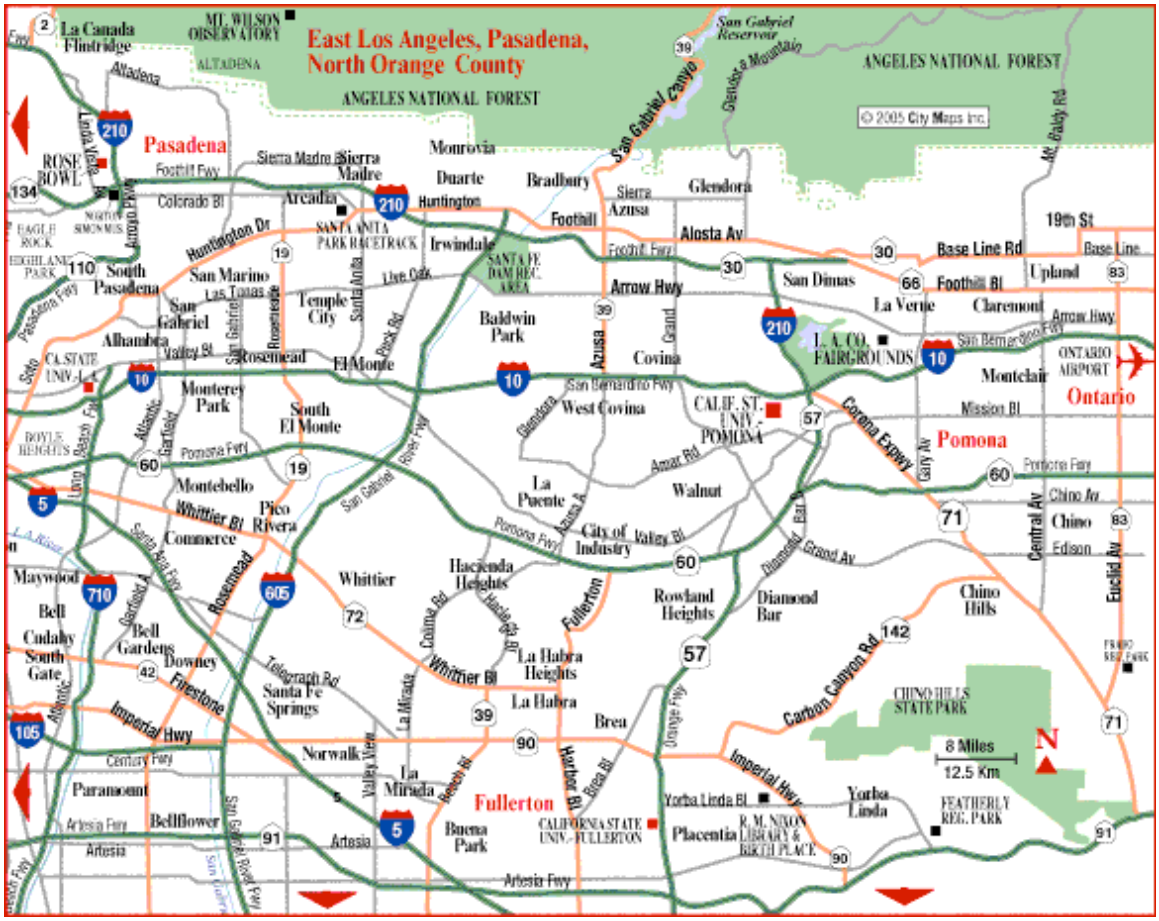
Roadmaps for Writing Workshop



Tuesday, April 26, 2010
10 AM to 3 PM
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Brooklyn College Writing Across the Curriculum

Agenda

Roadmaps for Writing Workshop

April 26, 2011, 10 AM – 3 PM

10:00 - 11:00: Introduction and Discussion of Course Writing Goals

1) Introductions and Overview of Workshop
2) Rethinking Course Goals
    a) Articulate course goals.
    b) Discuss course goals in groups of three.
    c) Full-group discussion of how writing might be used (or might not be) to achieve goals.

11:00 - 12:00: The Long Haul: Semester-Long Writing Activities & Assignments

1) Formal Writing Assignments: Scaffolding and Student Revision
2) Long-Term Informal Assignments: Journals, Dialectical Notebooks & Portfolios
3) Ideas for Short-Term Informal Writing Activities
4) Integrating Informal Writing into Formal Assignments

12:00 - 12:45: Lunch (Participants will complete forms)

12:45 - 1:45: Syllabi Workshop

1:45 – 2:45: Avoiding the Potholes: Common Issues in Assignment Design

1) Creative Assignment Design
    a) Sparking Curiosity
    b) Refining the Scope
2) Avoiding Plagiarism

2:45 - 3:00 Evaluations

RETHINKING COURSE GOALS

Prior to reworking your syllabus and individual writing assignments, it is a good idea to take stock of your course goals. To help refine these goals, try asking yourself the following questions:

1) What are the main modules within the course? How many sessions do you spend on a particular theme?

2) What are the main learning objectives for each of these modules and for the whole course? What are the chief concepts and principles that I want students to learn in each unit or module?

3) What thinking skills am I trying to develop within each unit or module and throughout the whole course? (For example, ways of observing, habits of mind, questioning strategies, use of evidence, etc. What ways of thinking are you trying to instill?) How would I prioritize these course-wide goals?

4) What were the most difficult aspects of the course for students in the past, both in terms of content and thinking skills?

5) If I could alter my students' study habits, what would I most like to change?

6) How large of a role should collaborative work play in my course?

7) What difference do I want my course to make in my students' lives—in their sense of self, values, and ways of thinking? What is my unique stamp on this course? What do I hope my students most remember about it after they take it?

Adapted from John C. Bean, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), p. 78.

REEXAMINING HOW STUDENT WRITING FITS INTO YOUR COURSE: PRIORITIZING COURSE GOALS

When rethinking how written work fits into your course, it is important to prioritize your course goals. You should let these priorities dictate the kinds of student writing that you assign in your course.

EXAMPLES OF HIGHER-ORDER GOALS (conceptual/related to intellectual work of your discipline)

- Students will be able to recognize and assess central debates of your discipline.
- Students will be able to apply key concepts of your discipline in their own thinking and writing.
- Students will be able to formulate their own positions within significant debates within your discipline.

EXAMPLES OF MIDDLE-GROUND GOALS (organizational/skill-building)

- Students will hone their ability to make a persuasive argument.
- Students will be able to identify and employ pertinent evidence to support an argument.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to organize a paper on the paragraph level.
- Students will be become more effective readers and editors of their own work and that of others.
- Students will learn to work effectively in a group.

EXAMPLES OF LOWER-ORDER GOALS (grammar/style/clarity of writing)

- Students will demonstrate the ability to construct coherent paragraphs and create effective transitions between them.
- Students will refine their ability to express ideas clearly but not in an overly simplistic fashion on the sentence level.
- Students will learn written disciplinary conventions (citation systems, stylistic conventions, etc.)
- Students will improve grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

RETHINKING COURSE AND ASSIGNMENT DESIGN: EXAMPLES OF HIGHER-ORDER THINKING TASKS

ANALYZING

- Based on course readings, demonstrate how [a natural phenomenon/a type of business transaction/a pop culture trend] occurs or develops.
- What factors do you think caused [a historical event/an environmental disaster/the evolution of one feature of a particular organism]?
- Based on a written description of a [chemical/psychological/political process], draw a diagram.
- Break down [an epic poem/a journal article/a documentary film] into its component parts. What role does each part play in constructing the work's meaning?
- How would you categorize certain [sets of data/political outcomes/molecular structures]?
- Do you recognize any patterns or trends in a [data set/collection of oral history interviews/series of experiments]?
- How would you characterize the point of view of the author of a particular text?
- What kind of methodology/evidence does an author use in constructing an argument? What is the quality of that methodology/evidence?

COMPARING

- How is one [psychological disorder/financial instrument/grassroots political movement] similar and/or different from another?
- What was the market for a particular a commodity like before and after a financial crisis?
- How would you compare a character's state of mind at the beginning of a story to what it is at the end?
- What are some of the subtle differences between these two similar [political parties/sculptures/nematodes]?
- What criteria might you use to compare these varied [meteorological events/architectural forms/chemical processes]?

INFERRING

- Hypothesize what would happen if a certain [chemical pollutant/non-native species] is introduced into a particular ecosystem.
- Predict whether or not a teaching technique will result in higher test scores.
- Propose a potential solution to a [political crisis/economic problem/public health threat].
- How might a character from a [story/play/film] behave in a certain real world situation?
- If you know a society forbids one particular behavior, what other related behaviors might it also proscribe?
- What might a painting tell you about the social, political, and cultural context in which it was produced?

EVALUATING

- Was a business's investment in its physical plant worth the cost? Explain your answer.
- Did a certain character in a novel behave in a convincing way? Would you have chosen a similar course of action? Why or why not?
- Was this experiment well designed? Defend your answer.
- Of all of the options presented, which offers the best solution to the problem? Why?
- How well are the conclusions supported by the data/facts/evidence? Explain.
- Apply a scoring rubric to this piece of work and explain why you are arrived at a certain score.
- Review a dance performance or art exhibit. Justify your evaluation.

Keeping the above questions and concepts in mind, list three or four of the most important goals that you would like students to meet in your course:

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

CATEGORIES OF STUDENT WRITING

Formal Writing Assignments

Characteristics:

- Assignments conform to the conventions of the discipline in which you teach.
- Audiences are often beyond the classroom (simulated or real academic/professional audiences).
- Assignments require particular language use and style (passive voice in some scientific writing, expected literature review styles in psychology and sociology, etc., use of formal citation systems like APA or Chicago Manual of Style).
- Assignments are in the genres of your discipline: law reviews, lab reports, case studies, memos, briefs, etc.
- The final product is submitted to the instructor for formal assessment.

Examples:

- Lab report
- Essay exam
- Group project report
- Journalistic report
- Research paper
- Literature review
- Book or article report
- Persuasive essay

Informal Writing Assignments

Characteristics:

- Discussion-like, and/or loosely structured, and possibly collaborative
- The audience is the student her- or himself, other students, and/or the instructor.
- Can vary in duration, from a course-long journal to a short in-class response to a prompt.
- Can serve as prewriting for formal writing projects.
- May or may not be submitted to the instructor for assessment.

Examples:

- Course journal
- Process reflection
- Timed in-class response paper
- Reading/lecture summaries
- Pre-writing on course topic
- Course dictionary or key word wiki
- Text completion exercise
- Practice exams
- Informal letter to the author of a text

Designing an Effective Formal Writing Assignment: Working Backward from Your Goals

A common mistake that instructors make when creating a writing assignments is that they "under-write" the assignment. In other words, instructors often give students too little guidance about their expectations. It is not enough to announce in class that students should write "a paper about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs" or to list in the syllabus: "Turn in research paper on a Renaissance artist of your choice." More than likely, both you and the students will be frustrated over the time spent writing papers and reading papers that have very little value to the course goals. At the same time, some instructors "over-write" their assignments. Not only is it impractical to hand out a six-page assignment sheet, but too much information can leave students confused, intimidated, and too constricted to allow for their own thought processes and creativity to play out.

When developing an assignment that is likely to produce strong writing, composition instructors recommend starting with the ideal response to the assignment and working backward from those model papers. In other words, begin with your goals for the assignment, and work your way backward through the process to determine the best starting point. What follows is a step-by-step guide to creating an effective writing assignment for any discipline.

Step One: Articulate the goals for the assignment.

Before designing a writing assignment, it is important to articulate goals for the assignment as clearly and concretely as possible. For example, will the assignment help students learn course material or writing conventions in the discipline—or both? The goals that you want to meet with your writing assignment will help you determine the assignment design.

Questions to Consider:

What do you want students to learn from the assignment? What skills do you want them to practice in the process of responding to the assignment?

Step Two: Determine how the writing assignment fits into the larger course goals.

There are two major benefits to understanding a writing assignment as a series of stages that enhance larger course goals while moving students toward a final product that demonstrates progress toward some of those goals: 1) Greater appreciation of the relationship between course and assignment goals and 2) Closer attention to specific assignment details and their combined role in advancing goals. `

Questions to Consider:

How does the writing assignment further the course goals? At what point in the semester will the students have the skills needed to complete the writing assignment? How might the assignment be broken into stages to engage student in the writing process? How do intermediary assignments (i.e., research, outline, drafts, etc.) fit in with the other course activities and goals?

Step Three: Determine what type of writing and audience will best meet your goals.

Identifying the type of writing you want and the audience to whom the writing should be addressed can help students focus their writing to meet the needs of the situation. Changing the "writing situation" changes the type of writing produced and goals the assignment will meet. Here are a few examples of how different writing assignments can meet different goals: If your goals include having students practice professional/scholarly writing and analytic skills, you might ask students to write an academic analysis of an article for a scholarly journal. If your goal is to have students demonstrate their understanding of a theory, you might have them write for an audience outside of your field, which would require them to use laypersons terms to describe the theory. If your goal is for students to engage with a text on a personal level, you might ask for a reflective response to a text.

Questions to Consider:

Will informal writing or formal writing help meet the goals of the assignment? Do you want an objective report or an argumentative article? Do you want a research paper or a personal reflection? Will students be writing a report for their peers or will they be practicing writing in a specific field?

Step Four: Determine your desired style and format conventions.

It's easy to assume that students will observe the same conventions we know and use everyday in our fields. Unfortunately, what we consider to be common practice for our fields and in academia is not always common knowledge. Without guidance here, students often end up spending far more time and attention on style and format concerns than on the larger assignment goals.

Questions to Consider:

How can you best support the assignment and course goals through specifications about word and page count, margins, and font size? Do students need to cite sources, and if so, what citation style is appropriate for your field? What documents should be turned in as part of the final product (notes, outlines, drafts, etc.)?

Step Five: Consider the Evaluation Process.

Evaluation writing and assigning writing go hand in hand. As you work the process of developing your assignment, think about how you will evaluate it. Your evaluations should assess students' progress toward the goals you have established for the assignment. It can be helpful to develop a grading rubric or, at least, your criteria for grading and include that information with the assignment sheet. It is also useful here to consider what elements of writing are most important to you and to your students? For example, do you want your students to spend more time on the content of the paper or on the syntax?

Questions to Consider:

What is the main purpose of the assignment and how will meeting that purpose be assessed? What aspect of writing do you consider a priority in relation to achieving your course goals? How would you prioritize the various elements of the assignment (e.g., for a research paper: quality of sources, explanation/analysis of material, citation style, focus of writing, organization or ideas, etc.)? How might your evaluation criteria help the student understand and benefit from the writing assignment?

Adapted from California State University, San Marcos Writing Center: Resources for Faculty, "Designing an Effective Writing Assignment." (http://www.csusm.edu/writingcenter/facultyresources/index.html, accessed 4/16/2011)

THE RESEARCH/TERM PAPER

If having students write a research paper or longer formal essay is integral to one or more of your course goals, here are some important considerations to help rethink the assignment's design:

1. **The Research Question/Problem**

- How much latitude will you give your students in posing the question? What cues can you provide to make sure that your students find an appropriate scope for the paper?
- Will all students write on the same question/problem? Will all students use the same materials?
- Is the assignment practical given students' abilities and the time that they have to do it?
- Is the question/problem overly broad and thus easily answered by cutting and pasting text off the web? How will you guard against plagiarism?
- Does the assignment really pose a problem/question that needs to be addressed, or is it merely a topic?
- How might you motivate students to engage the assignment in thoughtful and creative ways?

2. **The Context**

- What role do you want students to assume for this project? Do you want them to…
  a. present a synthesis of current research on a subject?
  b. answer a question or solve a problem with original analysis?
  c. design and conduct an experiment and report the results?
  d. evaluate a controversy and declare their own position?
  e. persuade others to adopt their position in a controversy?
  f. investigate research methods in a certain field?
- Is the role that you ask them realistic in terms of their knowledge and skill level?

3. **The Assignment**

- Do you written guidelines have the necessary information, including due dates, length, format, bibliographic style guidelines, suggested resources, cues as to the appropriate audience, etc.?
- Are you sure your students understand all the terms you have used?
- How will you present and discuss the assignment with your students?

4. **The Stages**

- How will you time deadlines for various parts or drafts of the paper?
- How will you explain the purpose and goal of each of the steps?
- Will you evaluate the process as well as the final product for each student?
- Will each student pass in a working bibliography, summaries, or notes?

5. **The Research Process**

- What skills will your students need to conduct the research?
- Would it be helpful to visit the library with your class to practice finding sources?
- Will you explain to your students what should be considered a reliable source?
- Are your students familiar with the citation style you expect before their note-taking begins?
- Do your students know how to collect, analyze/interpret, and present data?

6. **The Community**

- Do your students have access to appropriate models to emulate, such as exemplary professional articles, essays, or reports?
- Have your students had sufficient practice with the stylistic conventions of your discipline?
- Would your students benefit from peer review of their thesis statements, outlines, or drafts?
- Do your students know what writing help is available to them if they need it?

7. **Feedback and Revision**

- How much feedback will you give your students over the course of the assignment's stages?
- What opportunities will you allow for revision? Will you allow your students to rewrite the paper after it has been graded?

Sample Time Table for Research Paper

Task	**Due Date**	**Completed**
Topic Approved	September 16th	_____
Prospectus & Working Thesis	September 27th	_____
Preliminary Bibliography	September 30th	_____
Research Notes	October 11th	_____
Revised Thesis and Working Outline	October 27th	_____
Revised Outline	November 2nd	_____
Introduction	November 8th	_____
Rough Draft	November 20th	_____
Works Cited Page	November 26th	_____
Complete Draft #2	December 1st	_____
Final Draft	***December 16th***	_____

Dialectical Notebooks, Journals, and Writing Portfolios

Dialectical Notebooks

This exercise requires students to reflect on course material and then comment on their own reflections. It operates on the premise that putting course materials into one's own words enhances learning.

Instructions: On the right hand page of a standard spiral notebook, ask students to take detailed lecture and reading notes. Afterward, on the left-hand pages, ask students to create an interactive commentary on the material: posing questions, raising doubts, making connections, expressing confusion, and so forth.

An in-class collaborative variation on this exercise is to have one student take notes on the top half of a page on one side of the journal, and then have her pass it for the interactive commentary on the lower half of the page to a classmate, who in turn passes it to the next classmate, who uses the opposite page of the journal to engage with and respond to the commentary. This variation easily could be transposed to the web with via a course blog or wiki.

Journals

Course writing journals come in a variety of forms, but most are informal exercises that drive the use of writing to learn. Some examples include:

1) Open-ended journals, a.k.a. learning logs: ask students to write a certain number of pages per week about any aspect of the course. They can summarize lectures, explain why the textbook is difficult to understand, disagree with a point made by someone in class, raise questions about class discussions or reading materials, apply some aspect of the course to a personal experience, or make connections between different strands of the course content. The journal becomes a record of the student's intellectual journey.

2) Guided journals: Students respond to content-specific questions developed by the instructor. Students are asked to write two or three times a week for fifteen minutes responding to one or two questions designed by the instructor to get students engaging with assigned readings or class discussions/lectures.

3) Semi-structured journals: These journal assignments provide guidance in helping students think of things to write about. For example, some teachers ask students to begin each entry with an important idea that the student has learned since the previous entry, from either class or the readings. Many teachers develop a set of "writing probes" appropriate to their discipline.

Writing Portfolios

Writing portfolios offer a less formal alternative to the semester-long term paper assignment. At the same time, they require just as much planning and clarification so that the student can successfully produce a polished final portfolio. Portfolios are a collection of student writings carried out over the course of the semester that work cumulatively toward the course goals. Portfolios can be comprised of formal and/or informal writing assignments, some of which can be submitted to the instructor during the semester. Here are some tips for taking a portfolio approach to student writing:

1) Clarify the purpose and audience of the portfolio.

What are the possible purposes for a writing portfolio? To document the process behind a formal project? To prepare for a job interview? To enter a competition? To contribute toward a broader research goal? Each of these purposes will lead instructors to make different decisions about what to include and how to arrange a portfolio.

Clarify the audience. Is it only for the instructor? A prospective employer? A scholarship committee? Fellow students? The audience will affect what assignments should be designed for the portfolio.

2) Design assignments for the portfolio.

Portfolio assignments can include a mixture of formal and informal writing assignments, all of which can demonstrate a full picture of what the student has learned over the course of the semester. Here are some writing assignments that could be required for a portfolio:

- An academic essay that demonstrates the student's ability to argue a claim or position
- A personal essay that shows self-insight and demonstrates the ability to paint vivid pictures with words
- A brief report prepared for any class or community project
- An essay or other writing project showing student's ability to analyze and solve a problem
- The students' own favorite piece of writing based on field research, library research, or both
- Correspondence, such as a letter of inquiry, an email message, or a job application or résumé
- A piece of writing for a community group, club, or campus publication
- An example of a collaboratively written document accompanied by a description of how the team worked and what each student contributed
- A multimedia presentation

3) Ask students to prepare a narrative to accompany the portfolio.

This statement might be in the form of a memo, cover letter, personal essay, or home page (for online portfolios). Whatever the form, the statement should include:

- A description of what is in the portfolio: What was the purpose of each work?
- An explanation of choices: How did you decide these pieces of writing represented your best work?
- A reflection on the student's strengths and abilities as a writer: What have they learned about writing? What problems have they encountered, and how have they solved them?

4) Portfolios and Peer Review

Ask students to select a certain number of pieces from the portfolio to have fellow students critique. Give the reviewing students a rubric or questionnaire to guide their responses (unguided student peer review is not always productive).

Adapted from: http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/everyday_writer3e/addresources/1.html

IDEAS FOR SHORT-TERM INFORMAL WRITING ACTIVITIES

- Students required to comment on an slide show/movie clip/audio file posted online
- Process reflection paper
- Timed in-class response paper
- Reading/lecture summary
- Pre-writing on paper or course topic
- Text completion exercise
- Practice exam
- Informal letter to the author of a text
- List of questions for an author
- List of problems or issues with a text
- Explanatory letter to a friend or rival
- Opinion piece
- Informal policy proposal to a person in power
- Letter to the instructor
- Diary entries of a fictional character
- Require a one-page "QQTP" sheet for one class session (or for every one):
    - a Question prompted by the reading
    - a Quotation from the reading that you found compelling, controversial, puzzling, or otherwise remarkable
    - a brief set of ideas that can be used as Talking Points in class discussion
- Before/After Reflection: Ask students to write one page in which they reflect upon what you knew and/or thought about a topic before a bigger assignment and explain how their thinking changed (if it did) and why. Ask what questions might have arisen as a consequence?

Integrating Informal Writing into Formal Assignments

Informal writing can stand alone, or it can be used to accompany other more formal assignments. In the latter case, informal writing may be used throughout the process of completing a project, from the moment the assignment is handed out to any other point prior to submission, and even after the assignment is returned by instructor with comments.

When planning to use informal writing during formal assignments, consider the following possibilities:

- ***Assignment Paraphrase***. Too often, teachers hand out an assignment, read it aloud once, ask if there are any questions and then assume that students understand the assignment. But many don't understand and won't discover this fact until they are at home attempting it. On the day an assignment is handed out, **ask students to turn the assignment sheet over and write a three or four sentence paraphrase of it on the back.** Several students can read them aloud, and then the class can discuss the degree to which these paraphrases accurately reflect the work they've been asked to perform. It's an exercise that helps many students.
- ***Progress Statement.*** Mid-way through a project or paper, have students write a self-evaluation of their progress on it, noting what they've accomplished thus far, what they're most satisfied with, and what specific work remains to be done.
- ***Assignment Cover Sheet***. On the day students turn in a lab report, case analysis or essay, have them write for five or ten minutes, reflecting on the project and discussing the process, and then hand that reflection in as a cover sheet to their assignment. What problems and concerns did they have along the way, and how did they overcome them? What insights did they attain? Explain in what ways the project was and was not worthwhile. Can they pose one or two specific questions for the grader to respond to? Such cover sheets are quick reads which give the teacher a good sense of the typical kinds of problems students had and make responding easier and more focused.
- ***Response to the Response.*** Many times when assignments are handed back, students hunt for the grade, then file the assignment away, never looking closely at the teacher comments. The teacher might ask students to respond for five minutes after reading the teacher's responses. They might be asked to paraphrase it or identify one strength and one area to work on that is evident from the teacher's comments.

Adapted from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Writing Program, "Writing Activities to Get Students Thinking and Learning" webpage (http://www.mwp.hawaii.edu/resources/thinking-learning.htm; accessed 2/16/11)

WORKSHOPPING YOUR SYLLABUS: A WRITING QUESTIONNAIRE

1) Does the writing component enhance learning and understanding of course content? Does the syllabus articulate how assignments contribute to meeting the course objectives?

2) Is there any ways that you might refashion your writing assignments to be more closely integrated with your course goals? Can you demonstrate linkages between each assignment and specific components of the course objectives?

3) Do your writing assignments move toward a goal/goals in a cumulative sequence? Do they move from lower to higher order thinking skills, and from simpler to more complex writing assignments, as the semester progresses?

4) Are long-term formal assignments broken up into discrete, manageable components? Have low-stakes writing activities (pre-writing topic explorations, draft thesis statements, etc.) been incorporated into the bigger project?

5) Across the course, do students write for diverse purposes and diverse audiences?

6) Will you have any informal, low-stakes writing as a part of the course? Will you have any in-class writing in the course aside from an exam? Will you be evaluating any of these papers? If so, how will you communicate your grading criteria to students?

7) Is rewriting or revision allowed for formal papers? What parameters and mechanisms have you set up for dealing drafts and revisions?

8) Will your course feature any collaborative writing work? Are your expectations and evaluation for this type of work laid out clearly?

9) Will you have students undertake any peer review? Will your provide rubrics or question prompts for students to use in their reviews?

10) Will you provide ideal models of the types of writing that meet assignment expectations?

11) Do students have adequate time to complete the formal writing assignments?

12) Do you have a clear policy on late papers?

Syllabus Review Tool from the U. Mass Center for Teaching

Syllabus Components: Summary of Selected Literature[1]

Concept Area	Specific Components
General Principles	▪ The learning syllabus places students at the center of the questions: "What do students need to know in order to derive the maximum benefit from this educational experience?" (Diamond, 1998) ▪ Include more than less material – a detailed syllabus is a valuable tool for students and lessens their initial anxieties about the course. ▪ A study of Carnegie Professors found that what all of the Professors' syllabi had in common was "detailed precision." Each contained clear objectives, a day-to-day schedule identifying specific reading assignments and due dates, and clear statements regarding make-up dates, attendance, and grading standards, and information about faculty availability.
Logistics	▪ Provide basic information (instructor name and contact information, date/time/location of course, office hours and rules therefore, T.A. names, etc.) ▪ Specify textbooks and readings by authors and editions ▪ Identify additional material or equipment needed for the course ▪ Provide a course calendar or schedule, list important drop dates
Course Purpose and Structure	▪ Give an overview of the course's purpose, how it fits into the curriculum, and why students would want to take it; When appropriate, discuss relevance of course to General Education ▪ Clarify the conceptual structure used to organize the course *(why do the parts of the course come in the order they do?)* ▪ Describe the format or activities of the course
Learning Objectives	▪ State the general learning goals or objectives (what will students know or be able to do better after taking this course?) ▪ Where do these objectives lead intellectually and practically (why should students want to pursue these objectives)?
Learning Processes	▪ Outline how students will practice the skills described in course objectives ▪ Describe and explain the methods of instruction *(will the course be mainly lecture, discussion, group work?)* ▪ Why has the instructor selected the pedagogical techniques used in the course *(e.g., why is active learning used/important?)*
Expectations for Students	▪ Describe prerequisites for the course – help students realistically assess their readiness for the course. *(What does the instructor assume students already know how to do?)* ▪ Will there be opportunities to address missing skills during the course? ▪ List other course requirements ▪ Discuss course policies ▪ Estimate student workload ▪ Articulate expectations for student behavior (academic integrity, attendance, involvement in active learning, etc.)
Expectations for Instructor	▪ Describe instructor's role (how do you see your role as a teacher?) ▪ What are your responsibilities – what can students expect from you?
Assignments and Grading Methods	▪ List assignments, term papers, exams (with details about nature of each, length, etc) ▪ What are the purposes of the assignments, how do they link to course learning goals? ▪ Why have the specified readings been selected? What is their relative importance to the discipline? ▪ What will tests, etc. measure (memory? Understanding? Ability to synthesize?) ▪ State how students will be evaluated and how grades will be assigned
Fostering Faculty-Student Interaction	▪ Invite students with special needs to contact you during office hours ▪ Schedule time for fast feedback from your students ▪ Use conversational/approachable tone—express your interest in talking with/helping students
Fostering Student-Student Interaction	▪ Provide space for names and telephone numbers of two or three classmates ▪ Discuss importance of active learning, learning from each other as well as instructor
Helping Students Learn	▪ Include supplementary material to help students succeed in the course ▪ Provide information to help students know how to study/prepare for the course

[1] **Literature reviewed for this summary**:
Bers, T., Davis, D. & Taylor, W. (November-December 1996). Syllabus Analysis: What are we teaching and telling our students? Assessment Update, 8 (6). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publications.; Diamond, R. M. (1998). Designing and Assessing Courses and Curricula: A practical guide (Revised Edition). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.; Davis, D. G. (1993). Tools for Teaching. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.; Grunert, J. (1997). The Course Syllabus: A learning-centered approach. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company, Inc.; Imasuen, E. (May-June, 1999). Using Course Syllabi as Tools to Support Student Outcomes Assessment. Assessment Update, 11 (3). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publications.; McKeachie, W. J. (1994). Teaching Tips (Ninth Edition). Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Co.; Institutional Documents from: Northern Illinois University, Virginia Tech, University of Rhode Island.

Hewlett General Education Fellows Syllabus Component: Scoring Rubric

Criteria	Syllabus A**	Syllabus B**	Comments
Goals and Objectives: Clearly articulated learning goals and objectives for the course			
Relationship to General Education: Articulates the relationship between Course and General Education.			
Relevance to Students: Effort made to explain relevance of course to students' interests/needs			
Tone of Support /Approachability; Communicates instructor's teaching philosophy, commitment to helping students, meeting availability.			
Student Role: Articulates clear expectations for students (behavior, effort, academic honesty, etc.)			
Grading System: Clear outline of expectations; Takes into account varied learning strategies.			
Varied Pedagogy: Evidence of varied teaching strategies in assignments and class activities.			
Course Content & Activities: Does it appear to cover a range of General Education learning objectives – i.e., factual knowledge, thinking skills, appreciation			
Course-Based Assessment: Evidence of gathering information on student performance to understand their needs and their performance on specific objectives, to build communication, etc.			

****Rating Scale:**
0=Not Present
1=Present
2=Exceptional

Additional Comments/Observations:

Source: University of Massachusetts Center for Teaching "Teaching Resources" Webpage (http://www.umass.edu/cft/resources.htm; accessed on 4/16/2011)

Ideas for Sparking Students' Curiosity

1) Involve students in assignment design process
- Allow students to pick their research topic.
- Offer different options for their final product.
- Require students to conduct peer review of each others' work.

2) Ask students: what do you want to understand about your topic?
- Self-directed research into a topic can help students discover what intrigues them the most.
- Asking students to conduct observations—either in the world or in media, for example—can also foster curiosity.
- The tried-and-true method of using newspaper/magazine articles related to the topic helps students make connections beyond the classroom that can help render the topic more immediately relevant to their own experience.

3) Use small group work to develop debates among peers.
- Semi-directed small group discussion often draws out ideas students are not comfortable sharing in the larger group setting. Give groups an open-ended question to answer that requires consensus-building; peers may agree to disagree, but must report back to the larger group and explain the causes of disagreement. Hand-outs with directions, time limit, and expected final outcome should guide the small group discussion.

4) Make the student the teacher:
- As either an in-class exercise or a writing assignment, ask students to explain course concepts to a new learner in the field. They can do this either through use of discipline-specific language or through layperson's language. This process helps student escape the regular student-to-teacher role that most of their writing and expression necessitates.

5) Employ an assortment of formal exploratory writing forms. These forms are not thesis-driven, but can help students discover their own positions on the topic at hand.
- Some examples include:
    - Exploratory essays
    - Reflection papers
    - Personal narratives
    - Myths
    - Dialogues
    - Letters
    - Poems or short stories
    - Magazine-style articles or op-eds
    - Advertisements
    - Satires and parodies

Refining the Scope

A common problem facing student writers is the issue of the sprawling topic. Here are some tips for helping students streamline the scope of their argument.

1) Be clear with students about the connection between the page limits for the paper and what you are expecting them to accomplish within those limits. Give them examples of focused, discrete questions or problems that realistically can be addressed within the limits that you are imposing.

2) Help students move from a broad topic of inquiry to a specific question about that topic which their paper will answer. This can be done by setting up specific stages for the writing process, from preliminary reading and research, to pre-writing and brainstorming questions about the topic, to selecting a specific question which the student seeks to answer. Enabling students to engage in each stage of the writing process will ultimately yield more refined thesis statements, and produce more creative and original results.

3) Once the student has focused in on a specific question, ask the student to formulate a succinct thesis statement. Here are some tips for constructing a thesis statement that can be conveyed to students:

- A thesis statement should not contain two conflicting ideas. If two ideas are in conflict, it is impossible to support them both.

- A thesis statement is an assertion that requires evidence and support, not a universally agreed-upon fact or an observation. For example:

    - A universally agreed-upon fact or an observation**:** People use many lawn chemicals.

    - Thesis**:** People are poisoning the environment with chemicals merely to keep their lawns green.

- A thesis takes a stand rather than announcing a subject.

    - Announcement**:** The thesis of this paper is the difficulty of solving our environmental problems.

    - Thesis**:** Solving our environmental problems is more difficult than many environmentalists believe.

- A thesis statement is narrow, rather than broad. If the thesis statement is sufficiently narrow, it can be fully supported.

- Broad**:** The American steel industry has many problems.

- Narrow**:** The primary problem of the American steel industry is the lack of funds to renovate outdated plants and equipment.

● A thesis statement is specific rather than vague or general.

- Vague**:** Hemingway's war stories are very good.

- Specific**:** Hemingway's stories helped create a new prose style by employing extensive dialogue, shorter sentences, and strong Anglo-Saxon words.

4) Once students have constructed their thesis statements, ask them to map out an outline of the major points they will need to make to support their statement. Stress that points which do not directly support the thesis statement are extraneous and not needed.

Strategies for Preventing Plagiarism in Student Papers

1. Teach about plagiarism. Don't just warn against it. Make sure your students know what it is and give them help in avoiding it.

2. Give the students a "plagiarism quiz" (counting toward their grade) on defining plagiarism. Some professors have students sign an agreement stating that they are clear on the definition of plagiarism.

3. Give assignments that are not easily satisfied with plagiarized papers. Make the topic specific to the individual student's experience, or require a unique combination of topics.

4. Probably the best way to discourage plagiarism is to insist that students show their work to you at various stages. Have them pass in notes, outlines, drafts, etc.

5. Schedule interviews with your students to discuss the issues they are facing in dealing with their topics.

6. Hold a brainstorming session in class, so you can actually see the students putting their own ideas down on paper. Then have the students pass in that paper for comments.

7. If possible, demonstrate in class the appropriate and inappropriate uses of Google and other Internet search tools. As an assignment, have students Google a phrase related to their topic, and then produce an annotated bibliography of the top results.

8. Have your students comment on the Wikipedia article related to their topic, and challenge them to add to it or correct it as a step toward the completion of their project. This may discourage direct copying of the Wikipedia article and related Internet sources.

9. Make sure your students submit summaries of at least two major sources on their topic, so you can see that they have done the research, understand the material, and are able to summarize it.

10. After they have handed in their papers, have your students write in a journal or in class on the process they went through in writing them.

BEST PRACTICES FOR DESIGNING PLAGIARISM-RESISTANT ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Consider dropping the open-topic theme.** The more specific the assignment, the smaller the universe of information students can use to search and perhaps use inappropriately.
2. **Know your field of research.** If you require your students to do research, be sure that you have done the research yourself in advance. You will be familiar with many of the sources your students are using and you might recognize suspicious wording, etc. And if you demonstrate to your students that you have done the research yourself, you show your own commitment to the topic. You also give them reason to know that you won't be fooled, and this in itself can discourage academic dishonesty.
3. **Word assignments precisely.** It might not be enough to tell your students to cite their sources. You might also need to assign them the specific citation style, give them examples, and point out resources where they can get help.
4. **Incorporate information literacy standards into your assignments,** particularly the need to critically evaluate information, synthesize it and use it, rather than simply collect it and quote it, paraphrase it, or summarize it. The American Library Association has put together a fine resource defining information literacy and listing the five competencies in their brochure, *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/standards.pdf). The relevant competencies here are:

   The information literate student understands many of the ethical, legal, and socio-economic issues surrounding information and information technology.

   The information literate student follows laws, regulations, institutional policies, and etiquette related to the access and use of information resources.

5. **Become familiar with the student's "voice."** Have your students write early in the semester or term. A potent signal that a student may have plagiarized is a sudden change in language, style, and "voice," i.e. the way a student sounds in their writing. The VAIL Guide to Plagiarism Alarms gives a good overview of this and other signals that plagiarism may have occurred.
6. **Structure long writing assignments in small chunks or drafts** so that students can make incremental progress and not be led down the path of procrastination and plagiarism due to panic. Procrastination is a leading reason why students plagiarize in the first place (Roig & DeTommaso, 1995)
7. **Assign annotated bibliographies,** requiring students to provide abstracts of their sources in their own words. Librarians at Cornell University have put together a fine resource on the process at How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography.

8. **Have students turn in a log or journal of their research,** including the names of the search tools used (catalog, search engine, subscription database) and search terms used. Sample their tools and strategies by trying to replicate a few at random. Ask questions if the search cannot be replicated. The University of Maryland University College instituted an undergraduate course, Information Literacy and Research Methods, in which the development of such a research log is a central focus.
9. **Discuss student papers in class.** Ask questions about the meaning of suspicious passages. If a student cannot explain what he or she has written, perhaps that individual is not the true author. If students know in advance that they might be required to discuss their papers, this may deter some from plagiarizing.
10. **Assign oral presentations.** Have your students report on their research process. Prompting students with questions like "How did you find this article you cite? I would like to read it myself," is a non-threatening way to begin looking into suspicious passages that are not in your student's voice.
11. **Substitute a short written assignment for the oral presentation.** This can be a brief, one-page summary of their research process, including how they selected their sources. Ask students to sum up what they learned from their research.
12. **Require recent sources, including some that are in print.** If you only require Web-based research, this is more likely to tempt students to copy and paste the words of others since it can be easily done.
13. **Assign students roles or specific audiences to address in their writing.** The papers that can be found in most term paper mills are just that, i.e. term papers, and they are usually written in the third person with the teacher as the audience. If you assign your students roles as a researcher, someone advising an administrator who needs to make a decision, then it is unlikely that it will have the sound of a term paper.

In conclusion, designing assignments that are meaningful and challenging gives your students an incentive to learn, and when they have that incentive, they will do their own work.

Adapted from the University of Maryland University College Virtual Academic Integrity Library (VAIL) "Preventing Academic Dishonesty and Designing Assignments" webpage (http://www.umuc.edu/cip/vail/faculty/designing_assignments/assignments.html; accessed 4/16/2011)