Writing to Learn: Learning to Write

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Who am I?

http://www.ualberta.ca/~gravesl/index.html

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April 17, 2009

I'm new to the University of Alberta, having come from the University of Western Ontario where I was Director of the Program in Writing, Rhetoric, and Professional Communication in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. In my new position here I'll be working with faculty and students across the university as part of the Writing Across the Curriculum initiative. I will also be working with students and faculty in the Department of English and Film Studies.

I am the author, co-author, or editor of five books and 29 articles, including Writing Instruction in Canadian Universities. My current research interests include the development of doctoral student writing, writing assignments across disciplinary fields, and rhetorical approaches to text encoding. Currently I serve as co-Vice-President of the Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing (CASDW) and a member of the Executive Board of the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Literacy (CASLL/Inkshed).

Recent presentations
This page contains links to pdfs of slides displayed at presentations I've given.

Books
This page displays the covers and descriptions of books I've authored, co-authored, or co-edited.

Blog: Thinking About Writing
A new blog on writing-related issues at the U of A and beyond.
Strategies for Improving Student Writing

• **WAC**: Short, brief writing in class (unmarked or minimally graded)

• **Assignments**: Clear, well-structured assignments

• **Centre for Writers**: Facilitate Peer Response in writing groups and one-to-one tutoring at C4W

• **Rubrics**: Clear statements of evaluation criteria
What is Writing Across the Curriculum?

- writing-to-learn activities are short, impromptu or otherwise informal writing tasks that help students think through key concepts or ideas presented in a course
- Based on learning to write research in 1960s-1970s in US/UK
- First programs emerged in 1980s

The WAC Clearinghouse, http://wac.colostate.edu/intro/
WAC Philosophy

What is WAC?
Writing and assessment
WAC Assignments
Writing in the Disciplines

- that writing is the responsibility of the entire academic community,
- that writing must be integrated across departmental boundaries,
- that writing instruction must be continuous during all four years of undergraduate education,
- that writing promotes learning, and
- that only by practicing the conventions of an academic discipline will students begin to communicate effectively within that discipline.
Writing and Learning

• writing plays an indispensable role in developing critical thinking skills, learning discipline-specific content, and understanding and building competence in the modes of inquiry and dissemination specific to various disciplines and professions

Georgia State WAC Program,
http://wac.gsu.edu/content/introduction/what_is_wac.shtml
NSSE and Writing

What is WAC?
Writing and assessment
WAC Assignments
Writing in the Disciplines

• To what extent had your experience at Western contributed to: Writing Clearly and effectively?
• To what extent had your experience at Western contributed to: Speaking clearly and effectively?
WAC and Student Engagement

What is WAC?
Writing and assessment
WAC Assignments
Writing in the Disciplines

- student engagement with the subject matter being taught increases significantly when they are more frequently asked to write about that subject, particularly in courses in their junior and senior years.

Good Writing Assignments

- Tie the writing task to specific pedagogical goals.
- Note rhetorical aspects of the task, i.e., 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.

[http://wac.colostate.edu/intro/pop10a.cfm](http://wac.colostate.edu/intro/pop10a.cfm)
## Sample Writing to Learn Assignments

### What is WAC?

### Writing and assessment

### WAC Assignments

### Writing in the Disciplines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The reading journal</th>
<th>Solving real problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generic and focused summaries</td>
<td>Pre-test warm-ups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotations</td>
<td>Using Cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response papers</td>
<td>Letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesis papers</td>
<td>What counts as a fact?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The discussion starter</td>
<td>Believing and doubting game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing a discussion</td>
<td>Analysis of events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learning log</td>
<td>Project notebooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing the process</td>
<td>The writing journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem statement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WAC Clearinghouse, [http://wac.colostate.edu/intro/pop5.cfm](http://wac.colostate.edu/intro/pop5.cfm)
WAC Strategies

What is WAC?
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Basic Tools and Techniques

The items listed below represent a small sample

The Quickwrite
The "Good Question"
The One-Minute Paper
Summary and Précis Writing
Role Playing
Journals and Logs

http://www.upei.ca/uwc/wac/strategies/basic_tools.html
What is Writing in the Disciplines?

Writing in the disciplines focuses on instructing students in the language conventions of a discipline as well as with specific formats typical of a given discipline.

What is WAC?

Writing and assessment

WAC Assignments

Writing in the Disciplines
Writing Intensive courses

- WI courses incorporate revised assignments, sequenced assignments, peer review, and student assistance from a writing consultant. [Georgia State]
Writing Intensive courses at Simon Fraser

• A writing-intensive course is one in which writing is used as a tool for learning and developing understanding of subject matter and is taught as a means of communication in discipline-specific ways. Students are shown, rather than simply told, how to write in the genres most valued in the discipline and are given opportunities to use skilled feedback in the revision and rewriting of major papers.

http://www.lidc.sfu.ca/teaching/writing/resources/W-CourseCriteria.php