WRITING BEYOND WRITING CLASSES

Resources for University of Denver Faculty

University of Denver Writing Program

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Writing Beyond Writing Classes

2nd Edition

http://www.du.edu/writing

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Preface

> "Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress."
>
> Burke, Kenneth. *The Philosophy of Literary Form.* 3rd ed. Berkeley: U of California P, 1973. 110-11.

Kenneth Burke's scene is analogous to ones in which academic writers inevitably find themselves, whether freshmen, PhD candidates, or full professors. Writing in the university is largely a matter of joining conversations about many subject matters, in many disciplinary parlors. Being successful in each of them involves understanding not only the "what" of a topic (for example, what knowledge is assumed and what matters are in dispute) but also the "how" (what writing conventions are expected for a given field or readership). As a result, we must expect writing skills to develop over time, through attentive practice. Unlike the individual in Burke's analogy, students can benefit from professors "pausing" the discussion to clue them in a little, but there's still no perfect short cut.

The resources that follow are designed to give practical help regarding student writing to DU professors across the full range of disciplines—faculty who are neither trained as "writing teachers" nor have "teaching writing" as their primary professional identity. In offering them, my goal is by no means to proselytize or convert but, rather, to inform and encourage. There are some practical and economical things all faculty can do with writing to benefit their students and their disciplines—things that respect the complex professional lives that professors lead. *DH*

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Part 1: Backgrounds and Assumptions

Good Writing: A Complex Concept

It's fairly common to long for good old days when college writers were deft, precise, and correct. Alas, there has never been a time when faculty didn't express dismay about student writing:

- Everyone who has had much to do with the graduating classes of our best colleges has known men who could not write a letter describing their own commencements without making blunders which would disgrace a boy twelve years old. --Adams S. Hill, Harvard 1878

- It is obviously absurd that the college—the institution of higher education—should be called upon to turn aside from its proper functions and devote its means and the time of its instructors to the task of importing elementary instruction. --Report of the Committee on Composition and Rhetoric, to the Harvard College Board of Overseers, 1892

- One way to handle them is to force them to take "remedial" courses (often they cannot read intelligently and dislike any reading), a slow process of remedying the ills of a slothful public school life. Another is to fail them and send them home--rather heartless, but perhaps less so than to encourage the morons to go on. A third, too often done, is to accept them and work with their mediocrities; the inevitable result is the lowering of standards. --Phillip March, *How to Teach English*, 1956.

- Students at Yale. . . are less competent to write an effective composition than were the students of ten years ago. There is a grave weakness in their powers of analysis and organization; even the brightest students sometimes show that they lack basic training in the ways of beginning, developing, and concluding an argument of exposition. This is a much more troubling weakness than any small errors in usage, for it shows a lack of mental discipline in the basic principles of human thought. --Joseph Mersand, *Attitudes Toward English Teaching*, 1961

I point this out not to belittle the hope for better writing and writers, but to put things in context. The general state of student writing has been bemoaned for 150 years.

A traditional view has been to imagine that "well-prepared" students should come to upper level classes--or even to college itself--with writing skills fully developed. "Content" is something they learn in their general education or majors courses, certainly not skills. "Bad writers" need remediation and the inculcation of skills they ought to have learned earlier. However, most current theories and empirical research in the field conclude that learning how to communicate in a particular discipline (learning how to wield its symbol systems) is coextensive with learning the discipline. Content and formal/skills knowledge are intertwined. Thus, rather than assuming that writing skills ought fully to be developed prior to college or in specific, upper level courses, current theory and research illustrates that writing skills, even for "strong" writers, naturally continue to develop throughout the college years and beyond.

Eight Propositions about Writing

I've reduced about 40 years of writing research and theory into eight propositions that should inform writing in the academy. They underpin the advice that follows. I've explained some of the concepts below but would be happy to elaborate any of the rest.

1. The ability to write is the ability to generate and present ideas in language that is effective for a given audience and purpose. Good writing in novels to be read at leisure and in reports to be read to inform investment decisions share unhelpfully little in common.

2. Writing is a mode of learning. Assigning writing is a powerful mode of teaching.

3. Informal writing exercises both complement formal writing assignments and are valuable in their own right. For many classes, frequent short writing assignments are preferable to infrequent long ones.

4. Learning to write is not like getting vaccinated against measles. People learn to write by writing, not by being told about writing. "Telling" has some value, yes, but telling without doing has little value.

5. Writing strategies that seem obvious and natural to professors have been internalized through repeated writing experiences. Students have not yet had the same experiences.

6. Writing is a complex of many intertwined activities. New or more challenging writing situations may cause interference among these activities, and some writing skills may actually appear to degrade.

7. Learning a discipline also means the particular ways of learning to write in that discipline. This is a natural developmental process. Just as one doesn't expect freshman chemists or historians to know all of chemistry or history at age 19, neither should one expect them to know how to write chemistry or history.

8. *Effectively* responding to student writing does not mean *exhaustively* responding to student writing.

The Complex Varieties of "Good Writing"

So here's a trick question: Which of the following is the "best writing?"

1. Prices are rising for the black sludge that helps make the world's gears turn. If you think we're talking about oil, think again. Petroleum prices have tumbled from their record highs. No sooner was there relief at the pump, however, than came a squeeze at the pot. That jolt of coffee that a majority of American adults enjoy on a daily basis has gotten more expensive and could go even higher this year. . . .[1]

2. **U.S. person.** Use Form W-9 only if you are a U.S. person (including a resident alien), to provide your correct TIN to the person requesting it (the requester) and, when applicable, to:
   1. Certify that the TIN you are giving is correct (or you are waiting for a number to be issued),
   2. Certify that you are not subject to backup withholding, or
   3. Claim exemption from backup withholding if you are a U.S. exempt payee.[2]

3. `Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
   Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
   All mimsy were the borogoves,
   And the mome raths outgrabe.[3]

4. Abstract: We extend earlier ideas about the appearance of noncommutative geometry in string theory with a nonzero B-_eld. We identify a limit in which the entire string dynamics is described by a minimally coupled (supersymmetric) gauge theory on a noncommutative space, and discuss the corrections away from this limit. Our analysis leads us to an equivalence between ordinary gauge _elds and noncommutative gauge _elds, which is realized by a change of variables that can be described explicitly. This change of variables is checked by comparing the ordinary Dirac-Born-Infeld theory with its noncommutative counterpart. We obtain a new perspective on noncommutative gauge theory on a torus, its T-duality, and Morita equivalence. We also discuss the D0=D4 system, the relation to M-theory in DLCQ, and a possible noncommutative version of the six-dimensional (2; 0) theory.[4]

5. I remember vividly the moment that I entered the world of literacy, education, institutional "correctness," and, consequently, identity. I was demonstrating to my older sister how I wrote my name. The memory comes after I had been literally taught how to do it—which strokes of the pencil to use to create the symbols that equate to my name.[5]

The right answer, of course, is to reject the question—or at least to say that "it depends on the situation." Clearly the readers of a national newspaper, who would appreciate the lively language and phrase turnings of #1 ("relief at the pump. . . squeeze at the pot"), would dismay at the cautious forecasting and precise repetition of #4 ("noncommutative" appears six times)—and vice versa. Someone looking for precise advice would appreciate the directness of #2 and find off-putting the authorial self-reference of #5, though the style of #5 is completely appropriate and desirable for the readers of the journal in which it appears. And #3? Its purpose is not to impart information or argue a point but, rather, more aesthetic: to create an engaging experience through language. Each of these writings, furthermore, require different kinds of skills; we all know people who can write lively and imaginative prose but flail at report

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[1] "Joe Economics." Editorial *New York Times*, January 8, 2007.

[2] Internal Revenue Service, directions for W-9.

[3] Lewis Carroll, "The Jabberwock."

[4] Seiberg, Nathan, and Edward Witten. "String theory and noncommutative geometry." *Journal of High Energy Physics*, 1999. <http://ej.iop.org/links/r0OcrjXAO/fHGb9M6e2xGu2OqEav5vpA/jhep091999032.pdf>

[5] Geraghty, Elise. "In the name of the Father: Self Naming in the Face of Institutional Patriarchy." *Writing on the Edge* 17 (Fall 2006): 29-37.

writing, and people able to produce concise summaries of information but unable to write a funny after dinner talk. To make the point further, consider the dramatic differences among these assignments:

1. From the observational notes you compiled over the past two weeks, write an analysis of the habits of fourth graders at recess.
2. How does the theory of the carnivalesque explain the island world in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*?
3. After you've completed the experiment, please prepare a lab report in standard format.
4. Compose the CEO's letter for the Twain Corporation's Annual Report to Shareholders.
5. Write a humorous piece for the Arts and Entertainment section of the Sunday newspaper about the state of contemporary American film.
6. Create a web site that explains the services and resources of this not-for-profit agency.

What makes each of these tasks so very different is not only the content knowledge they require but also the formal knowledge and skills. They would differ not only in topic but also in voice, format, structure, purpose, and even syntax and diction.

As the list above suggests, the universe of discourse hardly consists only of academic writing. It may be useful to think of four different broad types of writing that people need to develop in their writing lives:

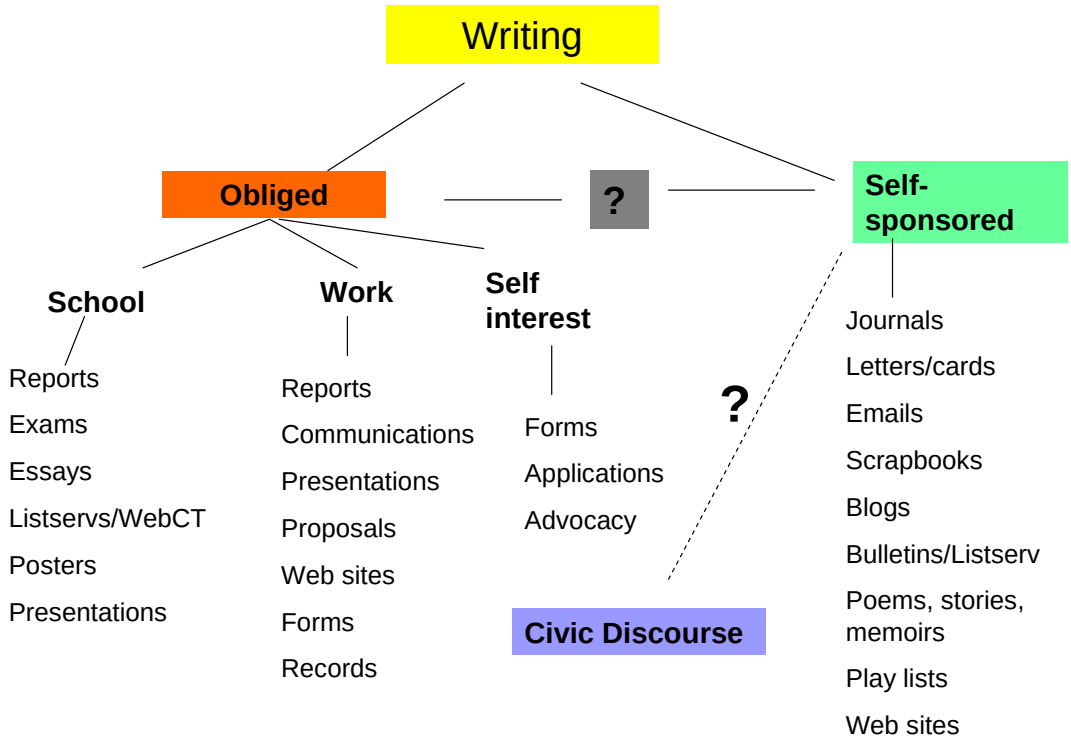
Academic Discourse is, of course, the language of higher education. It is written by scholars, for scholars and privileges such qualities as explicit citation and documentation, placing a high value on formal reasoning and evidence. Its defining forums are academic journals, which are intended for expert readers who are obliged to read them as part of their professional responsibilities. Undergraduate students are generally not imagined to be writing for professional journals; however, to varying (often tacit) degrees their writings are expected to display several of these qualities. To speak of academic discourse as if it were monolithic and standard across disciplines is, finally, misleading. Compare, for example, the kind of writing valued in a history class versus the kind in a psychology or chemistry. For more on this, see "On Academic Writing and Discourse Communities: A Primer."

Professional or Vocational Discourse is writing in the world of work. Whereas most academic writing prizes what might be called "essayistic literacy," extended and elaborated pieces of connected prose that follow certain documentation conventions, most professional discourse does not. Here, writing is used for various purposes such as documenting events (from case reports to minutes to field notes), establishing or documenting procedures (such as manuals), providing directions (instructions), advertising services or soliciting business (brochures, websites, proposals), conveying information (emails, memos, annual reports), or setting policy (white papers). As a result, the kind of writing someone does in an academic major may bear little resemblance to the kind of writing one does in the work place. For example, an English education major will write a number of critical essays about literary works, but his or her professional work as a teacher will require very little of that kind of writing; instead he or she will write curriculum proposals, notes and letters to parents, assignments, reports for the principal, conference notes, and so on. Professional writing comes closest to academic writing in trade journals or organizational correspondence, but it still differs significantly from them.

Civic or Popular Discourse is a broad category that includes all of the writing done for broader publics or readers. Here I'd include newspapers and magazines, as well as blogs and other websites, even some YouTube videos. Such readers differ in two important respects from Academics and Professionals. First, they don't necessarily possess expert knowledge on a given topic, though they have some interest that brings them to certain readings. Second, they aren't obliged to read anything. (Academic and professional readers/writers are obliged in the sense that, if they don't perform the work of reading and writing, there is a negative consequence: an F, a negative performance review.) As a result, this kind of writing must strike

readers as engaging, meaningful, and interesting or they won't put up with it. Prized equally—or above—the merely rational qualities of academic discourse are a sense of narrative or drama or aesthetics, qualities that make writings interesting to read. The term "civic discourse" emphasizes the kind of writing that seeks to inform opinions and decisions within a citizenry. However, this category also includes the whole range of nonfiction writing on various topics as well as "creative" writing.

Personal and Interpersonal Discourse is writing that mainly serves psychological or interpersonal needs. It is writing that builds connections with other people for the sake of those connections or writing that satisfies an individual's needs for expression. A lot of social networking sites, such as MySpace or FaceBook, exemplify this kind of writing, as do many blogs, fan sites, online reviews, personal emails, IM chats and text messages and chat rooms. In an earlier era, this was the realm of diaries and journals, of letters and cards. It's still the realm of scrapbooks and albums. This sphere is vast and important, the place of tremendous amounts of reading and writing these days. It overlaps with Civic and Popular discourse, obviously, not least because it, too, is self-sponsored and not obliged.



On Academic Writing and Discourse Communities: A Primer

Articles in chemistry journals have a style very different from those in sociology journals, and both differ from articles in English literature journals. These differences go well beyond the obvious differences in subject matter. They include what counts as an appropriate organizational strategy, as legitimate evidence for assertions, as an appropriate voice and tone, and as valid and necessary ways of referring to previously published work. It is not the case that writing in one field is "better" or "worse" than writing in other fields. Rather, it is the case that each field has evolved its own discourse conventions, which reflect their differing histories, epistemologies, and ethoi. Conventions may overlap from field to field; experimental research as published in psychology, for example, resembles, broadly, experimental research as published in biology. However, conventions differ from discipline to discipline across the university, and these differences reveal different assumptions about how knowledge is created and transmitted. The university is thus a coalition of many discourse communities.

Viewed broadly, a discourse community is a group of people bound by a common interest (i.e. physicists, English professors, investment bankers) who communicate through mutually-approved (implicitly if not explicitly) forums (i.e. *Physics Reports, College English, The Wall Street Journal*). A forum is a "place of publication" (i.e. journals, periodicals, professional meetings, other places where members communicate). Each discourse community has characteristic writing conventions. Conventions are topics and rhetorical strategies recognized as appropriate by the discourse community. These include acceptable subjects; the community's episteme and ethos; what constitutes "evidence," "validity," and "proof"; and what constitutes acceptable methods of organization and development, as well as perhaps more obvious matters of style and format: length, bibliographic method, manuscript mechanics, syntax, and so on. To summarize, then, discourse communities vary in terms of

- Source materials (primary or secondary readings; written artifacts; measurements; observations, etc.)
- Treatment of sources (lengthy summary and discussion, quick citation, etc.)
- Citation style (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.)
- Voice; representation of narrator ("present" in the text, effaced from the text)
- Conventional structures (set elements and order; implied elements)
- What counts as evidence or proof (facts, examples, testimonials, quotations, interpretations, etc.)
- Purpose (document procedures; record; explain; argue; etc.)

The Origins and Evolution of Academic Discourse Communities

Although it is possible to trace the notion of discourse communities back to Aristotle's treatment of audience, the most appropriate place to begin this particular discussion is the development of discourse communities within the American academy. David R. Russell, in *Writing in the Academic Disciplines, 1870-1990: A Curricular History*, provides an overview. Prior to the 1870s, and the adoption of the German research model for universities, the academy was a single discourse community. There was a standard curriculum, professors were to a larger extent generalists, and knowledge was primarily transmitted, debated, and examined orally. Furthermore, homogeneity in gender, social class, and values defined the students--who came from less than one per cent of the population (Russell 20). These common features permitted a focus on the aim of education as leadership, a uniform course of study, and a relatively "universalized" set of discourse characteristics.

Beginning in the 1870s, several factors converged to fracture this monolith. Industrialization led to the development of new professions, a situation which resulted in establishment of new systems of higher education, such as land-grant colleges, trade, technical, and normal schools. Partly in response to this expansion and partly because of the creation of new areas of knowledge, the academy began to separate into discrete disciplines and areas of specialization. In addition, enrollment swelled--tripling as a percentage of the population between 1900 and 1925 alone (25). These increases in enrollment served to fracture the homogeneity of the student population. The new elective curriculum,

introduced in the late 1800s, prepared students for professions in a new industrial society and all but eliminated the uniform course of study.

The development of writing and publishing technologies provided an easy medium of communication for the newly specialized and increasingly geographically dispersed professionals and academics. Specific areas of interest or fields of activities provided cohesion and coherence for these groups, and interactions became conventionalized in writing. Professional societies developed, increasing in specialization through the twentieth century, and with them developed journals and other written modes of communication. In this manner, as Susan Miller argues, writing for a particular group or within a field of knowledge became "a way of thinking, not just a way of preserving thinking for speech" (qtd. in Russell 5). These writings manifest themselves as different academic genres, as Amy Devitt persuasively notes.

The development of specialized and discrete text-based academic discourse communities altered the structure of the university. However, writing was still viewed in the academy as a general skill separate from the knowledges and assumptions of these disciplinary communities. Complaints about "bad" student writing abounded; Berlin and others have extensively documented committee reports at Harvard and Yale decrying the state of student writing abilities—among the best and brightest in America in a distant halcyon age. But, as Russell argues, "The complaints rarely addressed the central issue; standards of literacy were no longer stable; they were rising and, more importantly multiplying" (22).

In other words, with the rise of specialization--and specialized discourse--within the university, students were being expected to learn not a single "educated" writing, but multiple writing styles. But the extent to which this was true--and the implications for the teaching of writing--were not fully understood until the 1970's.

Instead, the academy's solution to the "problem" of student writing was to rely more heavily on generalized writing courses. Whereas a student at Harvard in the mid-19th century would have studied rhetoric for four years, it became increasingly common to reduce four years of writing and speaking instruction to a single semester or two of coursework--and then call the course "remedial!" The shift to freshman composition helped divorce "content learning" from writing. This approach failed to examine systematically the shifting conditions of knowledge production in the academy. It clung to the fiction of a single academic community and a naive view of language as the reporting of objective reality, a stance which resulted in an emphasis on mechanical skills in the writing classroom. The dominance of a perspective in which, as James Berlin notes, "truth is to be discovered outside the rhetorical enterprise . . . through the method, usually the scientific method, of the appropriate discipline or, as in poetry and oratory, through genius" (qtd. in Russell 11), masked an understanding of the rhetorical construction of individual disciplines.

Since discourse became increasingly compartmentalized in discrete communities within the academy, this naive view of the nature of discourse continued. It permitted an increase in the production of knowledges for which there was little impetus to disseminate beyond disciplinary confines. The task of dissemination is difficult and granted low status within the academy (Take for example the dismissive tag, "popularizer," attached to scientists like Carl Sagan.) The task of sharing knowledges with those beyond a specific discipline takes time away from the "real work" of that specialization. Furthermore, the effort to converge separate, often competing or contradictory symbolic universes often proves to be extremely difficult.

As indicated above, today academia is a singe discourse community only in a broad sense. For the most part, languages and epistemologies have become discipline-specific, diminishing the possibilities for shared linguistic forms. New knowledge is created and disseminated through the disciplines or in the professional or business-world adjuncts to those disciplines. Within this context, then, the recurrent dream of a singular academic language and its corollary, the newly reunited academy, must be modified. Specialization is the productive foundation of the academy and the source of the creation of knowledge itself.

Assumptions about How Students Learn Discourse Conventions

Writing in a discipline requires acquiring what Carolyn Miller calls "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (qtd. in Russell 12). However, most academic communities tend to regard teaching these typified actions as marginal to the primary task of transmitting knowledge. As a result, learning to write in an academic discipline becomes a tacit process, one achieved through a gradual acculturation and absorption of unarticulated conventions.

Within the local context of the discourse community, then, the initiate tacitly learns the activities of the community and "the issues it addresses, the purposes it serves, the concrete objects it manipulates, the questions it has excluded or already answered to the satisfaction of the community, the things that can be left unsaid because of the community's history and activity, or the things that might be said to accomplish its objectives" (Bazerman). Most initiates learn to read the conventions of the community unconsciously, without even realizing they **are** conventions. As a way of speaking becomes familiar, it appears natural. (Manifestations of this are professors' frustrations when students fail to do something that, to them, is "obvious;" others are when professors assume that the way "we" write [as English professors or psychology professors or whatever] makes sense and that other disciplines' discourses are jargon-ridden, unclear, or otherwise inferior.) Thus, as the new professional becomes ever more socialized into a discourse community, she perceives the tenets of the discipline as transparent. As Russell judges, ". . . unless spurred by external pressures, disciplines have not found it necessary to examine, much less improve, the ways students are initiated into their respective symbolic universes" (25).

Expert writers and novice writers differ not only in terms of their experiences but in terms of the range and depth of writing strategies and repertories they have internalized. Consider some factors that influence how (and how easily) writers produce a specific text:

- Knowledge of the subject.
- Ability to acquire new or additional knowledge on the subject (library research, direct observation, empirical study, experimentation, interview, etc.)
- Familiarity with the genre, including the degree to which genre conventions are deeply internalized or known tacitly.
- Ability to learn new genres.
- Experience working within the physical/social constraints of the task (amount of time available, working alone or with others, setting for the writing— for example, in class or office vs. at home—and so on)
- Past experiences and general fluency with writing.
- General knowledge of a range of topics and subject matters (among other things, influences ability to draw connections, develop examples, devise metaphors, etc.)
- Repertory of rhetorical strategies (invention, arrangement, style, etc.).
- Facility with the technologies of writing, from handwriting ability to wordprocessing, to html formatting
- Editing and proofreading skills, ability to produce conventional standard edited American English.
- Relationship to the target reading audience. For example, do readers know more than the writer on a particular subject (this is the difficult situation in which students generally write), or does the writer know more than the reader (which has the advantage of performing from authority but the challenge of translating that knowledge into an intelligible form).

As you can see, several elements determine how easily and well a writer succeeds in a given task. Almost all have a strong experiential basis. That is, most of the knowledge and skills are developed tacitly over time, through continual practice and repetition, as writers develop a complex repertory on which they can draw in new situations.

Teaching Academic Discourse Conventions: Options and Responsibilities

Since the mid 1960's there has been a dramatic rethinking of what writing is and how it should be taught. Three pertinent perspectives evolved. First, was an understanding that the act of writing is not merely a means of reporting knowledge; it is also a means of creating knowledge. Second, was an understanding that while there are many general principles common to various writing situations, what counts as good writing changes from context to context, so that students must, in effect, learn a number of writing dialects. Third, as a consequence of the first two, researchers and teachers recognized that writing should be a component of courses throughout the curriculum.

It is crucial to recognize that academic discourse is but one type of writing that educated students must learn to produce. There are myriad discourse communities beyond the academy, as the four broad types of writing discussed on page 7 suggest.

In the 1970's, faculty in a number of disciplines recognized that writing has dimensions in addition to testing or communicating knowledge. Writing is also a mode of learning, as a seminal article by Janet Emig explained. In response, a number of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programs emerged. Their goal was to enhance students' active learning in various content courses by having them write about course materials. Numerous pedagogical strategies emerged to help faculty assign and deal with student writing in courses that were not designed to permit much writing (usually by virtue of large enrollments per section). Writing is thus emphasized as a teaching tool, and the development of student writing abilities is a secondary, side benefit. WAC programs continue to be prominent in the majority of institutions across the country.

A later developing phase of WAC was Writing in the Disciplines (WID). Whereas the former emphasizes writing to learn, the latter equally emphasizes understanding and practicing discourse conventions pertinent to given academic disciplines. More attention is given to rhetorical and stylistic matters, usually in smaller majors courses. Such courses have, as part of their goals, helping students communicate as members of the discourse community do. Faculty help students analyze writing strategies and conventions, and they interact in the production of texts, often reading drafts and inviting revision.

Three Cautions about Exclusively Focusing on Academic Discourse

1. The danger of reification. Peter Elbow, Joseph Harris and a host of other scholars have warned against teaching academic discourse conventions in a way that reifies them. Research shows that discourse communities are more malleable and permeable entities than we might assume them to be. Well-intentioned efforts to identify explicit rules for producing various discourses have the effect of mis-representing them as more fixed and less complex than they actually are. One consequence is that students thus form a false sense of an academic discourse, perhaps even a parodic one. The university must be a site of innovation, not merely reproduction of a reductive status quo. Pedagogies of academic discourse must always contain a critical component that fosters innovation.

2. Overestimating the need for academic discourse outside the academy. Following graduation, English majors do not need to be able to write articles for *PMLA*. Physics undergraduates do not need to be able to publish in *Physics Reports*. Most strongly disciplinary discourse has as its domain the academy itself, and its readers are usually faculty or researchers with graduate-level training. As a result, to have the production of academic discourse as the primary goal of an undergraduate education in writing is to heighten the perceived split between higher education and "the real world." This is not to say learning to analyze and produce academic discourse is a waste of time; on the contrary, students benefit from the discipline of thinking through various rhetorical conventions, and the principles they learn about the relationship between context and language forms are translatable to other types of writing they will do. Further, it could be argued that an educated citizenry is one that understands issues and ideas presented through traditions

beyond general, popular discourse. However, students in the academy must master types of writing in addition to narrow academic discourses.

3. The neglect of public discourse. Over 15 years ago, in "The Age of Social Transformation," Peter Drucker wrote that formally educated knowledge-workers will emerge as the dominant group in the United States. Knowledge-workers are "people who have learned how to learn and who will continue to learn, especially by formal education throughout his or her lifetime" (66-7). According to Drucker, knowledge-workers possess highly specialized knowledges (emphasis on the plural). He notes that "the shift from knowledge to knowledges offers tremendous opportunities to the individual… but it also presents a great many new problems and challenges. It demands for the first time in history that people with knowledge take responsibility for making themselves understood by people who do not have the same knowledge base" (68). Drucker's exploration serves as an example of the outside forces which with increasing frequency press the academy for change. In this case, there is a call to take responsibility for dissemination across multiple knowledge bases.

Academic discourse communities are only one category of discourse communities. There is a much larger and more complex realm of public and political discourse. Both for their own success and for the betterment of society, college graduates must be able to write for those public audiences, not only to transmit information but also to argue positions. Teaching these kinds of rhetorical strategies is a crucial responsibility of WRIT 1122. Partly in response to the recent widespread emphasis on academic discourse within the broad field of composition studies, there is a strong movement to reassert the place of public discourse as a vital focus of writing instruction within the academy. Doing so revives the tradition since Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintillian of learning to communicate on public issues.

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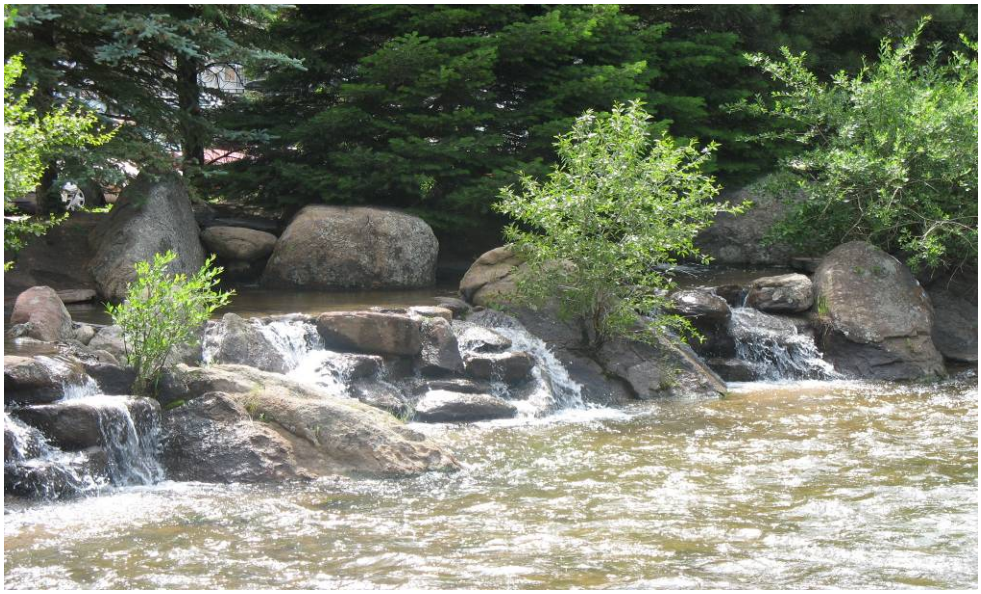

Courses that *Use* Writing vs. Courses that *Teach* Writing

You don't have to be a writing teacher to make effective uses of writing in any course that you teach. That is, you can make writing assignments that are extremely valuable in terms of your students' learning without any of the specialized knowledge that faculty with professional expertise in writing theory, research, and pedagogy might have. Perhaps even more importantly, you can make these helpful writing assignments without adding tremendous amounts of time to your teaching.

Faculty who teach writing courses per se (that is, courses whose primary focus is on developing student writing) must know current research in the development of writing abilities, both the social and cognitive dimensions, in assignment design, in response to and evaluation of student writing, in error analysis, in rhetorical analysis, and so on. There is, after all, a vast body of popular lore about learning to write that is wholly unsubstantiated by research, as George Hillocks's massive meta-analysis *Research on Written Composition* demonstrates. Graduate coursework in rhetoric and composition (there are some 75 PhD programs in this area) generally includes study and research in the areas of rhetorical theory and history; linguistic and discourse analysis; the development of student writing abilities; assessment; the analysis of individual student writing needs; composition pedagogy; and so on, as well as extensive "clinical experience" working with writers.

But you don't need that expertise to teaching writing intensive content courses or to use writing as a mode of learning in any course. It's useful to think of three sites of writing in the university. Some courses that include writing primarily as a teaching/learning strategy; these may be any course in the university. Some courses have, as one of their pedagogical goals, acculturating students in ways of writing important in a particular discipline or on a particular content area; for example, Writing Intensive Core Courses or Capstone courses in the Major. Some courses are directly and specifically designed to develop student writing abilities; for example, WRIT 1122 and 1133. The following table provides a few differences between courses that use writing to foster learning and courses in which learning to write is a main focus. (I've forced some distinctions for clarity; a blurry continuum would be more accurate.)

	Writing to Learn	**Learning to Write**
1	Emphasis on teaching course content through having students actively engage information and ideas.	Emphasis on students developing writing skills and strategies.
2	"Getting better" as a writer is an indirect side benefit.	"Getting better" as a writer is a direct and primary goal.
3	Class time features relatively little direct instruction on writing.	Class time features direct instruction on writing (teaching strategies, workshopping, etc.)
4	Frequent shorter writings are prominent.	Frequent shorter writings are prominent.
5	Students generally don't revise much writing after professor feedback.	Students are often required to revise writings after professor and/or peer feedback.
6	The focus of the course is on assigned readings, practices, or topics.	The focus of the course is on the students' texts.
7	Response tends to focus on quality and accuracy of student thought and engagement.	Response tends to focus on both quality and accuracy of student thought and engagement and on matters of presentation (rhetorical effectiveness, adherence to conventions, etc.)
8	Types of writing assigned may be characteristic primarily of academic settings and assigned in order to facilitate learning (microthemes, journals, reading responses, etc.).	Types of writing assigned may, additionally, emulate professional or civic discourses.
9	Can be used in any class, large or small.	At some point requires relatively fewer students because of time involved.
10	Presumes no special knowledge about writing on the part of the instructor.	Asks instructors to gain some modest knowledge about the development of writing abilities and conventions of the "target genres."

Options for Making Informal Writing-to-Learn Assignments

Informal writing-to-learn assignments can take many forms, but generally they're relatively shorter and the product of a single draft rather than extensively revised over time. With the primary emphasis on student engagement with course materials, the faculty member can make assignments that have students work with key ideas, and faculty can respond accordingly. Here are some possible junctures for making opportunities for making writing to learn assignments.

1. Before class, make an assignment to ensure that students actively engage the reading or material. Give students a question that involves summarizing or critiquing or applying the readings assigned for a particular day. Perhaps they'll write a paragraph or a page. If you'd like, have students post their responses to Blackboard before class; you can then select a few to start the class discussion, or you can incorporate their responses into your lecture.

2. At the start of class, begin with a five-minute writing to attune students to the day's activities. The start of class often has lots of jockeying and settling in. One way to get students' engaged is with a quick writing. You might use this as a quiz, I suppose, to test their preparation. Or you might ask a more provocative question to get their minds going. You can pick these up to check attendance or give a quick analysis of what individuals were thinking. (See below.)

3. During class, use writing to stimulate discussion or thinking or to provide more introspective students with an opportunity to engage the ideas. I've found that interrupting class with a five-minute writing is useful in a couple of situations. One is when the discussion is heated, there are lots of hands in the air, and you're worried that students aren't going to get a chance to contribute. Asking students to take five minutes to make the point they would make, if they had the floor, is a good way to get students involved even if they aren't speaking. Another opportunity is just the opposite: perhaps discussion has flagged, maybe because the issue on the floor is too complicated or threatening. Or perhaps you've detected that student attention to the lecture has waned. Toss out a question for five minutes of writing, then have students gather with one or two classmates to share and discuss their responses with a small number then sharing with the entire class.

4. At the end of class, ask students to summarize main ideas or to answer a specific question or to pose a question. The end of class is often another ragged time, as students start shuffling their stuff in order to get out. You might end class with a short writing in which you ask students questions such as the following: "What was the most important thing we talked about today? The most puzzling? The most interesting? What would you most like to hear more about? What is an application of today's topic? How did today's topic connect to yesterday's?"

5. Use some of the same questions as in #4, but after class, to extend and engage more thoroughly the day's discussion. You might ask students to post responses to Blackboard.

For a host of other ideas about using informal assignments, including extensive examples of specific tasks, please see John Bean's *Engaging Ideas*. There are copies in the Writing Program office.

Part 2: Assigning, Teaching, Responding

Making Writing Assignments, Especially Formal Ones

Nothing has as much affect on the writing situation as the assignment itself. The quality of the assignment affects student success or frustration. It affects the ease with which you can respond to or evaluate writings. It even influences how likely plagiarism or other forms of intellectual dishonesty might be.

The most fundamental element of assignment making is to make all assignments in writing. Simply assigning something orally is an invitation to confusion—for both you and the students.

Another fundamental element is to think very carefully about what you want students to do and, then, try to make this as explicit as possible. There's a fine line between being helpful with a sufficiently detailed writing assignment and burying the students in so many pieces of advice that the task strikes both them and you as formulaic and uninteresting.

Remember that professors have internalized many features of academic writing that our students have not. As a result, we can use what seems like a clear shorthand to us but what strikes our students as mystical code. Consider, for example, that old standby "Discuss," as in "Discuss the circumstances leading up to the situation in Iraq in 2003." Few words are fraught with as much peril for our students. For students, "discuss" simply means "talk about," which can include everything from "dump everything you know onto the page" to "summarize things from whatever sources you manage to find" to "share your opinions." I suspect that if you asked a group of professors what "discuss" means, you'd encounter some initial puzzlement ("it means, well, discuss") and then some variety of opinions. In the case of the task above, for example, take discuss to mean "explain some of the circumstances leading to the situation in Iraq in 2003, commenting on how each circumstance arose, how it contributed to the situation, and how it related to other things happening."

If we're going to use words like "discuss" in assignments, we should explain what we mean by them. Examples would be words like explain, interpret, compare/contrast, or evaluate. For example, here are confusing shorthand words that we use, along with what I think we mean by them (and what I think we should tell students):

Analyze:	What are the constituent elements of the main point or argument that the author raises? What is the evidence he or she employs? What are the strengths and shortcomings of that evidence? What are the implications of this position?
Synthesize:	What are points of agreement and disagreement between two or more readings or sets of data? Develop a thesis statement that would encompass a point by one or more readings, and defend that thesis, using references to the texts.
Critique:	Make clear the weaknesses or unsuitability of a particular text or position. Do this by making explicit the position or arguments made and the evidence offered. Also make explicit the assumptions that underlie the position and explain any information or interpretations omitted or slighted. Explain why a different position or argument is at least as valid.
Argue:	Offer a position or claim, with logical reasons and evidence to support it. Include an explanation why this position is superior to other ones that may be held by intelligent people.

Any assignment has many potential "slots" that you can choose to fill explicitly or to leave unstated. These include topic, role, purpose, materials/sources, genre, audience, and conventions. Page 19 provides an overview of these slots. Consider the following assignments:

1A. Write a ten page paper on a topic related to this course.

1B. Write a ten page paper in which you argue for or against teaching Intelligent Design in high school science courses.

1C. Read the articles on the science of intelligent design by Smith and Jones, summarize their positions, and explain whose position you find more convincing and why.

1D. You are invited to speak to a group of people who believe Jones is right. You, however, disagree. Write the speech that you might give; your purpose is not to persuade them to agree with you, which would be asking an awful lot. Instead, your purpose is to have them understand why you're a reasonable person who has thoughtful reasons for believing as you do.

1E. Using your writings from the previous assignments, prepare a web page that contains resources that will be useful for someone trying to understand the issues involved in this topic. Write a two-page commentary that explains the choices you made and shows that you made them with care and diligence.

Assignment 1A leaves most of the slots unspecified. While it will give students lots of freedom, ostensibly to choose a topic of personal interest, this is the kind of assignment that leads to massive headaches for the professor when it comes to evaluation and that invites plagiarism. The degree of openness ultimately frustrates students, too. I'd counsel never to give an assignment of this form—or to do so only with massive amounts of steps involved, from proposals that you approve to interim drafts and so on. Assignment 1B is better, giving a focus to the task; it invites plagiarism, perhaps, and very canned information dumps. 1C is even more focused, and the fact that students are asked to use specific sources (which you've chosen very carefully, of course) mitigates against plagiarism. 1D goes even further, assigning students to a particular role. This kind of assignment can be very good at developing students' wider thinking on a particular subject, especially when they're asked to assume a role counter to the position they naturally inherit.

Following are some other ranges of assignments, for your consideration and discussion:

2A. Write a research paper on the topic of the current situation in Iraq.

2B. Summarize and analyze the articles by Smith and Jones on the situation in Iraq.

2C. The articles by Smith and Jones take different positions on the ultimate success of America's involvement in Iraq. Write a paper that explains which position is more accurate, based on a careful analysis and evaluation of each. Successful writers will need to research some of the claims that Smith and Jones cite, including the evidence they marshal—or ignore. Your readers are thoughtful people who will be more impressed by careful reasoning grounded in solid research than by grand assertions or labels.

3A. Write a 700-word opinion piece on a topic related to psychology, addressed to a popular audience.

3B. Write a 700-word essay suitable for *Psychology Today* in which you provide a brief overview of how different personality types can affect the workplace.

3C. Write the review of literature section for a hypothetical article in a scholarly journal in psychology, an article that will report findings of a new study about personality types in work situations.

3D. Using your knowledge from this class, write a review of Barbara Ehrenreich's depiction in *Bait and Switch* of the use of personality tests in hiring.

Some Possible Variables in Making Writing Assignments

As I mentioned above, there are many different "slots" or variables that you can specify in an assignment, and by adjusting these, you can generate a wide variety of assignments. The variables you specific will also determine your evaluation standards and influence the kinds of guidance you give students in process.

Topic Open General subject field (topic area) Specific topic Specific position on topic	**Readership** teacher peers hypothetical or real individual general public audience specific audience (interest group, etc.) specific academic or professional audience, etc.
Role student collaborator/colleague professional peer expert employee citizen interest group member official	**Genre** memo; letter journal entry; log; lab notebook ethnographic notes report of information; of observations; of event response; blog entry—about readings? Events? article; essay case study; treatment plan research paper: primary sources? Secondary? short answer/microtheme class notes; summary poster; brochure class posting on a discussion board podcast; film PowerPoint; Web page
Purpose demonstrate knowledge organize materials analyze, draw inferences and conclusions synthesize critique argue a position or policy explore or reflect connect new knowledge to old or to experience interpret	**Conventions** Format Length Citation style, etc.
Sources Personal experience or opinion Texts or artifacts[1] that students find Texts or artifacts that instructor specifies Data[2] provided by instructor Data created by student(s) [1]Writings, images, objects, etc. [2]Observations, measures, statistics, etc.	

Sequencing Writing Assignments

The ancient Greeks believed, with some good justification, that writing and speaking skills were best developed by having students perform a particular sequence of tasks over the course of their educations, from retelling a fable to arguing a thesis. It would be desirable to discern and implement a similar sequence for students today, but the incredible variety of schools and students today makes the prospect unlikely, not only in the realm of K-16 but even during the undergraduate years. It may be possible for individual majors whose courses are highly sequenced to stage types of writing that students do as sophomores, say, vs. as seniors—and if your department has an interest in doing so, please contact me.

If the prospect of a well-integrated vertical sequence of writing assignments developed over several semesters is unlikely, however, there is consolation in the ways that individual instructors might sequence assignments in their courses. The concept is simple. Design writing assignments so that later ones can build on skills practiced in earlier ones. Consider the dimensions of what make some writing assignments easier or harder.

Spectra of Difficulty in Writing Situations

Known readers		Unknown readers
Friendly readers		Skeptical/hostile readers
Reader knows about the same		Reader knows much more (or less)
Familiar topic/information		New topic/information
Given information	→	Author must generate information
Familiar genre		New genre
Short		Long
Few sources		Many sources
Single purpose		Complex purpose
Well-defined task		Ill-defined task

Report Summarize Respond Analyze Synthesize Apply Define Critique

For example, if a writer is summarizing a familiar topic (say a TV show), for a friendly reader (say a roommate) who also watches that show, in a familiar, brief genre (say an email), that writer will have a much easier task than if he or she was analyzing a new topic (say a play by Moliere), for a skeptical reader (say a professor) who knows the play (and its criticism) backwards and forward, in a lengthy new genre (an article suitable for submitting to a professional journal). If that second task were the ultimate goal of my course, I'd try to divide the assignment into some smaller pieces, beginning with easier ones, and lead students through them. For example:

- You might first have students draft part of the paper for a friend, then have them revise that draft for a professor.
- You might have students write a summary and analysis of one source, then have them write a summary and analysis of a second source, then write a synthesis of the two papers, then move into the longer research paper.
- You might give students a few key sources that they must use in the paper, then have them do some additional research to add a few more sources of their own.
- You might have them do "translation" assignments. Take a piece that was written for an expert or scholarly audience and have them put in into language that a nonexpert would find clear and interesting. Or take a piece that appeared in a popular venue and have them do the kind of research and revision that would make it more suitable for a scholarly one.
- You might have students turn in some brainstorming of several ideas for a paper. Then they might select an idea and write a proposal. Then they might write an annotated bibliography, if the paper calls for sources. Then they might write some part of the paper, a "middle" piece. Then they might draft the whole thing except the introduction. Etc.

"Teaching" Writing: Instruction and Feedback

Obviously, providing students the opportunity to write is a necessary component of their developing writing abilities; theoretically, with world enough and time, opportunities alone may be sufficient. However, I don't know anyone with world enough and time, so it behooves professors to provide two kinds of help to guide and hasten the process of development. One is instruction, the other feedback.

Instruction

By instruction I mean specific advice and strategies that professor either provide students or in which they lead students. Providing can take the form, obviously, of textbooks or handouts: compilations of "how-to" materials or examples of target discourse. It can also take the form of lectures or presentations. More effective, however, than "providing" alone is when it's accompanied by "doing," when students are active participants. Following are several instructional activities. They presume, of course, a solid assignment.

How-to advice or strategies. What are strategies for generating and organizing ideas on a given assignment? How would expert writers go about doing this task? What are the characteristics of a successful piece of writing on this task? You might answer questions like these on a handout when you make the assignment, or you might direct the students' attention to appropriate sections of handbooks or writing guides. (The Writing Program has some, if you're interested.) Alternatively, you can give a few minutes of class time to explaining this. One useful strategy is talking about how you might complete the assignment.

Assign and discuss "small" exercises. Focus on a skill or feature needed in an assignment and create an exercise that has students practice it. For example, if the paper requires students to critique a reading, you might have them write a paragraph in which they introduce a quotation from the reading, cite it correctly, and write a response to it. You can use any number of response strategies, below.

Brainstorming sessions/idea generating sessions. You might use the day you give an assignment to have the class generate ideas for that assignment, in small groups or large. Perhaps you structure a debate, assigning students to represent various perspectives. Any ideas generated are free for use by anyone in the class. Even 10-15 minutes for this kind of thing is helpful. One strategy is for students to generate the qualities of an excellent paper on this assignment, and you can then have them compare their list with one you've generated. NOTE: If you'd like someone from the Writing and Research Center to lead such an exercise in your class, please contact us.

Models of published work. You might simply provide some works that are similar to the kind of writing that students are to produce. More effective, however, is lead some discussion of the features of the work. What are its parts? How does it begin? End? How does the writer develop ideas? What is the tone or voice? What about the documentation style? A useful question: how might the writer have gone about producing this work? What difficulties might he or she have encountered?

Example student works. Successful papers from previous courses are very useful, and you can discuss those with students in the same way you do published models. You can also bring in problematic papers from the past, but I'd take care to bring in at least "average" (not "terrible") papers and to talk about them in terms of how they could have been stronger.

Works in progress revision sessions. Have students email drafts of their papers before class, and choose one or two of them for discussions of revisions. The aim of such a workshop is for people in the class to give advice that might help students revise their papers. Alternatively, you can divide students into pairs or small groups to give feedback on peers' papers. For advice on how to make response activities productive, see below. NOTE: If you'd like someone from the Writing and Research Center to lead a revision workshop in your class, please contact us.

Systematic deformations. A powerful strategy is to give students two versions of a paper or parts of a paper and ask them to discuss which version they think more successful. Many things are more visible in contrast than they are in a single "good" or "bad" example. Even when students choose the version you think weaker, it opens a productive discussion, as they can then hear what you value. I regularly will create my own examples, either systematically deforming good writing (example B1 below, or improving poor writing, example A2 below.)

A. The assignment was to write a 4-5 page paper that discusses some aspect of gender roles as portrayed in the popular media. Which of the following openings suggests a more interesting and effective paper? Why?

1. The role of women has changed dramatically throughout time. This is evident in society and in the media. Throughout recent history, women have made progress in how they are portrayed. It used to be that women were there only to clean the house, cook dinner, and take care of the children. The man of the household would take care of working, disciplining the children, and fixing all the appliances. I once heard that anything inside the house was the female's domain, and anything outside of the house was the male's domain. Now, women can do anything they want. Women are very successful in the work place. Even with all this progress, it is still okay to stay home and take care of the children. There are more options for women in recent times. They can choose whether they want to work, or stay at home. Women have not always had these choices. Sitcoms are a good example of how the role of women has changed throughout history. Sitcoms show people in real life situations, they just add a little twist. When looking at sitcoms, it is really easy to see how the roles of women have changed.

2. In one episode of *The Sopranos*, crime boss Tony comes home to tell his wife Carmela that she has to move out of the house, at least for a while. A rival gang has decided to kill Tony and his associates, and he fears for the family's safety. The surprising thing is that while Carmela protests, she does so only briefly before getting into practical questions: where should she go? How long will it be? How can she reach Tony? Her behavior is typical of her "the man is the head of the house" style of marriage. Fifty years after *Leave it to Beaver*, viewers each week confronted a TV wife who is surprisingly like June Cleaver. Carmela Soprano has lots of company; women on television have changed surprisingly little.

B. Following are two versions of the same paragraph. Which do you think is better?

A

The phrase *academic bullshit* can mean academic writing that shows a reckless disregard for the truth—that it is almost certainly full of things that are false. That accusation stings because professors are supposed to be truthful in their work, even if the very question of whether truth is objective or knowable has come under much scrutiny in the past few decades. But even that debate is a question of the truth about the Truth. If academic writing is seen as unconcerned about getting things right, that is a problem. An additional problem may be that, as Frankfurt says, bullshit is not seen as a personal affront. Academic bullshit may bear no relationship to what is true or false, correct or incorrect. But no one is offended by academic irrelevancies anyway.

B

A'

The phrase *academic bullshit* presents a double insult to academics. It can mean academic writing that shows a reckless disregard for the truth: writing that it is almost certainly full of things that are false. That accusation stings. After all, the traditional aim of the university is to seek the truth without interference of politics or other loyalties. To what degree truth is objective or knowable has come under much scrutiny in the past few decades. But even that debate is a question of the truth about the Truth. If academic writing is seen as unconcerned about getting things right, that is problem enough. Yet an even worse problem may be that, as Frankfurt says, bullshit is not seen as a personal affront. Academic bullshit may bear no relationship to what is true or false, correct or incorrect. But no one is offended by academic irrelevancies anyway.

B'

Providing Feedback

Given the central role of practice in learning to write, no teaching strategy is more important than providing feedback to students. Certainly students learn from astute comments on their final drafts. However, they learn even more when they receive response—from a peer or a professor—to a draft that they can then revise. This is the most vital pedagogy for professional writing teachers, who ideally work in environments where they can regularly read and respond to student drafts, consult with students about works in progress, initiate collaborative and peer interactions, and so on.

Many professors believe there's a direct correlation between the volume of the comments they make and the degree to which they are being helpful or, even, responsible. Covering papers in ink (or Track Changes comments) may suggest serious rigor, but no one—student or professor—should mistake that practice for necessarily improving student writing. In fact, it can have just the opposite effect (see proposition 2, below). There are smarter ways of responding to student writing. On page XX, I've included thirteen observations, again grounded in research and theory.

Of course, professors aren't the only people who can provide useful feedback to students, especially for works in progress. Students can help their peers understand how their drafts are read or understood by others and can offer suggestions for revision. Now, many faculty have been disappointed with peer response, as students either do it meanly or perfunctorily or aimlessly. Investing some time discussing this issue with students is useful, as is providing some clear guidelines, questions, or roles.

Page 21 is a handout that we've found useful to provide students before they do peer response. It may be productive to have students talk about their own experiences of what works—or doesn't—before giving them this handout.

Page 22 shows one kind of peer response, in which students are asked to address specific questions about someone else's draft. The nature and number of questions to be asked, of course, is endless, but choose effectively based on the specific assignment.

Page 23 shows a different kind of peer response, in which students are asked to take on a role and write a general, more "narrative" comment to a classmate.

Use the approach that appeals most to you.

Peer Reviewing: General Advice for Students

Common Pitfalls

A surface-level reading. The greatest compliment you can pay to someone else's writing is to engage with it. Sincerely let the writer know how the text affects you as a reader.

Fear of negativity. If you avoid critiquing, you might make yourself feel better, but you won't help the writer strengthen the text.

Critiquing the person instead of the text. Instead of saying "You're not making sense here," a judgment about the writer, try "This section doesn't make sense to me."

Techniques that Work

Respond as a reader. You don't have to know how a writer should revise something; you just need to know what you like to read. Explain how the text affected you intellectually and emotionally. Be specific. Did you connect with it? Was it dull or confusing in places? Were there sections where you had to work to hard to see the main point or the connections between supporting ideas. Good writing does the hard work for the reader.

Use I-*statements.* Use *I*-statements ("I laughed here!" "I get confused here—I had to read this twice") to show the writer how a reader responds to the text.

Dig in. The instructor is going to scrutinize the argument/thesis in the writer's final draft. You'll do the writer a favor if you do the same. Is it sufficiently complex and insightful or simplified and obvious? Can you read it once and summarize the main points? Are you persuaded? Where are the holes? Are there other possible options, counterarguments, or pieces of evidence the writer could have offered? Do you get lost anywhere?

Remember, it's just a draft. The reason why we call them *rough drafts* is because they're still in their formative stages. Remind yourself that a tactful critique of a draft won't upset the writer.

Prioritize. You don't have to mention everything a writer should revise to make an A paper. Simply help writers see how a reader responds to their work so they can focus on 2 or 3 areas to improve in the next draft. That means you'll let some things go. How do you decide which 2 or 3 areas to mention?

- Choose higher-order concerns over lower-order concerns. Focus on issues that impede your understanding of the ideas. Don't worry as much about issues that are more cosmetic.
- Choose recurring issues over isolated issues. Focus on the issues that crop up repeatedly rather than the issues that appear only once.

Example 1: Peer Response Questions and Directions

by John Tiedemann and Eliana Schonberg

Reviewer's name: _____

Writer's name: _____

*Directions to **Writer**: Please choose three questions you'd like the reviewer to address. Circle them.*

*Directions to **Reviewer**: Please read the work and provide clear and detailed answers to each of the THREE questions to which the writer has asked you to respond. Continue on the back, if needed. After you've completed this, talk about your answers with the writer. Then write up a half-page synthesis and suggested plan for further action.*

1. How can this writer make the central argument of this work stronger, clearer or more easily accessible to readers?

2. Identify any paragraphs whose purpose is unclear or that seem to be working at cross purposes, and explain how the writer can revise them to make the purpose clear.

3. Does the sequence of the argument build successfully? If not, suggest a way to reorder it and identify transitions that may need clarifying.

4. Writers can offer their readers guidance in a number of ways, such as clearly defining their terms, explaining exactly how the evidence supports their claims, etc. Identify places in this essay where these forms of guidance could be stronger, and explain specifically how the writer can strengthen them.

5. Are there places in which you feel the textures or structures of language are not serving the writer's purpose effectively? Are there places in which the language could be modified?

Example 2: Narrative Peer Response

You may prefer not to have students answer specific individual questions about a classmate's draft but, instead, provide a more sustained response. I often give students a broad set of directions to create and extended response. One approach that's very useful is to assign students to respond in a certain role. That way, especially if they have critiques, they enjoy the cover of speaking in a persona and not as a classmate. Following is an example of this kind of assignment, with two actual student responses.

Letter to a classmate about her or his draft of Project 5. I'll pair you up with another student. Your task in this letter is to respond in the role of someone who disagrees with the author of the paper; explain as carefully as you can why you disagree. State your own arguments and explain why they lead to a different conclusion. Now, I want you to be polite about this; don't indulge in extreme partisan rhetoric of the kind we looked at earlier in the quarter. However, to be helpful to the author you should be as persuasive as possible—even if you're playing a role that you actually disagree with. Send this letter by email, with a copy to me (dhesse@du.edu).

Stephen
WRIT-1122
March 3, 2007
Hesse

Letter to Leslie.

To begin with I thought your paper was very thorough and well thought out. It was lengthy and covered all the important things you needed to. But as the point of this assignment is to disagree and offer constructive criticism there are some things that I think would help clarify and convince your readers who are on the fence to your position.

You use a lot of statistics and surveys in your paper. This is good, it added credibility and "scientific reasoning's" but when I see these I wonder where did you find these studies and are they themselves factual? You reiterated multiple times that in abstinence only education they will use statistics that are untrue or slanted to favor there position. How does the reader know that you haven't made these facts up or slanted them in your favor? My suggestion would be to label your studies and who they came from. If one of them is from a government agency, you can include the address so if the reader wanted to they could verify the facts that you offer. I'm not accusing you of doing this but it would only make your paper more believable.

You stated on page two that the SAM review found that consensual acts of sex between two young kids had no mental health effects on them. I whole heartily disagree with this point. Regardless of age and relationship status of the two parties involved someone always gets hurt when a sexual act occurs. If there was a relationship before, it has the potential to be destroyed due to the baggage related to close sexual acts. If one of the parties involved uses it as a one night stand and the other person really liked the other, he or she suffers emotional distress that could be extreme. Also, do you know if the study you used includes guys/girls that have suffered sexual abuse or single parent families? I know many girls who's father has left them and they seek that affection through random hookups and always receive heartache. This continued self abuse has to hurt them mentally. Further more, what is the SAM review? Also on page six you included an excerpt from a study that talked about depression. When I read the excerpt I was confused. "……who were not depressed at baseline and who acquired an STD between wave I and wave II….." Since we didn't do the research for your topic, its necessary for you to explain your sources as I mentioned in the first paragraph.

I received my first taste of sexual education when I was in fifth grade. I knew that what we were learning was something weird and interesting, I remember my teacher giving the permission slip and telling us that if we didn't want to take part in sex ed. we were to be assigned an alternative assignment. Even though I had no idea what I was getting myself into I knew that I didn't want to be the weird kid who was doing the alternative assignment. You mentioned that that sexual education could make kids feel weird and uncomfortable but at the same time if they don't participate in it, they will be ostracized by their fellow students for not participating. I know that if any kid was in high school and their parents said no to sexual education they stood a good chance to be made fun of.

Because I am a strong believer in no sex before marriage its difficult for me to make more thorough points for you to use. I think that sex before marriage causes more problems then it solves and that most people know that condoms are very effective. It is a personal choice and I do believe that giving out sexual education can encourage

people to engage in sexual acts before they are ready and should have more facts to encourage students to participate in sexual acts till marriage or at least until they are older (18yrs+) to limit the amount of emotional trauma they receive which no study can find.

Dear Stephen,

It is apparent that you have a true feeling for what you are writing about, yet your obvious opinions create a lack of credibility. I find myself asking, how can I trust that what the author is saying is more than just opinion? You do not cite your facts about affirmative action—the percentages could easily be made up for the purpose of supporting your argument.

You write about the potential that the lack of the men in professional fields such as medical and aeronautical could have on our nation—and potentially the world. I have to ask—would not the lack of men in such professions be easily filled by women who can do the job just as well? You say, "not to say that women cannot take on this position," but that is exactly what you *are* saying. If a woman were to got to a school for the same study as a man—mechanics for example—wouldn't she be just as qualified for the position? Or does her gender affect her ability to perform?

I have reason to question your information sources—how do you know that men are not being admitted into schools? Where did you find your statistical evidence? Yes, the lack of *people* in collage—and therefore getting an education—may increase the rate of crime, but where do you find the evidence to suggest that men commit the majority of crimes? How does this point relate to your argument?

Without men as political leaders, will we be in a very bad place as you say? What is to say that it wouldn't be a *better* place if the educated women of society were able to make political decisions rather than the men who have been controlling political systems since the beginning? It may well be time for a change as drastic as this one. For example, war after war has been begun and lead by male politicians, yet what have we learned or gained from any of them? Other than a select few, wars have proven to be costly—in dollars and human life—and lacking in beneficial purpose.

Where do you get the idea that men will be so scarce in collages that it would effect the athletic programs? Wouldn't a school not still try to recruit male athletes to fill the spots on their teams? They do not necessarily chose from the people they accept rather than chose from the potential students for their school. Even if you were to say that men are less often accepted into school than women, it is still the desire, or lack there of, for men to apply to and attend school that will create an effect as you suggest.

Also, how does a school benefit from not admitting men into their school? Are you suggesting that it is in the interest of schools to have an all-female student body or a student body dominated by female students? Shouldn't it be their interest to preserve balance in gender in their school? Could it be that women are doing more to be accepted into college and that they are in fact more qualified than men to attend school? Your arguments need further research—they are not credible.

Sincerely,
Leslie

13 Ways of Looking at Response, with Advice

1. No professor is capable of making comments so profound that a student will become a perfect writer on the basis of remarks on a single paper.
2. Unskilled writers are largely unable to assign levels of importance to comments made on their papers. In other words, they are likely to treat equally a comment that the argument of an essay is confusing and a comment that the essay contains several misspellings. Moreover, because comments on surface errors are more easily addressable (though error types themselves are not necessarily easily and permanently resolved), students are likely to attend to them and not to more serious problems in logic, idea development, focus, or order.
3. Teachers have a finite amount of time to spend responding to writing. There is evidence that time spent meticulously annotating every aspect of a student's paper does little good. This is especially true if the comments are rubber stamp ones: "awkward," "be specific" and so on.
4. Students learn to write by writing, and while judicious advice is helpful, there is a gap between knowledge and performance. A steady diet of being closely edited doesn't mean that a student will necessarily internalize what he or she needs to do in future tasks.
5. Set ground rules for yourself, and clearly convey to students what they can and cannot expect in terms of your response. For example, tell them (or include a response sheet that tells them) that your written comments will address only one main strength and one main area for improvement, if that's what you choose to do. Cover other aspects of the paper with a response or grading rubric. 1. "The most effective aspect of this paper is ___ (or, "The best section of this paper is on page) 2. "One thing that will significantly improve this paper or ones like it in the future is ____ "
6. "Edit" only a fraction of a paper: a selected paragraph or page. Make clear up front that you do not aspire to be exhaustive. See recommendation 3.
7. Make good student papers available to illustrate features of strong work.
8. Develop a response rubric, that is, a list of elements of the paper, with values you can check off. Typical broad criteria include: focus, thesis, argument; organization; clarity of development; quality and quantity of evidence or support; ambition (degree of difficulty); format; correctness; and style. However, each element may look different in different situations. Use general rubrics to develop ones tailored to specific assignments.
9. As you write assignments, consider how you might respond to the kinds of writing those assignments might yield. It doesn't "cheapen" the assignment to reveal criteria to students up front. You might provide more scaffolding to students at the beginning of the semester
10. Require students to tell you the specific aspect of the paper on which they'd most like to get feedback from you, then reserve most of your comments for that aspect. You might want to give them a menu of features to select from or, at least, explain to them why very general requests won't yield them much help (e.g. "Does it flow?)
11. Have students write a cover memo in which they describe their strategies in writing the paper and what they perceive its strengths and problem areas to be.
12. Use brief marginal comments to call attention to "higher order" aspects in the paper, usually content or development. A "good" or a "yes" or a "?" or an "evidence?" go a long way. Use squiggly lines (or what you will) to call attention to sentence errors or hugely rough spots (but remember that your goal should be to teach). Don't feel compelled to mark everything, and certainly don't edit everything.
13. In courses with multiple assignments, give students "vouchers" good for one detailed commentary per term. They should reserve that for the time they want you to read a paper as you would a manuscript submitted to a journal.

Identifying and Prioritizing Specific Problems in Student Writing

Whenever you're responding to student writing, you confront two limitations. One is your own time; probably your professional and personal life includes a thing or two beyond responding to student papers. The other, more interestingly, is the diminishing rate of return on the investment of your comments. As the "13 Ways" above suggest, comments beyond a few targeted ones tend to blur, especially for writers unable to sort out which have priority. The analogy is corrupt, but think of a patient coming to a doctor's office and the physician putting equal attention on the patient's hang nail, baldness, and heart arrhythmia. That last deserves attention.

Try, then, to identify first the highest level issues with a piece of writing. Generally, these consist of idea development, logic, or clarity. This doesn't mean that you should ignore surface features, but do recognize their place. It doesn't matter if words are misspelled if the student has done completely the wrong assignment, or the paper's argument is vapid or wrong. The following questions might help you identify why papers strike you as strong or weak. You might also develop responses from the grading rubrics we've included below.

A last word: tell the student what he or she is doing well. Praise is a good teaching tool, and it tempers critical comments with the message that you're working to help the student, not just looking to bludgeon.

1. Is the student doing the task assigned? If not, does the task that the student is doing have sufficient merit that you can sanction it?
2. Do errors, carelessness, or presentation so interfere with reading that the student needs to turn in a "clean" copy before your can respond? Is the paper in the proper format? Note: Papers that have this problem need not be marked; they might more effectively be returned, perhaps with a grade reduction.
3. Are there fundamental misreadings of information or ideas? Does the student accurately summarize and represent readings or sources?
4. How effective, appropriate, or ambitious is the focus? Is the thesis or topic
    1. clearly established and maintained throughout?
    2. worth proving or addressing?
    3. susceptible to coverage or demonstration in the situation available?
5. How well does the paper fit its intended audience?
    1. Are the ideas "new" or relevant enough to intended readers?
    2. Does the writing assume the right things of readers—or too much, too little, or the wrong thing? Consider in terms of information, facts, basic assumptions but also beliefs and values?
    3. Is the tone appropriate, or is it pitched too high or low or simply "off?"
6. Does the paper have the right kinds and amounts of evidence for claims?
    1. Are evidence and support present, or are they missing or inadequate?
    2. Does the writer address countering positions or confounding information or alternative interpretations? Or are these slighted or missing?
    3. Are complexities or subtleties treated well?
    4. Does the paper have the right kinds of evidence, suitable to the task and audience?
    5. Does the writer explicitly connect evidence to claims, or does he or she merely deploy it?
7. Is the structure of the paper effective?
    1. Does the introduction provide enough context or clearly signal purpose, without being padded or gratuitous? Is the introduction appropriately engaging?
    2. Is the paper balanced in development? Do important ideas or elements get relatively more attention than less important ones?
    3. Is the organization clear to readers? Is the sequence of parts the most effective one?
    4. Is the conclusion apt and engaging, or is it absent, superfluous, or perfunctory?
8. Is the style of the paper effective?
    1. Are word choices and sentence types appropriate for the audience?
    2. Is the paper free of stigmatized grammar, usage, and punctuation errors?
    3. Is the style appropriately economical and lively? Does the voice of the paper emulate the voice associated with good professional writing in this area?

Example: Part of Student Paper with Marginal, Final Comments, and Rating

Following is a page I excerpted from the middle of a DU freshman paper written in my WRIT 1122 class in winter 2007. The student was analyzing the features of political discourse on YouTube. You'll see my comments (I like to use the comments features of Word), my final statement to the student, and my grading rubric (which I'll discuss in the next section). Note: the purpose of this course is to improve student writing, so by necessity I spend 15 or so hours per week per class responding to student writing, something I certainly wouldn't expect of content area faculty.

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compilations of the best of George W. Bush. It features the classics such as "Fool me once…shame on you…" and "The literacy of our youth ARE appalling." These have been displayed over and over again for the public and are things that Bush will never shake from his reputation because of it.

So, whether it be an actor depicting a hypothetical situation that mirrors the concepts of the Bush Administration, or an anthology of our President's greatest moments, the world according to YouTube has come to define our President as an "American Idiot" whose plans do not appear to be credible nor derived from the slightest bit of intelligence. I had originally questioned whether it was only those who disagreed with President Bush that had the motivation to create such video clips, and this may still be true; yet when a collection can be made of things that Mr. Bush himself has said, my inquiry is not validated—when it is, essentially, George W. providing the mockery, or at least the material for it.

As we have already recognized, it is that much easier to address an issue through humor. Through humor, and the aid of YouTube.com (among others)—whose motto is "Broadcast Yourself"—the American public is both encouraged and rewarded (with those desirable 15 minutes of fame) for their mockeries of the President of the United States. The availability of a method for self-expression such as YouTube is revolutionizing the Internet and the way by which we obtain our opinion-basing information—the population of America can now both express their opinion and see how others feel about any issue by the simple click of a button. However many displays of personal opinions there are, there are that many more clips of things spoken by the President himself—the opportunity for people to see such stupidity in action, to pause, stop, repeat, laugh, play

Comment [DH1]: Nice phrase.

Comment [DH2]: Do you see why I suggest this change?

Comment [DH3]: This is an awfully broad claim to make on the basis of two videos. Even if you don't want to take the time here to summarize several more videos (and I don't think you do), you might include something like, "In an hour of scanning YouTube's George Bush videos, I glanced at 25 of them. All were in the same ridiculing vein." That helps your point.

Comment [DH4]: I'd thought you weren't really answering that question; in coming back to it now, though, I wonder if that's really the point you want to make. If so, you'd need to follow quite a different line of thinking.

Comment [DH5]: True. Did you turn up any positive portrayals or defenses of Bush?

Comment [DH6]: So, you found that there are more videos like the second you describe than like the first? That would be a good point to quantify, even in the approximate fashion I described above.

Final Comment on and Evaluation of "Sarah's" Paper

Sarah, this is a promising topic, as I mentioned when we talked about your partial draft last week. I wish you'd been able to turn in a full draft, as I'd like to have shared more thorough responses earlier. The idea of looking at Bush videos and analyzing them is interesting. The question you pose of what they represent is also interesting, but I don't think you resolve that question (do they represent the American attitude or the inclinations of people who post on YouTube?). You chose two types of videos to tell about in detail: one in which an actor created a scene, the other consisting of a greatest hits compilation. It would be interesting to know which of the types is more prevalent. Even if you're sensibly only going to describe a couple of videos (your audience would be game for a few more), describing how systematically you viewed several more would enhance your piece. The essay takes too long to get into your specific observations. Grounding your analyses more specifically in examples would let readers value your insights more. You should include a works cited page that includes information about how to find the videos.--DH

Rating, According to Project 3 Evaluation Standards

Discussion of specific "artifacts." Clarity and fullness of the examples. Ambition and thoroughness of choices. In the best papers, writers will thoroughly present some well-chosen artifacts (readings, television shows, articles, observations), in a way that is clear and engaging. 0-30 points.
Your score: 20

Quality of the interpretation. Insights generated. Connection of the "artifacts" to the interpretations. In the best papers, writers will go beyond some obvious comments and offer some interpretations that bring to light new insights. Those insights will grow out of the artifacts rather than simply seem to have been brought to the task. Or, the writer may make some familiar points but do so in a way that is refreshing, well-articulated, and specifically illustrated by the examples chosen. 0-30 points.
Your score: 25

Organization and balance of treatment. The best papers will be easy to follow. Their organizations will seem intentional and calculated rather than random. (For example, there will be reasons why some ideas come earlier and others later.) The most significant parts of the paper will receive the most attention and development. 0-15 points

Your score: 10

Style of the paper. The best papers will have engaging openings and closings and will present examples and ideas in a voice and manner that readers will find compelling and interesting. 0-15 points
Your score: 12

Editing. The best papers will be substantially free from errors in grammar, punctuation, usage, format and so on. They will be appropriately documented. 0-10 points
Your score: 6 (fine except for lacking documentation)

Note: Papers that have extreme problems in any single area may result in the overall grade of the entire paper being reduced.

A = 85. B = 70. C = 55. D = 40

Your score: 73

Part 3: Grading Writing

To grade a piece of writing is simply to let the writer (and others) know how well it matches a set of criteria specific to that task. There's the rub: what are the specific criteria? What does an A paper look like? A C? Some professors find scoring guides or rubrics (basically, a set of features and corresponding rating levels) useful either for responding to or evaluating student writing. Other professors find rubrics constraining or annoying. My own recommendation is to follow your personal preferences. However, whether or not you formally use a scoring guide, it's useful to make explicit the qualities that you value in a paper.

Generic rubrics for writing are pretty simple, focusing more or less on six elements: Focus (quality of the controlling idea), Development (quality of the evidence or support for main ideas), Organization, Conventions (including paper format, appropriate documentation), Style (including sentence varieties, diction, and voice), and Mechanics (grammar, punctuation, usage). These can be set up in a simple grid of however many scoring levels make sense. For example, see Figure 1:

Figure 1: Generic Grading Rubric

	Unacceptable	Weak	Adequate	Strong
Focus				
Development				
Organization				
Conventions				
Style				
Mechanics				

Features can be weighted to reflect their importance in a paper. An example in which the instructor might assign points by circling appropriate categories, then totaling them to reach a score for the paper:

Figure 2: Rubric with different values for each element

Focus:	1	2	3	4	5			
Development:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Organization:	1	2	3	4	5			
Conventions:	1	2	3	4				
Style:	1	2	3					
Mechanics:	1	2	3	4				

Figure 3: Rubric tied specifically to an assignment

	1-3 (needs improvement)	4-6 (accomplishes the task)	7-9 (represents the strongest work on this criterion)
Accuracy, clarity, elegance in your summary and presentation of source materials			
Identification and discussion of key issues from your sources			
Ambition, insights, and thoughtfulness			
Editing, documentation, and presentation			

Rubrics tend to be most useful if you go a step beyond identifying categories and scoring levels, to providing descriptors of scores at each level. The next page has such a rubric, which I developed to help people evaluate college application essays:

	Strong	Adequate/Fine	Weak
1. Quality of narrative or presentation of events or information	Writer tells a vivid story or presents information in an engaging fashion that makes it seem unique to the individual. Subject seems deliberately chosen and not just grabbed from convenience or stereotype.	Writer presents a clear account or set of information in a way that certainly meets that task but may be standard or common enough that any number of students could have generated the narrative or information.	The narrative or presentation is very short or very general (as if going through the motions) or perhaps, even, unclear or off-topic.
2. Quality of analysis; quality of insights drawn from events or information presented	Analysis goes well beyond the obvious to show keen insights and perceptive skills of reflection. The writer may include careful and sustained discussion of the general points raised, developing them further, generating nuances.	Analysis is present, even explained. However, the conclusions may be rather stock, even obvious ("and so I learned the value of perseverance") or their development may come largely through repetition or restatement.	Analysis is missing or very brief, so much as to seem perfunctory or obligatory. Analysis may not connect to the narrative or information.
3. Quality of voice, personality, or style	The writer has an effective flair for language and is able to present him or herself in a way that reveals an interesting personality, conveying the kind of wit, sensibility, or other qualities that would make him or her exciting to have in class.	The writer uses language effectively. The personality revealed is competent but not necessarily distinct or distinguished. Little is risked, on the one hand, but competence is clear, on the other.	The voice or style may be elementary or flat. Or the writer may be stretching so much (e.g. for vocabulary) as to raise questions about his or her control of language. Or the writer may seem so quirky as to be off-putting.
4. Integrity of the writing: how the parts fit together	Elements of the piece are arranged in an organic matter, reflecting the subject. As a result there may be surprises, even risks, but these achieve coherence.	Organization is safe and clear, if somewhat formulaic and predictable. (One example would be generalization, anecdote, commentary.)	Elements of the writing could be rearranged with little negative effect; as a result, the writing seems disorganized.
5. Quality of editing and proofreading	Nothing about the grammar, usage, or punctuation draws the reader's attention.	While there may be an error or two, the reader is generally confident that the writer can control language.	Reader's attention is drawn to enough errors in grammar, usage, or punctuation as to be distracting

The advantage of such a rubric is that it makes clear both to the faculty member and, even more importantly, to the student, what the basis was for each level. The disadvantage is that it takes considerable effort to develop this sort of rubric.

Beyond Generic Rubrics

Generic rubrics have limitations. "Development," for example, is an awfully broad category, and what might be merely adequate development for one kind of writing, might be superior in another. Furthermore, what we mean by development can vary. Is it the amount of evidence? The kind of evidence? The existence of analysis? The presentation of facts? The list could go on. As a result, I recommend developing rubrics that are specific to each assignment or type of assignment, so that you can specify the criteria that make sense for the task. Investing that time will pay off in the quality of your feedback. Fortunately, you don't have to start from scratch; on page 31 is a fairly complete menu from which you might select and construct elements in a given assignment or type. (I've based this on a rubric at Western Washington University. Please see http://pandora.cii.wwu.edu/cii/resources/writing/writing_rubric)

A Comprehensive Set of Questions for Rubric-Building[6]

A. Content	Strong	Accept.	Weak	Not Accept.
1. How appropriate is the topic for the assignment?				
2. To what extent is there a clear, appropriate, and significant focus or purpose?				
3. How ambitious is the content--in terms of source materials (library or other), concepts taken up, allusions, connections, and so on?				
4. To what extent is the evidence/information: Relevant? Accurate? Necessary Comprehensive?				
5. How effectively does the writer provide a context or exigency?				
B. Reasoning, Analysis, Synthesis	Strong	Accept.	Weak	Not Accept.
1. How significant and ambitious are the claims, conclusions, or ideas?				
2. How sufficient is the quantity of the evidence?				
3. How sufficient is the quality of the evidence?				
4. To what extent does the writer provide discussions that explicitly connect evidence to claims (rather than simply tossing in the evidence and leaving it to readers to make connections)?				
5. To what extent are assumptions made explicit and justified or critiqued?				
6. To what extent are counter arguments, interpretations, or positions acknowledged and dealt with?				
7. To what extent does the interpretation or analysis of evidence/sources/information show: Depth of thinking? Logical reasoning? Complex reasoning? Accurate conclusions? Justifiable recommendations?				
C. Organization	Strong	Accept.	Weak	Not Accept.
1. How well does the overall organization achieve the writing's purpose?				
2. How well do the elements of the paper (not only different ideas, source materials, or data but also visual and graphic elements) connect with one another?				
3. How clearly are readers led through the paper? Is there a sense of purposeful progression? (Yet, is that sense not insultingly obvious or artificial?)				

[6] You'd likely go daft applying each of these questions to every single paper you evaluate. I offer them, instead, to provide a pantry of ideas from which you might select and create your own recipes to evaluate specific tasks.

D. Rhetoric of the Discipline	Strong	Accept.	Weak	Not Accept.
1. To what extent is there evidence of disciplinary ways of thinking? That is, to what extent would "experts" accept the paper as an appropriate example of ways of thinking and presenting information in the discipline?				
2. How appropriate to the discipline is genre of the paper? The format?				
3. To what extent does the writer demonstrate knowledge of the subject that would strike a member of the discipline as sufficiently informed?				
4. To what extent does the use of specialized concepts demonstrate real understanding (as opposed, for example, to parroting jargon without necessarily grasping it)?				

E. Conventions/Presentation	Strong	Accept.	Weak	Not Accept.
1. To what extent is there clear evidence of editing and proofreading?				
2. How accurately and completely is information or source material cited?				
3. How appropriate and accurate is the documentation style?				
4. How effective is the format used?				
5. To what extent is the style (reflected in word choices, sentence structures, metaphors, allusions, and analogies) not only clear but even lucid and deft, creating a sense of not only a competent writer but someone with an adroit command of language?				

A Sample Hybrid Response Rubric

I want my written and marginal comments to engage the students' ideas and strategies; I try not to comment simply to justify the grade I've assigned. However, students frequently want to know "what they did wrong" (or right). And, frequently I need to provide feedback to lots of students in short order. Therefore, I sometimes run off copies of a feedback sheet, check the appropriate responses, and attach the page to each student's paper. Here's an example from an assignment I made in a literature course.

First some essential questions about your paper:

Does the paper make an argument?	Y	N
Are assertions supported with evidence from the text?	Y	N
Do you discuss that evidence?	Y	N
Is the paper easy to follow?	Y	N
Is the paper well-edited?	Y	N
Does the paper match MLA conventions?	Y	N

If so, your paper meets the assignment and qualifies for at least a C.

Grades of A and B depend on degrees of excellence in three other criteria:

1. the ambition and quality of the insights presented (quality of thesis)
   __ adequate; perhaps "safe" or standard.
   __ frequently thoughtful or innovative
   __ consistently thoughtful and innovative; even striking

2. the quality of the explanations, reasoning, and analysis used to support those insights
   __ adequate; perhaps "safe" or developed minimally or obviously
   __ frequently thoughtful or innovative; detailed
   __ consistently thoughtful and innovative; even striking or subtly argued

3. the style of the paper, including not only how engaging are the introduction, development, and conclusion but also how energetic are the sentences, how sophisticated and vital is the author's voice, how the paper uses metaphor or allusions to make points, etc.
   __ adequate and standard; correct but perhaps predictable
   __ frequently engaging, innovative or stylistically inviting
   __ consistently engaging, innovative, stylistically sophisticated and inviting

One quality of the project I found interesting or particularly successful is:

One suggestion I have for improving this project (or future projects like it) is:

Dealing with Informal or Writing-to-Learn Assignments

You have many options for dealing with informal writings from students. Practically, of course, you can have students submit them in traditional paper format, or you can have them posted on Blackboard or some like format. The advantage of the latter is that it becomes easier for you to make interesting responses available for viewing by other students in the class. I've often found that when students are able to see the work of classmates who are really performing well, they rise to the occasion and do better work themselves.

In terms of commenting on information writings, you have a range of options. One, of course, is simply to check it off as completed. While you might do this now and then, if you primarily or exclusively just record work as "done," students will understandably get cynical. The good news is that there are quick ways of responding to lots of student writings. Here are a few that you can use individually or in combination:

1. **Provide a quick comment.** Tell students that you're going to make but one comment on a writing—and then make yourself stick to that commitment. Try to make a specific comment: "The most interesting idea here was. . . ." or "In response to your claim that, I point out. . . ." or "Your response could have been strengthened if you. . . ."

2. **Use a rubric to provide a quick evaluation.** These evaluations might take the form of "check/plus/minus" or "strong/adequate/weak" or "3/2/1." The important thing is to develop some guidance for students so they know the criteria. I've provided some examples of rubrics previously.

3. **Randomly select a few student writings for comment.** Especially in larger classes, you might tell students that each time you'll select only a percentage of student writings for detailed comment, with the remaining ones either getting a rubric evaluation or a completion check. This will allow you to concentrate on fewer writings, but students can't be sure if theirs will be chosen. Of course, you'd like all students to receive multiple responses over the course of the term.

4. **Publish selected responses.** Choose a certain number of writings from each assignment to publish for the whole class, perhaps electronically, perhaps by handout. For the best of these writings, write a few sentences in which you point out the strength of the response. I see little purpose served in commenting on weak responses; it just creates anxiety and ill-will, and students will learn from your remarks on the stronger ones.

5. **Have peers comment on one another's informal writings.** Focus on their providing a response, not providing a grade, which just gets messy. (You should be the grader, not them.) There are some questions that students can answer for each other with great benefit. Among them are:
   What did you find most effective/insightful/helpful?
   What one idea/element might the writer extend further to deepen the writing?
   If someone were to disagree with or be skeptical of this writing, what might they say?

Evaluating Summaries of Readings

A summary should be directed toward imagined readers who have not read the article being summarized. The purpose of the summary is to give these persons a clear overview of the article's main points. The criteria for a summary include the following: 1) accuracy of content, 2) comprehensiveness and balance, and 3) effectiveness of presentation, including organization, clarity, coherence, correctness, and style. (Adapted from J.C. Bean, D. Drenk, and F.D. Lee. (1982). "Microtheme strategies for developing cognitive skills." In C.W. Griffin (Ed.), Teaching writing in all disciplines. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.)

3 A "strong" summary meets all of the criteria for accuracy, comprehensiveness and balance, and effective presentation. The writer should understand the article thoroughly. The main points in the article should appear correctly in the summary with all main points proportionately developed (i.e., the writer should not spend excessive time on one main point while neglecting other main points). The summary should be as comprehensive as possible and should read smoothly from beginning to end with appropriate transitions between ideas. Paragraphs and sentences should be clear and effective, without vagueness or ambiguity and without grammatical errors.

2 A "competent" summary is one that is good but not excellent. It will reveal a generally accurate reading of the article with a clear sense of the main points, but it will be noticeably weaker than a "three" summary in one of the areas of criteria or somewhat weaker in two areas.

1 A "weak" summary is weak in all areas of competence, either because it is so poorly written that the reader cannot understand the content or because the content is inaccurate or seriously disorganized.

Evaluating Responses to Readings

Your responses to readings or answers to reading questions should be in sentences and full paragraphs. Realize that, while some questions may require you simply to find information in the reading, the majority of them call for your own thinking and interpretation. Think of your response, then, as a miniature essay. This response should reveal your ability accurately to analyze readings, to defend fully your analysis, and to explain your thoughts clearly and effectively to a reader. Three main criteria are important in the evaluation of your answers. They are: 1) accuracy or reasonableness (keeping in mind that many questions do not have single, right answers; the question is whether your answer is plausible); 2) quality of reasoning, argument, and proof; the question is whether your answer is plausible; and 3) fullness, clarity, and general effectiveness. Your answer should supply a context, so that readers can understand the question or task without going back to the book or assignment sheet. Following are descriptions of three levels of performance. The scale may also be used to evaluate more general responses to readings. In this case, instead of "accuracy or reasonableness" your teacher will be concerned with "aptness," "appropriateness to the reading," or "quality of your reading."

3 A "strong" response effectively meets all of the criteria for accuracy, quality of reasoning, and general effectiveness. The writer has given a plausible response to the question or the text. The writer provides evidence, from the text or other appropriate sources or experiences, to defend his or her position. The writer generally interprets this evidence for his or her readers, showing its significance and bearing on the response. The writer may allude to and refute other responses or interpretations or may use the response as a "jumping-off" point to some further, pertinent discussion. In short, the response reveals the writer to have understood the complexity and richness of the question or reading. The "three" response is comprehensive, taking into account readers' needs and questions. Further, the elements of the response contribute to the effectiveness of the whole, which should read effectively from beginning to end.

2 A "competent" response adequately meets the assignment and all three criteria. It is reasonable, supported, and clear. It reveals less insight or diligence than in a "three." It may appear perfunctory or safe. A two response will be noticeably weaker than a "three" in one of the criteria or somewhat weaker in two.

1 A "weak" response is perfunctory or unengaged; the student is apparently just going through the motions, simply providing something to hand in. The response may be noticeably weak in two of the three areas of criteria or somewhat weak in all three. "One" may also be awarded to responses written with incomplete sentences or which are missing paragraph organization.

Writing Goals and Guidelines at The University of Denver

All of the following goals and guidelines are elaborated in ***extensive*** detail at the Writing Program's website, http://www.du.edu/writing

WRIT 1122: Rhetoric and Academic Writing

Students will

1. Demonstrate practical knowledge of the concept "rhetorical situation," through the abilities both to analyze and to write effectively in different kinds of situations.
2. Demonstrate proficiency with basic elements of rhetorical analysis (such as logos, ethos, and pathos) in a range of texts, and the application of that facility in their own writing.
3. Demonstrate the ability to produce writing that effectively provides evidence and reasoning for assertions, for audiences of educated readers.
4. Demonstrate the ability effectively to incorporate written sources into their own writing and to document those materials.
5. Demonstrate the ability to use feedback to revise their own writing and the ability to provide useful feedback to others.
6. Demonstrate the ability to edit and proofread their writing.

WRIT 1133: Writing and Research

In addition to continuing to master the goals of WRIT 1122, students will

1. Demonstrate practical knowledge of academic research traditions (for example, text-based/interpretive; measurement-based/empirical; and observational/qualitative) through effectively writing in at least two of those traditions.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of rhetorical/conventional differences among various academic disciplines or groups of disciplines.
3. Demonstrate practical knowledge of rhetorical differences between writing for academic audiences and writing for popular audiences, through both analysis and performance.
4. Demonstrate proficiency in finding, evaluating, synthesizing, critiquing, and documenting published sources appropriate to given rhetorical situations.

Writing Intensive Requirements for Advanced Seminar Courses

1. Students will complete a minimum of 6000 words (about 20 pages) of writing; some of it may be relatively informal (reading journals; response papers; postings to discussion boards) but some of it must be formal (revised, polished, and intended for an educated audience).
2. Students will complete a minimum of three writing projects that are distributed over the quarter. A possible exception is a cumulative project completed in stages over several weeks: a proposal, an annotated bibliography, a summary of key sources, a final long paper, etc.
3. Students will revise some of their work based on feedback from their professor.
4. There will be at least some instructional time given to writing. This may include advice on how to write particular papers, some discussion of models, some opportunity for peer critique of work in progress, sharing of good papers, workshops led by Writing Center staff, or so on.

Selected Further resources

The mother of all WAC portals, gateway to information about Writing Across the Curriculum, including tips for faculty, is The WAC Clearinghouse at http://wac.colostate.edu/ It publishes four online journals: *Across the Disciplines*, *Academic Writing*, *Language and Learning across the Disciplines*, and *RhetNet*. An interesting rubric for evaluating critical thinking aspects of writing is one developed at Washington State University, and available at http://wsuctproject.wsu.edu/ctr.htm

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The University of Denver Writing Center provides individual consultations with all members of the DU community; it also offers in-class workshops and advice to faculty. To learn about its services or make an appointment, please see the website at http://www.du.edu/writing/wrc.htm. The Center's Director is **Dr. Eliana Schonberg**, eliana.schonberg@du.edu

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