

# Writing Across the Curriculum

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Writing to Learn

Presented by:

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# Writing Across the Curriculum

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## What Is It?

- Education movement that began on campuses in the 1970s
- Designed to improve students' writing and critical thinking skills
- Aimed at incorporating writing into all classes, campus-wide
- Now an independent department at many universities

# Why Should We Write Across the Curriculum?

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- Writing is a necessary part of learning
- Writing develops independent thinking and critical thinking skills
- Writing aids in subject matter retention
- Students need more writing practice to prepare them for their professional expectations as writers
- Common Core has refocused attention on reading and writing across the curriculum from K-12

# Benefits of Writing Across the Curriculum

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## For the Faculty

- Through writing, students will be more actively engaged
- Student writing will help you see gaps in instruction you can adjust
- All of us will be in the effort together and can help each other

## For the University

- Student achievement in all subject areas will increase
- Student retention will improve
- The university's six-year graduation rate will improve

# Reflection

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Spend 5 minutes responding to any of the following questions:

- 1) What holds you back from including writing in your daily instruction?
- 2) How do you think your students would respond to daily/frequent writing tasks?
- 3) What are some practical concerns your department might have about including writing (or more of it) in the curriculum?

# Writing Across Curriculum

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## Writing to Learn

- Strategies imbedded in the learning process

## Writing to Demonstrate

- Assessments like:
  - Essays
  - Reports
  - Research
  - Projects

# Writing to Learn

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- The purpose of “Writing to Learn” is to **engage** students in the lesson and help them **develop** big **ideas** and concepts.
- Takes pressures off the students and the professor because the focus is not on assessment but rather on **mastery** and **understanding**

# Writing to Learn

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## Higher Level Thinking Skills

- Critical Thinking
- Analysis
- Application

## Characteristics

- Short
- Informal
- Impromptu

# Writing to Learn

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## It is NOT

- Focused on “correctness”
  - Grammar
  - Spelling
  - Style
  - Structure
- Graded...yippee!

## It could be

- Journals
- Logs
- Micro-themes
- Responses to oral questions
- Free writing
- Notes
- Summaries

# Writing to Learn Strategies

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- Low Stakes
- Builds student confidence
- Encourages thought and reflection

# Writing to Learn Strategy: Journaling

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- Journaling is a simple but effective strategy to get students to:
  - Reflect
  - Predict
  - Assess their work
  - Check their understanding
  - Summarize

# Ways to Incorporate Journaling

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- Respond to a reading
- Track progress on a lab assignment
- Keep track of complex multi-step equations
- Track procedures
- Reflect on an activity
- Make predictions for an upcoming activity

# Journals: Physical or Virtual?

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- ★ Blackboard: incorporate journals into your course assignments



## **Journals**

Select this link to access your journals.

- ★ Physical Journal: Assigning students a journal on the syllabus is a fantastic resource to refer back to throughout the course



# Keeping Track

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- Journals are LOW STAKES (not typically graded)
- To encourage students to engage with their journals you can **opt** to
  - Use ✓ marks (or +/-) to indicate completion
  - Make it an extra credit grade
  - Have “share-outs”
  - Assign groups/partners to encourage peer-revision

# Feedback

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- Students are far more likely to be engaged in writing assignments if they receive specific and constructive feedback

# Feedback for “Writing to Learn”

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## Does not have to...

- Be the whole assignment
- Be for each student
- Be everyday
- Address grammar, spelling, correctness (unless it impedes understanding or raises red flags)

## Should...

- Address higher-order thinking
- Be specific
- Address student concerns or misunderstandings
- Focus on growth (Here's what you can do next time...)

# Tricks for Manageable Feedback

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- Rotating Schedule
- Partners/Groups
- Whole Class Shareout
- Cold Calling
- Blackboard
- Focus on “3 Things”

# Spring Semester Challenge

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- How can you incorporate journaling into your course of the upcoming semester?
- For our next activity:
  1. Find a journal strategy that could apply to your course
  2. Look through your syllabus and incorporate the strategy at least once (bonus if you can incorporate it weekly!)
  3. Find a partner with a different strategy and share your discoveries

# Journaling for Specific Content Groups

	Purpose	Applies most to...
Reading Response	Students can write to respond to a recent reading	Social Studies, Arts, English, Psych.
Science Notebook	Students document their discoveries during a lab	Sciences, Nursing, Engineering
Math Notebook	Students document procedures for complex problems	Math, Computer Science, Architecture
Learning Logs	Students document their learning	ALL disciplines
Dialectical Journal	Students dialogue with a narrative text	English, Theater, History, Psych.
Double-Entry Journal	Students record emotional response to a text	Theater, Arts, History, English, Psych.
Metacognition Journal	Students track their own learning/thinking	ALL disciplines
Synthesis Journal	Students postulate how they can use what they learned	ALL disciplines

# Questions to Consider

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- What moments in my lessons do I need students to process or document their learning?
- How often could I incorporate this strategy into a class?
- What are some modifications I could make for a freshmen level course? Senior level course? Honors course?
- Is this a strategy I could bring back to my department?
- What challenges would students face with this strategy?

# Bonus Challenge

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- Find a non-journaling strategy you can incorporate into your course
- Draft a plan for including these writing strategies
- Find a partner with a different strategy and share

# A Continued Conversation

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- Writing Across the Curriculum is not “an island”
- It needs cross-departmental support to survive
- It needs it's own department to thrive

# Next Steps

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## Personal

- Incorporate “Writing to Learn” strategies into your curriculum
- Sharing with your department
- Encourage students to write, write, write!
- Encourage students to seek help with their writing (Writing Center!)

## University

- Forming a W.A.C. group
- Advocating to stakeholders for a W.A.C. department / funding
- Holding semi-annual meetings and check-ins
- Developing University-wide Professional Development

# Contact Us

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