

Teaching writing in the disciplines

Wendy Madden

Writing Center Director

027 Nimitz

410-293-2936

madden@usna.edu

1. Framework for writing in the disciplines

- **Assignments can be “transactional” or evaluative hurdles to be leaped**
- **Enrichment which encourages creative mastery of subject matter while developing the writer’s process**
“Writing is a dialectical process of developing an understanding of something”
(McCabe 2).

2. What makes a good writing prompt?

- **First, ask yourself: What do I want to read at the end of this assignment?**
- **A good writing prompt clearly and precisely articulates the goals of the instructor.**
- **Some questions to ponder and tips to consider when crafting a writing prompt:**
 1. What questions do you want students to consider? What kind of thinking do you want students to do? (illustrate, compare, analyze, evaluate...)
 2. Are you focusing on teaching students to place their arguments within a larger conversation or context? How does the assignment relate to your course objectives?
 3. Clearly articulate the requirements for the paper. Consider outlining research requirements in a way that educates students about the writing process.
 4. Consider breaking the assignment into specific questions or tasks. Encourage the development of writing as a recursive process.

Example A: working thesis, outline, draft, revised draft, revision plan

Example B: short response paper, annotated bibliography, research paper, peer review, revision
- 5. Write an outline of the assignment yourself.

3. Ideas for teaching writing

- **Scaffolding assignments and using rubrics to guide students**

- **Creative writing in conjunction with debate**
- **Exploratory writing: journals, letter writing, responses to reading, brainstorming**
- **Summary and analysis of news clips, political campaign ads, etc.; Op-Ed pieces**
- **Course Preparation Assignments or CPAs**
CPAs provide motivation for students to complete the required reading and apply knowledge in substantive ways...thus engaging actively with the material before entering the classroom (Ewell and Rodgers 210).
- **Feedback:**
 1. Instructor feedback with a focus on organization, content, coherence, clarity...
 2. Students struggling with grammar and mechanics could be directed to visit the Writing Center.
 3. In "Learning through Writing: Teaching Critical Thinking Skills in Writing Assignments," Gamze Çavdar and Sue Doe describe students who demonstrate "an inability or unwillingness to integrate the feedback that instructors provide on drafts" (299).
 4. Ask students to keep all their assignments in a folder. After they receive their graded assignment, ask them to review it, paying attention to instructor and reviewer comments. Then, have students write a short revision plan before they start their next assignment. As part of the final assignment, ask students to analyze their revision plans and evaluate their own writing process.
- **Peer Review**
 1. Peer Review worksheet or rubric
 2. In class or as homework for a grade
 3. Helpful for writer and reviewer
"Peer review provides individual attention and more immediate feedback" and is a "productive social process for both writer and reviewer" (McCabe 5).

Works Cited

Çavdar, Gamze and Sue Doe. "Learning through Writing: Teaching Critical Thinking Skills in Writing Assignments." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 45.2 (April 2012): 298-306. Web. 21 Sept. 2015.

Ewell, William Henry and Robert R. Rodgers. "Enhancing Student Preparedness for Class through Course Preparation Assignments: Preliminary Evidence from the Classroom." *Journal of Political Science Education* 10.2 (2014): 201-221. Web. 21 Sept. 2015.

McCabe, Don. "Writing (and Talking) to Learn: Integrating Disciplinary Content and Skills Development." Paper included in the Proceedings of the Eighteenth National Conference on Successful College Teaching (Orlando, FL, February 26-28, 1994): 2-15. Web. 21 Sept. 2015.

Reviewer _____

Peer Review Worksheet

Author of Paper _____

1. Thesis: Highlight or circle it.

2. Theme: Mark a “ * ” next to the most interesting points.

Mark an “X” next to any questionable, boring, or repetitive parts.

3. Development:

a. Evidence / examples? Circle some of the most compelling evidence which supports the thesis.

b. Canons of rhetoric: ethos, pathos, logos

c. Rhetorical strategies such as **parallelism** and **transitional phrases?**

4. Organization and Structure:

a. Does the paper accurately reflect the assignment?

b. Are paragraphs well-constructed with topic sentences?

c. Do the paragraphs enhance the clarity and cohesiveness of the argument?

5. Style/Diction: CIRCLE the term

Word choice-- expert average needs improvement

Verbs-- consistent tense passive-voice needs help with S-V agreement

Sentence structure-- varied run-ons too many simple sentences

Punctuation-- expert average needs improvement

6. Please circle any of the forbidden words (there are many, a lot, things, you, just, very)

7. Please provide some helpful comments for the author.

ANALYSIS vs. SUMMARY (adapted from <http://comptalk.fiu.edu>)

I. Summary: A brief paragraph describing and informing three or more of the following elements:

1. Who: those involved
2. What: the event or topic being covered
3. When: time, period, era, night or day
4. Where: the location, distance, place
5. Why: the cause or causes
6. How: the process(es)

Report: An extended summary that delves deeper into more descriptions and details of the above elements

II. Analysis: examines the summary elements described above in order to look for their meaning in the following contexts:

1. Relationships, trends, patterns
2. Roles of people, places, objects, situations
3. Consequences or results of events, decisions and processes
4. Causes and their effects
5. Advantages and disadvantages/ gains and losses
6. Strengths and weaknesses