

Writing Matters

Writing Across the Curriculum
Southwestern Community College

Volume V
Number 8

Now is the time to plan for WAC workshops for next semester!

WAC workshops can help support your students for the writing assignments in your class:

- Research methods and citations
- Drafting, revising, editing
- Taking essay exams

Or you can request a workshop tailored to your specific assignment!

Beginning With the End in Mind

There is an art in putting together a workable syllabus. It should contain just enough information to help students be successful, but it can't have too much, or it is overwhelming. A syllabus should be a functioning document that lasts the whole semester, becoming a reference and guide for you and for students.

Strong syllabuses begin with the end in mind. Where do you want students to be at the end of the semester? What skills should they have used/developed? What knowledge should they be able to use/demonstrate? Answering these questions often helps divide the semester into workable sections; each section, then, has its own assignments, readings, and writing to accomplish. As you prepare your syllabuses for next semester, consider how they can be support documents for student writing.

Beyond Due Dates: Your Syllabus as Writing Support

One semester ends with another one hot on its heels. Even as we grade finals and papers, we are prepping for the next semester. Most of us find ourselves creating or at least editing syllabuses in our preparation. It is important to remember, though, that a syllabus can be far more than just a publication of due dates. It can be a valuable document to support student writing in your classes.

Useful Support

Elements of a Syllabus

Course goals: Writing assignments should connect

directly and clearly with course goals. Begin with the desired outcomes of the class and work backwards. When you develop writing assignments, articulate for yourself and for your students how those assignments tie in with specific course goals. This gives writing assignments purpose and coherence.

Utilizing support services:

We are fortunate to have multiple services on campus to support student writing. Services range from writing tutors through Student

Support Services to library workshops to WAC workshops in class that focus on a specific assignment. You can even require students visit the Learning Assistance Center (LAC) to address specific needs in planning, outlining, revision, editing, etc. Including these services in your syllabus makes students aware of them and gives these services a place of importance in your teaching.

Your pet peeves: Give students the heads up if you have certain issues that you can't stand in writing or in

assignments in general. It's only fair to let students know what you expect. Go over these peeves so that they are on students' radar screens as they prepare assignments for your classes.

Space for informal writing: Give students time in class with informal writing to explore the important concepts of a course. By dedicating writing to the concepts that are core to your class, students are able to learn the information more

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There's no such thing as writer's block. That was invented by people in California who couldn't write. —Terry Pratchett

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Beyond Due Dates (cont'd)

deeply and clearly.

Sequence formal assignments: When assigning a formal piece of writing that is a significant part of a class grade, be sure that it is not just an assignment and a due date on the syllabus. Instead, take the assignment apart. Think about the “thought process” students must do to complete the assignment, and then break down the due dates for each step of the process.

This “taking apart” is also known as scaffolding because it helps build the support structure that larger, more high-stakes writing needs.

Engaging students with the syllabus: No matter how strong your syllabus is, it won't work if students don't read it and use it. Go over the syllabus in class, explaining each section. We nearly always add more information verbally when we go over a syllabus or an

assignment in class. This “additional info” may be just what students need to understand your syllabus. You can also have students sign an agreement saying that they have read and understood the syllabus, your class policies, assignments, etc. Students could also complete a syllabus quiz or homework assignment that requires them to carefully read through the course assignments and policies. Finally, you could have

students work in groups developing “quiz questions” about the syllabus and then present those questions to each other aloud in class.

Whatever assignments you choose to use and however you design your syllabus, remember that this ubiquitous college document can be much more than a list of due dates and textbook titles. It can be a reference guide and tool for students to use in order to produce successful writing.



Happy Holidays!

May your 2013 end with peace
and joy that carries over into
your 2014!