

Writing Matters



Getting Started

As instructors, we spend a great deal of time preparing for our classes each semester. We write a syllabus for each class, plan lectures, type up assignment sheets—all so that we can be fully prepared when the first day of classes rolls around. Our students don't have this same luxury. They walk into our classrooms on the first day completely unaware of what awaits them. They are barraged with four or five (or more) instructors, syllabuses, and sets of expectations. Is it any wonder, then, that we sometimes get the blank, glassy-eyed stare from students as we go over our syllabus on the first day? They are trying to soak in an overwhelming amount of information in a short time. Approaching a writing assignment can be much the same: an overwhelming task greeted by a glazed stare. Our students would benefit from having clear direction in these starting phases of classes and writing! The terror of a blank page (or blank computer screen) can shut down any inklings of writing students may have had. Let's help them get through it, and let's help them start well!

Encouraging Good Writing using Good Questions

Language is the medium in which we think and learn. Instructors use language to craft ideas and share them with students in the hopes that students will then take those ideas and make them their own—in other words, to put those ideas into language of their own. This is where the value of writing in *any* class begins to take shape: it helps students create thinking and learning by encouraging them to create language.

However, asking students to write can be a daunting task. How can we help students get started writing about the content we want them to learn? The answer is in asking quality questions,

posing problems to students in such a way that encourages writing and thinking.

Perhaps the most basic way to frame questions or problems that you want students to write about and wrestle with is to offer multiple layers. Don't simply ask "What?" but also ask "Why?" Ask "Who?" but also ask



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"When?" By layering different types of questions around one concept, you are asking students to engage more deeply with content at the beginning of a writing task. This gives students more ground to stand on to get started, a broader base of information to draw from when crafting their answers.

Another benefit to asking multiple types of questions at once is that we are able to take our students from mere memorization or comprehension to a higher order of thinking. When students write in response to questions that ask them to think about a subject in multiple ways, they are more likely to analyze and synthesize information in quality ways.

We can help students create the thinking they need for our classes. Good thinking is often mirrored in good writing; getting our students to write about our content is the first step to engaging their minds with the concepts we want them to learn.

Good seasons start with good beginnings.

—Sparky Anderson

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Schedule a WAC Workshop for your classes!

If you assign writing in your classes, and you would like to have the WAC Coordinator help support that writing, you can schedule an in-class workshop. Popular workshops include (but are not limited to):

- Research Basics
- APA/MLA/Chicago Style Research Writing
 - Evaluating Sources
- Revising and Editing Your Writing

Workshops can be tailored to fit your class or your assignment. Contact the WAC Coordinator, Jennifer Hippensteel, at jb_hippensteel@southwesterncc.edu.



The Exit Slip—A Writing Assignment for Any Class

The Exit Slip is a quick and easy writing assignment that can be used in any class, no matter what the discipline.

WHAT: The Exit Slip is a student's summary of the day's lecture or class exercises, including any questions or confusing points that need to be cleared up.

HOW: With about five minutes left of class, hand out blank notecards to students. Instruct them to write their names at the top, then write several sentences (you determine how many) about the day's lecture, reading, or exercise done in class. You can ask the students to include areas of confusion that you can clear up in the next class meeting. You can ask them to apply to a practical situation a concept you discussed in class. The content of the notecard writing is completely up to you and can be fashioned to suit any class. Once students are finished writing, they give you the notecard before leaving class.

WHY: The Exit Slip is a great way to create a dialogue with your students. You can use these cards in a formative way, allowing them to help guide you in developing your lecture for the next class. It will quickly become clear which students "get it" and who is still struggling. In addition, the Exit Slips are a quick way to take attendance without taking time at the beginning of class—simply check off which students gave you Exit Slips on the way out the door.

**The pen is the tongue of the mind.
—Miguel de Cervantes**