

The Campus Writing Program

The Campus Writing Program assists instructors as they incorporate writing into their courses; assists students, through tutorials, in meeting the demands of those courses; and researches the claims of writing across the curriculum.

Because writing in any discipline is governed by specific conventions, the Campus Writing Program approaches any discussion of writing from the perspective that the instructor is the expert of what constitutes good writing in her courses. In turn, CWP consultation and Associate Instructor and course assistant training focus on helping instructors communicate these discipline-specific concerns to student writers. Support to instructors takes several forms: interactive workshops as part of pedagogy courses or departmental training sessions, grade norming sessions, in-class workshops and presentations, one-on-one meetings, and pamphlets on common writing problems.

DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC SUPPORT FOR PEDAGOGY COURSES OR DEPARTMENTAL AI TRAINING SESSIONS

Departments and schools ranging from chemistry, folklore, education, and SPEA, to criminal justice, philosophy, anthropology, and communication and culture, invite CWP staff to lead Associate Instructors and course assistants in discussions about supporting student writing. Among the 30 to 40 sessions the CWP conducts each year, topics vary, depending upon interest:

- Using write-to-learn strategies
- Designing effective writing assignments
- Sequencing writing assignments throughout a course
- Developing clear and fair grading criteria and ensuring equitable grading among multiple course sections (see “Norming Sessions,” below)
- Employing time-saving grading and marking strategies
- Discouraging plagiarism
- Conferring one-on-one with students

ONE-ON-ONE SUPPORT TO INSTRUCTORS

Instructors may contact CWP staff directly for individual consultation on any topic related to teaching writing or using writing to teach. These confidential sessions can focus on such items as sequencing assignments to meet course goals, designing assignments, preparing in-class exercises related to writing, encouraging substantive revision, and evaluating student work.

“NORMING” SESSIONS

Norming is a tool for lead faculty to help guide AIs, course assistants, or graders through the process of grading papers in a specific class; “mock” norming session can also be a part of departmental training sessions for AIs and course assistants as a means of discussing grading more generally.

For faculty teaching multi-section courses, one of the longest standing student misconceptions to overcome is that grades are determined primarily by luck: students assume their grades will vary depending up which AI is grading their papers and how lenient or strict that particular grader is.

At the same time, it is quite possible that reasonable, intelligent, well educated and well intentioned people, when given a stack of student papers and a clearly worded grading scale, will nonetheless assign significantly different grades to the same essay. Norming session can help to improve inter-reader agreement. For lead faculty members teaching multi-section courses, norming sessions:

- Provide articulation of course and assignment objectives
- Establish equity among sections and reduce grade challenges
- Give confidence and authority to graders

For graders and AIs, norming sessions encourage evaluative practice that:

- Works from existing student essays written to the assignment
- Builds from demands of the assignment sheet
- Focuses on substantive, not incidental, traits
- Prioritizes and limits criteria
- Accounts for problems rooted in the assignment
- Establishes the middle—“competence”—grade level and rewards work that exceeds baseline expectations
- Identifies “benchmark” papers at various grade levels
- Produces items on which marginal and end comments may be based

Most norming sessions last 60 to 90 minutes. From a group of newly collected student essays, the lead faculty member chooses 5-10 papers, which are duplicated and distributed among the graders. Generally, the faculty members prefaces the activity by talking about their goals for the assignment, and what general characteristics they look for while grading. The graders then read the set of papers, affix a grade to each, and note two to three reasons for the grade given.

Grades are shared and then discussed. This conversation provides an overview of trends and points of real disagreement among evaluators. For example, graders may agree on the relative merits of each paper—they may have ranked them in the same order, but affixed different grades to each, the highest grade being an A from one grader, and a B from another. Or, there may be very close agreement among the faculty and several of the graders, with one person’s marks lying well outside that range.

The role of the faculty member, with a facilitator from the CWP, is to get everyone at the table to agree upon one grade for each paper, or norming the graders to the faculty’s “benchmark” grade. The heart of the conversation focuses on identifying those places where readers have little agreement and articulating criteria for each grade level that will help AIs be consistent from paper to paper and consistent with one another. The resulting benchmark papers also provide

texts for concrete comparison among the remaining essays—do they have more characteristics in common with one benchmark or another? The CWP staff facilitate these conversations by:

- Scheduling the session
- Providing copies of sample essays
- Facilitating the discussion of the grading scale
- Facilitating the development of the rubric
- Constructing the rubric document itself
- Distributing the finished grading rubric to graders
- Providing additional materials on marking errors, writing comments, and conferring with students about grades

IN-CLASS WORKSHOPS AND PRESENTATIONS

Typically, the CWP staff assists instructors in designing their own in-class activities. On some occasions, however, the CWP staff also provides classroom instruction. Most frequently, these presentations concern strategies for effectively integrating sources into student writing and how to avoid plagiarism.

Writing Tutorial Services, part of the Campus Writing Program, provides one-on-one tutorial help to students writing essays for any IU course. Tutorials are available by 50-minute appointment in WTS Ballantine 206, and for 30-minute walk-in appointments at various locations on campus, including the Wells Library and the Academic Support Centers in Briscoe, Forest and Teter residence halls (detailed information about hours of operation and making appointment available at <http://www.iub.edu/~wts>). WTS staff may also be invited to make brief (five- or six-minute) presentations to promote WTS to undergraduates in individual class sections taught by AIs.

PAMPHLETS ON COMMON WRITING PROGRAMS

WTS provides pamphlets on various writing topics, such as developing a thesis statement, using evidence, citing sources in APA, MLA, or Chicago style, and proofreading for common grammatical errors. Als who wish to distribute these materials or use them in class are welcome to pick up pamphlets at Ballantine 206, order them by calling WTS, or download the pdf versions from the WTS website to distribute to their students.