Eastern Illinois University Writing Across the Curriculum Handbook

2nd edition, Fall 2013

Tim N. Taylor
Former Director of Writing Across the Curriculum

Greg Peterson
Graduate Research Assistant, English

Fern Kory
Director of Writing Across the Curriculum

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Introduction to the Second Edition

I will begin by quoting from the memo written for the first edition of the EIU WAC Handbook by Tim Taylor, Director of the Writing Across the Curriculum from Fall 2008 – Spring 2013.

> The EIU WAC Handbook provides guidelines, recommendations, and ideas for assignments and activities that all faculty members can use. The first part of the handbook (pages 6-8) provides a historical context for Writing Across the Curriculum and the WAC program at Eastern. For those of you teaching writing-intensive (WI) courses, the current definition of WI courses is provided on pages 7-8.

> The rest of the handbook offers a variety of recommendations and ideas culled from decades of WAC scholarship. In addition, the appendix provides sample assignment sheets and writing-related handouts that you are welcome to use in your classes. In the coming years, the WAC committee plans to solicit more sample assignments and activities to showcase in subsequent WAC Handbooks.

I also want to invite you to take this opportunity to share with colleagues examples from your own pedagogical repertoire: handouts or exercises you use to help students work through the process of composing the types of writing you assign in your classes, and samples of writing-to-learn activities that can be used to help students come to grips with the content of your courses.

You can give me a call (217.581.6291) or stop by (CH3365) to talk about the methods you employ to guide students through the process of learning how to produce effective academic writing and writing in your discipline. And you can send me (fkory@eiu.edu) assignments and activities for the 3rd edition of the EIU WAC Handbook, which will be available Fall 2014. In each edition of the handbook, the names of contributors will be noted in the table of contents and acknowledged in the introduction.

Acknowledgements for the 2nd Edition

Thanks to Joe Gisondi for providing assignment sheets and a variety grading rubrics for this edition of the EIU WAC Handbook.

What Is WAC?

Writing Across the Curriculum's (WAC) primary mission is to help faculty members implement and shape courses that make writing an essential and integral component in the learning process.

Why Incorporate Writing?

Writing stimulates thought and challenges students to communicate their ideas, so writing represents a valuable learning tool for any classroom. Writing is simply one the best ways to provoke, evaluate, and assess student learning. Incorporating writing in your classrooms will benefit students and your learning goals by promoting deeper discussion and understanding of course concepts.

Writing Stimulates Critical Thinking
No matter the discipline or major, writing assignments and exercises can be used to stimulate understanding and increase critical understanding of course content. The act of writing requires students to play and work with ideas and concepts learned in the course. Writing promotes active thinking because not only must students think about course content when writing, but they must also do something with their ideas. Writing forces students to think about ideas and put them into action.

Writing Challenges How We Communicate What We Know
Knowledge and application are two different academic situations. Writing assignments strengthen the academic goals of any classroom because they challenge students to communicate and apply what they know, which can create a deeper awareness and understanding of course content.

Writing Is a Process
Like getting stronger through weightlifting or becoming a better golfer, becoming a stronger writer is a process, and it takes time and practice. Writing teaches students about the process of learning. It shows students that there is almost never a clear-cut path from an assignment's beginning to its end, but rather it is often a back and forth process of thinking, writing, and revising, which results in a more polished and intelligent finished product.

Your Background as an Asset
Any teacher is qualified to use writing as a learning tool. One challenge is some people operate under the assumption that writing should be left only for first-year writing courses. It is true that the composition classroom is where students should learn how to become better writers, but that doesn't mean that writing should be confined to one set of courses. Instructors of any discipline can use writing assignments and activities to augment and improve their courses. Furthermore, writing is not something that must always be evaluated on the correctness of grammar and punctuation because instructors can very easily use writing-to-learn and short writing assignments to stimulate thoughts and challenge students to communicate those thoughts.

How WAC Works & Writing-Intensive (WI) Courses

WAC at EIU and the National Context

As a committee and as a campus-wide initiative, WAC's role is to cultivate and reinforce the core tenets of writing across the curriculum/writing in the disciplines:

1) Using a **writing process approach** in classrooms not only to have students become stronger writers through practice but also to have students learn course content through composing diverse writing assignments.
2) Using **writing-to-learn activities** within classes to assist students learn course content more effectively and to make classrooms more student-centered.

These principles date back to one of the earliest WAC workshops by Barbara Walvoord in 1969 at Central College (Bazerman, *et al.* 26). And these core tenets are clearly articulated in "Writing as Learning Through the Curriculum," published in 1983 by C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon. As they state in that venerable article, instructors should use writing as a means for learning and for reflection about their learning:

> We would like to recommend a broader concept of writing-across-the-curriculum, one that makes writing central to courses in the disciplines other than English, one that accommodates the expertise of the historian, the biologist, and the engineer, and one that finds justification for writing, not in concern for displaying commonplace ideas in prefabricated forms, but instead in the potential for new learning implicit in the act of writing itself. (466)

The point about using writing as a way to understand course content also connects to Janet Emig's scholarly work (1977) on "writing as mode of learning" (123).

As scholars such as McCarthy (1987), Herrington (1988, 2000), Chiseri-Strater (1991), Herrington and Moran (1992), Freedman, *et al.* (1994), Freedman and Medway (1994), Fishman and McCarthy (1998) Herrington and Curtis (2000), Carroll (2002), Thaiss and Myers Zawacki (2006), Beaufort (2007), *et al.* relate in studies of WAC programs across the country, disciplinary discourses are rich areas of study for teacher-scholars in all disciplines. WC and WI courses such as EIU's are positioned to reinforce the importance of writing in the academy and beyond while they link critical thinking and writing assignments.

Writing-Intensive Courses at EIU

WAC as a committee began in 1990 as part of the revision of what was called the core curriculum, and in 1998 there was a formal designation of different types of classes across all curricula: writing-centered (WC), writing-intensive (WI), and writing-active (WA) courses. In WC courses, the "quality of the students' writing is the principal determinant of the course grade." WI courses "serve the dual purpose of strengthening writing skills and deepening understanding of course content." And in WA courses, "frequent, brief writing activities and assignments are required."

The current definition of Writing-Intensive courses is the following:

> Other general education courses, including all senior seminars, are writing-intensive.
>
> In such courses several writing assignments and writing activities are required. These assignments and activities, which are to be spread over the course of the semester,

serve the dual purpose of strengthening writing skills and deepening understanding of course content. At least one writing assignment is to be revised by the student after it has been read and commented on by the instructor. In writing-intensive courses the quality of students' writing should constitute no less than 35% of the final course grade.

In a broader context, EIU's WI courses, like similar classes at other colleges and universities, encourage students to learn the essential ideas, concepts, and conversations in diverse disciplines and to practice writing for varied audiences and appropriate reasons. As Jones and Comprone argue in their influential article where they reflect on the growth of WAC programs at the time (1993), "Teaching process in a single class—freshman comp—cannot ultimately be successful unless the writing in that course is reinforced by the same kind of approach to learning in other courses (59).

WC and WI courses at Eastern are structured to reinforce the important undergraduate learning goals of writing and critical thinking, especially because, as the cognitive psychologist Ronald Kellogg (2008) notes, practicing writing improves students procedural writing strategies and helps them grapple with and grasp course content (13).

In fact, Kellogg's research provides important connections to how WC and WI courses should connect to disciplinary discourses:

> Writing about topics that students know well provides a scaffold to support the writers and to allow them to devote a higher degree of executive attention to the juggling of planning, generating, and reviewing. For example, seniors in college should know the most about their major field and so should be provided with extensive opportunities to write within the discipline. The writing across the curriculum movement has stressed the value of situating writing assignments within the discourse community of a discipline on the grounds that writing is inherently a social act. While this is certainly true, writing within the discipline of one's major field has the added benefit of allowing the writer to free short-term working memory for the task by relying to some extent on long-term working memory. (15)

The ultimate goal of WI courses is to reinforce writing practice in order to develop students as critical thinkers and writers. As proponents of WAC have noted, and Walvoord and McCarthy's work in 1990 is relevant here, WI courses are *not* composition courses such as first-year writing (ENG 1001G, for example). In contrast, successful writing-intensive courses and WAC programs have professors in all disciplines integrating important aspects of what writing scholars know about the composing process and using various writing-to-learn activities in their courses to make those classes interactive, student-centered, and squarely focused on student learning.

As Carroll (2002) notes at the conclusion of her book that is a longitudinal case study, "Writing-intensive courses should not merely assign more writing but need to provide direct instruction and practice in using sources, reporting data, applying concepts, constructing arguments, and writing in genres appropriate to the discipline" (132). Carroll argues, like others before her, that WAC-influenced courses are not "writing courses," but the principles and what we know about sound writing instruction can be used to help student develop as stronger thinkers and writers in their disciplines as well as their professional and civic lives.

Writing-to-Learn Activities & Classroom Assessment

"Teaching without learning is just talking" (Angelo and Cross 3).

Ideas Provided in Chapter 7 of Angelo and Cross'
Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers 2nd Ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993)

Definition of Writing-to-Learn
Writing-to-learn is a pedagogical tactic that uses short and informal writing assignments to challenge students to critically think their way through course-related concepts and difficulties. These activities use quick in- or out-of-class exercises that are easy to implement.

Course-Related Knowledge and Skills Assessments
Here are some ways to assess how students are learning the content of the particular subject they are studying:

- Background Knowledge Probe: Instructors can use short, simple questionnaires at the beginning of a course, at the start of a new unit or lesson, or prior to introducing an important new topic. It may require students to write short answers, answer multiple-choice questions, or both.

- Minute Papers: This assignment is a quick in-class exercise that uses the last few minutes of class to have students write a response to a specific question. There are many potential questions like "What was the most important thing you learned today?" or "What important question remains unanswered?" that can help assess each student's level of understanding.

- Muddiest Point: This exercise provides a high information return for a very low investment of time and energy. This activity requires students to respond to what was their muddiest point about a particular topic. A muddiest point is when a student fails to understand or struggles to make sense of a concept or idea. The focus of the Muddiest Point assessment might be a lecture, a discussion, a homework assignment, or any class-related activity. This activity lets the instructor know where students are struggling, and it forces students to confront and attempt to work through their difficulties.

Analysis and Critical Thinking Assessments
It is crucial that students develop an ability to break down information, questions, or problems in order to fully understand and better solve or apply them. Here are some ways to assess the analytical and critical thinking skills of students:

- Defining Features Matrix: Students are required to categorize concepts according to the presence (+) or absence (-) of important defining features, thereby providing data on their analytic reading and thinking skills. This technique is particularly useful in scientific disciplines.

- Content, Form, and Function Outlines: This activity uses outlining to chart the "what" (content), "how" (form), and "why" (function) of a particular topic or idea. It assesses

students' skills in separating and analyzing the informational content, the form, and the communicative function of a piece of writing.

- Analytic Memos: These papers require students to write one to two pages of analysis on a particular problem or issue. The memo should have a specific audience for the student to write to, such as some sort of stakeholder who needs the student's analysis to make a decision. This exercise offers a more in depth look at a student's analytic skills and their ability to write for a specific audience.

Application and Performance Assessments

Once a student is familiar with an idea or subject and they are able to understand how it functions, it is important that they are able to apply this idea in other situations. Here are some ways to assess students' abilities to apply what they understand:

- Directed Paraphrasing: In many fields, success depends on one's ability to translate highly specialized information into language that clients or customers will understand. In this exercise, students are directed to paraphrase a part of a lesson for a specific audience and purpose by using their own words.

- Application Cards: After students have heard or read about an important principle, generalization, theory, or procedure, the instructor hands out an index card and requires students to write down one real-world application for what they have just learned. This allows teachers to assess how students understand the course content in relation to the world around them.

- Paper or Project Prospectus: This type of prospectus is a brief, structured first-draft plan for a term paper or project. The prospectus challenges students to think through the entire process of the academic endeavor, such as topic, purpose, audience, organization, time schedule, etc. This is a means to assess a student's ability to independently plan and execute academic inquiry.

Exploratory Writing Activities

Ideas Provided in Chapter 6 of John C. Bean's
Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996)

Informal, exploratory writing is "thinking-on-paper writing we do to discover, develop, and clarify our own ideas" (Bean 97), or, as physicist James Van Allen calls this writing, these activities are "memoranda to myself" (qtd. in Bean 97).

Instructors don't have to grade some exploratory writing. Instead, teachers use many of the activities to create discussion, or they can use them as pre-writing opportunities for formal papers. As Bean argues, exploratory writing "deepens most students' engagement with course material while enhancing learning and critical thinking" (118).

In-Class Writing
In-class writing does not have to be graded, or an instructor count them toward a participation or in-class writing grade. Here are some basic methods for using in-class writing:

- Writing at the <u>Beginning of Class</u> to Explore a Subject
- Writing <u>During Class to Refocus</u> a Lagging Discussion or Cool off a Heated One
- Writing <u>During Class to Ask Questions or Express Confusion</u>
- Writing at the <u>End of Class to Sum Up</u> a Lecture or Discussion

Journals
Instructors typically graded journals in some manner and often have a separate journal grade in their course policies/syllabi. Below are various types of journals instructors can use in their classes:

- <u>Open-Ended Journals</u>: Students write in response to a reading, but the focus of the journal is up to them.
- <u>Semi-Structured Journals</u>: The instructor provides a number of options, but the student has to choose one.
- <u>Guided Journals</u>: The instructor provides one specific prompt, issue, concept, or problem to which students respond.
- <u>Double-Entry Notebooks</u>: Students reflect on course material and then reflect on their reflections.
- <u>"What I Observed/What I Thought" Laboratory Notebooks</u>: These are divided notebooks that present empirical observations (on the left column) and the student's mental processes (on the right column).
- <u>Contemporary Issues Journals</u>: These journals connect the discipline to current events.
- <u>Exam Preparation Journals</u>: The instructor, early on, provides a list of essay questions that are similar to what students should expect on an exam. The student uses the journal entry to work through major concepts and themes of the course.
- <u>Lecture/Class Summary Journals</u>: Students respond to the issues and ideas presented in class.

Pre-Writing Documents
Instructors can have students submit a shorter writing assignment that leads to a larger assignment. Here are some typical examples (Bean, 2001, 222):

- Prospectus: For longer writing projects, instructors can use a prospectus to check on the progress of students' research while offering suggestions or intervening when needed.
- Question & Thesis: To offer advice before they write a paper, instructors sometimes require students to provide the questions their papers are exploring and their tentative theses.
- Abstracts: Instructors can ask for formal, one-paragraph abstracts that summarize the main points and details of their arguments.

Other Ideas
The first two can be journals and then turn into formal papers, and the last two are usually not graded:

- Writing Dialogues: Students write an imaginary situation where two figures in your discipline meet and discuss ideas (examples: Skinner and Freud, Pollack and Van Gogh, Aquinas and Marx)
- Thought Letters: This is an exploratory writing assignment where the student picks his or her concept/problem/idea to explore and takes the writing through numerous drafts after peer and instructor feedback.
- Exploration Task to Guide Invention for a Formal Writing: Instructors use part of class time to get students writing in response to their formal writing assignment. Students use brainstorming techniques like freewriting (continuous writing to get ideas out), informal outlines, idea mapping, and other invention strategies.
- Thesis Statement Writing: Students write one sentence (a thesis statement) that focuses their thinking about a subject, aids discussion, or prepares them for a formal writing assignment.

Designing Major Writing Assignments

Writing assignments can be tailored to meet the academic goals of any class. Below are key features typically included in successful writing assignments.

The Purpose/Task of the Writing Assignment

When we give writing assignments, many students think to themselves, "What do I have to do?" To answer this fundamental question, a writing assignment should make its rhetorical purpose/s and goals clear.

Provided are some rhetorical purposes and components of academic literacy that instructors often highlight in writing assignments:

- To Inform
- To Persuade
- To Analyze
- To Reflect
- To Express
- To Summarize
- To Argue
- To Research Primary and Secondary Sources
- To Work with Sources Effectively and Ethically
- To Calculate and Analyze Data Effectively
- To Respond to Readings
- To Explore Personal Experience Related to the Topic or Readings
- To Connect Discipline-Specific Concepts to Contemporary Issues and Arguments

Role and Audience

In some cases, professors have students write for authentic audiences, readers who have some form of power in the community, the university, or an organization. In fact, some writing assignments can be "client-based," meaning that the main audience is a client that the student writes for, with mentoring from the faculty member.

If authentic audiences or clients are not an option, then asking students to write from "positions of power" to someone who knows less about the topic than they do, someone who is "on the fence" about the issue, or someone who has an opposing viewpoint are sound pedagogical strategies.

Style and Format

Successful writing assignments provide clear guidelines on these aspects of style and format:

- Genre of the Manuscript (essay, report, memo, proposal, journal, *et al.*)
- Organization of the Document
- Thesis-Based Prose or Non-Thesis Based Prose
- Formality of the Prose (informal, semi-formal, formal)
- Length of the Document along with Specifications on Format and Margins

The Writing Process

Writing assignments typically offer specific details in regard to time frame, writing process involved, and the logistics for submitting the document. Answer these questions when planning your assignment:

- When is it due?
- Should I set aside class time for peer review or workshopping?
- Should peer review be mandatory? Should it be graded?
- Should I require some type of pre-writing, outline, prospectus, or conference required before the final draft is submitted?
- Do students have the opportunity to revise this paper or is a revised draft a requirement? If so, what's the process?
- What's expected in revision?
- If students revise, how does the revision count grade-wise?
- Should I collect all brainstorming, notes, outlines, drafts, and peer review comments along with the writing assignment?
- Do you want a hard copy, or is it submitted via an online course system or email?

Criteria for Evaluation

Like questions about the writing process above, it's also crucial for writing assignments to guide students about the criteria used to evaluate the documents and also provide examples or models of writing assignments that were successful or unsuccessful. Consider these questions when planning your evaluation:
- What type of grading scale should I use?
- What makes a paper earn an A, B, C, D, or F?
- What does a successful paper have to do?
- What different features (development, organization, readability, style, grammar) of the paper will you be analyzing? Which ones are weighed more heavily?
- How much does grammar matter?
- Do you have a rubric or a set of criteria that show how you will evaluate the writing assignment?
- Do you have examples of what is an average to excellent response to the assignment?
- Do you have any models to show students what you expect or do not want?

Tips for Talking to Students About Writing—Conferences

There are many ways to respond to student writing, and conferences are simply conversations to stimulate thinking about ideas, focus, and support in papers.

Benefits of Conferencing

- A one-on-one conversation with a teacher, even if it is brief, will give a student a greater understanding of their writing.
- Conferences allow teachers to better understand their students' abilities and weaknesses.
- Conferences provide an opportunity to address larger issues, questions, or opportunities related to the course.

Types of Conferences/Conversations

- Out-of-Class Conferences: This is the most time consuming, but it is by far the most beneficial for students. You set aside anywhere from 5 to 20 minutes to meet with each student individually and discuss their writing. You can choose take time from class or to add this on to your assignments. It is a small sacrifice that will be repaid in the effects it will have on student's writing and understanding of the subject matter they write about. One-on-one conversations invite a free flow of communication between student and teacher, which offers valuable and strategic teaching opportunities.

- In-Class Conferences: If you aren't able to use class time or office hours to meet with each individual student outside of class, then in-class conferences are a good option. These require that you only sacrifice a class period (or a portion of a class period depending on the duration of the class) to meet with students and respond to their writing. A valuable aspect about in-class conferences is that while you are meeting individually with students, the rest of the class can do related course work. In-class conferences allow you to maximize your class time and still meet personally with every student.

- Group Conferences: This is a potential modification of the first two types of conferences. The only change is that you conference with students in small groups rather than individually. The size of the group is best kept to no more than four. Group conferences don't have to be for collaborative writing assignments either. Conferencing with student peers eases the tension and allows students to share and discuss issues amongst themselves. Group conferences also save significant time and can easily be done during or outside of class.

- Written Memos or Audio-Recorded Comments: If meeting with students face-to-face to talk about their papers is not a possibility, then you can still engage students in conversations about their writing through other means. One-page memos or audio-recorded comments can be excellent methods to create a conversation about writing. You could respond to the student's paper with a memo or recording that evaluates the writing in a detailed manner. Besides explaining what is strong, problematic, effective, confusing, and in need of further development, you can ask questions that promote thinking about their ideas from a reader's perspective. Afterward, you could require the student to write a memo in response. Another

possibility would be to have the students write a memo about their process of writing to turn in with their assignment. The instructor can respond to the writing assignment and memo with an evaluator memo, which the teacher might require a further response memo from the student. This practice brings more attention to the students' writing and makes them practice reflection about writing and their writing processes.

General Tips

- <u>Listen and Guide Instead of Talking</u>: Because students will look to the instructor for evaluation and immediate feedback, you may feel pressured to dominate the conversation. However, it is easier and most beneficial to the student if they talk through their writing and explain their mental processes about why they wrote what they wrote. Making comments and asking questions in an open-ended manner will help guide students toward thinking critically about their work and their writing in general.

- <u>Remember Your Experiences with Writing in Your Discipline</u>: Focusing on the ideas of the writing and guiding students to express their ideas in the proper genres/formats is key. In addition, thinking about how you learned to write in your discipline when you were their age may help you reflect on how to best guide students to do what is needed and expected. Are there expectations and formats and genres that you take for granted or have internalized that students may need to know with specific directions? You may write in certain genres quite effectively because you have a great deal of practice composing those types of documents. Students may not.

- <u>Don't Expect Uniform Results</u>: Students will possess different writing and discipline-related skills. Because of each student's background and understanding of writing, no conference will be the same. This is as much a blessing as it is a burden. Embrace the diversity of conversation.

Methods for Helping Students Navigate the Writing Process

Planning and Pre-Writing

Here are possible ways to get students started on shorter writing assignments that can connect to larger writing assignments:

- Five- or Ten-Minute Writing Sessions: These can be in-class writing sessions that have students work through difficult concepts in order to use "writing as a mode of learning" (Emig), or students will do these to focus, start, or sum up discussion.
- Reading Journals: Instructors can use focused, semi-focused, or open-ended journals tied to reading in their courses.
- Summary Writing: Students can be assigned short and concise writing assignments to show that they understand the reading or to indicate which concepts, ideas, or issues need more clarification and discussion.
- The Believing and Doubting Games: Writers take a topic, issue, or problem (in-class or turned in), and they write in support of the idea, argument, or point and also write against it.
- Listing/Brainstorming: Students simply list ideas, details, main points, support, and reflections related to their paper topics.
- Clustering or Idea-Mapping: In a short amount of time, students can visually construct the main points and ideas of paper.
- Freewriting: Students simply brainstorm their ideas about their topic by writing nonstop with blatant disregard to grammar in order to generate ideas (five to ten minutes).

Writing and Revision

Writing should not be separated from the concept of revision. Instructors can integrate revision into their courses in a host of ways:

- Mandate that Students Submit an Initial Draft to You: Instructors can quickly read through drafts and provide succinct comments about where the drafts are going or where they need to go (either written commentary on drafts, emails, or audio-recorded comments)
- Create a Prospectus for Larger Writing Assignments: To guard against the midnight-writing approach to research papers, instructors can require that students provide a formal document that provides the research they've done already, their ideas, how they plan to structure their documents, and other concerns.
- Talk to Students about Your Expectations for Revision: Many times students equate revision with only editing and proofreading. Discussing what you expect with revision will help students understand what "the professor's looking for."
- Implement Peer Review in the Classroom: Professors can configure peer review groups in a number of ways (see page 18), and they often provide detailed questions to use when students are looking at others' papers.

Effective Methods of Peer Review

Why Use Peer Review?
Peer review is an excellent way to have students refine their writing, facilitate academic discussion, and inform students of a draft's strengths and weaknesses. Instructors can facilitate peer review in many ways, but the activity ensures that a draft of a larger piece of writing is done before the final deadline. In any form, peer review can be an effective way to get students thinking critically about course content and the communication of ideas.

Peer Review Methods
Before instructors devote a whole class for peer review or institute a take-home peer review component, they need to think about what they want peer review to accomplish in their classrooms. Most people use it for higher-order concerns (content, ideas, details, support), and others sometimes incorporate editing (citation systems, style, grammar) into the sessions. Regardless, it's helpful to provide a detailed sheet of questions/step to direct peer review sessions.

Here are some typical ways to structure peer review:
- Small Groups Reading Aloud: During class time students are split into groups. Each student reads his or her paper aloud, and peers offer words of encouragement, detailed comments, and suggestions for improvement. See page 36 of the appendix.

- Speed Peer Reviewing: Students read one another's papers in a short time span (5-10 minutes per paper) and offer concise feedback about content and ideas. The papers rotate to a different reader each round, and student-writers get many people looking at their papers.

- Out-of-Class Peer Reviews: Using a detailed peer review sheet, students collect one or two papers from their peers and provide comments via email by an established deadline.

- Phase One (Content) & Phase Two (Grammar/Style): The majority of the peer review session is devoted to responding to students' ideas and higher-order concerns, but the end of the session focuses on editing and proofreading. See pages 41-42 of the appendix.

- Read Aloud & Take-Home Method: 1-3 students present their papers during class with peers and the instructor providing suggestions to the writers, and the rest of the students select two papers and provide comments via email. See pages 37-40 of the appendix.

Discuss What's Expected in Peer Review and Possibly Grade Comments
It is a good idea to provide grading criteria, evaluation checklists, draft check-sheets, and detailed scoring rubrics, so student-writers have a good idea of what's expected. These documents will also allow you to align assignments to your courses' learning objectives.

Some instructors also devote a portion of class to talking about helpful and unhelpful peer review comments. In addition, some people find it helpful to grade peer review comments by establishing a "writing process grade" for their courses. If students are not following the peer review guidelines or not offering detailed comments and suggestions, you can hold them accountable. Peer review can also count as part of a general participation grade.

Approaches to Grading

Ideas Provided in Chapter 7 of Barbara E. Walvoord and Virginia Johnson Anderson's
Effective Grading: A Tool For Learning And Assessment In College 2nd ed.
(San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010)

The Time Sink Myth

Many instructors think adding in-class writing activities and formal writing assignments into their classes will create a mess of grading obligations. However, with the proper preparation and scaffolding, any class can incorporate writing assignments without dramatically increasing the time an instructor grades. And the writing assignments—in-class writing, short formal assignments like journals, writing-to-learn and in-class assessment activities, and larger formal writing assignments—will help students more effectively learn course content. By implementing various writing activities in your courses, you can help student effectively grasp course content.

Does Every Assignment Need a Grade?

It is important to realize that not every piece of writing needs a grade. Depending on volume of writing in your course, you may or may not want to grade every piece of writing. Evaluating your students' writing with just comments or collecting them for a general participation grade can cut down time spent grading assignments.

What Needs to Be Evaluated?

It is important that you establish what you want the writing assignment to achieve. Hone your evaluation to the specific goals of the individual writing assignment. This will allow you to quickly and effectively critique any writing assignment under the particular specifications of your discipline.

Consider How to Respond

There are many different ways to evaluate and respond to student writing. Grades, comments, and detailed responses are all useful methods with many different variations. Here are some ways to respond to student writing:

- A simple grade like a number between 1 and 10 or a plus, check, or minus grade for shorter formal writing assignment or in-class writing
- Marginal comments that could be used in conjunction with a grade or separately
- A checklist or rubric that evaluates the performance of the writing based on established expectations
- A response sheet that provides your evaluation of the writing assignment (handwritten, emailed, audio-recorded, written in Word documents, or posted online)

Three Types of Grading Scales

You can adjust your grading scale to the length and purpose of your writing assignment. Here are a few methods:

- Letter Grades**:** These are more suitable for longer writing assignments that are worth more points than in-class writing. The larger point total allows the student to see how their writing stands on the standard academic scale, and this is a more familiar method for instructors.
- Numerical Grade: This is a good middle option that gives the student a clear idea of their performance without requiring the teacher strenuous effort. For example, a 10-point scale can be explained to students with a rubric, checklist, or another type of handout.
- Plus, Check, Minus: This is a quick method of grading short assignments or in-class writing that saves time and still allows the students to see if their writing is meeting expectations. A plus represents writing that does an excellent job of following the assignment. A check represents writing that meets the basic expectations of the assignment but does shine like a plus. A minus represents writing that fails to meet the expectations of the assignment. Work resulting in a minus can be counted for reduced participation credit or given no credit at all.

Avoid Time-Consuming Grading Pitfalls

Since your class isn't a first-year writing course, you will be evaluating student writing from a disciplinary specific angle. Here are some concerns when grading:

- Know What Your Assignment Should Achieve: If you have a clear concept of what you expect from a writing assignment, then it would be much easier and quicker to grade. Don't let your evaluation stray away from the main purpose of the assignment.
- Don't Dwell on Unacceptable Work: Turned in writing that does not follow the assignment or possesses numerous critical errors should be marked with a "No credit" or "Mandatory Revise" grade with an explanation of what the paper needs to do. Don't waste time on writing that doesn't meet the expectations that have been clearly explained. Often, if revision is an option, students simply have to revise the assignment to fit what is expected.
- Use Comments Sparingly to Guide & Question: Writing exhaustive comments is time-consuming and often counter-productive. Instead, strategically write two to four detailed, content-based comments that can specifically guide the most important points or concerns in the student's writing. A focused set of comments will be more direct and helpful than numerous general comments, and you will save time.
- Don't Focus Exclusively on Grammar and Punctuation: It can be easy to dwell on simple and easy-to-spot mistakes in spelling, grammar, and punctuation, but they are probably not most important to your course's academic goals: learning, interacting with, and reflecting on disciplinary content. If you want to address grammar and punctuation when commenting on papers, it's important to consider what mistakes are truly errors and more importantly to identify patterns of error that occur because identifying two to three important patterns of error can help clear up a host of mistakes.
- Make Students Responsible for Organization: If you are concerned with handling and keeping a record of different writing assignments, then you can require the students to keep their work in a portfolio. You could grade the portfolio at midterm, the end of the semesters, or both. A portfolio teaches students organization and would even be applicable in math or science courses that contain many homework assignments or work problems. These portfolios may contain a great deal of material, but they can be easily maintain by stapling relevant course work and writing together into succinct packets of work.

Selected Scholarship About Responding to Student Writing

Explain Your Commenting Strategies

Commentary is an important rhetorical act that is crucial for student learning, so we need to see student-writers as thinkers while providing avenues for action. It's helpful to share your methods and goals (a comment guide) of commenting. Comments can be codified as comments from a reader, a coach, and an editor.

Gebhart Auten, Janet. "A Rhetoric of Teacher Commentary: The Complexity of Response to Student Writing." *Focuses* 4 (1991): 3-18. Print.

Avoid Appropriation and Be Text-Specific

Avoid providing comments that only justify grades. Instead, offer commentary that focus on higher-order concerns—ideas, development, evidence, support—and work on editing/mechanical concerns later in the process. Instructors should avoid "appropriating" student text, meaning that professors shouldn't write papers for students, and commentary should be "text-specific."

Sommers, Nancy. "Responding to Student Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 32 (1982): 146-56. Print.

Make Students Responsible for Their Own Editing

Use check marks or other forms of marginalia to make students aware of proofreading and mechanical errors. Employing a "minimal marking" method can show students that proofreading and grammatical concerns are *their* responsibilities, not instructors', while making them problem-solve sentence-level issues on their own.

Haswell, Richard. "Minimal Marking." *College English* 45 (1983): 600-04. Print.

Challenge Them and Make Them Rethink Their Ideas

Place larger-scale concerns before grammatical errors. Formative evaluation should provide reader-based feedback on drafts while challenging writers to rethink their ideas and evidence. The instructor should ask questions and offer multiple suggestions when commenting on drafts.

Horvath, Brooke. "The Components of Written Response: A Practical Synthesis of Current Views." *Rhetoric Review* 2 (1984): 136-56. Print.

Use a Portfolio System & Be a "Hard-Assed" Liker

By focusing so much on evaluating and ranking student-writers, we discourage them from taking risks in their writing. Evaluation is necessary and needed, but portfolio systems provide evaluation that is more holistic and process-based. Instructors need to truly "like" student writing by reinforcing the positive aspects of a document while challenging students to think more deeply—both at the large scale and sentence levels.

Elbow, Peter. "Ranking, Evaluating, and Liking: Sorting Out Three Forms of Judgment." *College English* 55 (1993): 187-206. Print.

Think About Your Commenting Genre
There is a genre of end comments for student writing, with sixteen different sub-genres identified and placed into three general categories: judging, response as a reader, and coaching. Students might dismiss commentary because it's so formulaic, so instructors need to think about whether their formula/genre is working.

Smith, Summer. "The Genre of the End Comment: Conventions in Teacher Response to Student Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 48 (1997): 249-68. Print.

Other Sources of Note

Connors , Robert J. and Andreas Lunsford. "Teacher's Rhetorical Comments on Student Papers." *College Composition and Communication* 44 (1992): 200-23. Print.

Haswell, Richard. "The Complexities of Responding to Student Writing; Or, Looking for Shortcuts Via the Road of Excess." *Across the Disciplines* 3 (2006). Web.

Practice in Context: Situating the Work of Writing Teachers. Eds. Moore, Cindy and Peggy O'Neill. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2002. Print.

The Theory and Practice of Grading Writing. Eds. Zak, Frances and Christopher Weaver. Albany: SUNY P, 1998. Print.

Tobin, Lad. *Reading Student Writing: Confession, Meditations, and Rants.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2004. Print.

How to Integrate Writing Into Your Course's Point Totals

Ideas Provided in Chapter 8 of Barbara E. Walvoord and Virginia Johnson Anderson's
Effective Grading: A Tool For Learning And Assessment In College 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010)

Establish Point Values Early

Writing assignments could constitute their own separate group of points or can get folded into another point group like participation. You can decide to make each individual assignment worth the same amount of points. This will require more initial planning as each grade will need to fit into your allotted points for writing assignments, but this method provides the most structure for your class.

You could choose to only grade a select few assignments of the ones turned in. This allows you to worry less about making every assignment fit into a larger point scheme. You can maximize the writing exercises while minimizing your grading chores.

Another option is to create a rubric of performance-based grading that shows students how much work achieves what kind of grade. The rubric could represent the evaluation criteria for individual assignments, weekly assignments, or all of the assignments in the semester. The rubric should clarify how the quality, quantity, and effort of the writing will be evaluated. There are many different ways to make the points work, but what is crucial is that you find a system that works for your class and stick to it.

Make Your Expectations Clear

It is important to explain in your syllabus how to use checklists, rubrics, or another type of handout to clearly show how the writing assignment will be evaluated. Having a clear guide to how writing will be evaluated in your class will make grading easier, and your assignments will become more clear to students.

Participation Points

Many instructors aren't sure where to fit small or in-class writing assignments into their overall grade points. There are many different and easy ways that this can be done. Creating or adjusting a class participation grade may be the easiest method. A participation grade is a good way to make sure that students are challenging themselves and not coasting through a course. Participation grades are usually large enough to have an impact on a student's point total, but so large that it detracts points from the primary form of assessment.

Example of a Breakdown of Overall Points for a Course

Midterm Exam	100 points
Final Exam	100 points
Paper 1	50 points
Paper 2	100 points
10 Reading Response/Analysis Journals (10 points a journal)	100 points
Participation, which includes in-class writing, group work and writing-to-learn activities	100 points

Students Using the Writing Center

Staff at the Writing Center can work with students from all academic levels and all majors. The writing center is a place where students can develop as writers and thinkers. Writing consultants recognize that students come to the center with individual needs and individual writing processes, and they are committed to working with students from all disciplines, majors, and academic backgrounds at any stage of the writing process.

Ways to Encourage Students to Use the Writing Center

One of the best ways to inform students about the Writing Center is to set aside time in your classes for a staff member to provide a 10-15 minute orientation about the Writing Center. The staff member will give your students a brief introduction about the Writing Center, provide brochures, and explain how they can work with them to become stronger writers.

If you would like a Writing Center Orientation for your students, please call 581-5929 or contact Tim Taylor (tntaylor@eiu.edu) to schedule an orientation for your classes.

In addition, if you would like to provide information about the EIU Writing Center in your course policies or syllabi, feel free to copy and paste the following two paragraphs into your course policy or syllabus:

> I encourage you to use EIU's Writing Center located at 3110 Coleman Hall. This free service provides one-to-one conferences with writing consultants who can help you with brainstorming, organizing, developing support, documenting, and revising your papers. The Writing Center is open to work with any student from any major at any stage of his or her writing process, and its system of one-to-one conferences demonstrates value and respect for individual writers, all of whom can benefit from feedback about their works in progress.

> To schedule an appointment, you can drop by the Writing Center (3110 Coleman Hall), or you can call 581-5929. The Center is open Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. On Friday hours of operation are 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

What Students Need to Bring to Writing Conferences

When students come for a conference in the writing center, they should bring these items:

- The instructor's writing assignment prompt
- A printed copy of the paper, the writer's laptop, or a flash drive with the paper on it
- Questions and ideas

What Students Can Expect in Writing Conferences

During a one-to-one conference, here is what students should expect during the session:

- There will be a stress-free and open environment
- The sessions will promote thinking about documents from a reader's perspective
- Consultants will ask questions that will prompt students to think about how to refine and support their ideas
- Consultants will offer advice on how to efficiently and effectively revise and edit their own work

What Will Not Happen in Writing Conferences

During a writing conference, consultants will *not* do these:

- Write the paper for students
- Grade their papers

Why Students Should Come in Early for Writing Conferences

Students should come in early for these reasons:

- If they come in early with their assignments and ideas, our consultants can help them understand and analyze the tasks and constraints of what they need to do
- If they come early, consultants can help them brainstorm, develop, and organize their ideas
- If they schedule an appointment early, conferences can act as mini-deadlines to keep them on task and motivated

Web Resources of Note

The following resources can be found on the WAC and Writing Center's websites, and EIU Writes is a blog associated with both the Writing Center and Writing Across the Curriculum.

EIU Writes

EIU Writes is a blog for discussion about writing sponsored by WAC and the Writing Center. It offers posts to ponder and resources to investigate for undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty members.

- EIU Writes: http://eiuwrites.blogspot.com/

Resources for Faculty page on the WAC Website

The WAC website offers numerous resources, but one of the most helpful pages is the "Resources for Faculty" page, which is a portal to faculty-oriented resources and websites.

- Resources for Faculty Page: http://castle.eiu.edu/~writcurr/resourcesforfaculty.php

Resources for Writers Page on the Writing Center Website

On the Writing Center's website, the "Resources for Writer's" page offers a diverse mix of links to websites and resources.

- Resources for Writers Page: http://castle.eiu.edu/writing/links.php

Suggested Resources

Angelo, Thomas A. and K. Patricia Cross. *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers*. 2nd Ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993. Print.

Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. 2nd Ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011. Print.

Fishman, Stephen M., and Lucille McCarthy. *John Dewey and the Challenge of Classroom Practice*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1998. Print.

Freedman, Aviva, C. Adam, and G. Smart. "Wearing Suits to Class: Simulating Genres and Simulations as Genre." *Written Communication* 11.2 (1994): 193-226. Print.

Griffin, C. Williams, ed. *Teaching Writing in ALL Disciplines*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1982.

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McCarthy, Lucille. "A Stranger in Strange Lands: A College Student Writing Across the Curriculum." *Research in the Teaching of English* 21 (1987): 233-65. Print.

Melzer, Dan. "Writing Assignments Across the Curriculum: A National Study of College Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 61.2 (2009): W240-261. Print.

Murray, Donald M. "Write Before Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 29 (December 1978): 375-82.

Sommers, Nancy. "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers." *College Composition and Communication* 31 (December 1980): 378-88.

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    Boynton/Cook, 2006. Print.

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    in the Classroom. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996. Print.

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    UT: Utah State UP, 2007. Print.

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    Southern Illinois UP, 2002. Print.

Chiseri-Strater, Elizabeth. *Academic Literacies: The Public and Private Discourse of University Students*.

    Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1991. Print.

Emig, Janet. "Writing as a Mode of Learning." *College Composition and Communication* 28 (1977): 122

    -28. Print.

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    IL: NCTE, 1998. Print.

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Jones, Robert, and Joseph Comprone. "Where Do We Go Next in Writing Across the Curriculum?"

    College Composition and Communication 44.1 (1993): 59-68. Print.

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