



## Why Should I Teach Writing: It is NOT my Job

“Writing is not simply a way for students to demonstrate what they know. It is a way to help them understand what they know. At its best, writing is learning.” (National Commission)

## Why Don't Students Know How to Write?

### ***What is Wrong With Student Writing?***

*My students apparently do not know how to*

- *Write or think critically*
- *Present an argument*
- *State and support a thesis*
- *Use and document sources*
- *Revise and proofread their papers*
- *Use basic grammar and punctuation*

(Gottschalk & Hjortshoj, 2004)

- ♣ 40% of high school seniors say they have never had to write a paper as long as 3 pages
- ♣ “High school and freshman composition teachers cannot prepare students for disciplinary writing”
- ♣ Many BYU students were not required to take freshman composition

Actually – students DO know how to write; they have been writing and getting A's! But – they do NOT know how to write in the disciplines

## What Kind of Writing Do I Need to Teach?

Thesis? ~~~ Structure? ~~~ Paragraphs? ~~~ Grammar? ~~~ Punctuation?

Only teach the writing principles that are important to you. When necessary, create explanations and post on Learning Suite instead of taking class time.

Teach the expectations for writing in your discipline. For example, I need to explain to my psychology students that although I require a persuasive literature review, in psychology we use “hedge” words instead of overt claims.

For writing in the discipline, undergraduates need guidance and models of good and poor papers. Save copies of student papers (with their permission) and comments you make. These can provide models of good (or poor) student writing, once the students' names have been removed. (Post them on Learning Suite; do not make copies to hand out.)

Does all student written work have to be graded? No! Writing is one means of understanding course content more fully. A variety of writing tasks can be assigned that do not need to be evaluated.

If you assign long papers that will be due at the end of the semester and you are not happy with the results, consider choosing shorter, more relevant writing tasks. For example, instead of a 20-page paper on a single topic, assign 3 5-page papers. The grading for the 3 similar papers could increase in rigor after each paper. Or assign 3 different types of writing, such as a book review, a policy paper, and an executive summary.

The quality of student papers is often dependent on how well professors prepare students. Simply assigning writing without instruction is insufficient. Be explicit in instructing students; well-developed prompt + a rubric to guide students.

### **Integrate writing with course content**

**Remember!** Student learning does not occur “if students are passively listening, reading, and taking notes primarily to absorb large amounts of information” (Gottschalk & Hjortshoj, 2004, p. 19).

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#### References

Gottschalk, Katherine, and Keith Hjortshoj. (2004). *The Elements of Teaching Writing: A Resource for Instructors in All Disciplines*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges. (2003). "The Neglected 'R': The Need for a Writing Revolution." College Board.