

Teaching with Writing (TWW) Tip

Teaching Writing Through Reading – Part 1

Teaching with Writing



The [last two teaching tips](#) have stressed the benefits of making writing expectations and conventions explicit for students through syllabus statements and the use of metateaching strategies. This month's tip begins a two-part series on how explicit guidance with reading tasks can also benefit student writing.

Writing *and* Reading Across the Curriculum

[Literacy research](#) has documented strong and symbiotic links between reading and writing. As Langer and Flihan note, "Writers incorporate what they have learned about language, structure and style from the texts they have encountered as readers" ([Center on English Learning & Achievement](#)). The key word here is *encounter*. If students do not read actively, chances are they do not see the benefits in their writing. For example, when student readers are unable to identify a text's core argument or the connective ideas among texts, they will likely struggle with summary and synthesis writing as well.

Here are three suggestions for fostering mutually beneficial reading and writing encounters.

1) *Assign Purposeful Reading*

Principles of effective [writing assignment design](#) stress the benefits of making clear the purpose, audience, and genre for students. The same holds true for reading assignments. However, as [Gottschalk and Hjortshoj](#) point out, when reading is assigned, the purpose for reading and the reader's role are often unspecified. Consequently, a student, highlighter in hand, will treat undifferentiated reading assignments as a surface, linear, and passive act – not an encounter. Two useful questions to consider when assigning reading are (1) *what do you want the students to do with the reading?* and (2) *what is their role as readers?* Brief yet explicit prompting that addresses these questions will guide students toward more focused reading and writing.

Example: Gottschalk and Hjortshoj offer this model from a course in Social Sciences: "Read Chapter VI in Hinton as a basis first for understanding the cases we discuss next week. We will return to this chapter when you write a comparison between Hinton's theory and Caldwell's two weeks later, and an understanding of both theories will serve you well in the midterm exam" (127). Here the instructor lays out the purpose for the reading (preparing to discuss cases and compare theories), and the ways that careful reading will prepare the student for future writing. The inclusive use of "we" also underscores how students are responsible for contributing to the course's production of ideas.

2) *Require Students to Read as Writers*

A majority of assigned reading tasks focus on what Adler-Kassner and Estrem term "content-based reading" – reading that asks students to summarize, interpret, consider connections, memorize information, and develop ideas (40). While content-based reading supports many

course learning goals, shifting the focus toward *process-based reading* (“scrutinizing the text to look at the decisions made by the writer”) and *structure-based reading* (“developing genre awareness”) can be especially useful for helping students identify models for their own academic writing.

Example: In an Environmental Engineering capstone course, a professor requires students to read technical memos and Environmental Impact Reports in preparation for their final projects. When students read the memos and EIRs, they annotate the documents, identifying specific rhetorical features, writerly moves, and genre conventions that will help them with their own writing. The annotated texts are uploaded to the course’s Moodle page to serve as writing guidelines for students.

3) *Leverage Reading and Writing Tasks*

As [earlier TWW Tips](#) have identified, reading and writing practices are mutually deepened when they are integrated. Ways to integrate reading and writings tasks include, dialectical notebooks, passage-based papers, reading journals, [précis writing](#), and the use of graphic organizers. Such tasks have the added value of generating ongoing inquiry. For example, when students generate questions about a reading, they can answer those questions in more formal writing assignments.

Example: In a Chemistry course, a professor assigns articles from *The Journal of Structural Chemistry* to a groups of students. The articles are complete, but the abstracts have been removed (“beheaded”). After reading their assigned articles, the student groups draft an abstract for their article and share with the rest of the class. The professor then supplies the original abstracts, and the class discusses the similarities and differences between the student abstracts and the originals. The beheaded abstract exercise prepares students for their own final projects, which will include a research proposal and a written abstract.

The Long Conversation

In its recently revised Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, the Association of College and Research Libraries has identified [Scholarship as Conversation](#) as one of its six core competencies. In order for students to participate productively in such a conversation, they must continue to develop their critical reading and written reasoning skills. Next month’s TWW Tip will extend this discussion of reading and writing by turning to the modes of summary and synthesis writing and the genre of the Literature Review.

Sources:

Adler-Kassner, Linda, & Estrem, Heidi. “Reading Practices in the Writing Classroom.” *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 31(1-2), 2007, 35-47.

Gottschalk, Katherine and Keith Hjortshoj. *The Elements of Teaching Writing: A Resource for Instructors in all Disciplines*. New York: Bedford/ St. Martin’s, 2003.

Langer, Judith A. and Sheila Flihan. “Writing and Reading Relationships: Constructive Tasks.” Eds. Indrisano, Roselmina, and James R. Squire. *Perspectives on Writing: Research, Theory, and Practice*.

Newark, Dela.: International Reading Association, 2000.

Further support:

See the [Teaching with Writing pages](#) on the Center for Writing 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. Visit us [online](#). To schedule a phone, email, or face-to-face teaching consultation, [click here](#).