writing in the major

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Course Faculty Handbook

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Welcome to a conversation about teaching writing.

The following handbook is designed as a guide to assigning, responding and assessing writing in your course. Following the context-setting introduction, it is arranged by scholarly suggestions we are calling "efficiency tips;" these tips are designed to support you in teaching the writing conventions of your discipline. We will use these tips to guide the weekly discussions.

INTRODUCTION

When looking at the national picture of student writing, we know that college students' writing competence does not meet the expectations of educators, and that many college students enter higher education with only the most basic of writing skills (Patchan, Charney, Schunn 2009). We also know that there is concern that student writing is not significantly improving. Research compiled by the National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, states that, "Recent analyses indicate that more than 50% of first-year college students are unable to produce papers relatively free of language errors" (2003). The following excerpt from a 2011 Carnegie report on the advantages of formative assessment asserts,

> Although some progress has been made in improving the writing achievement of students in American schools during the last twenty years (Salahu-Din, Persky, and Miller, 2008), most students do not write well enough to meet grade-level demands. The inability to effectively convey thoughts and ideas through writing plays a role in why many of these students do not complete high school. Among those who do graduate, many will not be ready for college or a career where writing is required. These young people will be at a serious disadvantage in successfully pursuing some form of higher education, securing a job that pays a living wage, or participating in social and civic activities.
>
> Finally, formative assessment and best practices in writing assessment hold their greatest promise for helping teachers and schools create students who are skilled and confident writers if they are implemented as part of a

comprehensive reform of writing instruction. To address the long-standing concerns about students' writing and the neglect of writing instruction in many classrooms, schools, school districts, and states need to develop new and better policies that establish unambiguous, challenging, and realistic plans for improving writing instruction and students' writing. These plans must establish clearly specified methods and incentives to ensure that

> Teachers are prepared to teach writing effectively;
>
> The teaching of writing is the responsibility of all teachers;
>
> Students write frequently;
>
> Students use writing as a tool to support learning across the curriculum;
>
> (Graham, Harris, Hebert 29).

The field of English Composition (Writing Studies) is not that old. It emerged in response to two factors: the open admissions policies from the 1960's and 1970's (Nystrand, Greene, & Wiemelt, 1993), and a need to break away from departments of literature that were attempting to dictate the research agenda of scholarship about writing instruction (Nystrand 2006; Silva and Leki, 2004).

We begin this conversation with the intention of accomplishing two major goals: 1.) to share with teachers what we know that can help them be more efficient educators in a classroom that teaches writing, and 2.) to gather data from faculty experience and expertise to add to the research in Writing Studies.

Efficiency Tip for week #1: Assigning writing to give students practice thinking, and assigning writing to test performance and proficiency, are very different things (Bean, 2011; Stiggins, 2012). Use writing for everything you want to teach, but not for every thing you want to test. If pressed for time and energy, consider not using writing to test things that can be tested in a more efficient manner--like by a short answer quiz or a multiple choice exam (Stiggins, 2012).

Writing assignments can allow students to experiment with ideas and wrestle with intellectual challenges in a way that makes those ideas, successes, and struggles obvious to both the student and the teacher (Bean, 2011). Writing assignments also can reveal information about student learning that allows teachers to test that learning on multiple levels (Stiggins, 2012).

Before assigning an essay or piece of writing, ask yourself if the goal of the assignment is a.) to encourage practice or b.) to test performance and proficiency. This discernment will dictate how you respond to what the students write, and determine how you weigh (or don't weigh) the quality of what they write.

Being clear about whether you are assigning writing to foster practice with ideas of genre styles or to test performance (content knowledge, skills with genre etc.) enables you to design your assessment strategy accordingly.

Teachers assign writing to accomplish a variety of things. Some teachers assign writing to test:
- understanding of the material within a specific knowledge domain
- proficiency with the genres of a specific knowledge domain
- ability to marshal evidence in support of a claim
- ability to arrange that evidence appropriately for a specific audience
- proficiency with managing the grammar of written English

Often teachers use writing to determine proficiency with all of these things, and with how these components cohere. Teachers also use writing to determine whether or not students are able to perform an array of complex and layered cognitive tasks (analysis, synthesis, prediction, evidence evaluation, problem-solving etc.).

Because writing is a multi-faceted and cognitively challenging activity, testing students on things they have not had a chance to practice reduces student

engagement (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Assigning low-stakes assignments and *formative* feedback throughout the writing process can provide support for student practice and improve motivation for learning (Bean, 2011). Formative feedback, or formative assessment, can be provided in the form of constructive, in*formative,* non-graded feedback to students about their writing (Adsanatham, 2012). Such assessment "treats a text as part of an ongoing process of skills acquisition and improvement, recognizing that what is being responded to is not a fixed but a developing entity" (Horvath, 1984).

Poor quality student work can come as a result of student apathy as much as from a lack of properly supported student practice—and in many cases these two things are related. The negative attitudes many students have about writing can result from writing being used to test them for proficiency more often than for letting them practice improving their writing skills. Writing is a deliberate practice skill (Ericsson & Krampe, 1993; Kellogg & Whiteford, 2009). This means that it takes thousands of hours to develop good writing skills. If we want students to be good writers, it is in our best interest (and theirs) to inspire them to practice and give them good guidance as they practice.

Given the very real time constraints within an educational environment where everyone is expected to do more with less, it is not efficient to use writing as a testing tool unless you are willing to spend the time that it takes to evaluate it thoroughly and fairly.

Put in its proper educational context, writing is a good way to demonstrate complex cognition, but it is not always the best way to demonstrate one's ability to memorize information and/or regurgitate facts.

Good writing instruction requires teachers to give fluent and detailed response/feedback/feedforward that focuses on a hierarchy of values that is related to the over-arching learning goals of each assignment (Straub, 1992; Angelo & Cross,

1993; Rysdam & Johnson-Shull, 2016). If a teacher does not have time to provide this kind of feedback/feedforward, and gives abbreviated, cryptic, correction-happy (or sometimes even cruel) commentary, more harm than good can come of this use of teacher time (Batt, 2015).

Efficiency Tip for week #2: The more things you use one piece of writing to test, the harder it will be for the student to show mastery of all of the domains asked for by the "testing" situation (Shepard 2005; Stiggins, 2012). Scaffolded or sequenced assignments can help students build up to a written performance (or presentation) that requires cohesion of multiple elements. Scaffolded or sequenced assignments are easier to grade because the evaluator is not looking for the intersections or interactions of multiple skills, but only for the demonstration of one or two things.

Writing a good essay requires the ability to integrate several skills and cognitive processes simultaneously (Bean, 2011; Stiggins, 2012). In order for one to write a successful essay (particularly at the college-level), a writer needs to:

- understand the genre conventions of the discipline they are writing for
- comprehend information about an (ideally) inspiring and challenging topic
- narrow the focus of the topic relative to the length of the essay
- grab the reader's attention
- organize the information in a way that is logical and coherent to most educated readers
- wield a substantial and varied (and properly spelled) vocabulary
- summarize and synthesize information with an awareness of audience needs
- recognize the kinds of evidence that must be brought to bear to be convincing
- identify the need for (and have the ability to apply) citation conventions
- construct solid, sensible and correctly punctuated sentences

Any weakness in any of these areas will result in a less than stellar essay.

It is important to keep in mind the level of intellectual sophistication required for the writing tasks you assign to your students (like the difficulty of an Olympic dive),

and to accept the fact that many students may have not achieved the desired level of sophistication in their writing by the time they take your class.

Depending on the challenges of comprehending particular course content, and of the limits or possibilities for expressing that understanding in different forms or genres, writing always has the potential to be a challenge regardless of how experienced a writer is (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Colyar, 2009). This is why it is important for the teacher to have a list of priorities relative to the assigned essay--so that the student can focus on improving the most important teacher priorities first (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Stiggins 2012).

Expecting a student to improve all aspects of an essay within only one or two cycles of feedback and revision is not realistic (Knoblauch & Brannon, 2006). It is like expecting a ballet student to master all of the physical complexities of a polished dance performance at each practice. In the learning process, skills need to be isolated, and worked on in isolation, before they are put together in a functioning and aesthetic composition.

Since the accumulation and use of knowledge is a process, and every student you have will be at a different developmental stage in that process, it will be important to think ahead about how to structure assignments so that they build in complexity (Shepard, 2005; Gronlund, & Brookhart, 2009). Scaffolded and sequenced assignments are assignments that build upon each other toward a larger and more cohesive and complex goal. If, for example, my goal is for students to write an evidence-based (research based) persuasive paper, I might break that goal down into several smaller papers. The first assignment might be focused on topic generation and topic narrowing. The second assignment might ask for one or two summaries of articles related to the chosen topic. The third assignment might ask for a thesis to be generated based on the information the student has gathered and summarized. The fourth assignment might ask for the information to be converted

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to evidence and counter-evidence for the thesis claim. The fifth (and perhaps last) assignment might ask for the evidence to be organized into a persuasive argument.

Efficiency Tip for week #3: Evidence suggests that despite "best practice" in the teaching of writing, teachers tend not only to be arbitrary in their response behaviors, but are habituated to negativity in their response behaviors (Durst). (They also tend to copy edit student work when it isn't a productive use of their time.) This arbitrary, negative practice can reduce student agency and motivation. Agency and motivation in writing are crucial because writing is a deliberate practice skill (Ericsson, Krampe, Tesch-Romer). This means that if students are not motivated to practice over and over, they will not improve.

Despite no real consensus on what teacher response practices are most educational (Marzano, Haswell, Straub), the scholarship on writing response has tenets that are basic to "best practice." Richard Straub's findings suggest that, "Students preferred comments that offered some direction for improvement," particularly those "in the form of advice and explanations, since these comments typically are specific, offer direction for revision, and come across as help" (1997). Straub summarizes that, "First and foremost, these students wanted comments that are clear and understandable and that, in their eyes, are valid and appropriate to their subject, point of view, and purpose" (1997). Yet despite the pleas in late 20th century composition scholarship to praise and offer guidance to motivate student improvement (Daiker; Straub), as well as to moderate the correction of grammar as a central emphasis in the teaching of composition (Haswell 1983; McCallister 1982), evidence suggests that composition specialists haven been rather tenaciously habituated to defining students largely in terms of shortcomings (Durst 2006).

In her 1982 article "Responding to Student Writing," Joyce MacAllister writes about the common inconsistencies in written response practice:

> The best way to begin improving student writing is to banish three popular beliefs that frustrate students and teachers. One is the belief that instructors should write a lot in the margins and between the lines. Another is that instructors ought to know and use a lot of specific grammatical rules and grammatical terms if they want to comment effectively. A third is that the most effective responses to student writing are instructor-written comments on the final copy. All three beliefs are false. (59)

The scholarship in English Composition that addresses writing response indicates that good practice is praise-filled; aligned with assignment values and expectations; dependent on a hierarchy of rhetorical concerns that values focused, organized, and evidence-based critical thought over correct and conventional presentation; limited in the amount of issues targeted for change; dialogic; and aware of patterns of both strength and weakness. (See Daiker, Haswell, Straub, Speck)

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Over twenty years ago, Donald A. Daiker wrote what teachers of writing should know by now, that praise is more effective than negativity in responding to student writing. In his article, "Learning to Praise," Daiker writes "that praise does not flow readily from the marking pens of writing teachers; it must be learned" (1989). He cites several sources that demonstrate just how few marks of praise teachers tend to write on student papers. One study shows that only 6% of comments written by teachers were praise "94% of the comments focused on what students had done poorly or incorrectly, only 6% on what had been done well (Dragga 1986)".

It is suggested that you not waste your time editing for or commenting on style unless you are teaching style as a component of the course (Medzerian, 2010). If you are going to edit student papers do it for correctness not for style (Bean, 2011).

Too many teachers confuse students about what is correct or incorrect in terms of grammar and usage because they edit student work based on style or conciseness. Style editing is appropriate before a text is published, or if the entire exercise (the whole reason for the writing assignment) is to make a point about style (Sommers, 1982). However, for most undergraduates, the focus should be on accuracy of content, the logic of organization, and correctness of convention. A focus on style (which can be highly subjective) can be confusing for most students (particularly for international students for whom English is not their native language).

If you have "pet peeves," (as many teachers do) about certain things like the use of contractions in formal writing, or the use of "I" in research papers, inform your students of those peeves ahead of time. Teacher pet peeves are often delivered to students as "Truths," when in fact they are just preferences. Peeves can be confusing to students because they are as varied as the people who have them.

Perhaps the area that generates the most controversy in the teaching of writing, or in the using of writing to teach, is the area of English grammar (Hartwell, 1985).

Many times teachers edit student papers and re-write student sentences because they do not like to read papers that are awkwardly or incorrectly constructed. While this editing or re-writing process makes student work more enjoyable to read (because it changes their work from student work to teacher work—and teachers are usually better writers), it is not a particularly instructive practice for students, and it is a form of text appropriation. Editing student work takes time and it lets students off the hook for learning proper conventions--since you did all of the work (Haswell, 1983).

Evidence suggests that students improve most in their facility to manage the conventions of written English when they are required to self-edit (Ferris 2001). Students should be provided with a self-editing structure that they can work within. Richard Haswell, author of the article "Minimal Marking," suggests that teachers use

a code in the margin of the paper that indicates to the student whether there are spelling or grammatical errors in that line of text (an x for each spelling error and a check mark for each punctuation error); the student is then required to find the mistakes and fix them. Noticing students patterns of error, and relating those in an end comment, will also provide a focusing frame for students so they can make their own corrections. (Make a comment like, "You have several run-on sentences in this essay. Locate and punctuate them and re-submit the paper to me.")

Research indicates that not all teachers agree on what constitutes serious writing errors, that teachers do not mark all of the serious errors when they grade essays, and teachers are not likely to mark a serious error that requires a good deal of explanation (Connors & Lunsford, 1988). This lack of consistency in teacher behavior results in poor knowledge transfer for students

We do not advocate that teachers ignore error-filled work. We do advocate that reading past errors in order to discern whether or not the student is grasping the more complex material presented in the course. Once the degree to which the student understands the course material has been determined, the teacher can come back to provide instruction on improving the presentation of that information.   In the case of teacher editing, less is more. Save the time and use it to make more substantive commentary.

If you want to provide instruction on grammar, start with comments relative to patterns of error ("it looks like you need help learning to use a comma") and/or use a rubric that points out the pattern of error by evaluating short-comings.

If you want to teach students something about conventions and correctness, you might consider using a rubric that deducts points for lack of facility with certain conventions (like punctuation or spelling). In the process of creating a rubric, decide (or have the students decide) how many points to subtract for how many mistakes, and communicate this clearly. Such a decision should be related both to the number

of points available for the entire assignment, and to thoughts about how important grammatical correctness is within the course context or within the context of a particular assignment. Avoid offering points for satisfactory performance of fundamental grammar skills. *Correct usage is not an "additional points" skill.*

Note that that this rubric (see below) has correctness as a *neutral* value. The neutral value construction is designed to reinforce the point that knowing the conventions of written English is not worth extra points. Not knowing it, however, will subtract points because it detracts from the over-all composition, and causes a distraction.

Correct Sentence Rubric			
Points	0	-10	-20
	All of your sentences are complete sentences.	**There are a few problems with your sentences. Some are either incomplete (called "fragments") or run-on (sentences that run together and have not been separated with the proper punctuation.)**	**There are many distracting problems with your sentences. Many are either incomplete (called "fragments") or run-on (sentences that run together and have not been separated with the proper punctuation.)**

A similar rubric can be constructed for punctuation and spelling.

Teachers commonly leave marks on student paper when they read and respond. Poet William Stafford called this "leaving tracks." Unfortunately, these markings often mean more to the teacher than the student. The fewer the markings on a student's paper, the easier it will be for the student to decipher and prioritize the teacher commentary. One way to help students decipher teacher commentary is to make sure that all teacher comments are legible and all symbol markings are coded to a legend that translates the meaning of the symbol. Symbols should be used

consistently. In other words, if you are going to circle words in the student's texts to indicate misspellings, do not use circles around words to indicate they are over-used. Let students know that when you circle words, it indicates misspellings--and that they are expected to fix those mistakes. If at all possible, respond to students in complete sentences. This models the complete sentence as a value for teachers who assign writing.

While most post-secondary educators expect students to know how to construct complete sentences, spell and use punctuation accurately, and demonstrate proficiency with citation conventions, the fact is that many college students do not know how to do this (or they have forgotten). The main thing is to acknowledge this fact and devise a way to deal with it. One way is to simply tell your students they must find a place to learn and practice this skill because it is pre-requisite to success in your course.

Another efficient way to get students to pay attention to aspects of grammar, punctuation or convention is to create home-work assignments that dovetail content-based coursework with attention paid to the written conventions in the reading and writings for the course. For example, students might be given a handout on sentence types and asked to re-read what they wrote for a short class assignment (or asked to re-read a certain # of pages from the assigned chapter), identifying what sentence types have been used (out of the 6 main sentence types). They could also be asked to attend to and imitate the citation conventions used. For additional examples, investigate the online writing lab at Purdue: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/
There are 6 types of sentences:

- the simple sentence
- the compound sentence
- the complex sentence
- the compound-complex sentence

- the question (interrogative)
- the exclamatory sentence

If you use peer assessment to determine student success with these exercises, you will reinforce the lesson without having to do any of the extra work yourself. Be aware that non-native speakers of English will need more time and support with this skill (and any skill related to written English). When dealing with non-native speakers and writers of English, remind yourself of your own struggles with learning to read, write, speak and listen in another language.

If you do not want to be bothered with having an exercise in your class that teaches or reminds students about sentences, then consider using a rubric that holds students accountable for that convention (Stevens & Levi, 2005). Better yet, let students be a part of creating this rubric. Instructive assessment "requires that we involve the student in all phases of the assessment of her work" (Huot, 2002).

Efficiency Tip for week # 4: The lens you look through determines the view that you see.   Rubrics are the lenses we use to look at student work to determine whether or not it is meeting the expectation of the assignment. Make sure the rubric is properly aligned with course goals and teacher values if you want students to meet those goals and values.

The best way to set yourself up for success with grading/assessment of writing is to know ahead of time what of the skills that you are teaching in your course are the most important for to see demonstrated at that particular time in the semester (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Those are the things that should appear in your criteria for evaluation (or your rubric); those are the things that will make the evaluation you deliver more efficient for you and more comprehensible for your students.

While it is not always necessary to use a rubric, it is necessary to have a "framework for noticing." A framework for noticing is simply a scheme of values that prioritizes certain aspects of a piece of writing.   WSU's Guide to Critical Thinking is an example of both a rubric and a framework for noticing, and its sole purpose is to shed light on the dimensions of critical thinking that are demonstrated by a piece of writing. The guide to critical thinking does not have a category for grammar and punctuation, or a category for organization. If you are using the Critical Thinking Guide as the "lens" to look at student writing, you would not be looking at or looking for issues of grammar and punctuation (so if you were going to evaluate those things, that would require an additional rubric). The Writing Center uses a framework called AFOSP. It is an acronym for Assignment, Focus, Organization, Support and Proofreading. This lens allows to tutors to hone in on those 5 main aspects of a piece of student writing. The Washington Six Traits lens categorizes the components in a piece of writing using Content/Ideas, Voice, Word Choice, Organization, Sentence Fluency and Convention as the available lenses. As with any lens you look through (social,

cultural, political) there are things it will bring to the fore and things that it will relegate to the background.

Different assignments will have different rubrics, because different assignments are likely to have different goals. The more complex the rubric, the harder it will be to use. See the below rubric for an example (from a different situation other than school).

While this mock rubric is silly (it is about sandwich making), in the teaching of writing our squares might include language such as Assignment Adherence; Ability to Focus on a Main Point; Success with Organization; Ability to Support an Argument with Adequate Evidence.

RUBRIC OF A SANDWICH Contributed By: Kelsey Philips

This sandwich received a 4(above average grade) based on their averaged score

TASTE	APPEARANCE
1 2 3 **4** 5	1 2 3 4 **5**
5. Taste buds are straight up raging in your mouth; dancing like there's no tomorrow 4. Your taste buds mingle and get their groove on in your mouth 3. These taste buds are the awkward kids at the party; not making much of a ruckus but at least they showed up 2. The smelly-kid of taste buds showed up to the "taste party" and is starting to run his B.O. all over the mouth 1. This sandwich tastes like it has been at a hot, sweaty party…for a week…then the smelly-kid of taste buds rolled around on it	5. This thing was sculpted by the gods; it has perfectly layered ingredients with beautiful proportions 4. The layering of ingredients on this sandwich looks pretty tasty; did your mom make it for you? 3. A slice of cheddar is falling out of the side but the general structure of the sandwich is still sound 2. The top piece of bread has completely fallen off the product; did your little sister make it for you? 1. This sandwich has been sitting in a backpack all day—it's all smashed, disorganized and sad
SMELL	TEXTURE
1 2 3 **4** 5	1 2 **3** 4 5

5. The fresh aroma coming off of this sandwich is unlike any other; it's like the best smelling perfume in the world…and you get to eat it 4. The sandwich is sending sweet scents out of the kitchen 3. The smell of day-old bread is present on the sandwich and the scent of meat is slightly too strong 2. After smelling this sandwich, I feel like I just walked past a dumpster on the street 1. After smelling this sandwich, I feel like I just feel into a dumpster on the street—and lived there for three days	5. If Ying and Yang were ever represented in an edible form, it would be this sandwich. It is the perfect combination of toasty bread, moist, mouthwatering meats and melted cheese 4. Texture-wise this sandwich looks pretty awesome, the bread may be a little crumbly but it won't stop you from digging in! Meat and cheese are good. 3. The meat is feeling a little more like jerky than turkey, but the cheese is still satisfactory. Bread is too dry. 2. Was there supposed to be something fuzzy in the middle of that bite? Meat is dry and cheese is moldy; bread is burnt. 1. This thing is either hard as a rock, or mushy as a bowl of grits, but either way I've lost my appetite. Neither meat, nor cheese, nor bread is up-to-par.

 5 = A; Excellent   4 = B; Above Average   3 = C; Average   2= D; Below Average   1= F; Unacceptable

Each of the four categories will be scored on a system broken down into 5 requirements; these will be averaged into a final score (1-5).

Efficiency Tip for week #5: Don't ask students to wash rental cars. In other words, create authentic assignments rather than assignments that don't serve a meaningful purpose relative to course goals.

"Authentic" assignments are those that ask students to engage in a real rhetorical task or in a mock-up of a real rhetorical task. A real rhetorical task is one that a person is likely to encounter in potential personal or professional interactions. Authentic assignments, or mock-up assignments, usually frame the writing task within the context of a real audience/real writer interaction. A real writer role is a perspective from which a writer positions him or herself relative to an audience. For example, if a goal in a chemistry class is for students to understand concepts of chemical flammability, an assignment might ask students to pretend they have been hired to talk to a class of structural fire-fighters (in training) about the combustion hazards of certain chemicals.   An authentic assignment is one in which the demonstration of knowledge is contextualized by a real world scenario. It is important when using authentic assignments to recognize that students cannot pretend to be experts in a field if they are still students in that field (so the role they play as writer might need to be modified to acknowledge their limitations). Authentic assignments discourage plagiarism because the uniqueness of the audience/role of writer frame limits the possibility that this paper has already been written by someone else (and, as a result, available to easy download).

Basic Assignment Design Guidance:

Usually, a course begins with teaching a vocabulary for that particular discipline (or level of the discipline) and moves toward asking students to exercise that vocabulary within a set of more complex cognitive tasks (application, synthesis, analysis).

Writing is best used when you are determining the ability of students to contextualize a certain vocabulary within complex cognitive tasks (comprehension, application, synthesis, analysis, evaluation, creation). Using writing to test vocabulary or to test the facts of a particular field of study is not wrong or harmful, but it is time consuming to respond to.

When you begin designing a writing assignment:

1.) Be clear about whether you are using your assignment primarily to give students practice or primarily to test performance.

2) Know the skills or group of skills you are teaching through practice or are testing for through performance.

3.) Know your values relative to the things you are teaching and/or testing.

- If you are using writing to *give students practice*, What is/are the most important concept(s) you are trying to teach by using writing as the vehicle for practice?

- If you are using writing to *give students practice*, Do you have a response strategy that is consistent with the goals of your teaching and that clearly considers the difference between noticing student progress through practice and evaluating that progress or proficiency with scores or grades?

- If you are using writing to *test*, What skills are the most important for students to demonstrate they have learned?

- If you are using writing to *test*, Is there a hierarchy of values relative to the skills you are testing for?

- If you are using writing to *test*, Are you testing only for skills that you are teaching or have taught, or are you also testing for skills students are expected to already know? (For example, foundational principles from previous or pre-requisite courses or grammatical and language conventions learned (ideally) in prior schooling.)

Efficiency tip for week #6: Peer review can work, but only if it is scaffolded with instructions that serve to develop the skills over-time.

Peer review can work. It usually doesn't, however. The reason peer review doesn't work is that students are asked to complete an evaluative task on a peer's paper before they fully understand what constitutes good writing.

The following guide shows the peer review process through the lens of Bloom's Taxonomy.

While using the taxonomy to structure peer review is being proposed as best practice, none of the suggested verb-driven directives are offered as "best practice;" they are offered as random examples of how the verbs in the taxonomy can make use of the levels of cognitive complexity in the peer review process.

Level 1 is the level at which beginners could be introduced to this process. Level 6 is the level of experts and therefore is no longer in the arena of peer review, as its evaluative function indicates authoritative, rather than peer, review.

Step #1:
Have students exchange papers (either in person or online)

Step #2:
Decide whether or not you want your peer review process to move up the levels of cognitive complexity over time (with each peer review session dealing with only one or two categories from the hierarchy), or if you want to move up the hierarchy in one session by having each directive for the process dealing with aspects of each category.

Step # 3:
From the following list of verbs, choose actions for students to engage in that bring to the attention of their peers aspects of their papers they might not otherwise notice.

Peer Review at Level 1 of Bloom's Taxonomy (Showing knowledge)

Identify
Indicate
Label
List
Select
Underline
Locate

| Circle |
| Highlight |

Examples:

- **Identify and List**:
  - The thesis statement
  - The call to action in the conclusion
  - The catchy lead

- **Locate and underline**:
  - Sentences where the writer uses passive voice
  - Sentences where the writer uses active voice
  - All the verbs that are used only one time on the first page

- **Locate and circle**:
  - Any words you notice that are misspelled.

- **Select and highlight (in blue, in green etc.)**:
  - Any compound or complex sentences that re-state the thesis.
  - Any words that are used more than 5 times in one page.

Peer Review at Level 2 of Bloom's Taxonomy (Showing comprehension)

| Classify |
| Describe |
| Discuss |
| Explain |
| Paraphrase |
| Recognize |
| Restate |
| Summarize |
| Tell |
| Record |

Examples:

- **Paraphrase and record** (write down) the writer's thesis as it is currently stated.

- **Restate and record** the writer's thesis in your own words.

- **Summarize** (write down) your sense of what this paper is about in two to three sentences.

- **Classify** the paper's "genre" type (is it persuasive, or informative, or both?) and **explain** this choice.

- **Tell** what you learned from reading this paper that you didn't already know.

- **Describe** the evidence you see being used to support the ideas in the paper.

Peer Review at Level 3 of Bloom's Taxonomy (Showing application)

Construct
Interpret
Organize
Predict
Trace

Examples:

- **Construct** a counter thesis to what you see as the writer's thesis.
- **Interpret** who an audience might be for this information or argument
- **Predict** how the intended audience might receive this information or argument.
- **Organize and tell** the writer your thoughts (in a paragraph) about why you think the audience might receive this information this way.
- **Trace** the logic or progression of the argument through a reverse outline

Peer Review at Level 4 of Bloom's Taxonomy (Showing analysis)

Compare
Contrast
Categorize
Inventory
Inspect
Question

Examples:

- **Compare** your peer's response to the assignment with the directions for the assignment.
- **Contrast** your peer's response to the assignment with the directions for the assignment.
- **Inventory** the sentences in the paper and **categorize** them according to the 6 sentence types available in the English language.

- **Inspect** the paper for possible grammatical or citation mistakes.
- **Question** the writer about aspects of the paper that you do not understand.

Peer Review at Level 5 of Bloom's Taxonomy (Showing synthesis)

| Formulate |
| Compose |
| Arrange |
| Propose |
| Prepare |
| Plan |

Examples:

- **Formulate** a plan of action that your peer might undertake to address next steps in his or paper.
- **Compose** that plan into a list of bulleted suggestions.
- **Arrange** that list in a hierarchy of hardest to easiest or most important to least.

Review at Level 6 of Bloom's Taxonomy (Showing evaluation). Notice that evaluation at this level is not an activity for peers. The reason for this is that what separates peers from subordinates and authorities is power to judge, rank, score or grade.

| **Appraise** |
| **Assess** |
| **Decide** |
| **Estimate** |
| **Evaluate** |
| **Judge** |
| **Rank** |
| **Grade** |
| **Measure** |
| **Score** |

Examples:

- **Estimate** the amount of work that the paper might need in order to get an improved **score.**

- **Decide** if this draft is better than the last draft, and if so, **evaluate** the degree to which it is improved.

- Compare your peer's paper to another paper of a peer (even your own perhaps) and **judge** which is better.

- **Select** 3 papers from the peer review process and **rank** them in order of ascending (or descending) quality.

- **Appraise** the quality of your peer's work according to the standards you think it will be **measured** by, and then **assess** the work with a hypothetical **grade**.

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Example of Peer Review that moves up the hierarchy is one session:

- Identify and List the thesis statement (showing knowledge of what a thesis statement is)
- Restate the thesis in your own words (showing comprehension of the thesis statement used in the paper)
- Construct a counter-thesis (showing application of one's comprehension to a different problem)
- Inventory the points that support the thesis and inspect for support that might be missing (showing the ability to analyze)
- Propose further evidence that might need to be gathered to support the thesis (showing the ability to synthesize the information).

Efficiency tip for week #7: A teacher is not the same as a public audience. A teacher is the one who prepares the student to interact with a public audience by providing opportunities for practice. The teacher can guide the student through the polishing for publication stage, and the teacher can *act* as "authentic audience" for a published piece (or a piece turned in for a grade), but the goal of the teacher (as compared to the goal of a public audience) is to assist in the improvement of the presentation rather than merely judge the quality of that presentation.

Notice your own behavior and expectations relative to any public practice that you engage in (exercise, dance, music, art, sports): How many of these instances are instances of practice rather than of performance? What kinds of comments do you

find helpful when you are practicing? How is that different from the comments you find helpful when you are performing? The answers to these questions will help you decide some important things about your values relative to the difference between practice and testing.

Writing, when used as a vehicle to give students practice with idea generation and/or exploration, uses the blank page as an intellectual space for experimentation and for the evolution and revolution of thinking. As with any space and time used predominately for discovery and experimentation (as compared to formal presentation and production), freedom and creativity is encouraged over conformity to convention.

If you are using writing to give students practice with form and convention, keep in mind the difference between practice and performance. Writing that is used to give students practice—even if it is practice with form and convention--must be revisable based on teacher and peer commentary; it is the process of practicing multiple iterations of something (drafts that receive formative response) that ideally improves student performance (Kellogg & Whiteford, 2009; Stiggins, 2012).

Teacher (and/or peer) feedback on writing that is used to give students practice should be formative (instructional), and focus on how the thinking and/or discoveries demonstrated within students' writing can be challenged, changed, furthered or improved (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Bean, 2011; Stiggins, 2012). Good feedback on students' practice writing contains questions relevant to the topic under consideration, gives guidance for making more logical intellectual connections, and might provide commentary on the quality of evidence used to defend the assertions made in the exploration.   Good response focuses on a hierarchy of assignment values, "To put responses in sequence according to a hierarchy of concerns reduces the likelihood that a student will confuse revising with editing or proofreading, and allows her to work toward better prose via a series of manageable tasks, attainable goals" (Horvath, 1984).

Good response to practice is also careful not to draw premature conclusions or level evaluative speculations on what has not yet entered the arena of "polishing for publication."

Polishing for publication means that the piece of student writing is no longer in the expressive stage but has entered a stage where it begins to stand on its own as a performance. It is in this stage that the feedback received by external audiences focuses on presentation and not on exploration. It is at the stage of the performance where it can be assumed that the thinking process is over (if such a thing ever happens), and that the effective presentation of the thought becomes the priority. It is at this stage that the student must become aware of the public-ness of the performance.

Once a piece of writing has been polished for publication (this includes giving it to a teacher for a grade), the response strategy changes from formative to *summative.* Summative writing assessment is presented in the form of a graded final assignment and in-class grades; it is highly evaluative and focuses almost entirely on the demonstration of skill acquisition. Summative writing assessment exists "outside of a context in which a student might improve his or her work" because assessors "consider a student text finished and its value fixed" (Huot, 2002, p.167).

In terms of assigning grades and values to student work, we discourage teachers from using a 100 point scale to evaluate student writing. The evaluation of writing is always somewhat subjective, no matter how hard we try to make it otherwise, and a 100-point scale implies a finely tuned quantification. If you cannot easily explain to a student the difference between and 85 and an 87 on a piece of writing, you are better off using a more gross motor scale. The five-point scale (A-F) or a 10 point scale is more reflective of the gross motor reality of evaluating writing.

Efficiency tip for week #8: Function and form are related, but function is more important if you have to prioritize one of them. This means that if you are pressed for time and resources in evaluating writing, prioritize the function over the form (unless the function is the form).

Ideally, function and form work together to create not only a working system, but an elegant one. However, in situations of limited time and resources, we sometimes have to choose to prioritize one over the other. An example of this might be using an adult-sized wool glove as a baby hat if caught in snow and wind without the right winter gear for your kid. The baby will, of course, look ridiculous with the glove-fingers sprouting above its head like a cock's comb, but its head and ears will be covered. Another example of this is my driveway. It is so steep that when covered with snow and ice it is only passable on foot if you have crampons, Yak-Trax or an ice-pick--unless it is modified with salt and sand. As someone who appreciates being able to get to my house in the winter without mountain climbing gear, I prefer the sand and salt strategy. My spouse complains that salt and sand wreck the form of our drive-way (and our entry way) by creating pock-marks and scratches. I, of course, am right that getting to the house makes more sense (even if it means our driveway erodes into an ugly pitted concrete surface) than freezing to death admiring the "like-new" look of slick cement.

Writing is the same way. The most important thing with writing is that it serves the function it is being created for. If it is being used to show mastery of the content of the discipline, or if it is being used primarily to pose and solve new problems, the effectiveness of those functions are worth more than the elegance, or even the correctness, of the prose. However, if its function is to delight with its aesthetic integrity (as in poetry or literature), then elegance and correctness are the function and must be the priority.

Efficiency tip for week #9: Be self-reflective about your pedagogy and

be willing to make some minor tweaks (slow, small solutions) in your practice. Consider if there are more substantial changes you might make for your future teaching.

Use this space to brainstorm take-aways from the conversations in the brown bag series. What are small things you might change in your current teaching? What are some bigger changes you might be willing to tackle next semester?

Final Thoughts:

There are resources to support you in teaching writing (and in using writing to teach). However, at the college level, no access site or instructional agency can improve incomprehensible writing skills in a semester. Writing is a process, and it takes years of practice.

In the case of non-native speakers, some students might need supplemental instruction in the form of an additional course, or a set of courses, that focus specifically on language improvement. While it is not your responsibility to ensure students take these courses, it is important to be aware of what services or courses are available to help your students.

The Access Center:

In the case of students with learning differences or disabilities WSU has an Access Center. The Access Center will set students up with Access Advisors to assist them. http://accesscenter.wsu.edu/

The WSU Writing Center:

The Writing Center is a valuable resource for supporting students with writing skills. The Writing Center employs para-professional peer tutors to work with native and non-native speakers at every phase of the writing process (pre-writing, drafting, re-writing). The Writing Center is a walk-in service open to all WSU students.

http://universitycollege.wsu.edu/units/writingprogram/units/writingcenter/unde rgrad/

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