Working with Student Writers

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Bad News

Uh oh...
There is No Writing Pill

- No grammar shot.
- And writers seem to forget much of what they’ve learned – much of what they might be good at – when faced with new and challenging writing tasks.
Transfer of Writing Skills

• Writers need cues and reminders to activate previous writing skills and apply them to new contexts.
• And every new context requires some new skills, too.
• So no writer will ever come to your class fully prepared and ready to go. Ever.
So, What Can We Do?

As teachers of content and the ways of participating in our disciplines.
Talk About the Ways You Write in Sociology as Unique Genres

• With unique rules and expectations.

• Here is a handy, customizable guide you can use to teach students about your discipline’s genres:
Think of Assigning and Teaching Writing as Coaching

• Students learn how to write in new genres *in process* – while they are doing it.
• Just like a coach, we can’t just show film and put them in the game and expect them to succeed.
• But we can – just like a coach – break down the process and engage with our student writers in each part.
Practical Things That Seem to Be Helpful

Which is kinda like good news.
Samples and Examples

• And methods for thinking about them that help writers see the expectations of the genre.
• Use the Genre Analysis guide, customized to your particular genre (like Literature Review, for example).
• An Idea: Collect and share your students’ chapters and dissertations.
Clear Expectations for Each Assignment

• The usual stuff about length and sources.
• But also genre expectations, using the vocabulary and language in the Genre Analysis guides.
  • Both the substantive and stylistic features.
The Chance to Write – And Have Their Writing Responded to – As a Recursive, Iterative Process

• Break assignments down into parts (summaries, arguments, introductions, implications, etc.) and phases (invention, organization, drafting, polishing).
• Giver writers opportunities to get feedback throughout the process.
• The most productive writers:
  • Regularly share drafts and partial drafts with teachers and peers.
  • Understand that writing is an iterative, recursive process. It is not linear.
  • Receive feedback designed to help them make progress from where they are now. Not feedback designed to inform them how far they are from acceptable.
So What Should We Do in Our Classrooms?

Four things.
Give Writers Good Samples and Examples

• From our own students.
• From our discipline and our own writing.
Articulate the Expectations of the Genres

• Using the language in the Genre Analysis guide.
• Both substantive and stylistic features.
Coach Our Writers Through the Process

• Engage with our writers early and often. Don’t just assign a paper and then collect it ten weeks later.
• Give content and organization feedback first.
• Save correctness feedback for later drafts.
• Set lofty goals that they will have to achieve to pass the class, but work with them to get there.
  • Give developmental feedback based on where they are at and how they can make progress.

Write better!
Encourage Our Writers to Make Use of All Our Writing Support Resources

• Meetings with you for content and organization feedback.
• Meetings with peers for content, organization, and correctness feedback.
• Meetings with Writing Center tutors for content, organization, and correctness feedback.
Thank You!

Questions, comments, discussion?