



I Do Not Have Time to Teach Students How to Write!

Frustrated?

Faculty may be frustrated because students do not come to their class with adequate writing skills.

Students may be frustrated because they believe they already write well and do not need instruction or writing assignments because they always received an A on high school papers.

Should I eliminate writing assignments since I do not want to teach writing?

Harvard seniors “identified the courses that had the most profound impact on them as courses in which they wrote papers” (Light, R. J. [2004] *Making the most of college: Students speak their minds*, p. 64). Instead of eliminating writing opportunities, choose writing activities which support your goals and your timetable. Create ungraded or low-stakes writing to help them learn content.

Should I simply have papers due at the end of the semester since I do not plan to teach writing?

Writing should not be simply “tacked on” to a course. It should be part of the course content.

Simply assigning a paper due at the end of the semester with no instruction and no drafts does not provide “supported practice”; consider reviewing Vygotsky’s Scaffolding Learning Model. (Besides – who wants to spend the end of the semester grading papers?)

How can I enhance student learning without teaching writing principles?

Create clear prompts: “Clearly [communicate] standards and criteria. That means not just talking theoretically about what [you] am looking for in an A paper and what drags a paper down to B or C or F.”

Provide good and poor examples of student papers that indicate your expectations for the assigned writing: “Terms like ‘coherent’ and even ‘specific’ [and ‘flow’] are notoriously hard for students to grasp. . . . Students often learn more about well-connected and poorly-connected paragraphs or specificity or the lack of it in examples from the writing of each other than they learn from instruction alone or from examples of published writing.”

Clear criteria for grading: “Our actual grading sometimes reflects criteria we do not talk about, perhaps even that we are not aware of. . . . (Peter Elbow, p. 62)

Corbett, E. P. J., Myers, N. & Tate, G. (Eds.). (2000). *The writing teacher’s sourcebook*. NY: Oxford University Press.

Consider using the last 5-6 minutes of class periods to have students do informal writing. For example, students could connect new material to previous lectures or reading assignments.

Why should I include writing assignments since I do not want to teach writing?

Students can more deeply learn course content using writing (graded or ungraded). In one study, over 800 college students listened to lectures all semester. Each time the instructor presented a key concept, he or she asked one group of students to summarize the ideas and create examples. The instructor showed a PowerPoint to a second group of students summarizing key concepts with examples, then gave students class time to copy the slides. On an exam, students who had written in their own words scored significantly better on the key concepts than those who had copied the instructor's summaries.

It is not simply exposure to concepts that produce learning (Brown, P. C., Roediger, H. L., & McDaniel, M. A. [2014]. *Make It Stick*, pp. 89-90). Simply summarizing readings or lectures does not enable students to make connections to the bigger picture.

How can the FHSS Writing Lab help?

Professor Dee Higley completed a double-blind experiment to see if students who went to the FHSS Writing Lab submitted better papers than students who did not. A one-way heteroscedastic (unequal variances) t-test revealed that there was a significant difference ($p=0.021$). Although the sample size was small, this experiment suggests that attendance at the FHSS Writing Lab may enhance student academic performance.

If you would like some suggestions of writing assignments that enhance student learning, but do not require extensive grading time, or if you would like to revise your current writing assignments, I would be happy to meet with you to brainstorm for ideas --

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