



What are Your Expectations for Student Writing?

What is your purpose for assigning writing? What do you expect from student writing? What do students think you expect? What help do students think they need to improve their writing?

What Faculty May Expect from Student Writing:

- Handle multiple sources, ideas, or points of view
- Address challenging questions about their writing
- Think critically
- Write with precision, nuance, and awareness of [conventions of the discipline]
- Achieve clarity, conciseness, & coherence (“University of Pittsburgh Study of Writing: A Report on Writing in the School of Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Curriculum,” 2009).
- Use appropriate scholarly writing as evidence

In contrast, What Might Students Think Teachers Want?

- Correct answers
- Evidence that students are doing the readings
- Organized/ clear structure
- Well-constructed argument (“University of Pittsburgh Study of Writing: A Report on Writing in the School of Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Curriculum,” 2009).
- Use of the best sources and authorities on the topic
- Perfect grammar, spelling, and documentation use

Based on Students’ Perceptions of What Teachers Want, What Help Do Students Think They Need to Improve Their Writing:

- Explain the relevance of the assigned writing – not just “busy work”?
- Create faculty 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 [this may be a desire for faculty to edit the student paper, rather than look at global elements of the paper]
- Provide model student papers – both poor and good papers (“University of Pittsburgh Study of Writing: A Report on Writing in the School of Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Curriculum,” 2009).

Student and Faculty Perceptions May Differ:

This gap between faculty and student expectations occurs for many reasons. Here are two insights to help us understand the gap: A 2005 study by Rebekah Nathan revealed that students “spent approximately two hours per day on all schoolwork [It is my understanding that students should spend about 2 hours out of class for every hour in class.] including ‘studying, reading, doing research, and writing papers, as well as watching class videos and meeting with project groups.” (Beth L. Hewitt. 2015. *Reading to Learn and Writing to Teach: Literacy Strategies for Online Writing Instruction*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, pp. 15-16). Students may view our course content as simply a hoop to jump through putting in as little effort as possible. They may not see the value of putting more time into their education.

A second problem is that students “can search broadly, but they may not see any reason to search deeply . . . once a question has been answered, however shallowly, their fast world and research inexperience seem to push young college students to the next concern.” (Beth L. Hewitt. 2015. *Reading to Learn and Writing to Teach: Literacy Strategies for Online Writing Instruction*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, p. 28). This problem was illustrated in my class recently. My students tried to persuade me that it is no longer necessary to critically read entire scholarly articles; they believe that by googling the topic they can get a more complete argument in much less time.

Understand the Disparity Between Faculty and Student Expectations:

We can help reduce the gap by being very clear about our expectations and the value to the students. For example, “few students really expect, as they begin college, to produce more than one draft of an essay.” Students look at their first draft as the completion of the assignment. It is our job to help students realize that the first draft is the “*beginning* of the composing process” (Edward M. White & Cassie A. Wright. (2016). *Assigning, responding, evaluating: A writing teacher’s guide*. Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin’s, pp. 3-4.)

Emphasize the Value of Student Work:

One way to validate student writing is to use class time to discuss the progress of student papers: “Any assignment demanding substantial student effort is worth discussing in class as the work progresses. The most valuable discussion often emerges from presentations of what the other students in the class are working on. As students listen to their peers’ plans, they [may] begin to envision new possibilities” (Edward M. White & Cassie A. Wright. (2016). *Assigning, responding, evaluating: A writing teacher’s guide*. Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin’s, p. 14.) Using class time can also offer the instructor time to make suggestions or brief comments and help eliminate problems in student topics and papers.

We can reduce our frustration with student writing as we clarify our expectations for both ourselves and our students.

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