

Writing Matters



Where in the World Are We Going?

In all the chaos of planning our courses, deciding what to leave in and what to cut out, writing lectures, printing handouts—our guiding lights are the goals we have set for the end of the semester. What exactly do you want students to learn? To do? To produce or publish? To achieve? Without these goals, our classes can too easily be derailed. We only help ourselves by understanding what goals our particular course hopes to meet. In addition, our stated class goals give us the ability to evaluate our students objectively. Grades are given based upon student demonstrations of reaching (or not reaching) our goals. Clarifying course goals isn't just for instructors; students also benefit from understanding where they are headed as they sit in our classes each week. If the end result is clearly defined for instructors and students, the journey to get there (including writing assignments, exams, lectures, etc.) is given purpose and meaning.

Tying Writing into Course Goals

Students can sense “busy work” from a mile away. From the time they enter first or second grade until we see their faces in our college classrooms, they've been virtually drowned in busy work. Worksheets, outlines, pointless summaries, countless problems—often used to keep them busy and quiet.

Our writing assignments can often seem like busy work to our students. Journals, reaction papers, lecture summaries—they feel too familiar, and students can often resent that. However, we can avoid the “busy work” plague by clearly stating to

students how various writing assignments tie into our course goals. We can also explain how these course goals (and assignments, more specifically) tie into the goals for our particular program as a whole. This gives writing assignments great meaning to our students.

Use the first few weeks of the semester to make clear the course and/or program goals for the students. Thereafter, any writing assignment you use can easily be tied into these goals through a bit of explanation. Let's look at an example.

Let's assume that one of

my course goals is for students to produce a persuasive essay that is logical, convincing, properly researched and grammatically correct. I can begin my semester by assigning writing that asks students to give logical reasons for various positions in an argument. I can ask them to write in a journal, developing logical reasons that support the position they are taking on a particular subject. This writing is fairly informal; I'm merely asking the student to begin thinking in a way that will ultimately lead to a quality persuasive essay.

Later assignments can help students develop that logical thinking into researched ideas. One assignment may ask students to bring in one journal article or book that supports their arguments about their subjects.

Finally, when all these various assignments are brought together into one logical, convincing, properly researched persuasive essay, I have brought students to the end goal I had set at the beginning of the semester.

Your assignments, whatever they may be, should move students along the path toward your course goals, and, ultimately, toward the goals set by the entire program.

Our plans miscarry because they have no aim. When a man does not know what harbor he is making for, no wind is the right wind. -Seneca

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Set up your WAC Workshops!

You are not alone in assigning and supporting student writing!

If you would like the WAC Coordinator (Jenn Hippensteel) to conduct an in-class workshop for your students, please fill out the Workshop Request Form on the WAC Website (www.southwesterncc.edu/wac) and email it to Jenn (jb_hippensteel@southwesterncc.edu).

WORKSHOPS AVAILABLE:

- Research Basics
- APA, MLA or Chicago Style Research
 - Recognizing Scholarly Resources
- Answering Short Answer or Essay Exams
 - Grammar Basics
 - Revision, Editing and Proofreading
- Presenting Research (along with PowerPoint Basics)
 - Using the Writing Process
- And more! Jenn can create workshops to meet your specific needs!



Welcome on board, new WAC faculty members!

On Monday, August 9, 2010, five faculty members participated in the Writing Across the Curriculum Workshop with me, Jenn Hippensteel. There, we discussed how writing is connected to critical thinking, how informal writing assignments can help students grasp course content more fully, and techniques of assigning and evaluating formal writing assignments. I'd like to say thank you to the participants. Thank you for the great discussion, the varying viewpoints, and especially for your commitment to student learning through writing!

2010 WAC Faculty Participants

Chad Hallyburton

Greg Harbeson

Dennis Keough

Diania McRae

Kimi Stevens

Writing , to me, is simply thinking through my fingers.

- Isaac Asimov