

# Writing Matters

Writing Across the Curriculum  
Southwestern Community College

Volume VI  
Number 6

## Science Fair APA Workshops

Next week, there will be two sessions on APA formatting available to students considering entering the Science Fair. Science Fair submissions are judged, in part, on use of APA format.

Interested students should come to only one session (not both).

- Tuesday, October 28  
1-2 pm, Burrell 202
- Wednesday, October 29  
9:30-10:30 am, Burrell 304

## New series—Making the Invisible Visible

Writing often seems to be a mystical activity. When we think of “a writer,” we picture a man waiting on the muse to strike, or a woman hoping that inspiration will come pouring through a sun-filled window. In reality, writing can be a messy business, and there are often hidden rules and agendas that novice writers simply don’t know about. Your students don’t know the rules of writing and the ways of thinking in your field that seem so familiar to you. These invisible aspects of writing should be made visible to our students.

We will explore ways of making the invisible visible in this three-part series in the WAC newsletter. We will first examine how to expose the language of your field, and then we’ll look at making visible the ways of thinking in your field. Finally, we will discuss how to introduce students to the key issues currently confronting your field.

## Making Visible the Language of Your Field

Each discipline or field of study has its own unique language. Walking through the hallways here on campus, it isn’t unusual to hear the language of accounting being spoken in one room, while the languages of history and literary analysis are being used in rooms next door. These languages specific to particular fields are often made up of lingo that “insiders” are comfortable with. Those individuals new to the field—like our students—are often made to feel like “outsiders” because

of their lack of knowledge of this invisible, “insider” language.

Learning the lingo of a field is much like learning a second language and the culture that surrounds it. A large part of any culture is the language used. If you think back to your own experience, learning a foreign language in school often involves not just vocabulary, pronunciation, and verb conjugation, but foreign language classes also explore language’s use within the particular culture of that language. A closer example

of “insider” lingo here in the United States is the world of sports. Each sport has its own lingo from icing the puck in hockey (which does not involve spreading a creamy, sugary substance on a puck) to the battery of baseball (which has nothing to do with electricity or voltage) to the shotgun and pistol formations of football (which do not involve firearms of any kind).

“Insiders” throw these sports terms around all the time in natural, easy ways. But to someone unfamiliar

with the sport and its particular terminology, these words are foreign and unnatural.

Likewise, students start out feeling like they are using a foreign and unnatural language. But learning the language of your field is the way your students become “insiders”; it’s the way they get to start practicing to be a professional in that discipline.

### *Tips for Teaching*

The following three tips are ways to help

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The limits of my language are the limits of my world.  
—Ludwig Wittgenstein

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## Language of Your Field (cont'd)

students learn, understand, and use the language of your field.

First, give students a key terms sheet at the beginning of semester. If there are certain terms that are used again and again throughout your class, go through them at the start of the semester to familiarize students with them before

you use them. This is especially true for new, specific vocabulary that students may not have encountered before.

Second, use informal writing assignments that ask students to use the language/lingo so they can begin to make it their own. Informal writing allows students a chance to wrestle with the

new vocabulary, test it out, and become more comfortable with using it on their own.

Finally, be sure to model the use of the language of your field. In your lectures, presentations, or discussions with students, use the vocabulary that you expect them to be familiar with. This gives students a

sense of the correct context and “culture” of the vocabulary they are learning.

Our students are learning to become “insiders” in their chosen fields. Make visible the invisible lingo of your field, and give your students a head start to achieving “insider” status.

### **WORKSHOP SHOWCASE TAKING ESSAY EXAMS**

The Workshop Showcase is a place to introduce the most popular in-class workshops (by faculty request) that the WAC program provides for students. You can request a workshop for your class at any time! Contact the WAC Coordinator, Jenn Hippensteel, at [jb\\_hippensteel@southwesterncc.edu](mailto:jb_hippensteel@southwesterncc.edu)

This month, the Workshop Showcase focuses on a workshop that many students find invaluable: taking essay exams. Test taking of any sort is a skill, and doing well on essay exams requires a certain set of skills that students either do not have or they have never consciously thought about.

This workshop focuses on three skills: how to study for an essay exam, how to read exam questions, and how to write the exam essay. For example, in the section on how to read exam questions, students are asked to participate in discussion about what they think certain “direction words” in exam questions mean—words like “analyze,” “explore,” and “discuss.” What does the question need you to do to answer it? What’s the difference among those direction words? Often, students need a bit of nudging in the right direction with some of the higher order thinking skills that exam questions require.

The goal of the workshop is to give students practical, hands-on tips to develop the skills needed to feel more comfortable taking (and being successful on) essay exams.

Language is the means of getting an idea from my brain into yours without surgery.

— Mark Amidon