



Help Students Transition from First-Year Writing to Writing in Your Discipline

What Can I Expect: What Have Students Already Learned About Writing?

Students enter BYU with 3.7 grade point averages (or higher), so it is likely that students consider themselves at least fairly good writers.

However, many students skipped first-year writing because they took it in high school or received AP credit, etc. They may be coming into your classes with no experience in university writing.

First-year writing has excellent course outcomes (see the list below), but no student masters them all. And many of the outcomes do not apply to disciplinary writing:

- 1** -- Use rhetoric to compose arguments in a variety of genres for specific audiences and purposes.
- 2** -- Critically read texts, which includes the following:
 - analyzing how a text functions in a specific situation, community, or public;
 - analyzing the nuances of language (diction, figures of speech, tone, etc.);
 - identifying and evaluating the elements of an argument—claims, reasons, assumptions, and ethical, emotional, and logical appeals.
- 3** -- Write coherent and unified texts (effective introductions, clear theses, supporting details, transitions, and strong conclusions) using a flexible and effective writing process, including prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing.
- 4** -- Use style—diction, figurative language, tone, grammar, punctuation, spelling, mechanics—genre, conventions, & document design correctly and for rhetorical effect.
- 5** -- Navigate the library to locate primary and secondary sources, evaluate the appropriateness and credibility of those sources, and effectively incorporate and accurately document outside sources in a research paper.

Unfortunately, You May See a Variety of Problems in Your Students' Writing

Common Problems or Insufficiencies Observed in FHSS Student Writing

Lack of a Thesis – many students seem puzzled about using a guiding statement for their papers and may not know where to locate it in their writing.

Lack of a Claim – students seem to be much more comfortable with writing informational papers rather than persuasive, argumentative papers. They frequently just summarize what they read and do not analyze the research.

Lack of Synthesis – students are often frustrated with having to synthesize sources; they often simply announce a source and summarize it; add another source and summarize it, etc. (Lack of critical reading & thinking)

Inability to do disciplinary research – students often do not understand the concept of a “community” within a discipline that has certain expectations and types of writing.

There are additional problems, of course. However, based on the insufficiency of student writing, it is not valuable for faculty to focus most heavily on grammar, punctuation, documentation style, etc.

Many faculty are uncomfortable “teaching” writing – that is NOT what we trained to do!

You do not need to be proficient in teaching writing: “The ‘practical knowledge’ of writing cannot be gained by listening to lectures on the rules and protocols of writing; it can be gained only by actually writing and performing writing-based activities.” [Svinicki, Marilla, & McKeachie, Wilbert J. (2011). *Teaching tips: Strategies, research, and theory for college and university teachers*. Wadsworth Cengage Learning, p. 59]

In fact, “Students learn to write from continual trial-and-error writing and almost never profit from lectures, from teacher-centered classes, or from studying and memorizing isolated rules” (p. v).

One way to guide students is by providing good (and poor) examples of good writing in your discipline. Give them relevant scholarly sources to read, as well as student papers. You could annotate the sources to point out your own expectations.

Faculty DO write their own papers in their discipline

We can introduce students to our discipline – the transition from writing for an English class and writing in a scholarly discipline is a very difficult one! “Be patient when students express greater comfort with shallower learning challenges. At the outset of a college education, it is developmentally normal to resist thinking in complex ways” [Glenn, C, Goldthwaite, M. A., & Connors, R. (2003). *The St. Martin’s guide to teaching writing*. Bedford/ St. Martin’s, p. 3.]

Practical Reminders:

- Have clear, well-defined prompts and rubrics to guide students
- Help students see the relevance of writing to your discipline
- Consider putting students in “research groups” of about 3. They can exchange drafts without taking class time
- Send students to the FHSS Writing Lab

Best Wishes for a Fruitful Semester

FHSS Writing Lab

1175 JFSB

<https://fhsswriting.byu.edu/Pages/Home.aspx>

801-422-4454

Faculty Supervisor: Joyce Adams (422-8168)

Student Lab Manager: Rebecca (422-4454)