

# Writing Matters



## Student Reflection—A Brief Philosophy

Too many times, when students turn in writing assignments, they breathe a sigh of relief and think, “Okay, that’s done. On to the next thing.” Any remarks we make on student writing frequently fall on deaf ears, and we wonder if our students are even thinking as they write and read. Incorporating student reflection into the process can encourage the active engagement of the mind that we’re hoping for. By having students take a moment and think (and write) about what they’ve produced, how they’ve answered the assignment, and the process they have used creates an environment where they can take ownership of their education by participating in it. Kathleen Blake Yancey (1998) states that reflection helps us to “ask students to participate with us, not as objects of our study, but as agents of their own learning” (pg. 5). We can offer our students a valuable opportunity to take hold of their own education by encouraging them to reflect on their work. It’s quick, easy, and offers feedback that you, as instructor, wouldn’t receive otherwise.

## Reflection Activities for Any Classroom

Having students reflect upon their own writing is definitely worth the time you give it. There are several easy-to-integrate ideas that get students thinking about their writing. What follows is a brief discussion of a few of these ways.

If your students have a paper due in class (it can be a major paper or just a simple reflection paper), have them take a moment before turning it in to answer a few questions. One of the documents attached to the email with this newsletter is a sample reflection. It asks the student to think about ideas

such as, “What are the strengths of this paper?” and “What could you change to make this paper better?” Have students write out their answers to these questions, then turn in the reflection with the final copy of their paper.

Another helpful way to incorporate reflection into student writing includes keeping a portfolio of student work. Each student begins the semester with an empty file folder. A copy of each completed writing assignment goes into the folder. At different points in the semester, have stu-

dents look back over their writing and answer some reflection questions about it. “What piece do you consider your best? How do you know that it is good? What would you need to create writing that is as good as or better than that piece?” You may be surprised at what kinds of answers students supply to these questions. This method of reflection is easy to use in online classes or face-to-face classes.

Student reflection is valuable for the students (as stated in the above philosophy), but it also presents

invaluable information for the instructor. By reading what students think of their own writing, you can get a feel for ways to encourage and support them as they write. This information can also help you improve the way you write your own assignments, communicating more clearly your expectations and standards. Finally, it gives you insight into the thought processes (or lack thereof) that students go through as they write.

Reflection is a valuable part of learning and something we can encourage our students to do in a very real and practical way!

**We write to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospection.**

**Anais Nin**

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## Faculty and Student Survey Responses

This fall, the WAC program conducted surveys taken from the general faculty population and the general student population. These surveys asked each individual to reflect upon writing skills, use of writing in the classroom, and strengths and weakness displayed by our students. The information gleaned from these surveys is invaluable to the WAC program as we continually strive to offer our faculty and students the most relevant and accessible support.

Attached to this email are summaries of those surveys. The first two are narrative summaries of the surveys, one for the faculty survey and one for the student version. These include the full questions exactly as they appeared on the surveys along with brief summaries about percentages and majorities of answers. The last summary is a spreadsheet indicating the percentages and means for each question with numerical answers. This document has a comparison of the student answers with the faculty answers for the same questions.

I believe you will find this information interesting and educational! It is good to know how we, as faculty, perceive writing, but it is better, I believe, to know how the students we teach perceive writing. I was surprised at some of the answers I received on the student surveys, particularly the repeated request for more writing, writing instruction and feedback. We have students who want to do well and who want to learn. If we are able to tap into that desire, we can equip our students with tools that will take them far in life.

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## Workshop Update

It was a busy semester for in-class workshops! Over the course of the past semester, I completed 17 in-class workshops, in addition to tutor training sessions for Student Support Services and the LAC. It is encouraging to see students soak up the information and ask insightful questions in each workshop. Many of them drop by my office afterwards to ask questions or simply to say, "Thank you." I'm looking forward to Spring 2010!

Remember, you can request workshops by using the form posted under the "Workshops" link on the WAC website! <http://www.southwesterncc.edu/wac>

## A prime example of why writing matters!



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**Being a good writer is 3% talent, 97% not being distracted by the Internet.**

**Anonymous**