

From Writing “Intensive” to Writing “Integrated”

Making the Move from *Assigning* Writing to *Integrating* Writing

There’s no way around it. Student writing skill will atrophy (like a muscle!) if it is not developed through frequent, varied, and challenging writing exercise in the major.

- “Traditional” classes often include writing assignments that are *supplemental to the work of the course*—a paper or project completed outside class that in one way or another draws on students’ classroom learning.
- *Many students fail to meet our expectations with these assignments*, however, because they are unfamiliar with the many different tacit expectations, routines, heuristics, conventions, and resources that experts often take for granted.

Strategies for Writing-Integrated Courses

- Provide opportunities for low-stakes writing. Students often produce better final products when they have had frequent trial runs and opportunities for revision; asking them to write informally throughout the semester builds skills they need for more formal writing at the same time that it encourages active learning of course materials.
- Shape writing exercises to reflect course learning goals, discipline-specific concepts, and the sorts of problem-solving active in your field. Students engage most effectively with writing when they understand clearly how such writing can increase their understanding of key course concepts.
- Sequence writing exercises. Because complicated skills are often best developed in steps, writing-integrated courses offer students a sequence of exercises as a “scaffold” with which to build complex understanding.

Making Disciplinary Conventions Explicit

Students may come to us with very little prior experience/knowledge of the writing central to work in our fields. We can help them become more familiar with how experts in a field use writing, as well as our conventions, expectations, and processes of problem-solving.

Some tips for making these norms more explicit:

- Try to define and discuss a range of possible audiences *within your discipline* and ask students to target their writing to one or more of those audiences. (Specifying an ideal audience helps avoid students writing only for you.)
- Share a number of example texts from professional venues: not just journals, but newsletters, casebooks, correspondence, and everyday sorts of writing. Examples are especially valuable because one of the most effective ways to learn about organization and style concerns in a field is to read many different examples written by working professionals in the field.

- Ask students to think about how the writing they are asked to complete in your class is the same or different from the writing they have completed in composition, English, or other courses.
- Share your own drafting process with students—making your own processes an example helps to build respect and rapport.