

Writing Matters

Writing Across the Curriculum
Southwestern Community College

Volume V
Number 1

In-Class Workshops Available for Your Students

You can schedule an in-class workshop now through the WAC Coordinator, Jennifer Hippensteel, to encourage student success on your assignments. Workshops can be tailored to your classes and specific assignments.

Contact information:
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What Do You Want From Me?

When we use writing assignments in our classes, typical student questions about those assignments center around what we might consider the “mundane” details - when is it due, how many pages, what format, do I really need to use citations? In reality, what students are asking is, “What do you want from me?” Keep in mind that our students are novices in our fields—what seems obvious and familiar to us is mysterious and uncomfortable to them. By letting them know exactly what we want in the details of the assignment, we actually free them up to do what we truly want the assignment to do—teach them to think deeply and critically.



Making Expectations Known—Using Models

When a new semester begins, we venture off to the first class of the session, hand out and review the syllabus, make students aware of assignments, and we’re ready to go! It seems so straightforward that we hardly take a moment to consider what these first few days may feel like to our students. Often, they are overwhelmed with information, and having writing assignments thrown into mix can drive some students to the brink.

Every time we design a

writing assignment for one of our classes, we have the picture of the “perfect” assignment in our heads; why not let our students know what that might be? When I assign an essay, I have a preconceived idea about what the “best possible essay” would look like, what it would analyze, how it would use language, and the topic it would defend.

Of course, it is important to have written guidelines for any assignment—we hand those out and go over them in class. However, students

still may not have a clear idea of what is wanted on a particular assignment.

Using a model is a particularly useful way to let students know what you expect.

Using the “Good Model”

One way to incorporate a model into your teaching is to use a model of the “ideal” assignment.

It is often best to pass around a copy for students to look at. You can project the same model onto the screen and scroll through to point

out the qualities that earned that model a good grade. Only hand out individual copies if you’re not concerned about copy/paste.

Make sure to somehow annotate the essay—indicate what qualities make it so good. Then go over those qualities in class—why does the introduction work so well? What do the body paragraphs do to develop the main idea? What about citations or use of research?

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High achievement always takes place in the framework of high expectations.
—Charles F. Kettering

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Making Expectations Known—Using Models (cont'd)

Using the “Bad Model”

Another way to let your expectations be known is to use a model of the “not so good” assignment. Again, be sure it is marked or annotated to draw students’ attention to the weaker elements. When you go over this model in class, be sure to point out the qualities that make this essay “sub par.” It is also vital to explain to students how those elements could

be strengthened and the essay could earn a better grade.

Please remember that if you use actual student work for either type of model, remove any names or identifying information before going over the models in class.

Why Models Work

Models “work” for a variety of reasons. First, they appeal to various learning types in one easy exercise. Visual learners and

hands-on/kinesthetic learners will benefit from the handout or electronic walk through. Auditory learners will benefit from your statements about what works and what doesn’t.

Further, freedom from being overwhelmed by the details helps students focus on what matters in a writing assignment: their thinking and the thought process they use to complete the assignment. Writing is thinking made visible, and when we assign writing, we’re

actually giving a “thinking assignment.” We hope our students will go through a process of thought and critical analysis of the topic in order to produce the writing. Using a model gets the details out of the way and allows students to focus on thinking.

Our students benefit from knowing what we expect from them. Models can show your expectations in a straightforward, practical way.



Announcing the Fifth Annual WAC Essay Awards



Who: Currently enrolled students at SCC

What: Submit any essay written for a class at SCC during this past academic year (Summer 2012, Fall 2012, Spring 2013)

Categories: Research Essays and Non-Research Essays

Deadline for submissions: Wednesday, April 3, 2013, at 4 PM

CASH PRIZES in each category: 1st-\$200 2nd-\$100 3rd-\$50

Full rules and submission forms available at Oaks 101B and at www.southwesterncc.edu/wac