

**Teaching with Writing (TWW) Tip
Summer Tip #3:
Ways to discuss writing in your syllabus**



This is the last in a three-part series of summer tips that 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](#) emphasized writing activities, assignments, and instruction in course preparation and design. The series included 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

This final tip brings together all of the work you may have done on reflecting on the role of writing in your course and the ways writing activities and technologies could be integrated into your classroom experience.

First consideration: Explicit description of the roles of writing in the course

Often we think of student writing in terms of finished, graded texts. You might consider making it clear that other sorts of writing are valued in your course for purposes other than grading. Rather than simply asking students to read a chapter, ask students to write reading notes. The act of writing their notes will improve student retention of knowledge and will encourage close reading, especially if tied to reading quizzes or other evaluative activities.

For example: In addition to identifying the readings and particular dates on your syllabus, you might link to guiding questions as inspiration for reading notes. This advice is especially valuable if the goal for your class meeting is to move beyond simple summaries of course readings. Remember, you need not collect and respond to every piece of writing students produce for your course, or you might adopt a very simple grading process (satisfactory/unsatisfactory) to reduce your paper load. For advice on making the role of writing explicit, see this earlier [tip](#).

Second consideration: Including developing as a writer in your course goals

Course goals or outcomes can be tremendously valuable for helping students see the big picture of your course and to understand the relationship between assignments, activities, and learning goals for the course. L. Dee Fink has written persuasively about the sorts of course goals that lead to [significant learning experiences](#). Writing is an excellent way to apply skills, integrate course material to life experience, discuss shared or changing values, and to learn how to learn.

In Writing Intensive courses, the learning how to learn goal is especially significant, so attend carefully to improvement in writing as both the product of effective assignments and as a component of the course content. Your syllabus can foreshadow both the direct instruction in writing and practices of revision that are required of WI courses. If you have questions about your writing intensive course, consider signing up for a [consultation](#).

Third Consideration: Describing writing assignments and grading criteria

While we often include general grading guidelines and grading scales in the syllabus, you can help your students to understand your system of evaluation by providing information and guidelines about assessment. Categories like analytical rigor, organization, attention to audience, and depth and specificity are all assessable in the context of student writing.

Final Consideration: Promoting awareness of Student Writing Support

Student Writing Support provides free writing instruction for all University of Minnesota students—graduate and undergraduate—at all stages of the writing process. In face-to-face and online collaborative consultations, we help students develop productive writing habits and revision strategies. Our surveys show that more students use SWS because of their instructors' encouragement than for any other reason. On the “For Instructors” page of our website (<http://writing.umn.edu/sws/instructors.html>), you will find materials to help you introduce SWS to your students.

Please note that SWS consultants will not work with students on take-home exam essays unless the instructor states in writing on the exam or in the syllabus that it is permissible for students to use our services specifically for these assignments.

Writing Across the Curriculum: Support for Instructors (WAC)

Just as we work one-to-one with students on their writing, we also consult individually with instructors from all disciplines on concerns ranging from assignment design and coaching to grading and instructional practices. See the Teaching with Writing pages (<http://writing.umn.edu/tww>) on the Center website for teaching resources, including sample assignments and syllabi.

As many of you know, our WAC program also hosts the popular **Teaching with Writing event series**. Each semester, this series offers free workshops and discussions. We hope you will visit <http://writing.umn.edu/tww/events.php> in September to learn about and register for this semester's offerings.

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.