

The Writing Campus
A Blog for Writing Across the Curriculum Faculty

From Writing “Intensive” to Writing “Integrated”: Keeping Student Writing at the Center of Your Class

AUGUST 28, 2014 / DR. M. LAFRANCE



By Michelle LaFrance

In WI courses, achieving a balance between crucial content, key learning goals, and explicit writing instruction is never an easy task. Because this balance is so delicate, “traditional” classes have often posed writing assignments as supplemental to the other work of the course—a paper or project completed outside class.

To kick off our new program blog, *The Writing Campus*, I wanted to ask faculty who teach WI courses to think about the ways they manage this important balance: *What do you do to overcome this divide between simply assigning writing and the need to teach writing?*

I will close here with a few examples of approaches for integrating writing into your courses—making instruction in effective written responses a central component of your WI class.

Strategies for Writing *Integrated* Courses

- Provide opportunities for low-stakes writing. There are strong connections between deep learning, active learning and writing. Allowing students to write their way into complex concepts helps them to think through those concepts as they go, building the skills they need for more formal writing.

- Sequence writing exercises. Because complicated skills are often best developed in steps, writing-integrated courses offer students a sequence of exercises as a “scaffold” with which to build complex understanding.
- Offer model responses for students to consider or evaluate. Ask students to discuss the effectiveness of different responses or to think about how a model does or does not meet the criteria of an assignment.
- Be sure to suggest the audience for different types of writing or approaches to problems. Discuss the differences between different audiences—what do some readers value, expect, or require that others do not?
- Ask for revisions following your comments. Students often produce better final products when they have had frequent trial runs and opportunities to respond to what a professor has said.
- Shape writing exercises to reflect course learning goals, discipline-specific concepts, and the sorts of problem-solving active in your field. Students engage most effectively with writing when they understand clearly how such writing can increase their understanding of key course concepts.

In the comments below, I invite you to share your thoughts, assignments, and techniques for *integrating writing* into your courses—keeping writing at the center of student learning. What to you is the difference between *assigning writing and teaching writing*?

Michelle LaFrance is the director of the George Mason University Writing Across the Curriculum program. Her academic work on the material conditions of writing programs has appeared in College Composition and Communication and edited collections in the field of Writing Studies. New to the DC area, she spent the summer discovering bike trails along the Potomac.

Link: <http://thewritingcampus.com/2014/08/28/from-writing-intensive-to-writing-integrated-keeping-student-writing-at-the-center-of-your-class/>