

Meeting Our Students Where They Are

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June 10, 2022

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Outline

- Practical approaches to the first day of class
- Theoretical background
- Results of this approach
- Findings and suggestions

Assignments for the first days of class

- ***Self-Assessment:*** Within the first week of the semester, all students must submit written self-assessments in which they take stock of their abilities as readers and writers and set some learning goals for themselves. This assignment is an occasion to introduce students to the kind of reflective yet public writing they will do in their final portfolios (see below) and to invite them to take responsibility for their own educations. The assignment is also intended to provide information about your students' abilities and goals in order to establish a baseline.
 - *Option 1: Self-assessment essay/letter:* Students write essays or letters in which they take stock of their abilities as readers and writers and establish some learning goals for themselves.
 - *Option 2: Self-assessment essay/letter & diagnostic essay:* Students write brief essays (possibly in-class) engaging with a short passage relevant to the course. Students then write self-assessment essays/letters as above, but also commenting on their diagnostic essays or drawing on them as evidence.
 - *Option 3: Self-assessment essay/letter & sample paper:* Students submit a sample paper from a previous college course. Students then write self-assessment essays/letters as above, but also commenting on their sample papers or drawing on them as evidence. If possible, students should submit source-based academic arguments as sample papers.

Task 2: Academic Writing Course Profile

Graduate course, to be filled out and submitted in class on the first day:

Tell me a bit about your writing habits:

- What have you written in English?
- How many papers have you written or co-written?
- What do you do when you have writer's block?
- How do you organize your ideas before you start writing?
- When and how do you revise your work?
- How well do you write in English as opposed to your first language?
- What role(s) do your colleagues play in the writing process?

Pre-writing assignment before drafting Paper 1

- **Write a letter describing what the paper is going to be about.** One of the simplest, most efficient exercises you can do to sort through ideas is to write a letter to yourself about what you are planning to write in your paper. You might start out, “My paper is going to be about....” And go on to articulate what evidence you have to back up your ideas and what parts still feel rough to you about your ideas. In about 20 minutes, you can easily gain a good sense of what you are ready to write and the problems you still need to solve in your paper.

Final Assessment at End of Course: 60 learners, 3 sections

Sample question: Which sentences in my paper do I like the most? The least?

- **Answer 1: I like the introduction and thesis; the least is the complicated long sentences that I can't shorten.**
- **Answer 2: Actually, I like this paper the most. I think I did well in the draft and I hope I can improve my grade also in the final version.**
A sentence I liked: "The setting of a dark stage alludes to Krapp's self-pity and deterioration, the first of which leads to the second". That is my thesis statement, I really liked the choice of words and the order itself, at the beginning of the year it was not an easy task for me to write a thesis and then admire it. I think we can call this an improvement; I hope.
A sentence I don't like: Actually, sometimes when I repeat a word more than one time and then I reread it I decide to delete the entire sentence, and then do it again.

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The Writing Center websites at UNC and Brandeis