

### Helping Students Write!

A "Write Place" workshop
Presented by Dr. Kem Roper, Director
January 20, 2022

#### 2021 WORKSHOP RE-CAP

#### What We Covered:

- 1. Clarifying expectations
- 2.Helping students think
- 3. Writing to Learn vs Learning to Write

#### Clarifying Expectations

- Our unrealistic or unspoken expectations can set students up for failure!
- For example, each of us has a slightly different expectation of what a research paper should do



It's our responsibility to make our expectations clear, not to assume that students know "how to write a research paper."

#### ALSO

The "research paper" is not monolithic.
 Research looks different in every discipline and how research is shared will look different too.



#### Helping Students Think

- If we want students to become scholars in this discipline, we have to show them what scholars in our discipline do and why they do it!
- If we ever expect students to "get it" we have to find creative ways to engage them
- In order to engage them, we have to first understand who they are and where they are
- We also have to help them make connections between their old knowledge and the new knowledge that we invite them into

## Macdonald's four stages of student development as writers



- 1. Nonacademic writing (what students bring from high school)
- 2. Generalized academic writing (freshman comp)
- 3. Novice approximations of particular disciplinary ways of making knowledge (early courses in major)
- Expert, insider prose (advanced courses in the major)

Bean 228

#### Our Goal

To move students from outsider to disciplinary insider-from novice to expert



### What I'm Inviting Us to Do

Think Critically/Use Writing to Learn/Teach Students Deep Reading

#### Think Critically

#### **Evaluate Each Assignment**

- What is the purpose of this assignment? How does it fulfill a course or discipline objective?
- 2. What is the important question I want students to answer with this assignment? And why?
- What **information** do they need in order to fulfill the requirement? Have I provided them with the tools that they need?



#### Think Critically

- How are students interpreting our instructions? How do I know? Ask!
- What assumptions do they make? What assumptions have I made?
- What are the key concepts students need to understand in order to do this assignment? (ie "research," "analysis," "critique")

#### Think Critically

- Are we aware of our privileged point of view? Can we put ourselves in their shoes?
- What are the consequences if we misunderstand one another? Do I allow for this possibility? Do I have a plan if understanding breaks down?

#### Use Writing to Learn

- Use writing to help students understand content in a deeper way
- Give non-evaluative feedback on low-stakes writing assignments
- Build low-stakes/ungraded writing requirements into high-stakes, graded writing assignments



# Today's workshop is all about asking questions

How do we move students from reacting to course content to engaging with course content?

How many of you tried some of the techniques or assignments suggested last semester?

How did it go? What worked, what didn't work and why?



#### What do you think would happen if...

you give 5 "low-stakes" writing-to-learn assignments in the first 5 weeks of class. Students get 10 points for doing it by the deadline 0 points if they don't.

for the mid-term exam you give a 2 question shortanswer mid-term that covers the content of those first 5 assignments. Maybe they are questions that could easily be answered if they did the first 5 "warm up" assignments.

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#### What do you think...

you give 5 "low-stakes" writing-to-learn assignments in the last 5 weeks of class. Students get 10 points for doing it by the deadline 0 points if they don't. 3

the final exam is an essay, research paper, or another 2-question exam that covers what was in the second set of low-stakes activities



# Might that help students to be intrinsically motivated to do the low stakes assignments?

Might the low-stakes assignments help them gain deeper knowledge of the content?

## Writing to Learn

The Principle

#### Writing = Thinking

- Writing is not a box into which we place pre-formulated ideas
- Writing is the way that we discover, uncover and unlock our thoughts!
- Through writing we come to a deeper understanding and deeper knowledge



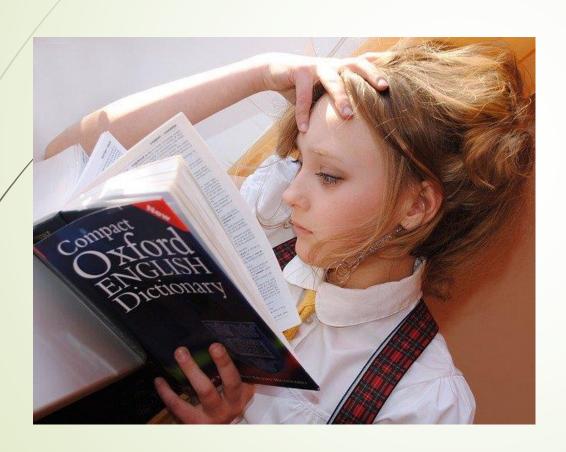
#### Writing = Thinking

- We can teach students to write, but let's first show students how to use writing to learn
- If we use writing activities to introduce students to your course content without the pressure to create something in perfect form, could we build on that?

### Teaching Students How to Read

Reading and writing go hand in hand

## Deep Reading



Students need to become deep readers who focus on meaning, as opposed to surface readers who focus on facts and information Bean (Chapter 9)

## Deep Reading Avoid pseudo-learning

- Quizzes and tests on reading assignments (especially multiple-choice) encourage "surface learning" based in short-term memorization
- Deep learning transforms one's perspective and involves long-term comprehension
- If we want to address the causes of students' reading difficulties, we must try to change academic cultures that reward surface learning

## Deep Reading

- Prep them before they read—give context, audience, purpose, author background, maybe even the major question at issue
- Create a reading guide
- Let them compare two articles on the same topic with different perspectives



#### Deep Reading

- Make them DO something with the knowledge they gain from the reading
  - Set up a debate between two groups, have them argue for and against the premise of the article or chapter
  - Tell them to include evidence from the text to support their argument

#### Make students teach

Have them do 5-10 minute presentations (individually or in small groups) explaining a concept that you covered in previous class, or that was in the previous reading assignment

## Designing Writing Assignments

Principles of Assignment Design/Tools and Techniques to try

### Good Writing Assignments

- Deepen student's engagement with course material
- Promøtes critical thinking
- Helps them learn the discipline's discourse—its characteristic methods of inquiry, analysis, and argumentation



#### 5 Principles of Assignment Design

- Tie the writing task to specific pedagogical goals
- Note rhetorical aspects of the task (audience, purpose, writing situation)
- Make all elements of the task clear
- Include grading criteria on the assignment sheet
- Break down the task into manageable steps

The following assignments are good for students' self-reflection. I would not suggest you assign a grade—only credit for doing

# Easy to Grade or No-Grade Writing Assignments that Prompt Thinking



- Reverse outline
- What it says/What it does outline
- Summary Response/Double-Entry Reading Logs
- Graphic organizers
- Journal—free-writing, inclass activities

## You can send them to the Writing Center for us to do some of these with them...

We will help them to interpret their writing and offer suggestions for next steps

#### Public Service Announcement!

#### WHAT WE DO...

- Teach students about writing
- Coach students to improve their writing process
- Offer feedback, suggestions and support
- Explain concepts & rules they don't understand





### WHAT WE DON'T DO...

Approve, review, sign off, check, fix, edit, critique, assign value

#### Reverse Outline

# In journal or as a homework assignment:

- Assign numbers for each paragraph
- Write a sentencesummary of each paragraph



# REVERSE OUTLINE EXAMPLE

Thesis: Katniss Everdeen, the heroine of The Hunger Games, creates as much danger for herself as she faces from others over the course of the film.

Main idea

How it supports the thesis

Body #1: She volunteers to fight in the games.

This is the root of most of the immediate danger she finds herself in, so her directly volunteering to do it definitely helped put her in font of that danger.

Body #2: Shooting the apple out of the pig's mouth.

This draws more attention to her and essentially puts a target on her back the other tributes will very much want to hit.

#### What it Says/What it Does

#### In journal or as a homework assignment:

- Create a table with 3 columns
- In column 1 assign numbers for each paragraph
- In column 2 write 1-2 sentence summary of what each paragraph says
- In column 3 explain the purpose. What is the author doing here?

para	Says	
1	Since the 1970s the proportion of women in many scientific fields has increased size in	Does
	would be morally wrong and hurtful to science to turn back the clock.	Introduces the subject of gender difference and presents author's assurance that he respects and
2	Although Summers was not trying to turn back the clock, many prominent scientists and engineers protested vehemently against his speech.	values women scientists  Makes transition to Summers' case and lists examples of negative reaction against Summers  Rejects the popular press's misrepresentation of Summers by summarizing Summers' actual argument
	Summers never claimed that women have inferior math abilities; rather, he attributed women's underrepresentation in science and engineering to three factors: possible discrimination; possible biological gender differences; and women's reluctance to sacrifice family and child-rearing to time-intensive jobs.	
t	Anyone who has seen men talking about gadgets can understand why women might not be attracted to engineering; however, we must turn to science to help us determine to what extent gender differences are biological.	Supports the reasonableness of Summers' argument and asserts importance of using science to help determine whether gender differences are biological or cultural
d ch ha di of	the negative consequences of overestimating discrimination against women include falsely tharging innocent people of sexism, proposing armful remedies such as quota systems, and everting attention from university policies on timing tenure that hurt women during the childbearing tears.	Shows the negative consequences of overestimating discrimination against women as the cause of women's underrepresentation in science and engineering

#### Summary Response/ Double-Entry Reading Logs

- A 2-column reading log
- On the left side they summarize the author's main points
- On the right side they respond to the author's main points

#### Summary Response/ Double-Entry Reading Logs

#### WHAT THE AUTHOR SAID

- His/her thesis
- His/her points that support the thesis

#### **MY RESPONSE**

- Possible Responses:
  - ☐ Things I don't understand
  - ☐Things I don't agree with
  - ■What this reminds me of
  - ☐ How my experience compares/connects
  - ■What makes me angry
  - ☐ My opinion in contrast to the author
  - □ Evidence that is lacking

#### Graphic Organizers

- Some students are visual learners
- Allow them to represent the author's main points with a mind map!
- The author's main point would go in the center and their interpretation of the supporting points in the outside bubbles
- Sub-points and support are connected to main points



- Do a mind map together as a class, then assign them one for homework
- Let them compare their maps in class, then discuss
- olt might be interesting to see the differences in interpretations

#### Journaling/Free-writing

Requiring a dedicated notebook or journal is a good way to keep track of the low-stakes writing activities that you have students do

 Use journals as a location for students to explore thought Have them write responses to assigned readings



- Let them free-write on a topic for class discussion before beginning the discussion
- Journals can be collected once or twice a semester and checked for compliance—if they did it, they get credit!
- If you can't collect journals, promise an occasional pop quiz on required journal entries. If they refuse to keep up with it, they will lose double points

#### SETTING UP FOR ESSAY-WRITING

How to Set up Your Students for Success

#### Progress, not Perfection!

- Writing is a process—we have to teach with this in mind
- Don't expect students to produce a polished, well-thought-out finished product without your guidance
- Embed deadlines for small tasks that build to the final
- Remember that attention spans are short AND students need time to process information

#### Progress, not Perfection!

- Think about your own writing and researching process!
- What steps do you take to get to the finished piece?
- Think about the messiness that happens before the end. This is where we meet our students--in that foggy place
- Don't leave them there!

# Use Peer Review to save yourself from grading

- o Have students exchange papers and evaluate each other according to your rubric
- Use reverse outline for peer review activity
- Send students to The "Write Place" with your rubric!



#### Benefits of Scheduled Peer Review

- Students benefit from peer feedback and discussion
- This also forces them to begin writing early and to write multiple drafts
- You only have to grade the final draft



#### **Review as a Class:**

- evaluate a sample paper using your rubric
- Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the model paper
- This will help them think about what is required when they write

#### If students struggle with language



- When students respond to a text, they often don't know what to say
- If you give students the "compare two articles" assignment they may also struggle with depth
- Templates give them some guidance

# They Say/I Say Templates to Compare Texts

X argues \_\_\_\_\_, but y argues \_\_\_\_\_

X is right about \_\_\_\_\_\_, but y has a good point about \_\_\_\_\_ because\_\_\_\_

Although y believes \_\_\_\_\_ x thinks \_\_\_\_\_

#### Using Templates to Respond to Text

- lagree that \_\_\_\_\_\_ because my experience with \_\_\_\_\_ confirms it.
- This author's concept of \_\_\_\_\_\_ is extremely important because \_\_\_\_\_
- This author's claim that \_\_\_\_\_ assumes that
- I disagree with this author's view that \_\_\_\_\_\_\_
  because \_\_\_\_\_

How to Discourage Plagiarism

- Give them the sources for the research assignment
- Do pre-writing and discussion of research topics in class
- Assign 2 small research papers instead of one long one OR



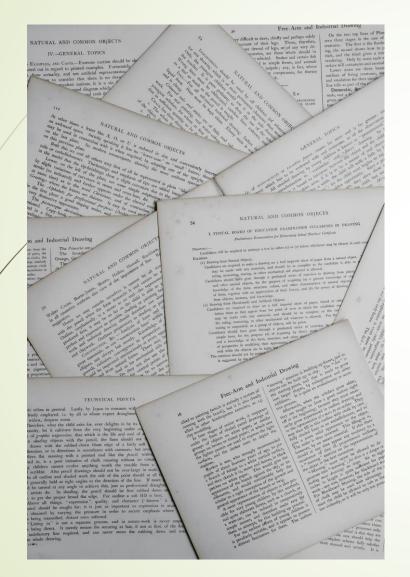
#### How to Discourage Plagiarism

- Divide long paper into two separate assignments—(ie give lit review first then the other sections for second part)
- Use the shorter assignments as low-stakes—give them feedback but few points. The focus is on early guidance on research process
- This helps them to understand your expectations/priorities

How to Discourage Plagiarism

- Setting deadlines for parts of the paper reinforces the importance of the writing and research process
- Assign annotated bibliography due a week or two before final paper





- Use other low-stakes assignments, already mentioned, as feeder assignments for the final paper—all the points add up!
- Have them write early drafts of the paper in class using the notes in their class journal
- Collect these drafts, but don't grade. Skim to see if they're going in the right direction. Give feedback where needed

# **Assessment**



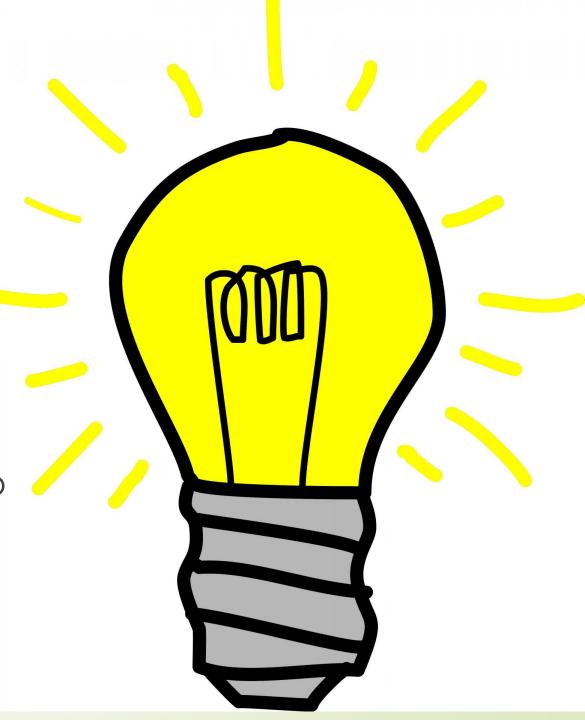
- Grading is a form of assessment
- But what are we assessing?
- When should grades be assigned?

#### **FYI...**



 Grading does not necessarily lead students to deep engagement

- I would suggest that assessment should be informative rather than punitive
- Grading should come after we've assessed students knowledge and we have provided them with the information to add to that knowledge
- The grade, then, communicates the extent to which the student reached the standard they've been "training for" during the semester



#### Set the Bar

- Let students know up front what matters most with this assignment (rubrics)
- For low-stakes assignments, a greater % of the grade should be on:
  - Evidence of critical thinking (did they ask good questions?
  - Engaging with the course content (even if they misunderstand something)
- Less of the grade should be for wrong answers
  - Use their misunderstanding as information—now you know what to teach in the next lesson!
  - Guide them to better understanding.



#### Rubrics

- Let's look at some sample rubrics
- In deciding which type to use, keep in mind the goals for each assignment
- Set priorities for each assignment
- Evaluate fewer things with low-stakes assignments
- Use your assignment instructions to create rubric; grade them on what you required of them!

#### <u>Resources</u>

Google folder of handouts to accompany this presentation