

TLS - Discussion Series:

Why do students make so many mistakes when they write?



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Recall a recent writing
experience of yours

What made it easy to
write—or hard to
write?

Thinking About Writing

A blog about academic writing



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Towards a Plan for Communication Skills in the New BA

Posted on [February 12, 2013](#)

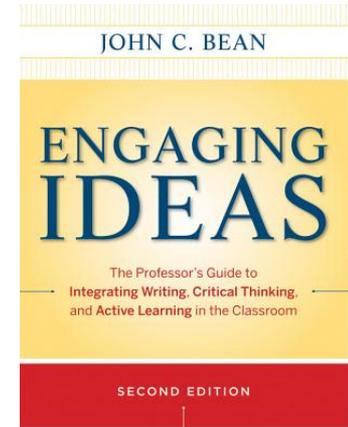
In this space I'll try to sketch out some ideas for how a new BA structure might account for the development of communication skills in our undergraduates. We already have a base in first year; we could add two further components—one in second year and a second one as a capstone exercise—to give shape to the work we already require of students.

First year "W" course

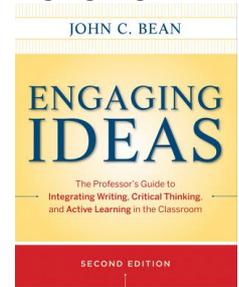
Current requirements for the first year. Currently Arts students take 6 credits of 100-level English or a combination of 3 credits of 100-level English and 3 credits of 100-level Writing Studies. While English and Film Studies is currently reviewing the curriculum of the 100-level courses, at the moment they devote approximately 30% of the course to writing development.

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- **“At least half of student errors result from inattentive editing” (75)**
- **“Student errors are systematic” (76)**
- **“Errors in student writing increase with greater cognitive difficulty of the assignment” (77)**
- **“Traditional procedures for grading and marking student papers may exacerbate the problem” (79)**



- **“Errors often disappear in student’s prose as they progress through multiple drafts” (78)**
- **“Hold students responsible for finding and fixing their own errors” (83)**
- **“Shift from ‘editing-oriented’ comments on papers to ‘revision-oriented’ comments” (82)**
- **Ground comments about errors in the harm they do to a writer’s credibility—the rhetorical effectiveness of the student’s writing (80)**

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One source of that misconception might be that students didn't understand the rubric/scoring guide criteria.

Maybe more specifically, they didn't understand the level of performance needed for each criteria.

WRS 302: Proposal Writing

Evaluation criteria: Presentation

| Criteria | Excellent | Average | Poor/missing |
|--|-----------|---------|--------------|
| Communication of structure/organization of the presentation | | | |
| Background about the organization | | | |
| Description of funding need | | | |
| Description of rationale for funding this program | | | |
| Description of how funds would be used | | | |
| Description of assessment and sustainability of project | | | |
| Presentation skills Clear voice/ enunciation Did not talk too quickly Made eye contact Used presentation software well: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited the words on slides • Used visuals on slides • Faced audience Created appropriate handouts | | | |
| Overall impression | | | |

Comments:

They didn't see enough of their peers work to know what a good performance on the assignment might look like.



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They showed their work to someone else, but that the other reader didn't want to criticize their work for fear of offending them.

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The other reader didn't read carefully or couldn't see the issues/problems that you saw when you evaluated the work.

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You or someone who did do well agrees to read a draft of their next assignment with the proviso that the feedback be as honest as possible and constructive.

Students who don't do well need to make it clear they want as honest an assessment as possible.

With those ground rules in place, student expectations (if not performance) should be recalibrated to be more consistent with yours.

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