

Writing Matters

Writing Across the Curriculum
Southwestern Community College

Volume VI
Number 5

WAC Faculty Workshop Day a Success!

Held on Friday, Sept. 5, the WAC Faculty Workshop Day was a time of rich conversation from across disciplines of how writing is used in those fields. We also discussed the power of informal writing and how to integrate it into any classroom.

We welcome on board to the WAC program:

Anna Walls—OTA
Laurel Radley—OTA
Brian Kane—Fine Arts
Mike Park—English
Christine Hughes—Music
Robert Johnson—Math
David Jons—Spanish

Student Anxiety About Writing

It is no secret that writing often creates a substantial amount of anxiety in our students (and even in ourselves if we are honest). Anxiety about writing often “looks” like students who are not engaged, not caring, or not interested. Somewhere along the way, our students (and we ourselves) become convinced that they can’t write, they’ll never be able to write, and they might as well just give up trying. So, when we assign writing in our classes, even the most informal of writing, many of our students “seize up” and shut down.

How can we alleviate this anxiety? How can we work with students’ needs to show them what we want and how to be successful in our courses? As we consider the writing assignments we want students to complete, the questions above are one way of guiding the design of an assignment, our approach to writing in the classroom, and the support we offer students to help them be successful.

Tips for Addressing Writing Anxiety

While we are never going to be able to “cure” or “solve” student anxiety over writing, it is important to consider ways that we can address it in our classrooms. Sometimes simply recognizing that it exists can help put students at ease, especially those who were cringing in the back of the room, convinced that they are the only ones who struggle with writing.

Beyond recognizing and naming the anxiety, the following are some useful techniques to consider

implementing to address and alleviate the anxiety students feel over writing.

Informal Assignments

Use informal assignments to support larger, formal assignments or to simply reinforce important concepts that students need in order to progress. Informal writing assignments are easy to incorporate into nearly any course. This type of writing can be as simple as a quick summary of the day’s lecture or activity. Simply the act of writing helps students learn the material, and the fact that

the writing is informal frees students from anxiety. This, in turn, enhances learning.

Support Formal Assignments

Formal writing assignments (essays, reports, research papers, etc.) still have an important place in our teaching. Fully support formal assignments with concrete steps that students can take to be successful. Examples include utilizing in-class workshops from WAC or the library, requiring students to use the LAC or Smarthinking, and breaking the larger formal assignment

into smaller, workable steps. An example of smaller steps to use for a formal research paper could be a topic proposal, a bibliography of sources, an outline, and then a rough draft.

Use Multiple Drafts

Use multiple drafts of formal assignments so students can begin to understand and incorporate feedback. This takes the “weight” off that first draft that often leads to burn out, procrastination, and

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A great deal of talent is lost to the world for want of a little courage.

—Sidney Smith

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Writing Anxiety (cont'd)

plagiarism (most frequently caused by anxiety over formal writing).

Multiple drafts also narrow down the amount of work you put into feedback throughout the process. The majority of feedback you give will be on the rough draft, leaving the final draft as a quick (and relatively painless)

read through. This structure certainly helps you receive final drafts that you will want to read!

Share Your Own Process

A final way to help ease writing anxiety is to write with your students and share your process. Letting students “see behind the curtain” can often

demystify writing in your field. Share what helps you write or helped when you were a student. If you assign writing during class time, doing it yourself alongside the students can help open them up to the idea that everyone struggles with this and has to take time and energy to produce

valuable, effective writing.

Writing anxiety is nearly always present in our classes. While it isn't something that we can “solve” or make go away, there are steps we can take to help our students feel more comfortable about writing, and therefore, about learning.

WORKSHOP SHOWCASE RESEARCH STYLES

The Workshop Showcase is a place to introduce the most popular in-class workshops (by faculty request) that the WAC program provides for students.

This month, the Workshop Showcase focuses on the most popular workshop requested by faculty: Research Skills and Styles. Among the “big three” styles—MLA, APA, and Chicago—requests are fairly evenly distributed. These workshops walk students through best practices for research (finding scholarly sources, taking notes, outlining, thesis development, etc.). Then, the workshop focuses in on a particular style as requested by the instructor.

All research styles boil down to three facets: format, citation style, and a listing of sources at the end of the paper. The research workshop walks through those three facets, giving plenty of examples, and explaining some of the reasoning behind the stylistic differences among the “big three” styles.

All research workshops end with a list of resources students have at their fingertips. First, students see the pertinent sections in the handbook used in English classes, *A Writer's Reference*. Students are encouraged to talk with their instructor for specifics, but they are also encouraged to go to the LAC for help with proofing or with style questions. They are given the WAC Coordinator's contact info, as well as websites that are helpful (including one that accompanies the handbook used in English classes).

The secret of getting ahead is getting started. The secret of getting started is breaking your complex overwhelming tasks into small manageable tasks, and then starting on the first one. — Mark Twain