to content standards (quizzes, tests, exams, formal papers, etc.). Because they are spread out and occur *after* instruction, summative assessments are tools limited to helping instructors assign students' grades and evaluate placement.

As grades are concerned, educators put considerable effort into providing students with detailed feedback and fair evaluations of their work. We know how important it is for students to receive meaningful input about the quality of their work and how it can be improved. To this end, we strive to ensure that our grading systems are fair, transparent, and integrally connected to the learning outcomes in our courses. Unfortunately, grading student writing is not as straightforward as grading multiple choice exams. The next section aims to ease potential concerns and simplify the process of evaluating student writing.

Scoring Guides for Evaluating Student Writing

Scoring guides are an important resource that can demystify the task of evaluating student work while helping to explain writing assignments and expectations to students.

Scoring guides can make the process of grading written work more manageable. The evaluation criteria along with their descriptions help instructors provide more meaningful and specific feedback to students. The guides can lead you to be consistent and objective and can help to explain your grading to students. You don't need to be a teacher of composition and grammar to provide effective feedback to students on their writing. Overall, we think that untangling the scoring process goes a long way toward enriching writing across the disciplines.

Besides being useful for faculty, scoring guides are a great resource for student learning. By sharing a scoring guide with students while you are assigning a writing project, you are helping to clarify the assignment and your expectations. The guides also provide students a focus for improvement of their writing by directing them toward specific goals. Students are able to see descriptive terms (indicators) of what needs to be accomplished in a quality paper. Scoring guides seem to motivate students to do better work by providing benchmarks for improvement during drafting and revision.

While we believe in the value of using guides and rubrics, they are not intended to be a substitute for individualized commentary from instructors on student papers. As you read and evaluate student papers, you will probably find it important to add specific written comments to address content issues or other criteria and indicators.

Included in the following pages are two assessment guides that can help you evaluate student writing. We encourage you to experiment with these examples and modify them to meet your objectives. If you wish to use them as is, they can easily be removed from this guide and copied.

Holistic Assessment Guide. (p. 33-34)

This guide approaches scoring based on the entire paper rather than on its individual components. It describes “What is considered an A paper, a B paper, a C paper, etc.”

Rubric with Six Criteria and Indicators for Each. (p. 35-36)

This guide allows you to evaluate writing on six different criteria and allows you to assign point values to each criterion depending upon your objectives.

CRITERIA FOR GRADING PAPERS

“A” Papers:

- ◆ Convey immediately a sense of person behind the words: an individual voice speaks firmly and clearly from the page.
- ◆ The introduction smoothly indicates the direction, scope, and tone of the whole piece. The reader feels the writer’s assurance and is in no doubt about what is being communicated.
- ◆ The writing is replete with quality information. Examples and comparisons are carefully chosen and feel comprehensive. Occasionally there is a vivid image or deft comparison.
- ◆ Organization of material is smooth and logical. Reader does not stumble or hesitate over the sequences of facts or ideas.
- ◆ Sentences are varied, with rhythm and emphasis appropriate to the meaning. Phrasing is often fluent, even graceful. Sentences read well aloud.
- ◆ Word choices, especially verbs, are accurate, sensitive to connotations.
- ◆ Punctuation is appropriate, helpful to the reader.
- ◆ There are almost no mechanical errors (grammar and spelling).
- ◆ An “A” paper is not necessarily flawless; there is no such thing in writing. But it reflects a writer who is in full control of the material and language.

“B” Papers:

- ◆ Have most of the characteristics of an “A” paper, **but**—
- ◆ Information may be a little thin. Examples or illustrations may be slightly forced or exaggerated.
- ◆ Organization is clear, and reader does not stumble over sequence.
- ◆ Sentences are more obvious and occasionally awkward or wordy.
- ◆ Word choices are workable and clear, though verbs may lack bite or strength.
- ◆ Punctuation is occasionally confusing.
- ◆ Few mechanical errors (grammar or spelling).

“C” Papers:

- ◆ Characterized by awkwardness throughout.
- ◆ Information tends to be adequate—but thin.
- ◆ Organization is occasionally unclear, causing reader to stop and reread previous material to be sure of meaning.
- ◆ Sentences have little or no structural variety. Phrases often awkwardly placed.
- ◆ Diction is usually characterized by wordiness, clichés. Unnecessary words and phrases make the writing loose.
- ◆ Several grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors.
- ◆ A “C” paper will do; it’s adequate. However, it gives a reader an impression of fuzziness and lack of assurance (in the writer). The reader has to work to understand what he is reading.

“D” Papers:

- ◆ The main impression is one of haste, carelessness, lack of attention, or simply inability to craft direct or even simple sentences.
- ◆ The paper is barely adequate in the categories listed above.
- ◆ The paper may make some sense, but only when the reader struggles to find the sense. The writer obviously has scanty control of the material.
- ◆ Multiple errors in grammar and spelling. Sloppy visual presentation.

“F” Papers:

- ◆ The paper is so vague, undeveloped, disorganized, or full of errors in grammar and mechanics as to be unacceptable.
- ◆ “F’s” may also be given, at the instructor’s discretion, to late papers, plagiarized papers, or papers that fail to meet the specific requirements of a given assignment.

Adapted from

Roger H. Garrison, “What’s An “A” Paper?” that appeared in Teaching English in the Two-Year College 7.3 (1981): 209-10.

RUBRIC WITH SIX CRITERIA AND INDICATORS FOR EACH.

CRITERIA AND INDICATORS			
<p>Content. Details, Supporting Evidence, Response to the Assignment Instructions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Quality of information – relevant, accurate, current, reliable, credible, depth & breadth. ◆ The writer demonstrates understanding of the topic by using appropriate and clear details, examples, arguments, and explanations to support assertions and conclusions. ◆ Concepts and terminology correctly applied. ◆ The paper exhibits sound understanding, interpretation, and analysis of the topic. ◆ The paper follows the assignment. <p>Comments:</p>			
Exceeds	Meets	Approaches	Doesn't Meet
<p>Central Idea/Purpose. Focus, Thesis, Controlling Idea, Meaning, Center of Gravity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ There is a central idea or purpose to the paper. ◆ The introduction smoothly indicates the direction, scope, and tone of the whole piece. ◆ The reader is in no doubt about what is being communicated. ◆ The controlling idea or purpose is original and well established and presented. ◆ Clear communication of ideas, including a clear focus/thesis. <p>Comments:</p>			
Exceeds	Meets	Approaches	Doesn't Meet
<p>Voice/ Language Use /Awareness of Audience. Vocabulary, Word Choice, Style, Language Use Appropriate to Subject Area, Resonance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The writer uses words effectively, economically, and accurately. ◆ Word choices are appropriate to the specific writing situation (context). ◆ The paper shows style and thought, and conveys a sense of person behind the words speaking firmly and clearly from the page. ◆ The writer shows an awareness of audience and purpose through effective use of words, sentence structure, and sentence variety. <p>Comments:</p>			
Exceeds	Meets	Approaches	Doesn't Meet

Organization. Coherence, logic

- ◆ The paper has a clear order that is easy to follow.
- ◆ The reader does not stumble or hesitate over the sequences of facts or ideas.
- ◆ Smooth and effective transitions are made within the development of the paper.
- ◆ The organization (ordering of assertions) is clear. Inferences are drawn logically; no part of the essay is extraneous.

Comments:

Exceeds	Meets	Approaches	Doesn't Meet

Grammar & Mechanics. Sentence structure & syntax

- ◆ The writer shapes and uses sentences accurately and effectively.
- ◆ The writer follows the rules and conventions of standard written English in regard to grammar, usage, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.
- ◆ Sentences are varied in length and structure; phrasing is often fluent; sentences read well aloud.
- ◆ The writer chooses words and constructions with care, making statements directly and clearly.

Comments:

Exceeds	Meets	Approaches	Doesn't Meet

Documentation & Layout. MLA / APA / CSE Style appropriate to discipline

- ◆ Instructions have been followed.
- ◆ Paper is neat.
- ◆ Proper method and format for in-text citation and source list are used.
- ◆ Every citation in the text matches a citation in the source list.
- ◆ Use of 1" margins, double spaced throughout, paragraphs indented 5 spaces, title is centered and not underlined, writer's last name and page number on every page.

Comments:

Exceeds	Meets	Approaches	Doesn't Meet

Tips for Instructor Feedback

Giving carefully balanced, constructive feedback and fair, accurate grades is one of our greatest concerns in teaching, but it can also be very energy consuming. Being organized and focused in how we grade and give feedback not only saves time, but also often makes us more confident and objective in our grading. The following is a list of suggestions for thinking about and giving feedback on student writing:

Managing an intimidating stack of student writing:

Read all the papers once through without marking them.

Try reading papers aloud.

Create stacks based on your initial read-through of "A work," "B work," "C work," etc.

When giving feedback on student papers:

Address each student as an individual.

Be positive. Highlight what stands out about the paper – structure, content, voice, etc.

Comment on your reaction to the paper:

- ◆ How does it make you feel?
- ◆ What do you think?
- ◆ What did you learn?
- ◆ What do you want to know more about?

Ask challenging, empowering questions.

Identify one or two problems and explain how and why they weaken the quality of the paper.

Address mechanics, particularly when mechanics interfere with understanding the content or meaning of the paper.

Avoid marking an error without an explanation of how to fix it. Refer students to The Open Handbook by Ann Raimés (see Resources Section, 44-5).

Avoid marking errors that are recurring – instead, offer opportunities for students to identify and correct repeated mistakes.

Carefully link your feedback to your assessment criteria.

Set 1-3 goals for the student to work toward in the next assignment or revision and suggest strategies for reaching those goals.

Offer suggestions, but avoid imperatives and commands.

“Perhaps you could...”

“What if you....”

“You might want to try...”

Give early drafts of a project more feedback than the final drafts, which students are unlikely to revise.

On final drafts, give forward-looking comments that students can take with them into the next project.

Take care to make final comments that go beyond merely justifying a grade — this is an opportunity to tie together the marginal notes and inform students about their writing and understanding of course content.

Conferencing with Students:

Encourage conferences, either formally or informally.

Be clear ahead of time about the purpose and focus of the conference, the length of time, and what the students should bring.

Ask that students bring two copies of the paper so you can each have one to look at.

Be inviting. Avoid intimidating room arrangements or body language.

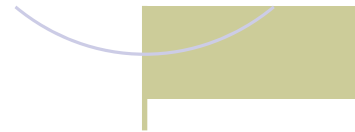
Suggest that the student read the paper aloud.

Rather than talking and instructing, focus on listening and asking open-ended questions, such as “Why did you choose to explore this particular topic?” or “What part of your paper is giving you the most trouble?”.

Let students maintain control/ownership of their paper.



resources



The Write Place

At **The Write Place**, faculty offer assistance to instructors on a variety of writing related issues: developing writing intensive courses, designing writing assignments, responding to and grading student writing, as examples. Tutors at the writing center offer assistance to students on any writing project on a drop-in basis.

The Library

Reference librarians can assist faculty with developing research assignments. They also offer instruction to students on locating and using information resources. Reference guides for MLA, APA, and CSE documentation styles are available in-print and on-line.

The Teaching Center

The Teaching Center, located in the Library, offers a variety of resources to enhance teaching and learning through workshops, conferences, discussion groups, and mentoring projects, as examples.

Further Reading

Angelo, T. & Cross, K.P. Classroom Assessment Techniques. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.; San Francisco, CA, 1993.

An invaluable compendium of assessment projects, many writing-based, with advice on their use in clarifying instructional goals. Copies are available in the **Teaching Center**.

Bean, John C. Engaging Ideas, A Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2001.

An outstanding reference, full of ready-to-use ideas for teaching strategies and assignments. Copies are available in the **Teaching Center** and at **The Write Place**.

Style & Usage Handbooks

American Psychological Association. Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. Fifth Edition. Washington, DC: APA, 2001.

Gibaldi, Joseph. MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. Sixth Edition. New York: MLA, 2003. (www.mla.org)

Council of Science Editors. Scientific Style and Format: The CSE Manual for Authors, Editors, and Publishers. Seventh Edition. Reston VA: Council of Science Editors, 2006.

And the official English usage and grammar reference used at **The Write Place**:
Raimes, Ann. The Open Handbook. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006.

Other Organizations and Websites

The Institute for Writing and Thinking, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, offers writing and thinking workshops for teachers of all disciplines.
<http://www.writingandthinking.org>

The OWL at Purdue offers on-line handouts covering writing, research, grammar, and MLA and APA style. Packed with information.
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>

The WAC Clearinghouse (Writing Across the Curriculum), in partnership with the International Network of Writing Across the Curriculum Programs, publishes journals, books, and other resources for teachers who use writing in their courses.
<http://wac.colostate.edu/>

Writing Across the Curriculum Bibliographies from University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee English Professor, Peter Sands, offers discipline specific annotated bibliographies to assist faculty across the disciplines in making their courses more writing intensive.
<http://www.uwm.edu/letsci/edison/wn.html>



acknowledgements



Right from the start, The Write Place Project has been a collaborative effort among faculty at Finger Lakes Community College. The concept for the program emerged in 1999, while the college was pursuing a grant from the State University of New York's Mission Review Initiative. Responding to the request for proposals, a team of faculty - Sandra Camillo, Pat Malinowski, Josh Heller, and Marylou Boynton - met intently and on short notice to transform their visions for an ideal writing program into concrete plans. Those plans were rewarded in 2000 with a three-year \$267,000 grant. VTEA grant funding continued to sustain the project for four more years, until 2007-2008 when the college began to support the project with operating funds.

During the project's first full semester, The Write Place services for students expanded from a few faculty office hours held in a library study room into a comprehensive writing center open to all students in any course. Since then, Sandra Camillo, Deborah Ferrell, Alton Jowers, Maureen Maas-Feary, Pat Malinowski, Trista Merrill, Louise Mulvaney, Barbara Murphy, Curt Nehring Bliss, Karen O'Donnell, Jon Palzer, and Christopher Parker, all of the faculty who teach English and Composition in Humanities and Developmental Studies, have volunteered their office hours on a regular weekly schedule. Now, with assistance from numerous, dedicated adjunct faculty, individualized writing assistance is available to students forty hours each week between the main campus and the campus centers.

In the second year (2001-2002) of The Write Place Project, faculty from each academic department began to meet monthly to lay the ground work for a program of writing intensive courses. These faculty -- Gloria Bembem, Mary Lou Boynton, Sandra Camillo, Charlotte Cooper, Marty Dodge, Barbara Etzel, Terry Gauthier, Josh Heller, Jim Hewlett, Bob Lowden, Curt Nehring Bliss, Christopher Parker, Jane Rogalski, and Warren White -- thoughtfully debated criteria for writing intensive courses that were ultimately approved by Curriculum Committee and became an official component of the college's course offerings. By Fall 2003, Anoop Bhargava, Tim Biehler, Mary Lou Boynton, Marty Dodge, Josh Heller, Bob Lowden, Curt Nehring Bliss, Ann Terninko, and Jeremy Tiermini pioneered the first writing intensive courses, after revamping course outlines and writing assignments to meet the new criteria.

As the number of faculty choosing to employ writing as a strategy for teaching and learning grew, the college's writing faculty created materials and workshops designed to help them become as effective as possible. Through thoughtful dialog and careful review of professional literature, they created these resources. This is their work. First, Barbara Murphy, Curt Nehring Bliss, and Jon Palzer created the "Scoring Guides for Assessing Student Writing" which includes three model assessment rubrics. The writing assignments project followed, produced by Pat Malinowski, Barbara Murphy, Curt Nehring Bliss, Karen O'Donnell, and Jon Palzer. More materials were added: Sandy Camillo's "Formal vs. Informal Writing" and most recently "Rethinking the Research Paper" was the work of Alton Jowers, Barbara Murphy, Curt Nehring Bliss, and Jon Palzer.

Pulling these resources together so they can be more readily shared, Nannie Nehring Bliss artfully assembled and carefully edited this publication. And finally, Katherine Stathis provided meticulous proof reading. With it, *Writing Intensive Courses: Strategies and Resources*, I hope faculty who are teaching writing intensive courses can reflect upon and strengthen their approaches, and faculty who are just considering the process of creating a writing intensive course will benefit from the experiences and insights of this great team of colleagues.

Michele Howland
Director of the Writing Center

