Writing Pedagogy

Writing has a place in teaching and learning contexts across the disciplines. In genres including lab and project reports, briefing notes, artistic pieces, lesson plans, policy documents, and the classic academic essay, students at Queen’s are regularly asked to write in their courses. But are they being taught how? If you’d like to learn more about how to integrate evidence-based strategies for teaching writing into your own disciplinary context, educational developer Robin Attas is happy to meet for individual or group consultations, and to work with departments to plan meetings, retreats, or large-scale curricular development. Writing pedagogy workshops are also offered on a regular basis; check our upcoming events page for current offerings.

Ten ways to enhance your writing pedagogy

Start a class discussion with 1-2 minutes of student writing, asking students to respond informally to the question or problem you’ll ask them to discuss. This allows students to generate some ideas prior to discussion, making for richer and more focused conversations.

End your teaching session with 1-2 minutes of student writing asking students to respond informally to the prompts “What’s my biggest takeaway from today?” and “What questions do I still have?” Students can either keep these for their own metacognitive learning, or instructors/TAs can collect and skim for common themes to reference at the next session.

Pose your final paper topics as problems to be solved rather than information gathering, to foster critical thinking. For instance “What design flaws led to the Challenger space shuttle disaster?” or “What operations and management flaws led to the Challenger space shuttle disaster?” rather than “Write a paper discussing the Challenger space shuttle disaster.”

Design your assignment handout so that the learning outcomes, audience, format, and expectations are clear to students from diverse writing cultures. Genres and instructions in one class, discipline, or culture may not look the same as genres and instructions in another class, discipline, or culture (think about the way that news articles on the same story are quite different from one news source to another, and the way that terms can change meaning depending on their context).

Give assignments in stages, incorporating peer and instructor feedback and student revision at various points along the way. This helps students see writing as a process rather than as something that is done once and then submitted.

Work with Student Academic Success Services to design class- or assignment-specific workshops. This helps you focus on your disciplinary expertise and allows those with writing-specific expertise to advise students appropriately, and also allows students to make personal contacts with valuable student-focused supports on campus.
Recommend campus resources such as Student Academic Success Services (SASS) and EAL-specific academic skill development workshops to all students, not just those who are struggling. Writing is a challenge for both native English and English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners, and all students can benefit from peer and professional feedback on their work. SASS offers online writing resources, workshops, drop-in events, EAL specific support, and writing appointments.

See peer review as an opportunity for timely feedback and as a way of teaching students how to give it effectively. The CTL can also help you find technological approaches to peer review, such as the software Aropā that’s easily connected to onQ. See a CTL-developed resource on peer review practices here. [LINK to CTL PDF resource “the 5 Ps of Peer Review” and backside on Aropā]

Provide revision-oriented feedback that helps students understand what to improve upon in future. Keep your assignment’s learning goals and rubric weighting in mind, use models of good work as the starting point for discussions, and focus your attention on higher-order concerns where possible.

Use rubrics for every assignment and make sure both students and graders understand them. By considering rubrics as a conversation-starter around expectations, you’ll help students, graders, and yourself understand what it is you’re really looking for in an assignment. A well-designed rubric doesn’t have to lead to ‘cookie-cutter’ submissions.