Tips for Combining Content and Writing in a Writing Intensive Course.

1) I try to emphasize—not only in the context of the honor code, but also in other areas—the ethical obligations of the writer: the obligation to truth, for instance, as opposed to verisimilitude.

2) I hand out major writing assignments AT THE BEGINNING of the unit of the course to which they pertain.

3) I craft short assignments, for use in class, that facilitate the completion of a major assignment, and that make strategic use of the material I want the students to use.

4) In class discussions, in discussions of model essays, and in workshops, I emphasize rhetorical elements that keep conversation grounded in content: “Thesis,” “Agenda,” “Analysis,” “Evidence.”

5) I emphasize QUESTIONS, and try to get students to stay with questions, as long as possible.

6) I focus on reading aloud and listening, in class and in conference.

7) I try to make clear to myself and my students the difference between revision and editing.

8) I try to be mindful about how I attribute “form” to analytical writing, telling myself:
   a. to consider the potentially emptying effects of rigid formulas both to describe paragraphs (“topic sentence, points 1, 2, and 3, transition sentence”) and to describe essays as a whole (e.g. “hourglass,” 5-paragraph essay);
   b. to consider the similar effects of sensuous or reifying metaphors for effective writing (e.g. “flow” to mean particular logical or syntactical connections”; “shape” to mean particular arrangements of particular ideas); and
   c. to be careful not to represent the activity and skill of “outlining” with more power than it has. Obviously it can have an important function. What precisely is that function? When is it most effective? How should it be used? What are its limitations?

9) I try to be mindful about invoking my own “pet peeves” pertaining to style and mechanics, recalling that revision almost always comes before editing. So how and when do I want to invoke my peeves? How important are they RIGHT NOW as I discuss something in a student’s writing?

10) I allow myself to deal with content and writing separately when it seems best to do so. I also remember that all these rules are rules of thumb. In particular “be mindful” or “be careful” isn’t always an admonition against (see Items 8 and 9).