Preparing Students for a Writing Assignment

With small changes to your teaching, you can take advantage of the benefits that multilingual students bring to your class. Nearly half of Mason students are multilingual, and they have different levels of fluency. However, the strategies below are designed to help you support both multilingual and other students.

Faculty FAQ: How can I prepare my students for an upcoming writing assignment?

Lockhart & Soliday (2016) and Jamieson (2013) point out that instructors and students often have differing motivations and goals for reading and writing. Instructors cannot assume that their students understand 'the why' and 'the what' of given reading and writing tasks.

1. ***Review the purpose and audience of the writing assignment.***

Why are your students writing and for whom? The answers to these questions can be deduced from the assignment instructions; however, students need help seeing and understanding them. Reviewing the instructions in class is helpful for students since they can also ask questions about the meaning of specific directives like "analyze, synthesize, evaluate etc" and you can explain your expectations.

2. ***Show your students examples of the kind of they are going to do.***

Provide a sample essay and allow time in class to review it and consider how it meets (or doesn't meet) the assignment prompt. Encourage students to analyze the writer's choices and reflect on the impact of these choices on the students' understanding of the essay. Doing this will help your students internalize the assignment's expectations as readers while also starting to think about their own writing moves. Consider using the *Model Essay Activity* here.

3. ***Let students do some of their writing in class.***

Writing is a process that takes time. Students can learn this when you provide room for them to perform the process. A 10-minute in-class free-write on the essay topic/question can help students begin thinking about their writing soon. A 30-minute outlining activity provides students the opportunity to think about the organization of their essay. For other in-class writing activities, see

4. ***Remind students about other writing resources.***

See the section below called "Additional Writing and Writing Feedback Resources."

Model Essay Activity

Place students in pairs or three's and have each group read the same sample essay without taking notes or marking it.**

Assign the following questions to each group to discuss:

1. Has this essay followed the basic requirements of the assignment (e.g. word count, structure)?

2. What did the instructions ask the writer to do? (*e.g. analyze, describe, explain, evaluate).* Has this model done that?

3. What else do we like about this model? In other words, what else is the writer doing well?

4. Based on the assignment instructions, what would we do differently from this model? *(e.g. structure, content).* What part(s) of the instructions is required?

Ask each group to combine with one more group and share their responses with that group. Repeat this step as needed.

Harvest students' thoughts in a large group discussion.

**Before doing this activity, ensure that your students understand the essay prompt and your instructions.

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FAQ: How can I provide more useful feedback on multilingual/international students' writing?[1]

Research also indicates that feedback emphasizing grammar errors can be overwhelming for the student and time-consuming for the instructor (Hartshon et al, 2010; Bitchener, 2008). Here are some strategies you could use to provide effective feedback in an efficient manner.[2]

Do Less	What are the most important learning outcomes you would like your students to demonstrate in this assignment?
Praise in Detail	What are your students doing well in a given assignment? What would you like them to keep doing?
Look Past Accuracy	If you have to comment, what is one grammar issue you would like all your students to notice in their writing? How will you address that issue in class?
Require Revision	Before writing comments, do you require your students to revise this assignment?
Be Regular and Be Frequent	If you require a revision, how fast do you want that? If you expect your students to apply the feedback, how soon will you send it so that they can have time to react to it?

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[1] This question is part of a collection of questions shared by Mason faculty and compiled by K.Skipper. For more information, visit stearns.gmu.edu and read the "Helping Multilingual Students Succeed" handout.

[2] Hartshon, K.J., Evans, N.W., Merrill, P.F., Sudweeks, R.R., Strong-Krause, D. , Anderson, N.J. (2010). Effects of Dynamic Written Corrective Feedback on ESL Writing Accuracy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 44, 84-109.

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Other Recommendations and Teaching Resources

Apply Today	Doetsch-Kidder, S., Miller, L., Weinstein, A. (2018). "Structuring reading/writing assignments to improve critical thinking skills" [PowerPoint]. *Innovations in teaching and learning,* (10). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.13021/G8itlcp.10.2018.2153 GMU Writing Across the Curriculum (n.d.) "Discussing prompts." [PDF File]. Retrieved from https://wac.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Sample-Activities-1_Part2.pdf GMU Writing Across the Curriculum (n.d.) "Low-stakes writing." [PDF File]. Retrieved from https://wac.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Low-Stakes-Writing-1.pdf GMU Writing Across the Curriculum (n.d.) "From writing intensive to writing integrated" [PDF File]. Retrieved from https://wac.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Integrating-Writing.pdf GMU Writing Across the Curriculum. "Dealing with student error" [PDF File]. Retrieved from https://wac.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Dealing-with-Student-Error-1.pdf Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning, GMU. (n.d.). "Reframing Students' Roles in Collaborative Learning". Retrieved from https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/student-engagement-classroom-managment/collaborative-learning/ Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning, GMU. (n.d). "Grading: providing effective feedback to students". Retrieved from https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/course-and-curriculum-redesign/grading/
Listen Today	Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning, GMU. "Collaborative learning" Retrieved from https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/student-engagement-classroom-managment/collaborative-learning/ Perez, A. & Stachowiak, B. (2016, September 22). "Bridging the culture gap." *Teacing in Higher Ed Podcast.* Retrieved from https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast/bridging-culture-gap/ Haras, C. & Stachowiak, B. (2018, June 28). "Reflecting on our teaching." *Teaching in Higher Ed Podcast.* Podcast retrieved from https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast/reflecting-on-our-teaching/ Teaching in higher ed. (n.d). Cultural competence. Retrieved from https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast-category/cultural-competence/

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Read Today	Writing Across the Curriculum. Retrieved from https://wac.gmu.edu/learning-modules-resources/ Writing Across the Currilum, GMU. "From writing intensive to writing integrated." (n.d). Retrieved from https://wac.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Integrating-Writing.pdf Online Writing Lab, Purdue University: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_style_introduction.html Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning (n.d). "Developing critical thinkers.". Retrieved from https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/course-and-curriculum-redesign/developing-critical-thinkers/ Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning, GMU. (n.d.) "Using writing to learn in your classes". Retrieved from https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/student-engagement-classroom-managment/writing-and-research/ The Writing Center, GMU. "Writing center quick guides." Retrieved from https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/writing-resources/wc-quick-guides Zawacki, T. (n.d). "Managing the paper load and responding effectively to student writing" [PDF File]. Retrieved from http://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Managing-the-Paper-Load-and-Responding-Effectively-to-Student-Writing.pdf

Suggestions for further reading

Biber, D. & Gray, B. (2010). "Challenging stereotypes about academic writing: Complexity, elaboration, explicitness." *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 9,* 2-20.

Bitchener, B. & Knoch, U. (2008). The value of written corrective feedback for migrant and international students. *Language Teaching Research 12*(3), 409 – 431.

Hartshon, K.J., Evans, N.W., Merrill, P.F., Sudweeks, R.R., Strong-Krause, D. , Anderson, N.J. (2010). Effects of Dynamic Written Corrective Feedback on ESL Writing Accuracy. *TESOL Quarterly, 44,* 84-109.

Jamieson, S. (2013). Reading and engaging sources: What students' use of sources reveals about advance reading skills. *Across the Disciplines, 10*(4). Retrieved from https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/atd/reading/jamieson.pdf

Lockhart, T. & Soliday, M. (2016). The critical place of reading in writing transfer (and beyond): A report of student experiences. *Pedagogy 16* (1), 23-37.

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Do you have other resources to share? Send them to <u>stearns@gmu.edu</u>