

Teaching Upper-Division Writing Intensive (GWAR) Courses Best Practices for Implementing GWAR Policy

Best practices suggested here are drawn from decades of research and study by scholars of writing. The Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) / Writing in the Disciplines (WID) movements argue that writing is fundamental to learning, problem-solving, and generating ideas, and that student learning of writing across the curriculum and in the discipline requires university-wide responsibility and involvement. GWAR-approved writing intensive courses do not simply involve more writing than other courses; they also engage students more actively and critically in their own learning of writing in order to help students achieve the learning outcome of writing more effectively in different disciplines and context.

The following are best practices for approaching these writing-intensive courses.

Design courses to support writing to learn as well as learning to write.

- Low stakes “writing to learn” assignments can help students comprehend and display knowledge of course content provided via lectures, readings, videos, etc. Such assignments help students become “active learners” by using writing to solve problems and think critically. In addition informal “writing to learn” activities can serve as a bridge to writing in the disciplines by assuring that students understand difficult content. These assignments are not intended to be marked up by the instructor but rather to provide a window into student understanding and synthesis of course material. Students can receive credit for completing such assignments and submitting on time. Such assignments in aggregate can count for a small portion of the course grade (5-10%).
 - Examples of writing to learn assignments might be a journal or blog (reading journal, learning log, project notebooks or sketchbooks).
- Higher stakes disciplinary writing assignments teach students to write in professional/academic genres specific to their field of study. Writing in the disciplines assignments help students learn and demonstrate mastery of both content and disciplinary writing conventions of their field.
 - Examples of writing in the disciplines assignments might be lab reports, literature reviews, research proposals, and scholarly essays.

Design assignments and course activities that include revisions and feedback. Learning to write is recursive, requiring continual practice and feedback. Writing assignments that include revisions and feedback from faculty allow for students to learn from feedback, think more

critically about how they write, and apply it in another iteration.

- Two or more assignments allow for recursive learning and transfer of knowledge and skills from one writing task to the next.
- Revision and feedback on papers (from faculty, writing tutors, and peers) provide students time to reflect on their writing and practice writing in order to improve. Revision in writing might be supported by curricular design that encourages stages of writing and/or multiple drafts.
- Peer review of assignments can be helpful for feedback, but faculty should also provide feedback on drafts if possible before final submission.
- Timely feedback can be provided at various stages of the writing process and in a variety of formats. An ongoing dialogue (such as via comments on Google docs) allows students to take ownership of the writing process, ask clarifying questions as needed, and learn to identify areas of strength and areas to improve.
 - For example, faculty might decide to provide a combination of written feedback and verbal feedback (live or recorded, either in person or via Zoom/Canvas).

Provide explicit communication of the process of writing supports metacognitive learning.

- Genres of writing (such as proposals, literature review, reports) should be discussed and analyzed with samples if possible.
- Clear rubrics for how assignments will be assessed help students understand the standards by which their work will be measured. (You might encourage student to generate rubrics as a class).
- Open lines of communication should allow for instructor expectations to be articulated and clarified as students progress from the initial, brainstorming phase through each draft and subsequent revision.
- Examples/models of assignments might be discussed in class:
 - Assignments may be assigned in stages to break down different components of the writing
 - Clearly articulated genre conventions of course/discipline.

Writing Across the Curriculum Resources

- [CI Writing Guide](#)
- [WAC Clearinghouse Statement of WAC Principles and Practices](#)
- [What Makes a Good Writing Assignment?](#)
- [How Can I Handle Responding to Student Drafts?](#)
- [Teaching & Learning Innovations Faculty Development Workshop: Writing to Learn](#)
- [Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing \(by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project\)](#)

Sample Syllabi & Assignments

- [ENGL 330 Syllabus](#)
- [ENGL 330 Assignments](#)
- [SOC 305 Syllabus](#)
- [SOC 305 Assignments](#)
- [HIST 300 Syllabus](#)
- [HIST 300 Assignments](#)
- [ESRM 335 Syllabus](#)
- [ESRM 335 Assignments](#)

Sample Rubrics

- [CI Composition Program](#)
- [CI G.E. Rubric for Written Communication](#)
- [AACU Written Communication VALUE Rubric](#)