

Scaffolding Writing Development in Course Syllabi

August 18, 2023

Writing and Critical Thinking Conference

Domains of Learning and Thinking

1. Knowing
2. Comprehending
3. Applying
4. Analyzing
5. Synthesizing
6. Evaluating

Writing as showing: in educational settings, we read student writing for evidence that they effectively know, comprehend, can apply, can analyze, can synthesize, and can evaluate course content.

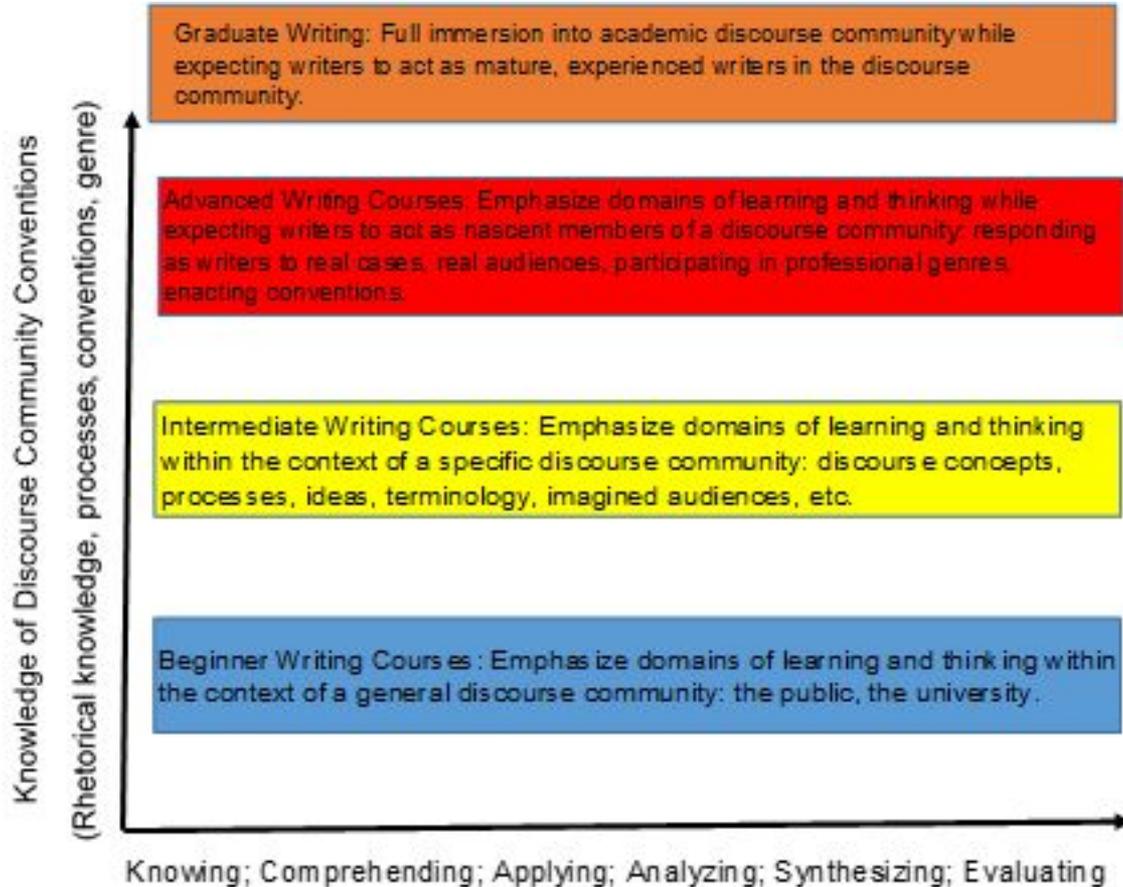
Writing as doing: But the work of applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating does not happen in our minds independent of language...learners use language and writing as tools to do this advanced thinking: to name things, scrutinize them, and give them relations to other things.

Writing is advanced thinking

THE SOCIAL ACT OF WRITING AND ITS COUNTERPARTS (PARTICIPATING IN COMMUNITIES OF DISCOURSE)

- Rhetorical knowledge – the ability to analyze and act on understandings of audiences, purposes, and contexts in creating and comprehending texts, including within specialized discourse communities, such as academic disciplines.
- Writing processes – strategies to approach and undertake writing and research within the traditions of a discourse community
- Knowledge of conventions – the **formal** and **informal** guidelines that define what is considered to be correct and appropriate, or incorrect and inappropriate, in a piece of writing
- Thinking conventions: ways of thinking and knowing (methodology, epistemology) that are conventions in a community of discourse
- Genre knowledge and genre conventions - awareness of various genres and textual arrangements that help organize writing, and portray pre-defined ways of thinking, especially through genres valued by a discourse community.

Distinguishing among beginner, intermediate, and advanced writing courses?



Connecting Writing + Thinking

- Ways of thinking get mapped onto writing in both large and small language structures.
- Large structures: Genres, Assignments
- Intermediate structures: Genre or Assignment “Sections” or major requirements
- Small structures: linguistic moves, style requirements, rules about voice, etc.

Ideally, these elements interrelate to one another as they accumulate into a way of thinking on the page. Example: If I want students to think about how a reading relates to their life, I might assign a “response paper” (genre), that includes both a summary and personal reflection (assignment sections), and promote student use of first-person throughout (linguistic and style requirement).

What would be some ideal elements of a writing course if we could start from scratch?

- Provide readings and materials that begin to engage students in a community of discourse at the desired level (beginner, intermediate, advanced, graduate)
- Provide space for class conversations about how that discourse community operates, what ways of thinking are valued, and why those ways of thinking are valued.
- Provide informal, short writing assignments that help students learn as they practice these ways of thinking.
- Provide informal or formal longer writing assignments that ask students to do advanced thinking in the field under study, enacting ways of thinking to a defined audience.
- Ensure these assignments are designed in a way that the large (genre), intermediate (sections), and small (style) language requirements all contribute toward a coherent way of thinking
- Anticipate that students will struggle, and make more frequent errors as they try to do advanced thinking and join an unfamiliar community of discourse, and where possible intercede in their writing processes to help them address struggles.
- Promote learning by providing commentary and student writing with opportunity for revision.

Solo-Activity: If you could start a course in your field from scratch:

1. What ways of thinking would you want to teach your students?
2. What types of genres and assignments could help students participate in those ways of thinking?
3. What informal exercises (writing or otherwise) could you do to help students:

...see those ways of thinking?

...enact those ways of thinking themselves?

4. What small style or linguistic moves might you encourage to help students think in the ways you imagine?

Dr. Kelly Fisher's Management Approach

Dr. Tricia Davidson's Nutrition Approach

Requirements for Writing-Emphasis Courses and GE

Writing Across the Curriculum web page:

<https://wcupa.edu/viceProvost/writingAcrossCurriculum/default.aspx>

“W” Criteria page:

<https://wcupa.edu/viceProvost/writingAcrossCurriculum/criteria.aspx>

Other process-based assignment approaches:

1. **Write during class time:** Devote class time to writing and ask students to raise a hand when they want input on something
2. **Sectional drafts:** Require or encourage students to submit just one small portion of an assignment (“submit one source summary”)
3. **First Drafts:** Require or encourage students to submit an ungraded, but complete first-draft
4. **Peer Revision:** Require or encourage students to share their drafts with other students
5. **Group discussion of drafts:** Have the entire class discuss a handful of drafts that have been read by the whole class (names removed or not)
6. **Revision after instructor commentary:** In place of reading a first draft, read and grade a final draft and allow opportunity for revision.
7. **The portfolio approach:** provide no grades on writing throughout the semester, only commentary toward revision. Have students submit all writing as a portfolio at the end and grade their writing as a whole.