

# Writing Matters



## “Now THIS is an Essay!”

We’ve all had them—the students who just don’t seem to “get it” when we give a writing assignment. Even after handing out a detailed assignment sheet and going over it, there always seems to be one (or even more) that still doesn’t understand our expectations for the assignment in question. We can dispel the fog around the brains of these students by providing a model of the type of writing we expect. We all know that learning styles differ from person to person; some of our students are predominantly visual learners. The approach of using models appeals to these students (and others, too). However, models cannot be used in isolation. A critical piece of using a model involves going through the example with students and explaining why (or why not) this piece is considered ideal for the assignment at hand. The previously foggy students will often respond with an “aha!” moment that shows you the sun of understanding has broken through the mist.

## A Practical Guide to Using Models

Perhaps one of the best pieces of advice to give any instructor when assigning writing to students is to assume nothing. We tend to forget that our students are novices at all the skills that we perform as though they were second nature. That said, using a model as a tool in assigning writing is an activity that takes very little time but often reaps great benefits.

One way to use a model is to show students an example of what an exemplary piece of writing would look like for this particular assignment. Allow students to pass around the model as you

discuss its finer points. Explain WHY this writing deserves an “A” for this assignment, because students won’t automatically understand why this particular writing is so good.

Another way to use models in the classroom is to show students a sample of writing in its various stages. We often use words like “revise” or “proofread,” assuming that our students understand precisely what we mean. Models can make sure that students understand these terms. I’ve used this technique in English classes before. The first essay that students see (as a handout) is a rough

draft but unmarked. The next handout is the same rough draft but with revision and editing marks and comments on it. The final handout is a revised and edited version of the essay that incorporated the marks on the previous handout. Not only does this show students an example of a good process to use, but it also gets them used to the marks and comments that I will use on their papers throughout the semester.

Finally, it can also be useful to show students a model that is simply “adequate” or “not quite there” for a particular

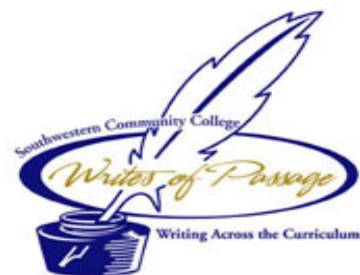
assignment. Give students a copy that is unmarked, then take a few minutes to go over it. Explain why it is simply “adequate” and what the writer could do to make it better. Students will then understand how to make their writing better for you in your particular class. As instructors, we aren’t all looking for the exact same qualities in student writing; a model can help clarify your expectations.

For students who are navigating four or five different classes, a model of what is expected in your class can often be the “aha!” moment that helps them succeed.

**Learning is not attained by chance; it must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence.**

**—Abigail Adams**

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## A Season for Giving Thanks

### **Delia Frederick, Nursing**

I'm thankful for the family I've been blessed with in life. Their friendly support keeps me upbeat even when I am worn.

### **Kathy Thomas, A/S**

I'm very thankful to Dr. Barb Putman and SCC for giving me the chance to work here in what I can only describe as "the best place on earth." I'm also very thankful to everyone here, instructors and staff alike, for their kindness, generosity, understanding, patience, guidance and help since I started here; I couldn't have made it without them.



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### **Jenn Hippensteel, WAC**

I'm thankful that I live in such a beautiful place. After living in VA Beach for four years, I'd forgotten how much the mountains mean to me. This fall has reminded me in abundance about the beauty and power of the mountains.

### **Gregory Harbeson, Surveying Technology**

I'm thankful for the interaction, dialogue and relationships I have had an opportunity to have at SCC. I have been genuinely impressed and satisfied with working with so many individuals with depth and professionalism, all making sacrifices to promote learning.



## **My students turned in their papers. Now what?**

Need help figuring out how to assess and organize all that writing that students did this semester? Feel free to contact your WAC Coordinator for helpful tips on responding to student writing, assessing writing and keeping yourself organized!

Jenn Hippensteel: [jb\\_hippensteel@southwesterncc.edu](mailto:jb_hippensteel@southwesterncc.edu) or ext. 4264

**Somebody saw something in you once - and that is partly why you're where you are today.  
Find a way to thank them.--Don Ward**