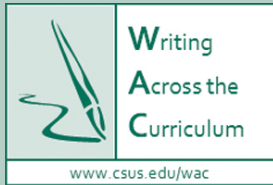




WRITING

across the curriculum

NEWSLETTER



WAC NEWS & EVENTS

Multilingual Student Writers: Language and Cultural Diversity in the Classroom

Writing Across the Curriculum and the Multi-Cultural Center present a workshop on responding to multilingual student writers on Thursday, February 26, from 12:00-1:15 in the Folsom Room of the Union. RSVP with WAC at 8-6925 or melzer@csus.edu.

Faster, Fairer, Easier Grading Using Rubrics

Writing Across the Curriculum and the Center for Teaching and Learning present a campus-wide brown bag, "Faster, Fairer, Easier Grading using Rubrics" on Thursday, March 19 from 12:00-1:15 at the CTL, LIB 4026. To pre-register contact the CTL at 8-5945 or ctl@csus.edu.

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To find out more about the WAC program or to schedule a consultation, contact Dan Melzer, University Reading and Writing Coordinator, at melzer@csus.edu or (916) 278-6925.

Research as Process:

Teaching the Large Research Project

By Laura Basini, Music Department

One of the most significant challenges of assigning a research project is providing ways for students to experience the joy and stimulation of research that is relevant to their own intellectual and career development. This is often particularly difficult in the time-crunched frame of an academic calendar. Frequently in our courses, research projects are for a variety of reasons left until the last segment of the semester, incorporated into the course as extension-type assignments to be completed after "the material" has been covered. A main complaint of students, often, is that there wasn't enough time for the assignment and that they only had one attempt at a project of this kind. This is often closely followed by comments that may lead us to believe that many students see such assignments as extraneous to learning "core material," with research perceived as "another" discipline irrelevant to their interests and educational priorities (something particularly prevalent in performance-disciplines such as my own). Apathy about research assignments, what is more, is often exacerbated by psychological issues about writing ingrained in students from past experiences, with many students considering themselves as simply "not being good" at writing and research.

How can we as instructors provide students with opportunities to experience research as a long-scale process that allows time for developing skills, overcoming individual writing challenges, and experiencing ways in which research and writing can relate to individual interests and enthusiasms? In my recent teaching I have been able to experiment with devising strategies for addressing some of these problems while overhauling a core course in our department: Introduction to Graduate Studies. One of the main goals of the class is to provide students with the tools they would need to complete a thesis or culminating project. In order to achieve this, students are guided through the steps of a research paper along the entire course of the semester, producing a 25-page paper by the final week of term. The research and paper preparation is intertwined with discussion of other material and guest lectures on various topics. While students usually find the class demanding, by the end of each semester feedback on the research procedure has consistently been positive. What follows here are some hints about approaches I have found useful in teaching research over the course of a semester rather than at the end of it. While these ideas have been developed through a graduate class, the tips are easily applicable to other levels of learning, particularly upper-level students and those in Writing Intensive classes, capstone classes, culminating courses in a major, etc.

- Make topics relevant to the careers of the students. When possible, allow students to choose their own subject matter, which increases their investment in the project.
- Meet students where they are, whatever their skill set. Verbalize that all writers develop at their own pace, and that this assignment is an experience-based rather than an end-goal assignment. The point is to complete the process, rather than turn out a perfect project. (There is no perfect project!) Following this, make it clear that you will grade accordingly as process and for improvement rather than result. This will make them more likely to take risks and not despair about their perceived failings.

- Pace assignments over the course of the semester and do the breaking down of tasks for students rather than expecting them to know what sub-tasks need to be completed. For example, estimate as best you can the amount of time necessary to sub-tasks such as database searching, reading, thinking about and comparing these possibilities, etc., and incorporate mini-assignments with specific deadlines. The class can move in lockstep together through at least the first few steps of the research process.
- Allow thinking and reading time. Be realistic about how fast students can read and develop ideas. In the middle of the project timeline, schedule other activities in class time but allow students homework time to get ahead on their project research and reading.
- Allow time for in-class discussion of writing, and for individual coaching. Teaching research and process takes up a LOT of instructor time, and instructors still end up spending a lot of time with individuals outside of classroom hours. But assigning class time to individual meetings will also help.
- Schedule workshops with different instructors and writing experts discussing the research and writing process. The more ideas and voices the students hear, the more likely your students will find ways of relating and grasping what will work best for them.
- Approach research and writing as doing. Emphasize that research and writing, in the same way as performance arts, is developed through practice. Research and writing entails forethought, drafting, re-working, re-thinking, etc. By ensuring students complete mini-assignments such as thesis formulations, drafts, and outlines, students will come to understand that successful papers are the result of multi-step, weeks-long process rather than one-time, night-before inspiration.
- Demonstrate how students can get ideas from doing – from talking, writing, and completing tasks. Writing is not something to be done “at the end,” after thinking, but (also like in performance) develops as we do it and other tasks.
- When possible, approach writing as part of the student’s professionalization and incorporate different kinds of writing tasks that they will need to use in their future careers. That is, assign not only the research project with abstract, the annotated bibliography, etc., but also letters, resumes, biographies, online publicity statements, web copy, or whatever is relevant to your discipline.

Sample Pacing of Assignments Throughout the Semester

Week 2-3: Have the students come up with a few ideas that they’re interested in writing about, and have them complete searches on information on those topics. Read selected chapters from books such as *The Craft of Research* and practice formulating hypothetical versions of potential research problems.

Sample Assignment: Read chapters 3-6 of *The Craft of Research*. Then, for your chosen topic, follow the processes outlined on pages 40-55.

- “from a broad topic to a focused one”
- “from a focused topic to questions”
- “from a merely interesting question to its wider significance”

Come to class with at least two formulations of your research problem (“I am studying X because I want to find out what / why / how . . . in order to help my reader understand . . .”). Be ready to discuss your formulations with your classmates.

Week 4: Develop critical thinking skills that students will use in their reading and research. Read articles together and discuss in class.

Sample Assignment:

For each article:

- Outline the main points and / or thesis (no more than one or two paragraphs). What do you think is the author’s agenda?
- Describe at least two strengths of the article, and two weaknesses.
- Identify at least one quotation that is either extremely provocative / debatable, or which you feel sums up the article or attitudes therein.
- Be ready to share your ideas and discuss in class. Turn in your typed notes at the end of class after the discussion.

Weeks 5-6: Have the students produce an annotated bibliography on their chosen area of research.

Sample Assignment:

Using the databases we have examined in class, compile an annotated bibliography for your potential research project. You must have at least thirty relevant academic

items in your bibliography, including at least fifteen specialized articles. Aim to have each of the following:

- Relevant primary sources
- Relevant secondary sources
- Relevant general background informational sources
- Relevant musicological articles
- Relevant music analysis

*Present each title in your bibliography in the format given in **The Chicago Manual of Style**, page 627.* Under each title, write your annotation. Refer to the example overleaf for an idea of what to write. Your bibliography must be alphabetized, with the correct placement of information about authors, titles, publishers, date of publication, etc. Read **Chicago Manual of Style**, pages 612-629, for full explanations of how to tackle various entries in your bibliography. **Pay precise attention to the formatting, placement of commas, periods, use of italics and capital letters, etc.**

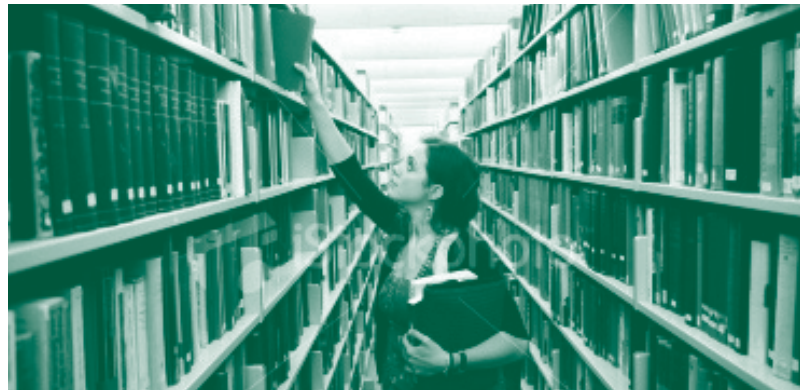
As you are researching and reading for your Annotated Bibliography, think about what research issues arise from what you find. What material and questions do you find most interesting and stimulating? What gaps exist in the current literature? How might you argue with perspectives or approaches with which you disagree? Be sure to make notes on these questions as you continue your research.

Week 7: Reading and thinking time (schedule another activity or guest lecture in class).

Weeks 8-9: Individual meetings with students (reading and thinking time).

Sample Assignment:

- Come to class on your assigned date. Bring a copy of your annotated bibliography with you. Prepare notes on each of the following points, and be prepared to talk about them.
- What is your basic research paper idea? What originally made you interested in the topic? What has defined your path towards this final project?
- Why do you (and why should we!) care about your project?
- Outline the main research and ideas already published on your topic. Which are the most influential authors and readings you have encountered? Which the most controversial?
- What do you think might be the main thesis or theses that your own paper will present?



- What information or ideas do you know your paper must include?
- How will you actually craft and organize your ideas in your research paper? What might go in each section – introduction, initial sections, middle and end sections, conclusion, etc.?
- What problems are you encountering at this point in the research process?
- What questions do you have about your research or the paper process?

Week 10: Have the students start writing (schedule a guest lecture or other activity in class).

Sample Assignment:

Continue to read relevant sources for your project.

Continue to think about how you will actually go about writing your final paper, in particular how you will make and organize your argument. Revisit if necessary chapters 7-10 of *The Craft of Research*. Begin to think in detail about what will go into each section of your paper. Draft a few outlines with various possibilities. Jot down any ideas you have for striking ways to begin and end your paper. Read Chapters 12-16 of *The Craft of Research*.

Begin to write a part of your research paper. Perhaps you have some informational or factual body paragraphs that will be easier to write than other passages. You may have some music analysis that can be quickly accomplished. Your paper may include a literature review. Aim to have written at least five pages of something by the end of the week.

Week 11: Have the students continue writing. Have them complete an abstract for their paper.

Week 12-13: Individual Meetings with students (writing time).

Weeks 14-15: Class presentations.

Evening Tutoring in the Library: A Useful New Extension of the Services of the University Writing Center

By Tori Wolfe, Writing Center Graduate Associate Coordinator



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information:*

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Email: writingcenter@csus.edu

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www.csus.edu/writingcenter

The University Writing Center in Calaveras 128 is a very useful site for getting help with writing. Despite the extreme usefulness of the Writing Center, it has limitations as well. The evening library tutoring is the solution to the problems of limited hours. Because the hours offered at the Writing Center itself are not optimal or convenient for some of the students here due to classes or work, the library offers alternative evening hours that appeal to those students who cannot use the Writing Center during the day.

The library tutoring in conjunction with the Writing Center first began in Fall 2007 at the behest of then Writing Center coordinator Cathy Gabor (a former professor of CSUS) and Linda Goff of the library. At the time, it ran with only a single tutor and very limited hours. This was a way for the tutoring services to extend into the evenings without the Center itself being open. Now the library tutoring is typically open for 2-3 hours Monday-Thursday evenings between 6:00 and 8:00 pm.

I interviewed one of the tutors who spends time in both the Writing Center and the library tutoring in order to get an idea of the differences between the two venues. She had a lot to say: she almost always helps students the entire time she is in the library (similar to the Writing Center), the hours there are very useful for those who cannot come during the Writing Center's open times, and the library tutoring has been very effective.

Library tutoring takes place in room 3501A on the third floor, and can be used for weekly appointments (students are allowed up to one hour of tutoring per week) or in a drop-in capacity. Student writers can check the Writing Center website to find out exactly what hours will be available in the Spring 2009 semester: www.csus.edu/writingcenter.