



## Teaching with Writing (TWW) Tip

### Summer Tip #1: Writing and Course Design

This is the first in a three-part series of summer tips that will invite you to think about when, where, and how writing appears in your courses, either in new ways or more effectively in familiar ones. While usually tips emphasize practical advice about ways to incorporate writing instruction into diverse course offerings, these three tips will emphasize writing activities, assignments, and instruction in course preparation and design. The series will include activities for reflecting on the role of writing and writing instruction in your courses, recommendations for planning graded and ungraded writing on a variety of platforms, and material related to writing instruction and assistance that might be usefully included in course syllabi.

Summer Tip #1: Writing and course design

Summer Tip #2: Writing activities and technologies

Summer Tip #3: Ways to discuss writing in your syllabus

**Look for trends in student’s final documents and assessments:** Although one of the joys of the end of the semester is setting aside a completed pile of graded work, take a moment to reflect on patterns that emerge in students written assignments and activities. In relation to the course goals, are you confident that students are meeting expectations? Are there patterns of weakness or error associated with a particular topic area, assignment requirement, or task? Is there evidence that students’ used good practices for constructing their final assignments, or do they appear to have rushed or run out of steam? Do all graders seem to agree on what constitutes a passing grade, or what counts as excellence?

Once you have completed a thorough review of your student’s responses, consider thinking about ways to modify your instruction and activities leading up to the final assignments. For example, difficult course concepts might be effective targets for additional explanation, examples, or supplemental instruction through writing. Persistent errors or the absence of crucial steps in completed assignments might emphasize the need to clarify an assignment sheet or provide additional instructions about processed of drafting. By creating early check in opportunities for drafts or peer review, you may encourage students to practice more effective project management. If consistency appears to be an issue among graders, you might consider developing more effective assignment rubrics or practicing some grade norming. The Teaching with Writing program has resources available in all of these areas.

**Read state of the art research in the scholarship of teaching and learning:** You may already be familiar with some of the widely popular books on teaching in Higher Education like John Bean’s [Engaging Ideas](#), [How Learning Works](#) by Susan Ambrose et al, or Linda B. Nilsen’s [Teaching at its Best](#). If not, each of these is an effective starting point for research-based evidence on practices of effective teaching and learning. More than simply providing experience based tips, these resources often point to research in cognition, motivation, retention, and skills acquisition that can inform your practice in other areas. Implementing researched based interventions in teaching strategy can be helpful in “closing the loop” regarding internal and external assessments of assurance of learning.

In addition, journals in your own subject area or discipline may provide new and novel ways to use writing to teach particular subject matters. Some of these may be in the genre of practical

tips, but many fields have a robust teaching scholarship that can help us to think about our work in new ways.

Finally, consider reviewing scholarship and resources dedicated to writing across the curriculum. [The WAC Clearinghouse](#), hosted by Colorado State University aggregates, books, articles, and resources about writing across the curriculum at universities around the world. Most items are available free and full text.

**Finally, schedule a meeting with a WAC/WID Teaching Consultant:** The people who write these tips are here this summer to talk about writing in your courses and curricula. A brief meeting now or a request for consultation can be a good first step to finding resources and thinking about your classroom practices. In addition, the shared interests and concerns of faculty are the basis for planning our series of Teaching with Writing during the academic year. Consultations are available by clicking the link below.

If you aren't yet ready for a teaching consultation, take a minute to browse the teaching resources at our [Teaching Resources page](#). It offers advice and resources on all aspects of assigning, assessing, and responding to writing. In addition, if you identify a topic that hasn't been discussed or needs clarification, you may inspire the next Teaching with Writing Tip.

**Further support:** Visit us online at <http://writing.umn.edu/tww>. To schedule a phone, email, or face-to-face teaching consultation, [click here](#).

*Our purpose is to provide practical strategies for teaching with writing. Our goal is to offer timely and pragmatic support to faculty members and instructors who teach with writing in undergraduate and graduate courses in all disciplinary areas.*