

Writing Matters

Writing Across the Curriculum
Southwestern Community College

Volume VI
Number 3

Faculty Roundtable Feedback That Works

Join fellow faculty members in a discussion about improving the feedback we give on student writing!

Where: Burrell 307

When: Wednesday,
March 26, 2014
2:00-3:00 PM

“But that’s not how my other instructor wants it!”

One of the most difficult aspects of being a student is navigating the various sets of expectations when it comes to writing—title page, no title page, double-spaced, single-spaced, typed, hand-written, lots of details, just get to the point, etc. And these various expectations are not mere caprice on the part of instructors. Instead, these variations usually reflect the particular sets of rules that determine “good” writing within individual disciplines. For example, we wouldn’t write in the same style or format for a literary analysis as we would for a chemistry lab report.

How can we help students navigate these various writing situations? First, by understanding them ourselves, which requires being clear in what we value and expect. Then, we must communicate these values and expectations to students.

The “Situatedness” of Writing

Writing is just writing, right? Not really, especially when thinking about writing within our disciplines. Writing within our particular fields is unique in content, of course, but it also carries with it expectations and “rules” about what’s correct and what’s expected. And, as we all know, what is considered “correct” or “good writing” in one field often isn’t in another. In other words, writing always takes place within a particular “situation.” In rhetoric, this is often discussed as the

“situatedness” of writing, and our students are trying to navigate these changing rules with every class they attend.

How, then, can we help students determine what is considered good writing within our fields?

What is valued?

Every field has its own set of values when it comes to how professionals within that field think and write. While most fields have some values in common—correctness, professional language, accurate writing, etc.—there are those values that are

specific to certain disciplines. First, determine for yourself what those values are and see if you can verbalize them. These may be ideas that seem second nature to you; after all, you’ve been in this field for a while and these values seem obvious. However, they aren’t obvious to your students.

What is common?

A second question to consider first for yourself and then for your students is what kinds of writing are common in your discipline. Reports, particular forms,

and specific formats are typically directly connected to the discipline itself. A student majoring in English may never fill out a patient chart in a healthcare setting. However, nursing, physical therapy, and respiratory therapy students (plus many others in the health sciences) may do that every day.

In addition, every discipline has its own vocabulary, a “lingo” that is known and used by

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**Writing is thinking. To write well is to think clearly. That’s why it’s so hard.
—David McCullough**

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“Situatedness” (cont’d)

professionals in that field. Your students may be novices in using the very vocabulary that is common and everyday to you.

Communicating values and expectations to students

Our students don’t come to us with any of this information “pre-programmed.” It is up to us, within our fields, to teach, model, and emphasize the values that we want to see in student thinking and writing.

Obviously, we can and should outright teach our

students what we expect and what is expected in our disciplines.

However, we should also explain why these values are held. Students are more likely to learn deeply and independently if they understand why they are learning the content. Finally, be sure to model for your students the values in thinking and writing that you are emphasizing to them.

By examining your field’s values and writing styles, you can help your students be successful in your classes.

Remind your students about the WAC Essay Awards! Deadline is April 2, so there is still time for students to enter! Check WAC website for rules and submission forms.



6th Annual WAC Awards Essay Writing Contest

Let the Words Flow ... and Win Some Dough!

Categories	Research Essays & Non-Research Essays Any length • Any essay written in an SCC class in Summer '13, Fall '13, or Spring '14 is eligible.
Who Can Enter	Current SCC students can nominate themselves or Instructors can nominate student writings
Cash Prizes	Top three essays in each category: 1st - \$200 • 2nd - \$100 • 3rd - \$50
Deadline	Wednesday, April 2, 2014, by 4 p.m.

For more info, contact the WAC Coordinator, Jennifer Hippensteel
jb_hippensteel@southwesterncc.edu • Office Location: Oaks 101B
Full rules and submission forms available at <http://www.southwesterncc.edu/wac>

Writing, to me, is simply thinking through my fingers.

—Isaac Asimov