

The Franklin College Writing Intensive Program

Course Guidelines and Criteria

(Portions of this document were originally composed by Parker Middleton; additions and amendments made by Michelle Ballif.)

"Because many students rely on pulling an 'all-nighter' when a paper is due, college courses serve an important role when they provide opportunities and methods for developing more orderly, reflective writing habits."

-Bedford Guide to Teaching Writing in the Disciplines 16

As the case in any course that asks students to write, strong syllabi are especially important in writing-intensive courses because they model effective writing, establish the purpose and role of writing in the course, and give vital information about it. Furthermore, in a WIP course, syllabi teach the writing process by charting writing assignments, their stages, and due dates. Moreover, syllabi, both paper-based and online versions, are perhaps the course document that students are most likely to keep up with and to review most often. This makes the syllabus an important teaching tool—for students as well as for faculty. Previous WIP faculty have reported that writing-enriched classes lead them to articulate more clearly their goals for a course and to state objectives and criteria for grading more explicitly in their syllabi and materials.

Some features of effective syllabi for Writing Intensive Program courses are listed below.

_____ Make writing in the disciplines philosophy, as well as the role and benefits of writing in the course, clear. WIP syllabi should integrate writing assignments fully into course learning. In some situations, this may entail more selling than in others: students in lecture-based courses may not expect to have to write and may be resistant because, as they put it, "It isn't an English class." This resistance may be met by emphasizing the benefits of writing to learn the course content, as well as by emphasizing writing as a critical competency in an information culture. It can also be countered with truly innovative writing assignments that students see as clearly relevant to their university and post-university careers and that boost their performance in the course.

_____ Model the writing process as a learning process. By providing students with a process for writing, WIP courses teach important process management skills. Many students simply have no experience with managing time and work, routinely making final-hour efforts when work is due. This lack of process skills becomes clear when we ask them to write. By modeling a process for getting work done in syllabi and other materials, "college courses serve an important role": they provide both "opportunities and methods for developing more orderly, reflective writing habits" (*Bedford 16*).

_____ Stage assignments, breaking them into manageable parts with opportunities for guidance, feedback, and revision. A course calendar or process timeline can be useful.

_____ Sequence assignments so that students can build on and elaborate early learning.

_____ Make effective use of WIP teaching assistants to help give more attention to student writing than would be possible in a non-writing intensive course (see below).

_____ Consider logistics of prompt feedback, conferences, and revision.

_____ Offer clear guidelines and criteria by which work will be generated and evaluated. Along with articulating the features of effective writing in a course and specifying the most important writing conventions, course materials should let students know what part disciplinary styles and formats such as MLA, APA, or CBE will play, as well as the role that editing errors involving grammar, punctuation, and spelling will play in finished work.

_____ Teach discipline-specific models, formats, conventions. Along with teaching the writing process, teaching students to write means [teaching the writing conventions of a discipline](#): how to think, how to argue, how to write as scientists, sociologists, or music historians. Judith A. Langer's "Speaking of Knowing" emphasizes that "writing (and the thinking that accompanies it) then becomes a primary and a necessary vehicle for practicing the ways of organizing and presenting ideas that are most appropriate to a particular subject area " (71). This requires faculty to state explicitly the often tacitly held "rules of argument and evidence that represent the ways of thinking unique to each discipline" (83).

_____ Avoid the tendency to attempt too much. Two sequenced writing assignments with guidance and feedback in planning, drafting, and revising, for example, give students greater learning benefits than turning in a 20-page paper at the end of a course. Teaching with writing requires working smarter, not necessary harder. Strategic adjustments can bring big gains.

Working with a Writing Intensive Program Teaching Assistant Talking Points for WIP Faculty and Teaching Assistants

WIP teaching assistants help faculty to provide the enhancements that a writing-intensive course offers. In general, the Writing Intensive Program selects discipline-specific teaching assistants who believe that writing is important, who demonstrate effective communication skills, who have a more sophisticated than usual understanding of the writing process, who show promise in working with others and leadership in problem solving.

WIP teaching assistants receive extensive training in teaching writing in the disciplines skills. Each August, those selected for the program attend a pre-seminar designed to introduce writing intensive pedagogy and the logistics of supporting writing intensive courses. During Fall Semester, WIP TAs meet weekly for WIPP 7001, a graduate course in the pedagogy of writing in the disciplines; they also meet with the Director during Spring Semester to further discuss pedagogical issues.

To make the best use of these specially trained "writing coaches," you will need to work to harmonize your course goals with the principles of the Writing Intensive Program. Hence, prior to the beginning of the semester, the participating faculty member and his/her assigned WIP teaching assistant should address the following in order to be clear on the logistics of the

course, the roles and responsibilities of both the faculty member and the WIP TA, and, most especially, to guarantee that the WIP TA will be utilized as the WIP principles and best practices prescribe.

_____ How will the Writing Intensive Program and the Writing Intensive Program TA be introduced to the class? Will there be a statement on the syllabus that explains the program and explains the role and responsibility of the WIP teaching assistant? What will these statements be? Make sure students know the TA's purpose and role, and how they are to work with the TA, for example, whether meeting with the TA is required to get back drafts or papers.

_____ What kind(s) of writing will be assigned? Low-stakes (informal, writing-to-learn activities, such as journal entries) or high-stakes (formal essays, term papers, etc.)? Who will compose each actual assignment (the document that specifies the writing task, purpose, requirements, and evaluative criteria)? Will the specifics of each assignment be included in the syllabus, or will the assignment document be a separate handout? Will the faculty or the TA compose the assignment?

_____ How will the logistics of the course guarantee that the WIP TA is actively involved in the writing processes of the students and is not being used just as a grader? The WIP prescribes two, key course components: mandatory conferences and opportunities for revision. How will the syllabus provide for at least one, required (individual or group) student-TA conference? How will the syllabus (and the writing assignments) provide opportunities for revision? Will the TA have class time to discuss writing assignments or effective writing, in general?

_____ Related to above, if the faculty member will be assigning high-stakes writing assignments, how will the assignment be staged, so that the TA can intervene several times in the students' writing processes? How will the logistics of such be managed on the syllabus (e.g., establishing due dates for drafts)? How will low-stakes writing assignments be configured to allow TA-student interaction?

_____ How will the written assignments be evaluated? The Writing Intensive Program urges faculty to provide for students clear guidelines for effective writing and grading standards in your course. Criteria may be spelled out in a rubric that can be adapted for reviewing drafts and grading final products. Who will create these rubrics—the faculty member or the teaching assistant?

_____ Who will be responsible for an assignment's final grade? Or will both the faculty and the TA weigh in on the grade? However this is decided, make sure the students understand, and make sure that the TA has some authority. A brief, norming session may be helpful between the faculty member and the TA to help ensure that rubrics are used effectively and uniformly (in short: to make sure that a paper that the faculty member considers to be an "A" paper is the same as what the TA considers to be an "A" paper).

_____ Talk about the time and logistics involved in getting work back to students promptly, as well as how feedback strategies will be communicated to students.

_____ Talk about how grade disputes and disgruntled students will be handled.

_____ Talk about how to best communicate with each other (e.g., e-mail, during office hours). Establish whether the TA is expected to attend the class every class period. Discuss any other expectations that you have for the course and each other.

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