



Teaching with Writing (TWW) Tip

The Write Stuff:
Supporting Student Writing & Learning in Your Syllabus & Assignments

In their recent book, [*The Meaningful Writing Project: Learning, Teaching, and Writing in Higher Education*](#) (2016), researchers Michele Eodice, Anne Ellen Geller, and Neal Lerner share results from a multi-year study featuring surveys and one-on-one interviews with students and faculty at three universities. Their [core findings](#) are useful to consider as you prepare course syllabi and assignments for the upcoming academic year. This month's TWW tip offers three suggestions that align with findings in *The Meaningful Writing Project (MWP)*.

MWP Finding: Students encounter meaningful writing assignments across the curriculum and throughout their college careers, but they are most apt to encounter meaningful assignments in their major.

Suggestion: Align Writing with the Discipline

Because students associate meaningful writing with work in the major, it is useful to offer a statement on your syllabus that makes explicit how writing promotes learning in discipline-specific ways. Even for students outside the major, such statements are beneficial because they can clarify the purpose and rationale for your assignments and activities. Two questions to consider when crafting a role of writing statement: How will the writing assigned in your course support students' learning as they progress through the term? How might the assigned writing students do transfer to other contexts?

Example: In her mathematics course at Cornell, Cynthia Francisco provides this statement on her syllabus: "Writing is fundamental to mathematical research at all levels. Obviously, mathematicians write to convey their ideas to others, but they also write in all stages of investigating a problem to clarify their own ideas and finish the details. In this course, students will engage in these types of writing to give them deeper insight into how mathematicians work" ([TWW resource](#)).

For additional examples of how writing can be aligned with discipline-specific learning, check out the [Teaching with Writing website](#).

MWP Finding: Meaningful assignments provide opportunities "for learning that connects to previous experiences and passions and to future aspirations and identifies" (4).

Suggestion: Design Forward-Thinking Writing Assignments

The orientation of many writing prompts is often backward-thinking, asking students to show they learned X, Y, and Z. Instead of asking students to repeat course material, consider forward-thinking assignments, which L. Dee Fink describes as "activities that look ahead to what students will be able to do in the future having learned about X, Y and Z" (86).

Example: In a course on Shakespearean drama, a professor asks students to apply their emerging views of Antonio, Bassanio, and Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* to a proposal for a new production. In their proposals, students indicate how the characters should be directed.

MWP Finding: “Faculty who teach courses in which meaningful writing takes place often deliberately build these qualities into their teaching and curriculum, expressing their goals and values for writing through specific practices” (4).

Suggestion: Show Your Support for Students in Writing

A syllabus can be much more than a document that contains policy statements and procedures. You can convey your support for student writing and learning by inviting students to meet during office hours and by appointment to discuss assignments and feedback, by [scheduling targeted, in-class time to support specific writing tasks](#), and by directing students toward online and campus-based resources.

Example: Many faculty find it useful to include statements on their syllabus that direct students to the Center for Writing’s Student Writing Support (SWS). On the Center for Writing’s [Student Writing Support \(SWS\) website](#), you will find materials to help you introduce SWS to your students. You can include the following language on your syllabus:

Student Writing Support (SWS) offers 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, SWS consultants from across the disciplines help students develop productive writing habits and revision strategies.

Consulting is available by appointment online and in Nicholson Hall, and on a walk-in basis in Appleby Hall. For more information, go to writing.umn.edu/sws or call 612.625.1893.

In addition, SWS offers a number of [web-based resources](#) on topics such as avoiding plagiarism, documenting sources, and planning and completing a writing project.

Sources:

Eodice, Michele, Anne Ellen Geller, and Neal Lerner. *The Meaningful Writing Project: Learning, Teaching, and Writing in Higher Education*. Logan, UT: Utah State U P, 2016

Fink, L Dee. *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003.

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](#).