

Writing Matters



Looking Back to Look Ahead

As the Spring semester winds down, I know that all of us are counting down the days until summer. Even having a few days of break is refreshing! However, it is true that as one year ends, another begins, and it would behoove us to look ahead and start planning for our Fall semester now. In order to do so, take a few minutes to reflect back on this semester. How did your classes go? Do you feel like your students engaged in the content in an authentic way? Did you have writing assignments that worked or didn't work? Are there certain subjects that you teach that deserve a short writing assignment in order to have students engage with it more deeply? As you ask yourself these questions, you're actually laying the foundation for next semester's syllabus. Because this semester is still so fresh on our minds, it is the perfect opportunity to take a few moments and allow it to help us plan for the Fall.

Syllabus Design and Writing Assignments

Instructors know that a critical component of planning any college class is the syllabus. We spend hours tweaking class policies, changing required texts, and shifting around assignments in our schedule. As we look ahead to next semester, now is the perfect time to adjust the ways our writing assignments are laid out in our syllabuses.

Beginning at the End

One useful way of planning a syllabus or a writing assignment is to begin with the end in mind. What kind of product do you want students turning in? When will it be due?

If you can answer the above questions, you can

work backwards to best support major writing assignments. If the due date is November 15, when should students have a rough draft completed? If the rough draft should be finished on November 3, when should research be completed?

By working backwards, and by including those dates on our syllabuses, we can better support the major assignments we expect our students to complete.

Writing as Thinking

Writing assignments are truly thinking assignments. How do you want students to think as they produce writing? What do you want them thinking about?

Your syllabus can help nudge students along the thought pathway you want them to take. For example, if a history instructor wants students to be able to analyze the causes of World War II, the syllabus would build students to that final thinking product. Perhaps there would be a day dedicated to the ending of World War I. Then, there could be a class period dedicated to discussing the importance of analysis and cause and effect. That thought pattern isn't automatic for students, but by planning ahead and scheduling specific days to work at it, students are guided into the

thought process that works best for that particular assignment. It is a building process, and the design of your syllabus' daily schedule can build that in.

Smaller Assignments

Finally, it is important to think about assigning informal writing in order to have students engage in a deeper way with your content, lectures, and readings. This can be something as simple as a reading journal or a lecture summary at the end of class. You can read these to gain an idea of how your students are learning, but these assignments do not require extensive grading.

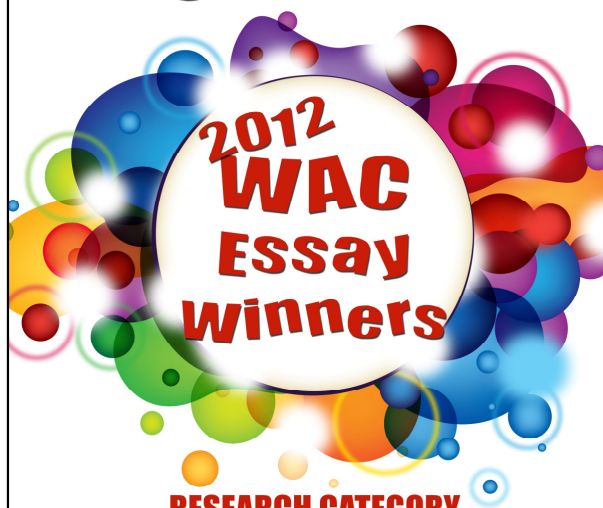
Plan ahead, be ready for fall, and have a great summer!

To be prepared is half the victory. —Miguel de Cervantes

Writing Matters



Congratulations



RESEARCH CATEGORY

First place: Anthony Collins

Second place: Isaak Roots

Third place: Kellie Wilcox

NON-RESEARCH CATEGORY

First place: Susan Williams

Second place: Hannah Tallent

Third place: Adrienne Lindley

WAC Essay Awards Wrap-Up

The Fourth Annual WAC Essay Awards brought in over 40 student essays. The submissions represented classes as diverse as the Physical Therapist Assistant program, Spanish, History, Psychology, and English.

Judges also represented a wide variety of individuals here at SCC. I want to thank Jenny James, Nina Rogers, Amanda Pressley, and Jim Hippensteel for volunteering time out of their busy schedules to read and score the essays.

As with every year, it was a pleasure to read the writing our students are producing in their classes. The level of thought and expertise was encouraging to see. The competition was close and there were a couple of tie-breakers (a third reader) that had to be resolved! Please congratulate the winners if you see them!

You are invited to the annual WAC Faculty Workshop/Training Day Monday, August 6, 2012—9 AM to 3 PM

This is a fantastic professional development opportunity where you can join with colleagues from various disciplines to discuss the importance of student writing.

Topics covered:

- Integrating writing into any course
- Using informal writing to promote learning
- Reading, grading, and responding to student writing (you don't have to be an English teacher!)
- Connections between writing and critical thinking
- Reducing the workload for instructors
- Addressing student anxiety

Always plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark. —Richard C. Cushing