

Ten Best Practices for Teaching College-Level Writing

1. Be intentional and transparent in creating writing assignments: determine clear objectives (learning outcomes) for each assignment (for example: complex argument/thesis; sophisticated engagement with secondary literature; synthesis of ideas; following disciplinary conventions).
2. Contextualize writing objectives within the liberal arts environment: are the objectives discipline-specific, typical of an academic division, and/or interdisciplinary in nature? How do they adhere to, combine or depart from standard writing forms/genres? Where do the objectives fit within the overall continuum of writing within a discipline?
3. Identify/Define for students the audience(s) for each writing assignment.
4. Describe/break down particular features of the expected writing and/or provide students with models of high and low end work. Isolate/excerpt one or two features to discuss at a given time (introductions, theses, structure, voice, etc).
5. Know your “end” goal for their writing in not only a particular assignment but for the course; sequence assignments accordingly.
6. Consider whether or not and how your assignments invite students to wrestle with the “big ideas” in your field(s).
7. Identify and discuss, where appropriate, relationships between writing process and product.
8. Involve students at some point in the assessment process through self-evaluation and/or peer review. Consider giving them a rubric for self or peer evaluation. Perhaps assign an informal reflection/self-evaluation due along with the paper.
9. Have pre and post-assignment conversations with students about their writing. Establish individual goals for the next paper.
10. Assign an informal essay that asks students to reflect upon their relationship to your discipline and its relationship to local and global challenges. How do students understand (or not) the potential significance of their discipline-informed (interdisciplinary) voices?