



**Understanding and Creating Academic Discourse May be Difficult for Students:  
How Can We Help?**

<b>Why is it so difficult for our bright students to write in our disciplines?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students may not know how to locate or to read scholarly sources</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students may choose topics about which they lack background knowledge (Flower, 1987 as cited in Hauptman et al., 2003, p. 6)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students may simply “move information from outside sources to their own written research papers, without engaging in critical, original thinking” and engage in a “knowledge-telling strategy” (Bereiter &amp; Scardamalia, 1987, as cited in Hauptman et al., 2003, p. 124).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students cannot analyze, evaluate, or synthesize without a knowledge base. (Students need help to competently understand and use knowledge from multiple sources in specialized disciplines.)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are “trying to record and recall large amounts of material,” which may mean they are missing the <i>connections</i> among facts, concepts, and viewpoints (Gottschalk, K., &amp; Hjortshoj, K. [2004]. <i>The elements of teaching writing: A resource for instructors in all disciplines</i>. Boston: Bedford/ St. Martins, p. 19).</li> </ul>
<b>Students may have misperceptions about what professors expect from them</b>
(from “The U of Pittsburgh Study of Writing: A Report on Writing” 2009):
<b>Students’ Perceptions of What Professors Want:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exact answers</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence that students are doing the readings</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of students’ own thinking</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organized/ clear structure</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well-constructed argument</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perfect grammar, punctuation, &amp; spelling</li> </ul>

<b>Students Want Help in Improving Writing:</b> [These strategies may help our students]
• Explain the relevance of the assigned writing – not just “busy work”
• Create comments that are informative instead of “great job”
• Offer the opportunity to write about something that matters to them
• Include explicit guidelines for an assignment
• Include a rubric that correlates with the writing prompt (distribute the rubric with the prompt)
• Provide explicit feedback on a draft with the opportunity to revise
• Provide model student papers – both poor and good papers

**Other strategies that might help our students adjust to writing in our disciplines:**

**Peer Review** “Seeing examples of the work of others and commenting on them also helps students become more objective and critical about their own work. Students respond to others’ understanding of what quality looks like and how to produce it.” (Svinicki, Marilla, & McKeachie, Wilbert J. (2011). *Teaching tips: Strategies, research, and theory for college and university teachers*. United States: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, p. 117)

**Model good practices in research, reading, and writing** Adults need to model the writing strategies for students. Then, students need to practice with our support before they can move on to independent student performance. (Dean, Deborah. (2010). *What works in writing instruction: Research and practices*. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, p. 11)

**Guided practice with peers** It can be very helpful to create small groups of students and provide opportunities for each group to discuss their research and writing (Ibid., p. 12)

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