Introduction
Designing effective assignments
Responding to and evaluating student assignments

INTRODUCTION

By 1990, nearly 40% of American colleges and universities had established writing across the curriculum (WAC) programs of some sort, and the number continues to rise. Still, WAC programs, whatever their size or place within the institutional structure, continue to elicit questions: What are the benefits to students and faculty of using writing in courses outside English? How much difference can instructors trained to teach content-driven courses make to students' writing anyway? And how can teachers committed to covering a wealth of material in an impossibly limited space of time add writing instruction to their already overloaded syllabi? This is especially problematic when other programs, such as research across the curriculum, critical thinking across the curriculum, and active learning across the curriculum are also calling for attention--and for equally good reasons. While we cannot pretend to exhaust such questions in this manual, we do endeavor to address them, along with other questions that may arise about WAC, whether from instructors who have used writing in their courses for years or from those only now beginning to incorporate writing into their teaching philosophies and agendas.

Our purpose in this manual is multi-fold. First, since the WAC program at GCC is quite new, we offer a brief history of our program and of WAC programs generally, along with a definition of WAC both in its theoretical and its practical dimensions. We also address some of the questions that commonly arise in relation to designing writing assignments and evaluating student writing, and we have included a guide to writing resources at other institutions and on-line. In addition, and with much thanks to the generosity of GCC faculty from across the disciplines, we have compiled an initial archive of hands-on writing materials (along with instructors' explanatory notes). These portions of the manual are works in progress to which we will continue to add as we receive new materials from faculty. The materials range from informal assignments, to supplemental course handouts, to formal assignments such as essays and research projects. We hope that you'll take the time to browse these materials, use any of them "as is," or adapt them with appropriate modification to suit your course. Most importantly, we hope that you'll see these materials as we have come to see them: that is, as opportunities for collaboration and for learning from the pedagogical expertise of a faculty exceptionally committed to classroom innovation and student success.

This manual is one of several components central to GCC's WAC program and to students' writing and learning development. Other components include the Writing Center, the library, a WAC website (www.glendale.edu/wac), faculty-development events, one-on-one consultations between faculty and WAC administrators, and semester-long workshops composed of a small, rotating group of faculty from across the disciplines. We encourage your calls and emails concerning WAC generally or the use of writing in your own courses specifically. If you have any questions, comments, or ideas, related to WAC, or if you would be interested in participating on the WAC committee, please contact WAC coordinators Amber Casolari (casolari@glendale.edu; x3028) or Monette Tiernan (mtiernan@glendale.edu; x5160). We look forward to hearing from and working with you in upcoming semesters.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WAC

WAC originated in the mid-1970s, partly in response to an increasing awareness of students' writing deficiencies, not only in entry-level college courses but in graduate seminars as well. Following the lead of some of WAC's earliest proponents, such as Toby Fulwiler, Susan McLeod, Peter Elbow, and Elaine Maimon, many college instructors came to believe that the increasing compartmentalization of writing instruction, its relegation to one or two semesters of English composition, could not possibly provide students with sufficient written skills to perform successfully in advanced (and increasingly specialized) courses across the disciplines (Thaiss 1). This conviction helped to initiate what is still the primary staple of most WAC programs today: small groups of faculty from various disciplines working together to define the problems they encounter in their students' writing and to generate strategies to address those problems.

Although WAC programs in their earliest stages focused largely on improving students' writing, it soon became apparent that when students wrote more frequently and in more of their courses, there were a number of ancillary benefits. As Chris Anson notes in his recent work, The WAC Casebook (2002), "students became more active learners, more thoughtful readers, and more engaged participants in class as a result of putting their knowledge, uncertainties, speculations, and intellectual connections into words on a page" (x). They also began to see writing not merely as the unfortunate requirement of "irrelevant" English courses but as an activity central to their growth as learners and thinkers, whatever their majors. In other words, what became clear was that the very act of writing, whether formal (as in graded essays) or informal (as in "free writing" or written brainstorming), promoted students' learning of course material at the same time that it honed their written skills. Gradually, then, WAC programs came to be associated not only with instruction in writing but also with other campus-wide curricular movements critical to student success. Currently, in fact, some of the most useful books on WAC, such as John C. Bean's Engaging Ideas (2002), focus more on the relation of writing to active learning and critical thinking than on the improvement of writing *per se*.

The WAC program at GCC began in 2001 with a small task force appointed by the Academic Senate. One of our first projects on the task force was to conduct a faculty survey concerning the kinds of writing occurring in courses across the curriculum, the extent of instructor satisfaction with the written work of students, and the faculty's level of interest in implementing a system of college support to improve students' performance in written communication. The results of the survey indicated that the majority of faculty were mildly to hopelessly distraught over the state of student writing in their courses, and most said (not surprisingly) that they would be willing to try any form of institutional support that might help. What was surprising (and happily so, to many on the task force) was that the survey also revealed an impressive amount of writing in nearly all disciplines. This suggested that despite extensive dissatisfaction with the quality of writing they received, most instructors who responded to the survey were nonetheless committed to writing's relevance in their classrooms. It also told us that, unlike many fledgling WAC programs, which face the onerous task of trying to persuade faculty to

use more writing in their courses (often implementing along the way required "writing-intensive" courses across the curriculum), our program could focus instead on the friendlier, though no less rigorous, task of figuring out how to get better results from the writing already being assigned. Further, we realized that many on the task force had believed prior to the survey that they were the only ones who required writing in their courses. We realized, in other words, how little we knew about each other (at least insofar as writing went) and how much we all had to talk about in terms of our course materials, our experiences, and our expertise.

The following year, we began the discussion. Funded by a grant from Title V, we hired a WAC coordinator from the English division and established a WAC committee, with members acting as liaisons to their respective divisions. We set priorities, met with Writing Center and library staff, and ran a number of small, introductory workshops for faculty, focusing on such topics as "Integrating Writing into the Syllabus," "Writing to Learn," "Assignment Design," and "Responding to Student Writing." A year later (2003), we hired a co-coordinator from the Social Sciences division. In addition to in-house workshops, we also invited WAC experts Susan McLeod (U.C. Santa Barbara) and John Edlund (Cal Poly Pomona) to run two full-day faculty workshops. We also created a WAC website with writing resources for students and faculty, which we continue streamline and augment.

Most recently, we have begun to offer a workshop in which up to ten selected instructors meet with WAC coordinators and each other five times over the semester to create and/or revise the writing-related materials for their course(s). Instructors receive a stipend and, in return, agree to make both their work and their assessment of student progress available to the entire faculty in a faculty showcase or other comparable forum. Prior to each semester, we advertise the workshop to solicit faculty. In the meantime, if you have interest in joining one of these workshops, please contact Monette or Amber with any questions. Included in this manual are some of the assignments and materials resulting from last semester's workshop.

WAC IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Because the components of WAC programs vary greatly according to the diverse resources and needs of particular institutions, it is difficult to offer a definition of WAC that holds true for all involved. What we can say is that *most* WAC programs subscribe to a common philosophy of writing—both of what writing is and of what it can do. In the 1970s, roughly at the same time that early WAC practitioners were theorizing the need for more attention to writing in courses across the disciplines, teachers of English composition were also re-envisioning the ways in which they thought about and taught writing. Prior to this time, writing teachers had largely emphasized the finished "product." Lessons on essay structure and grammar were given in a lecture format, writing assignments were distributed, and papers (generally written in a "single shot") were submitted to instructors, who handed them back with grades and (often copious) corrections of grammatical and logical flaws. In opposition to this practice, researchers

in composition, psycholinguistics, and learning theory, such as James Britton and Janet Emig, were formulating new ideas about writing and writing instruction that began to shift the pedagogical focus away from writing-as-product toward *writing-as-process.*

As the process model of writing took stronger hold, instructors came to understand students' writing not merely as a way of *reproducing* thought but also as a complex intellectual activity that is *constitutive of* thought. In other words, most writers, including student writers, construct meaning (identify ideas, draw connections between concepts, refine or clarify thoughts, and so forth) *in the act of writing*. The implications of this model dramatically transformed what writing instructors did in the classroom and laid the groundwork for the kinds of writing instruction still encouraged by WAC programs today. In short, the core principles of writing instruction advocated by WAC are that, in order to produce better writing, students need to write more (and more often), they need to receive constructive feedback (from instructors, tutors, and/or peers), and they need to have opportunities to revise.

Intimately connected to the process model of writing is the idea that if, indeed, the act of writing helps writers to discover what they know, to generate new ideas, to think in sustained and critical ways about those ideas, and to make "visible" to themselves and to others what they understand and don't understand, then writing is, as Janet Emig put it in her essay of 1977, "a mode of learning." For proponents of WAC, this was a groundbreaking concept, for it meant that when students wrote regularly in courses across the disciplines, they would not simply become better writers but would also "transform…from passive to active learners, deepening their understanding of subject matter while…learn[ing] the thinking processes of the discipline: how members of the discipline ask questions, conduct inquiries, gather and analyze data, and make arguments" (Bean xi). Today, this concept, commonly known as "writing to learn," is integral to most WAC programs across the country and influences the kinds of writing tasks instructors design for their students both in English courses and other disciplines.

Finally, along with the process model of writing and the idea of writing to learn, most WAC programs encourage attention to how writing conventions differ from discipline to discipline. While there are of course certain features of good writing that most instructors would agree upon—clear organization, logical thinking, a relative command of grammar, an appropriate sense of audience, and so forth—other features of good writing are not so easily defined with consistency across the academic board. What constitutes a good thesis, for example, is open to considerable debate, a point that was driven home at one of our recent workshops here at GCC. One instructor remarked that she often gave her students a "formula" for the thesis and told them that this formula would basically work in any discipline. Every thesis, she said, needed to have two parts: it needed to name the topic of the paper (that is, *what* idea, person, place, or thing the paper was about); and it needed to name one or more points (that is, what ideas the writer would assert or argue *about* the topic). Other members of the workshop (there were several disciplines represented) politely and promptly, intervened, pointing out reasons why that model might not work in their disciplines and also providing the group with alternative models. When we consider that even the *thesis*—that most sacrosanct of

academic prose basics—is flagrantly open to question, we can only imagine the frustrations our students face as they move through a semester or a year of writing in a multitude of disciplines: what counts as "good evidence" in a literature course might not be considered evidence at all in a sociology course; conventions of argumentation and analysis might not be the same in philosophy as they are in a speech class; a topic "narrow enough" for a five-page paper in a history course might seem inconceivably broad for the same length paper in a biology course—not to mention the shifts in disciplinary convention that occur when it comes to conducting proper research and to citing and documenting sources (processes which even faculty these days often scramble to keep abreast of).

None of this is to say that students should not be challenged by our assignments. What is does suggest, however, is that we need to attempt as much as possible to demystify academic writing for our students, making clear not only our expectations and grading criteria but also the assumptions that underlie (often implicitly) our reasons for assigning a given writing task in the first place. To accomplish these ends, we need not be composition teachers. In fact, a recent document prepared by college writing program administrators across the country suggests some of the ways in which instructors in all disciplines can enhance students' command of both writing and content by helping students to learn, where appropriate,

- The main features of writing in their fields
- The main uses of writing in their fields
- The expectations of readers in their fields
- The uses of writing as a critical thinking tool
- The interactions among critical thinking, critical reading, and writing
- The conventions of usage, specialized vocabulary, format, and documentation in their fields
- The value of collaboration, feedback, and revision in the writing process (WPA Outcomes Committee 324-25)

This kind of instruction, far from taking class time away from the teaching of course content, can most often quite easily be built into already existing assignments and syllabi. Later sections of this manual include specific assignments and other writing-related course materials into which instructors have successfully incorporated one or more of these strategies.

Designing Effective Assignments

Along with other educational services, the first two years of college provide students with an introduction to the conventions of academic writing. At community colleges, the difficulty of such orientation is complicated by the fact that the student body often consists largely of first-year college students, first-generation college students, adult students returning to school after years in the workplace, students who speak English as a second or third language, and students who are new to U.S. culture (academic and otherwise). While required English and ESL courses cover many of the basics of English grammar and essay structure, these courses cannot familiarize students with all of the written conventions they will be expected to control as they move from discipline to discipline; nor can these courses alone turn students into flawless or even consistently fluent writers. For these reasons and more, it is useful to keep in mind that students might not be familiar the written conventions they will need to complete a course successfully, and that, in light of this, the writing assignments we create often need to be clarified or "unpacked" before students begin to work on them.

At best, our students come to us having been well trained in high school to write high school prose. But whatever their educational backgrounds, they bring into the classroom a number of preconceptions about writing (and about what "good" writing is). Some of these are as follows:

- That essays always have five paragraphs (introduction, three body paragraphs, conclusion)
- That assertions don't have to be argued or defended ("everyone has the right to his or her own opinion")
- That readers are responsible for figuring out what writers have to say ("if you don't understand what I've said, it's your problem")
- That the pronoun "I" should never appear in an essay
- That passive voice, lengthy sentences, and big words make writers sound "smarter" than does clear, direct prose
- That the grammatical correctness of writing is entirely distinct from the content of writing ("I know there are a few mistakes, but you know what I mean")
- That only inexperienced writers seek feedback or revise their prose
- That students don't have anything "new" to say
- That research papers consist of quotations, loosely strung together
- That summarizing a text is the same as analyzing a text
- That one way of seeing or understanding a text (or course concept) is as good as another ("…but this is *my* interpretation")
- That although good writing may be relevant to English teachers, it is not relevant to most academic majors or careers

In short, our students often hold ideas about writing that differ significantly from our own. When we add to this the fact that the writing assignments students encounter in college are highly diverse (reflecting the pedagogical and disciplinary interests of individual instructors) we have a formula for potential misunderstanding, if not disaster. This is not to say that every time we ask students to jot something down, we need to provide them with a meticulous set of instructions. On the other hand, it is useful to think of our assignments (especially those that are heavily weighted in a course) as the *only* models of our own writing that students are likely to see, and therefore to be as clear, unambiguous, and "reader friendly" as we expect our students to be. Though instructors of content courses generally do not have much class time to devote to *discussing* writing, many of the difficulties students commonly encounter can be circumvented at least partially by assignments that

- Articulate the purpose of the writing, what it is meant to do or teach within the context of the course. (When students have a clear purpose, they can generally think more productively about how to approach the assignment.)
- Specify formal requirements (length, format, documentation style, and the number and types of sources to be used, where appropriate).
- Clarify (in the assignment or in class discussion) any potentially ambiguous or discipline/course-specific terms.
- Clarify the assignment's "action." For example, are students being asked to describe, to analyze, to narrate, to report, to summarize, to interpret, to argue, to compare? (The verb may be the most important word in the assignment, and we can't always assume that students understand what we mean by it.)
- Emphasize the essential issue or question to be addressed—especially if the assignment contains a barrage of "thought questions" meant to get students thinking about the topic.
- Specify the intended audience: for whom are the students writing? For the instructor? For each other? For someone knowledgeable or unknowledgeable about the paper's topic? For someone who agrees or disagrees with their position? For a specific (imagined or real) reader, such as a local politician, a historical figure, a character in a novel, a parent? (When students have a clear sense of audience, it helps them to decide on an appropriate tone, level of diction, point of view, or "voice.")
- Warn students in advance against any taboo topics or approaches and against any personal irritations you might have as a reader.
- Make evaluative criteria as explicit and concrete as possible, perhaps providing a scoring guide and/or a model paper from a previous semester. (When students understand how an assignment will be graded, hours of questioning and explaining can be eliminated.)
- Allow sufficient time for "incubation," feedback, and revision.

Finally, most assignments contain embedded assumptions that, depending on an assignment's purpose, might need to be made explicit. In the following prompt, designed for an introduction to literature course, several assumptions can be identified:

> Compare and contrast Arnold's "Dover Beach" (written as a dramatic monologue) with Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Are they solely about love? How do they differ?

What are some of these assumptions? That there is value in noting the similarities and differences between one literary work and another? That the genre of the "dramatic monologue" should be discussed in the paper? That the poems are (really) not just about love? That students should focus more on the differences between the poems than on the similarities?

Intellectual activities that seem self-evident to us as experts in our respective disciplines may give rise to considerable question and confusion as students work to decipher what an assignment is asking them to do.

Responding to and Evaluating Student Writing

Not all student writing need be graded or evaluated; in fact, scholarship in composition over the last 30 years has shown that to become clearer thinkers students can and should write informally and as often as possible, whether or not they get extensive feedback every time. For example, Toby Fulwiler notes that "The more people write, the better they learn: writing is the most powerful use of language for developing sustained critical thought; it helps people to visualize thought and therefore to modify, extend, develop, or criticize it" (35-36). Typically, of course, homework assignments, short essays, term papers, essay exams, and other written assignments are marked and evaluated. The writing across the curriculum movement has a basic premise for responding to student writing: *less is more*.

There are several problems that arise when faculty attempt to mark every feature of student writing, from surface errors to logical and organizational flaws. First, students are easily overwhelmed by the marks. This is not simply due to the emotional impact of seeing the shortcomings of their work. Researcher Linda Flower has also found that writers *literally* cannot respond productively to extensive correcting and commenting: "Taking the perspective of another mind is . . . a demanding cognitive operation. It means holding not only your own knowledge network but someone else's in conscious attention and comparing them. Young children simply can't do it. Adults choose not to do it when their central processing is already overloaded with the effort to generate and structure their own ideas" (290-291). Such studies suggest that our attempts to be thorough and useful in our feedback may sometimes confuse, discourage, and even incapacitate students when we mark too much.

The marks we place on student writing should be *prioritized* to reflect our greatest concerns. For example, if the level of student error interferes with our ability to read and

understand, then grammar might be our primary focus. On the other hand, if larger problems such as thesis, organization, and logic are present, it is likely that the writer needs to be working more on general conceptual problems than on punctuation or spelling.

When it comes to responding to grammatical and surface error, decades of research reveal that an overemphasis on mechanical and grammatical skills does not significantly improve student writing. Partly this is because "imperfect writing" is often a sign of "imperfect thinking and learning" (Fulwiler 35). According to Petr, "writing to learn recognizes clearer thinking as a joint product with clearer writing, placing higher priority on an instructor's contribution to a student's thinking than to more technical editorial skills" (227). Further, studies of grammatical error in student writing show that breakdowns in syntax are often intimately connected to the level of intellectual complexity with which students are being challenged. In other words, as students struggle to "think beyond themselves," to manipulate new material, and to express more sophisticated ideas, they are more likely to make grammatical mistakes. Conversely, as they become more clear about their ideas, and as their reasoning and understanding of subject matter improves, they tend to make fewer errors in syntax, sentence structure, and mechanics.

We do not want to discourage our students from taking intellectual risk; nor do we want to elicit from them "safe" or formulaic thinking in the name of grammatical correctness. On the other hand, command of grammatical convention is an essential part of academic and intellectual growth, so neither can we ignore grammar entirely. Many teachers of writing have developed strategies for "putting grammar in its place." That is, they recognize that grammar evolves along with thinking, and so do not placing undue emphasis on it too early in the drafting process. Once students have a handle on what they want to say, grammatical and mechanical error should be pointed out but *should not be corrected for them*. A number of methods have been used to encourage students to identify and correct their own mistakes. For example, in "Minimal Marking," Richard Haswell advocates placing a check in the margin next to any line with an error. He then returns the papers to the students and has them discover and correct the error ( ). Other instructors have similar techniques, such as underlining mistakes rather than correcting them, or using a method of symbols or colored highlighters to indicate important errors.

In short, over-marking papers (whether in relation to content or grammar) runs the risk of turning teachers into editors. When this happens, students tend to repeat the same mistakes again and again because they have not learned to recognize them on their own. We have all spent countless hours marking student papers, only to find that students have done little to incorporate our comments and suggestions into their revisions. Indeed, one of the biggest challenges we face in the classroom is teaching students to self-revise and self-edit. Developing ways to encourage this behavior not only leads students to think critically about their own work but also significantly lessens the faculty paper load.

There are several strategies that faculty can use to diminish their workload and to give students the practice they need in revising their own work. The first of these is

"scaffolding," or embedding drafted stages into paper assignments so that students are forced to revise their work. Many faculty implement scoring guides as a way of quickly responding to these drafts. Scoring guides "allow you to score separate features of a piece of writing and then sum them up for a total score" (Bean 236). They also provide a more specific and informative evaluation of student work than simply assigning a single grade, and "they are particularly useful when your workload prevents detailed commentary on papers" (Bean 236).

Peer review is another way for students to learn how to revise their work. In this context they are able to see what their classmates have written, receive non-threatening feedback, and develop an eye for error and/or essay structure by evaluating the work of their peers. Because peer reviewing engages students in a process of active learning and critical thinking, students often tend to internalize their findings more fully in this setting than when instructors correct their work for them. Further, peer evaluation takes little instructor time and can be assigned as homework instead of being completed during class.

Faculty Contributions

Monette Tiernan, an Instructor in the English Division and WAC coordinator, finds that the use of scoring guides clarifies grading for students and simplifies the process of grading for her. She remarks, "I use scoring guides similar to the following for English120, the course students take just prior to English 101. The guide shows students both what weight I will assign to various aspects of their essays and what they need to avoid in order not to receive point deductions from their overall score. I assign up to 25 points for each of the four categories listed, add up the points for the paper's overall score, and then make deductions."

She further adds:

> My criteria change a little from essay to essay. For example, as the course progresses, students are responsible for weeding more and more kinds of grammatical error out of their final essays, so the "deductions-for-grammar" part of the guide becomes longer. And in the scoring guide for the research project, 50 percent of the grade is based on the incorporation and documentation of outside sources.
>
> Although I also make comments directly on students' papers, the guide allows them to see at a glance their main strengths and weaknesses, instead of having to infer that information from my (sometimes too copious) marginalia. In addition, when a student sees his or her paper go from a "B" to a low "C" due to too many fragment sentences, or from a "C" to an "F" for late submission, it's astonishing how attention to grammar and due dates increases.
>
> I print a scoring guide on the back of each of my assignments so that students know as soon as they begin working on a paper how I'll be assessing the work.

To see Monette's assignment click here: (Monette)

Another instructor who utilizes scoring guides to minimize her workload and clarify feedback for students is **Amber Casolari**. Amber comments, "I created this scoring guide because I felt like I was writing the same comments on students' papers over and over. With the guide, I can simply check off the problems with the essays. When students receive their essays back with lots of marks, they sometimes feel that they have done nothing correctly. Thus, I have also included in my guide a section for 'commendations,' so that I do not forget to express to students what they have done well."

She continues:

> Additionally, students can see their trouble spots by simply glancing down the evaluation sheet. I place very few marks on their paper; most of them are typically on the first page or so. Thus, students can go back through their work and find and correct their common mistakes. One thing that I do not disclose to students is that almost all of them will need to re-write their paper. I know in advance that the first paper they turn in will most certainly be a draft. After they revise their paper, I utilize either the old scoring guide with a new color pen or another clean copy so that they are able to see the before and after. This method shows the student that revision is an important part of the process of writing and can dramatically improve their score. For further guidance in revising, I have a section in the guide that allows me to direct students to the Writing Center when necessary. Students are not always familiar with the Writing Center, but they become so after I direct them to visit it. Using my scoring guide, the Writing Center staff can focus most carefully on the issues my students need help with.
>
> To see Amber's scoring guide click here (Amber)

Informal Writing

Traditionally, writing has been used in the classroom as a tool for evaluating student progress and learning; more specifically, it has been used as a tool for testing what students *already know*. However, in the mid-1970s, researchers interested in the relationship between writing and learning, such as Britton, Emig, Maimon, Elbow, and Bean, recognized a direct link between clear thinking and clear writing. For example, they noted that in the act of writing, students became more active participants in the learning process, increasing their engagement with course material and improving their memory, as well as becoming better writers. In other words, researchers recognized writing as a mode of learning. "Writing to learn," as it has been coined, is the process by which students learn course content or skills through writing rather than merely demonstrating what they have already mastered. In short, informal writing is one of the

primary means by which instructors in many disciplines use writing to help students learn course content.

Informal writing can be defined as "thinking on paper" or "talking to oneself on paper" (Bean). It is also known as "exploratory writing," "free writing," "unstructured writing," "expressive writing," or "personal writing." All of these labels lend insight into the nature of informal writing and its role in the classroom: informal writing is unpolished prose that is generally not graded or not heavily weighted. As a teaching tool, it is quite versatile, since instructors can assign it to be completed during class, after class, in peer groups or individually.

Most professional and academic writers use informal writing of some sort on a regular basis. For example, before researchers publish an article or create a document to be read by its final audience, they engage in a process that includes many stages. One of the first steps in the process is often to brainstorm or free write and then create an outline or ordering of ideas. From there they begin drafting, and during this process they often seek feedback of some sort from their colleagues. This process is precisely what we mean by informal writing. Teachers often utilize this strategy with great success; however, we rarely teach it to our students, probably because we assume that they already do it. In fact, students most often write papers for final submission in a single sitting. Therefore, talking to students explicitly about the writing process and building various kinds of informal writing into courses can help students understand the stages needed to produce quality academic writing and can demonstrate writing's inherent value as a learning tool.

Students benefits from informal writing in three primary ways. First, "thinking on paper helps us to clarify our ideas" (Bean). Gathering ideas is an important first step for both writing and learning course content. Therefore, when we ask students to brainstorm in the form of free writing, journals, or short "trial-run" papers, we strengthen their writing skills at the same time that we reinforce their understanding of course materials.

Additionally, "the process of writing drives thinking" (Bean). In other words, through informal writing new thoughts can be created and new ideas generated by simply *seeing one's thinking* on the page. Informal writing gives students the time and practice they need to complete formal writing tasks successfully. Learning to organize thoughts into clear prose is a lengthy and complex process, and often students, particularly in their first years of college, are not prepared to carry out the written tasks they are assigned. "Scaffolding," or breaking long, formal writing tasks, such as the research paper, down into informal (ungraded) "chunks" (outlining, drafting, revising, and so forth) gives students the structure and feedback they need to produce their best written work.

In addition to improving students' thinking and writing skills, informal writing has a number of secondary benefits. First, it is likely to engage students in course material and class activities more than the standard lecture format. When students are less concerned with written formality, they tend to focus more intently on the critical thinking components of an assignment. Second, students are more interested in course

material when they are given a chance to respond to it as they learn and when they have some autonomy over assignments. Moreover, informal writing has the potential to reach students who have diverse learning styles. According to Bean, "by including several different kinds of assignments in a course, teachers give students more opportunity to find one or two that are particularly effective for them; likewise, students get to discover that they can learn significantly from doing an assignment that is not, by nature, their preferable way of operating" (40). Finally, informal writing can be easily incorporated into class, since it does not use large blocks of time, and it requires little, if any, grading.

Faculty Contributions

In many disciplines, one of the most challenging tasks with student writing is to get students to describe images or intangible thoughts clearly. This is a skill that requires lots of practice. **Mark Maier** is an instructor that has found an innovative technique to get students to clarify their thoughts on paper. Mark finds that students' essays generally lack direction and rarely exhibit critical thinking. As he comments, "The problems I encounter in teaching writing are that in short (two-page) essays in economics, students typically either summarize an argument by experts or present their own viewpoint without placing it in the context of other thinking. In his book, *Clueless in Academe,* Gerald Graff suggests a simple solution: we can help students write focused yet nuanced argumentative essays by asking students to use template *starter* sentences beginning with *Although*….

Click here for Mark's assignment: (Mark)

Linda Griffin, teaches ESL and is especially interested in the relationship between reading and writing. Thus, she pairs her ESL 146 course with the ESL Reading and Vocabulary IV course and has found that it "encourage[s] students to think more deeply."

Click here for Lin's assignment guidelines (Lin)

Another instructor, **Chris Juzwiak**, uses an on-line journal that connects reading and writing skills and encourages students to collaborate, think critically, and engage more fully with course content. For his developmental English courses he has created an extensive website.

Click here to see what Chris has to say about how his assignment works Chris:

Formal Writing

Formal and informal writing are closely tied to one another insofar as informal writing is a preparation for the formal exercise. However, they function differently in the teaching and learning process. Formal writing requires a polished end product, and the general objective in assigning it is to evaluate student progress. Informal writing, on the other hand, asks for unstructured, unpolished writing that is usually not graded or not

given significant weight; its purpose is to teach students the writing process and to generate learning of course content and skills.

Examples of formal writing are essays, research or term papers, and timed essay exams. The most frequently noted faculty complaints regarding students' formal writing are that they lack focus and organization, rarely have a well-constructed thesis, and/or lack credible or rich evidence; additionally, faculty often note that students are unable to incorporate evidence smoothly into their own text and are unable to avoid plagiarism by properly citing sources.

There are several strategies that can ease the grading nightmares that all of us have experienced at the end of the term when wading through poorly written essays. The first strategy is scaffolding. This is a technique whereby students turn in smaller portions of a larger assignment gradually throughout the term for instructor or peer feedback. Scaffolding gives students the chance to rethink and revise, while also providing them with the structure and practice they need for learning the conventions of academic writing and research. For instance, essays or research papers require that our students learn to perform many different tasks, such as gathering and evaluating data, organizing their argument, (typically by creating an outline), drafting a paper, and finally revising and proofreading to create an end product. When students are not asked to carry out some or all of these stages, they often turn in as a final product what is, in essence, a rough draft. Creating smaller assignments throughout the term to address some or all of these stages usually results in a more polished and reader-friendly final essay.

Besides scaffolding, modeling good research and writing practices helps students see what their work could look like and how it might be improved. Some instructors make overheads and show samples of excellent papers from prior semesters, some faculty place examples of well-constructed papers on-line so that students can refer to them day or night, and other faculty prefer for students to practice peer review. Peer review, in which students respond to each other's work, is typically performed in class or assigned as homework. It is useful for students to sample their classmates' writing, since it reinforces the skills they need to better revise their own work. Additionally, it is significantly less threatening for a peer to make suggestions than for a faculty member to do so. The faculty member is also an excellent role model. Students often see our own written assignments as examples or models of academic writing. In fact, the more we can share our own writing approaches with students, the more familiar they become with academic writing and with our expectations. Regardless of the strategy, showing students examples of good writing will promote better writing in their own work.

Finally, "practice makes perfect." Informal writing provides the necessary practice students need to master the process of writing more formal essays. The informal writing assignments and strategies discussed in the previous section of this manual enable students to practice writing in a non-threatening way, teaching them the basic principles of writing and giving them successful strategies to employ while writing longer, more formal assignments.

Another common form of formal writing is the timed essay or essay exam. Instructors have voiced similar complaints about timed writing as they have about the research paper. Many of the techniques used to improve term papers can also be implemented to improve performance on essay exams. One crucial difference, of course, is that the time component does not allow for significant revision or scaffolding. Still, if there is time left over after answering the question, students should be encouraged to revise and/or edit. Further, students may or may not have time to draft or outline their response and so may begin writing immediately without having thought out their organization beforehand. Practicing writing informally and formally can address many of these problems. The more essays students write, the better they will become at constructing, organizing, and revising timed essays. Similarly, the more high-quality essays they see, the more likely they will be to create a well-thought-out essay of their own. Finally, the clearer the question is written, the clearer students will be about the instructor's expectations.

There are many resources on campus to assist students with both writing and research as related to their formal essays. The GCC library has a wealth of databases to help students find books, periodicals, and relevant on-line materials. Moreover, a staff of reference librarians are willing to work with students and faculty on a one-on-one basis and/or in workshops offered throughout the semester that focus on various search techniques and more specialized research issues. The staff will even provide proof of attendance if you wish to give credit/extra credit to students for their effort. Additionally, the library has many on-line and in print resources available for students on issues such as citation, incorporating evidence into writing, plagiarism and how to avoid it, and overall research strategies.

The Writing Center is also a valuable tool on campus. Students can drop in for assistance with specific writing-related issues, or faculty can arrange an in-class session with Writing Center staff. Currently, the Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing Center staff are arranging a format by which faculty can leave their assignments in the writing center so that tutors are able more fully to understand instructors' expectations for a particular assignment during student conferences. The Writing Center also has computer programs available so that students may get help with grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, and many other writing-related challenges. Finally, the Writing Across the Curriculum coordinators and the Writing Center staff are developing a series of Writing Center workshops for students that are focused on specific writing-related issues, to be implemented in Spring of 2005.

Faculty Contributions

There are many faculty at GCC who employ creative formal writing assignments and have found that scaffolding larger research assignments helps students manage the task of creating a term paper or research project. One method employed by **Dierdre Collins**, who teaches mathematics at GCC, is to have students practice writing in stages and in context. She explains, "My assignment is divided into three parts. Each part

should be completed correctly before attempting the next part. These assignments are for the Beginning Algebra class, after we complete the graphing concepts in Chapter 3."

Dierdre further adds that "Everyone is required to turn in the original newspaper or magazine article. No photocopies are allowed because I want every project to be unique. As you know, students hate anything having to do with graphing, and I have been forced to call these projects "course requirements" in order to make students do them because otherwise they would rather lose the points than even attempt them."

Click here for Dierdre's assignment (Dierdre)

Another innovative instructor, **Michael Reed**, teaches geography and has a final poster project for his Geography 102 course. He summarizes the key writing problems that he faces: "It [is] challenging if not impossible to assign and grade final research projects. When they are submitted, student papers tend to be poorly written and insufficiently edited. Often the final papers are simply not submitted, resulting in a failing grade for the student. Thus my goal was to devise a more guided and successful research project."

Click here to see Mike's assignments and his comments about it (Mike):

A third instructor who utilizes scaffolding and modeling in a research project is **Deborah Moore**, an Instruction Librarian for the Glendale College Library. Deborah teaches Library 191, an Introduction to Information Competency, and has found a research journal to be an effective way to improve students' research ability. She remarks that "What I like about this assignment is, when done properly, it really does help students become better researchers by making them aware of what steps they are taking and what's working/not working. Besides looking at the students' journals off and on throughout the semester, I also periodically start a class discussion by asking the students for helpful tips they've learned about research. Both of these things help them focus on research as an on-going process, not a one-time task they have to complete."

Click here to see Deborah's assignment and her comments about it (Deborah)

Denise Ezell, an instructor of English, was hired as a developmental writing specialist; she also teaches transfer level courses. In the following assignment, Denise successfully employs scaffolding, peer discussion, and lots of humor to direct students to a better understanding of serious social issues.

Click here for Denise's assignment (Denise)

Campus Resources

The Glendale College Library (link to library here)

The Glendale College Library offers a wide variety of resources and services to support the Writing Across the Curriculum mission. As one of the top community college libraries in California, we offer access to a physical library with a multi-level information competency instruction program that serves as a statewide model, as well as a "virtual library" which is also a model for the California Community College System. The physical library is located on the 3rd and 4th floors of the library building. The virtual library is available at www.glendale.edu/library. Below is a summary of resources that may be helpful to faculty seeking to implement writing across the curriculum.

Information Competency Instruction: The GCC Library information competency program includes four models of instruction: A series of nine research-related library workshops; LIB 191, a stand-alone two-unit class covering strategies and methods for conducting research in both print and electronic environments; LIB 191 as paired with another full semester course such as English 101 or BUSAD 106; and individually arranged subject-specific class orientations. Due to limited faculty, the library is no longer offering introductory-level class orientations; instead, we recommend that instructors consider directing students to the library workshop program. A long-term study completed by Glendale College's Institutional Research Department has shown that students who completed information competency instruction in one or more of the various models had significantly higher GPAs as well as higher retention rates.

Library workshops are offered weekly at various times—mornings, afternoons, and evenings—with topics rotating from week to week to allow students an opportunity to attend all workshops if desired. Full-time and part-time instructors are encouraged to assign three or more library workshops for class credit. Instructors may want to consider excusing students who provide evidence of successfully completing LIB 191 from any library workshop requirements, since LIB 191 provides more extensive coverage of the same or similar topics. Additional information about our information competency curriculum, including LIB 191, the library workshops, and a current workshop schedule, may be found at the library home page: www.glendale.edu/library. Handouts on library resources and research techniques are also available in paper and online.

Library Handouts Related to Writing Across the Curriculum (available from library home page):

- Avoiding Plagiarism
- MLA Style: A Brief Guide (for citing print sources)
- MLA Style for Citing Electronic Sources: A Brief Guide (for citing online sources)
- APA Style: A Brief Guide (for citing print sources)
- APA Style for Citing Electronic Sources: A Brief Guide (for citing online sources)

Library Databases Related to Writing Across the Curriculum:

• *NoodleTools*: Interactive online MLA and APA-style bibliography composer. Generates MLA and APA styles citations based on information students have entered. Handles

punctuation, alphabetization, and formatting, while producing a polished source list for import into Microsoft Word.

Reference Service: Reference librarians can brief you on GCC's holdings and online resources, help locate materials in preparation for a class assignment, and connect you with information outside the library. Please contact the reference desk at ext. 5577 or online at www.glendale.edu/library/servs/refquest.htm.

Voyager Online Catalog: The Voyager online catalog provides quick access to our collection of 92,000 books and CDs, 6,400 e-books (available online in full-text), 1,200 cataloged Web sites, and 312 print periodical subscriptions.

Library of Congress subject headings related to writing across the curriculum include:

- Academic Writing
- Academic Writing—Handbooks, Manuals, Etc.
- English Language Grammar
- English Language Grammar—Handbooks, Manuals, Etc.
- Interdisciplinary Approach in Education
- Interdisciplinary Approach in Education—United States
- Report Writing
- Report Writing—Handbooks, Manuals, Etc.•

Interlibrary Loans: In many cases books or periodical articles unavailable in the GCC Library can be ordered through interlibrary loan. Fill out the ILL request form at the reference desk or online. You and your students may also borrow materials directly from Pasadena City College and Cal State Los Angeles using your GCC photo I.D.

Databases: The GCC Library offers access to a variety of databases covering a wide range of subjects. All databases are accessible to the GCC community from home. Many databases offer examples of how to cite sources in MLA and APA formats. In some cases a writing guide is available from the database help screen or from a separate research screen. Two examples of writing guides are:

Gale Literature Resource Center (database): Click on "Guide to Conducting Literary Research" from the home page and you will find a table of contents that includes: Choose a Topic; Craft a Thesis; Evaluate Thesis and Sources; Identify a Variety of Information Sources: Take Efficient Notes; Begin and Organize a Research Paper; Use Parenthetical Documentation; Prepare a Works Cited Page; Draft and Revise a Research paper.

Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center (database): Click on "Research Guide" from the home page and you will find a table of contents that includes: Analyzing Current Issues; Judging Opinionated Material; Review Author's Credentials; Identify Main Idea of Viewpoint; Evaluating Content; Analyzing Sources With Facts and Ethical Concerns; Critical Thinking and Bias; Distinguishing Fact From Opinion and Bias From Reason.

Liaison Librarians: Each division has a liaison librarian who serves as a contact for information about library programs, resources, and services:

- Shelley Aronoff (x5763; saronoff@glendale.edu): English, ESL Credit, ESL Non-Credit
- Brenda Jones (x5578; bjones@glendale.edu): Biology, Business, College Services, Language Arts, Mathematics
- Deborah Moore (x5759; dmoore@glendale.edu): Social Sciences
- Linda Winters (x5579; lwinters@glendale.edu): Allied Health, Health & P.E., Non-Credit Business & Life Skills, Physical Sciences, Technology & Aviation, Visual & Performing Arts

Class Assignments: When planning a class assignment, please call or email your liaison librarian to make sure our resources are sufficient. We can put library materials on reserve for your class so everyone has a chance to use them. The reference librarians can be briefed so they can better help your students understand the assignment and find the information they need.

The Writing Center (link to writing center)

The Glendale Community College **Writing Center** and **CAI Lab** (AD 226 & AD 232) are central to writing across the curriculum goals, providing a number of electronic resources for writers, as well as individual and group tutorials conducted by Writing Center staff. Though the Writing Center focuses primarily on assisting students, the tutors also serve as a valuable interface between students and faculty, helping students to better understand course assignments and faculty expectations, and providing them with more specific kinds of guidance in writing than faculty are often able to provide within the limited framework of the classroom. Additionally, the Writing Center will provide instructors with reports detailing issues covered during tutorial sessions, and the CAI Lab will send out weekly reports on students' progress on Computer-Assisted Instruction assignments.

Current Services in the Writing Center Include:

- Drop-in tutoring for any assignment involving writing, available on a "first-come, first served" basis. The calendar for drop-in service is posted outside the door of AD 226 and is available online at http://calendar.yahoo.com/gccwritingcenter2004.
- Scheduled ½ hour appointments with writing tutors (by appointment only). The Writing Center requests a minimum one-day notice. Students can call (818)/240-1000 Ext. 5335, email gccwc@glendale.edu, or stop by to arrange appointments or to seek additional information.
- Class assistance on specific writing issues (by appointment only). Faculty can bring a class to the Writing Center (or bring Writing Center tutors to their class) to have staff work with students on such issues as peer editing, paragraph focus,

incorporating outside resources into research papers, or other writing-related issues of your choice. Faculty should arrange for these sessions in advance.
- Other resources, such as handouts, on-line writing lab sites, computerized grammar and reading exercises, and videotapes on the writing process. Staff will locate the right materials for individual student needs.

Current Services in the CAI Lab Include :

- "Passkey," a computer-assisted tutorial with writing (especially grammar) and reading components, including diagnostics, lessons, and pre- and post-tests. Interested faculty can drop by the CAI Lab to see if this format is appropriate for their instructional needs.
- Class orientations for Passkey during the first month of the fall semester. Reservations are required.
- Tutorial access and other resource material for individual students. If individual students need help on specific grammar or writing issues, faculty can contact the CAI Lab to learn of appropriate resources for the student.

How Faculty Can Help the Writing Center and Tutorial Process: Students generally visit the Writing Center by themselves, and while they usually bring with them a draft of what they are working on, they frequently do not bring with them the assignment that their draft is addressing. Nor are they often entirely clear about how a given assignment will be evaluated or "what the instructor wants." By providing Writing Center staff with syllabi, assignments, grading criteria, and/or other supplementary materials, tutors can meet your instructional goals more efficiently and thoroughly. The Writing Center welcomes your assistance and collaboration!

Computer Labs, IT and WebCT (link to computer centers)

Glendale Community College Information Technology Services (ITS) provides a wide range of services supporting students and faculty. Key areas that relate to support for the Writing Across the Curriculum mission are the Academic Computing Labs and Instructional Technology Services.

Academic Computing Labs
GCC has a number of Academic Computing Labs located throughout the campus. The two main open lab complexes are the San Rafael lab located on the 3rd floor of the San Rafael building and the San Gabriel lab located on the 1st floor of the San Gabriel Building. These labs are free to any registered Glendale Community College student.

In addition to the open labs, GCC also has an ESL and Language Labwww.glendale.cc.ca.us/current/departments/esl/lab/index.htm and an English Lab www.glendale.cc.ca.us/english/eng.lab.html which focus on students development of reading, writing, speaking skills. A number of other specialized labs, including the High Tech Lab available for student with disabilities, are located throughout the campus as well. For more specific information on these labs, go to www.glendale.edu/student-labs.

A listing of lab hours, locations and available software can also be found in the printed schedule of classes.

The open and specialized labs on campus offer a variety of software from Microsoft Office to subject and course specific software. Instructors interested in learning more about what software is available or in working with Academic Lab personnel to discuss acquiring and installing course specific software for their students use should contact John Miketta, Computer Center Supervisor for both the SR and SG labs, or Tom Starr, Computer Center Supervisor for all other academic labs.

Instructional Technology Services supports a variety of technology used in teaching and learning, from video projectors in classrooms to WebCT—an online course management system. Several of the key areas are highlighted below:

WebCT: WebCT is a course management system that is available for student and faculty use via the internet. It is an easy mechanism for instructors to use to *post course materials* (syllabi, handouts, powerpoints etc.), to *communicate* with students (email, discussion boards and chat rooms), and to *evaluate and administer courses* (on-line quizzes, on-line gradebooks, and student tracking).

WebCT is extremely flexible and can be used in a variety of ways depending on how the instructor chooses to incorporate the available tools. Several "best practice" approaches include the use of discussion boards as private journals for students to share their thoughts and reactions with the instructor or other students online. Another model is to use WebCT to facilitate the sharing of essays online for peer review and discussion.

GCC also offers extensive support to both faculty and students using WebCT. Instuctors interested in learning WebCT can participate in a variety of WebCT workshops as well as work with staff in ITS on a one-on-one basis. GCC also provides a WebCT HelpDesk staffed by student workers to answer student and faculty questions relating to WebCT or supporting software programs. For more information on available support and technology, including hardware deals, software deals, and free downloads for both students and faculty, please go to www.glendale.edu/online.

Available Technology: The college has upgraded a number of classrooms by installing ceiling mounted video projectors to work with an instructor station that includes a computer, a DVD player, and a VCR. Recently GCC has invested in a number of interactive whiteboard devices. Interactive whiteboards allow instructors literally to mark up any electronic document or website on a computer as one would mark up an overhead transparency with a pen, allowing a more dynamic discussion of documents. Interactive whiteboards and a variety of other equipment are available for checkout from Media Services. A listing of available equipment can be found at www.glendale.edu/techequipment . For workshop dates and times on how to use digital whiteboards and a variety of other equipment go to the Staff Development website at http://www.glendale.edu/staff-development/.

Additionally, GCC holds a number of site licenses that aid in instruction such as Turnitin and Respondus. Available to full- and part-time instructors, Turnitin is the standard for anti-plagiarism software, allowing both students and faculty to submit a paper which can be checked for authenticity against a database of already written documents in a matter of moments.

Respondus is a powerful tool for creating and managing exams that can be printed to paper or published directly toWebCT. Exams are created offline in a familiar Windows environment, and the software provides many time-saving tools, such as the ability to import existing exams from word processor files.

More information on upcoming workshops for Turnitin, Respondus, and other software programs available at GCC can be found on the Staff Development Calendar. For more general information on available support and technology for both students and faculty, please visit www.glendale.edu/online.

Online Writing Lab http://www.rogueowl.org/
GCC is a participant in the Rogue Online Writing Lab sponsored in part by the Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE) and the U.S. Department of Education. This website provides a host of materials for students and instructors that supports WAC. OWL aids instructors by providing supplemental assistance and materials for students, including on-line tutors, writing tips, and sample documents by subject areas.

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