EWP TEACHING METHODS: PREFERRED PRACTICES

...lesson planning, collaborating, conferencing, commenting, grading...

The following collection of resources is designed to help you to plan for and carry out day-to-day instruction.

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A note on preferred practices: These ideas collected here are meant to give you an idea of the array of teaching methods that might be effective in your composition classroom. The preferred practices were solicited from EWP instructors and therefore reflect personal tastes within particular class contexts. The practices preferred by others need not be the practices you prefer in your own classrooms, but they can help generate ideas and focus energies.

A note on contributing materials: This resource is designed to be dynamic, to be updated and augmented over time. If you have documents or preferred practices that aren’t represented here that you’d like to contribute, please send them to Chelsea Jennings. Thanks in advance for helping us continue to improve this resource!

SCAFFOLDING

Scaffolding is the practice of building towards an end learning goal or Outcome. It is often useful to work backwards, developing a major assignment before writing the short assignment prompts, and to then identify which writing skills students will need in order to successfully complete the major paper. Layering these skills, one by one, through targeted writing assignments and in-class lesson plans allows students to learn skills in manageable, goal-oriented pieces, rather than being faced with a daunting amount of new writing tasks all at once. Scaffolding assignments also provides opportunities for metacognitive awareness of learning, as students consider why they are doing what they are doing and how the various skills they are learning build on and relate to one another. Students can become aware of the fact that they’re learning skills assignment by assignment, and then bring them all together for a major paper assignment.

PREFERRED PRACTICES FROM INSTRUCTORS

work backwards: “I work backwards—identify points of complexity in an assignment and break it down into manageable teaching portions. I am explicit with students about what I am asking them to do.”

scaffold differently for sequence 1 & 2: “I try to scaffold my two sequences very differently to target different learning styles. For the first sequence, I really enjoy starting out with a personal essay and peer reviewing it right away to prepare students for collaborative work from the very beginning of the class. Papers two and three fit together much more by separating out discreet writing skills, usually close reading of a primary text and then academic summary of a secondary text that is then combined and reworked in developing the first longer paper, which is based on self-designed questions. Then after this first very structured sequence, I like to do something very different for sequence two, either research- or project-based, with only two short
papers working toward one final long paper. Finally, I like to have a mini-final sequence in which students return to their first personal paper to reconsider it in the context of the class."

use the calendar: "It can be really frustrating to scaffold a sequence and then not be able to fit it on the calendar (what a professor of mine once called 'syllabus meets reality principle'). Now I scaffold with the calendar in hand, marking down the most important due dates, peer review sessions, conferences, and essential in-class activities. I've found that most often what gets cut in this process are activities or readings that I thought would be really fun and interesting, but that aren't actually necessary to scaffold the sequence. (Then the trick is to make what you kept more fun and interesting.)"

use the Outcomes as a scaffolding structure: "In my English 111 class, I use the EWP Outcomes as a writing scaffold. The first short paper targets Outcome 1 by asking students to perform a close reading (or rhetorical analysis) of a given text. For the second short paper, we add one text, and the students have to set up a 'conversation' between the two texts, thereby targeting Outcome 2. In the third paper, I have the students 'enter the conversation' they staged in Short Assignment 2 with a claim, targeting Outcome 3. For the Major Paper, they make a more complex claim about the artifacts and conversations they've already set up, and of course we add Outcome Four by taking the MP through several drafts. To use this broad structure, of course, one must scaffold discrete writing skills (paraphrase, quoting, citing...) into the class periods between papers."

LESSON PLANNING

Lesson planning combines many of the categories below (discussion, small group work, presentations, group projects, conferences, peer review). Much like scaffolding, one best practice is to work backwards: first, identify the particular learning goals for the day. Teaching a discrete skill, assigning and discussing a paper prompt, or working through particular aspects of a reading might be goals for a given class period. Lesson planning is the art of deciding how to use class time in order to reach that goal. Many instructors like to have a mixture of activities during the day, in order to balance the amount of time they're talking in front of the class with the amount of time students are working independently or in small groups. Some will set up a regular rhythm in their class; for example, the first few minutes are free-writing, or the last few minutes are class reflection on the day's work. Time management during class is also an important part of lesson planning. For example, knowing when to let an activity go longer than anticipated, and also having extra activities prepared in case things go quickly, can help an instructor confidently move the class towards the learning goals.

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make a plan: "There's just no way around planning. For each class, you need to have thought about what students are bringing in with them that day and what they're going to have to go home and do. So you need to have activities planned, but you also need to have a firm grasp of your objectives...how the activities draw on what students have learned already and how the activities will get them ready for the next thing." Here is a lesson planning template (SM4.doc) and the same template filled in with a lesson on reading comprehension (SM6.doc).

plan for every minute: "Some people are able to know what their teaching goals are for the day, and just need a rough outline of the steps they'll take to get there. This just makes me anxious; I need to know that I have enough activities, and enough information at my fingertips, to effectively use every minute of class. So, my lesson plans are literally blocked out in 10-minute increments. I write down the timeframe, the page numbers I'll need to reference, how students will break into small groups— whatever it is, I prefer to have a plan rather than wing it. Of course sometimes the actual class detours wildly from what I've planned, but other times the lesson plan gives me a secure way to move through the period, knowing that I have enough time to get to everything I want to. And if we don't get to everything, then at least I have it written down as a reminder of what I originally intended for the day." Here is a lesson planning template with timed increments (SM5.doc).

lesson plan close to the class time: "I've generally found that the more time I give myself to lesson plan, the longer it takes, so for me it works best to give myself 1-2 hours before class to plan. Of course, if I know I have prompts to write, worksheets to design, etc. I'll prepare these ahead of time, but spending that time right before class preparing also helps me to have everything fresh in my head so that I don't have to keep referencing my plan constantly."

keep a lesson planning notebook: "At the beginning of my first quarter teaching, I started a lesson plan
notebook where I jotted down schedules and notes for each of my classes under a general title that would remind me what we were doing that day. If something went amiss with the plan or if I had new ideas for how to improve it, I would jot them down in the notebook after class. When I taught the same class in the winter, I could look back and see exactly what we did for each lesson and remember what worked and what didn’t. It was a lifesaver!”

CONFERENCING

Conferences offer an important site for rapport building between an instructor and an individual student, and conferences can be scaffolded into a course in a variety of ways depending on the instructor’s goals. While many instructors incorporate a conference into the drafting process for one of the longer assignments, conferences can also be used for brainstorming, discussing paper feedback, reflection, or planning for the portfolio. Overall, conferences offer students help that is specific to their individual needs and, by giving the instructor more specific information about where a student is, can help the instructor give more tailored instruction, support, and feedback at crucial points in an assignment sequence.

PREFERRED PRACTICES FROM INSTRUCTORS

Instructor A: “Be very clear about expectations and goals. Give students a chance to prepare. Define roles.”

Instructor B: “I like to have students do a worksheet or some form of preparation toward the next assignment that they bring to conferences. I have them talk that through. This gives me a chance to listen for problem areas and correct/guide away from problems ahead of time and tell them ‘Yes! That’s exactly the kind of thing I’m looking for!’”

Instructor C: “Because it can take a long time to get to know students en masse, I like to hold my first conferences early in the quarter, at the beginning of week two. Students typically have submitted a short assignment that we can talk over, but the primary focus is to have a personal conversation. I prepare questions to ask that range from personal to academic. I try to get a sense of what each student’s personal interests and investments are as well as how s/he feels about writing and specifically about classes about writing. This has been especially important in establishing good relationships with English Language Learners who have anxieties about their language skills.”

Instructor D: “I like one of my two conferences to be held in groups. Groups can be three, four, or five students, and I multiply the number of group members by twenty minutes to determine the conference time (i.e. three students for an hour, four students for an hour and twenty minutes). I do this because I get to play the role of facilitator and encourage collaboration between students. These sessions work best when I want to facilitate peer review, group projects, or collaborative analysis of a difficult text. At their best, group conferences are way less work than individual conferences, but also seem to accomplish just as much or more.”

Instructor E: “I’ve held my second conferences during the final week of the quarter. By this point, the students should have not only selected the papers they’ll use for the portfolio, but also begun revisions and work on the cover letter. I like to sit down with them during this time so that I can make sure they’re on the right track, and they can ask me any last-minute or logistical questions that have come up. It’s a good thing to do in groups because often they all have the same questions; also, they have the chance to bounce ideas for the portfolio off the group, and/or ask for work-shopping help. As with any group conference, I plan these with 20 minutes focused on each student.”

Instructor F: “Set up a shared document that students can all edit.”

LECTURING

Lecturing might seem out of place in a skill-building course like composition, and certainly it is an inappropriate method of teaching when students would be better off discovering or practicing writing and reading techniques on their own or in groups. But lecturing has a place in the composition classroom because lectures can be used to model important skills. Before students practice a skill, they often need explanation and demonstration; therefore, these “lectures” look very different from lectures in other classes. At the same time, lectures can usefully follow discussion or practice, as when an instructor summarizes a discussion or points out general principles related to a skill that students have been practicing. Framing class
discussion with necessary context, modeling annotation methods on an overhead, and demonstrating how to 
build a claim on the board are all examples of ways to communicate information that students will then put 
to use. Having a discussion when a brief lecture is more appropriate can be aimless or frustrating, especially 
when the instructor seems to be “fishing” for the correct answer, and small group work used in place of 
lecturing can be similarly problematic, since students may struggle to work with skills that they haven’t fully 
understood. So, while lectures that are lengthy, dry, or not clearly linked to skills required for the course are 
likely to have little impact, well-planned lecturing to explain key concepts can be an efficient and useful 
method for teaching writing.

PREFERRED PRACTICES FROM INSTRUCTORS

lay out the plan: "Always begin by explaining the purpose of the lecture. I alert students to what I want to 
accomplish and what I want them to learn from the lecture. If they know what I am trying to teach, they are 
better positioned to learn."

lecture from notes: "I used to ramble and take a half hour to convey ten minutes worth of information. That 
was frustrating for me and for students! So I started writing out a list of talking points for myself, and 
consulting them repeatedly while I was lecturing. This made my lectures clearer, and also made them much 
shorter. It’s a simple solution, but it really helped."

model notetaking: "When I first started lecturing I found myself infuriated that so few students were taking 
notes. I was saying good things, spouting number-able lists, and still nothing but attentive onlooking. And 
then I realized that students often had a hard time figuring out what was important and what was 
conversational or demonstrative. So I started taking notes for them on the board or the overhead projector. 
So now my students know how to take notes and get more from what I’m conveying in lectures."

mix it up: "No lecture is complete without at least some student engagement. You need to ask some 
questions and asking questions keeps them engaged and you engaging. Ask to get the temperature of the 
room, to solicit special knowledge, to support your own conclusions, to demonstrate the importance of 
question asking and your ability to answer."

DISCUSSION

Discussion can help students clarify difficult concepts, work through complex ideas, and exchange 
perspectives; well-orchestrated discussions are dynamic, collaborative events in which knowledge is actively 
produced, and as such they are often engaging and enjoyable for students as well as the instructor. In the 
composition classroom, discussions are most effective when they produce knowledge that is directly relevant 
to a particular reading or writing assignment. Because many instructors are accustomed to graduate-level 
seminars and writing workshops, it can be tempting to think of discussion as a basic skill and expect students 
to arrive knowing how to do it, but students often need support in order to engage in meaningful discussion. 
Specifically, they may need guidelines for how to prepare, a sense of the goals of the discussion, and an 
explicit set of expectations about how to participate. As such, it is helpful to engage in a certain amount of 
meta-discussion, starting with instructors being explicit about what they want the discussion to accomplish, 
then pausing during key points in the discussion to highlight discoveries, connections, and other noteworthy 
elements, and then finally taking time at the end to summarize the take-away or to bring closure to a 
discussion.

PREFERRED PRACTICES FROM INSTRUCTORS

ask students to prepare before class: "To prepare students for discussions of readings I like to assign a 
journal entry the night before. This journal entry can take the form of a discussion question that will turn into 
large or small group in-class discussion or the journal entry might ask students to prepare one or two multi-
part discussion questions to present to the class. This journal-discussion technique is particularly effective in 
quiet classrooms, with difficult readings, and as a way to call on more reserved students without putting 
them on the spot too uncomfortably."

use notecards to begin conversation and keep it going: "The first day we discuss a text, I like to ask students 
at the start of the period to write down one critical question about the reading. I give them about five 
minutes to formulate these, then collect them. Oftentimes, students are then more comfortable discussing 
the material as a group, but if participation dwindles, I pull a question randomly from the stack and pose it to 
the class. I always note whose question it is, which also has the side benefit of allowing students less
comfortable with speaking in public a voice (if I happen to choose those). As part of their reading assignment is to annotate, culling their marginalia to formulate a question for the class also makes the work they do outside of class enter our class work in a more obvious but seamless way."

**make listening matter with GoPost:** "GoPost can be great for requiring active listening. I ask students to post a comment—a response, a reflection, etc.—on the discussion board after a class discussion. And they can't just repeat something they said during the discussion! They have to reflect on what was said and add to it or analyze it. I've found that quieter students take this role especially seriously, and it rewards paying attention to what others say."

**prepare for contingencies:** "After many experiences of not knowing what to do when students couldn't or didn't answer one of my discussion questions, I started planning for possible responses. If students don't understand this question, how will I rephrase it? If they're still confused about the reading, what 5-minute lecture might I give to get them on track? If no one wants to talk, will I ask them to freewrite or think/pair/share, or will I simply start calling on students? Having a plan B made me much more comfortable as a facilitator."

**let students respond to one another:** "Saying 'thank you' and moving on to the next comment is completely acceptable, as is just nodding to the next student to speak. Sometimes, if a student says something that I find disrespectful or offensive, rather than take them on myself, I ask, 'Does anyone want to respond to that?' Usually, in the space created by this question, a student will step in."

**remind students to "step up or step down":** "This is a vocab term I usually introduce about half-way through the quarter. At this point, discussion patterns have usually emerged and are becoming routine: who talks too much, who contributes sometimes, and who is silent. So, I'll ask them to consider (to themselves) how much they've been talking (I distinguish this from "participating"—and I tell students as much - meaning that there is great quiet participation, just as talking all the time is not actually good participation. But that they do need to pipe up sometimes). Then I ask them to consider if they need to 'step up'—contribute verbally more—or 'step down'—contribute verbally less. I'm not sure why it works, but this simple reminder often gets the quiet ones to pipe up and the noisy ones to become a bit more considerate. Sometimes after this I will also remind people, as in: 'OK, it's time for you to step down,' or 'Anyone want to step up?' Cheesy, but it works."

## SMALL GROUP WORK

**Small group work** gives students the chance to pool their knowledge to explore concepts and practice skills. Small group work is particularly effective because it requires every student to participate; students who have a hard time speaking up in all-class discussion might feel more comfortable working with only one or two other students. Some instructors will choose groups based on integrating different skill levels; other instructors allow students to choose their own groups, or count off randomly. It is important to give groups a specific task, deadline, and expectation. If the task is too vague or difficult, group work can easily go awry. Likewise, if students don't know the time limits or the expectations of the work (i.e., report out, or turn in something written), they might become distracted. One of the challenges of lesson planning involves determining which tasks are most appropriate for groups, and which are better addressed through all-class discussion, independent work, or lecture. Acts of Inquiry is a particularly useful tool to develop small group work lesson plans, since many of its rhetoric sections begin with a reading, and conclude with a small group assignment. Assigning the reading for homework and then performing the task in-class can be a productive way to review the text and practice a writing skill. For information about sustained group work with more formal output, see [presentations & group projects](#).

## PREFERRED PRACTICES FROM INSTRUCTORS

**vary group members and sizes:** "One of the best guidelines I learned for group work is to vary group sizes and members. For example, maybe have an introductory exercise where students pair up and then later combine two pairs into a small group. That way students don't get too comfortable with their group mates, but they are still able to discuss the topic in a low-stakes situation."

**establish discussion groups:** "Put students in 'peer groups' for day one—these are their go-to groups for class discussion all quarter (or switch them up for sequence two). Establishing groups a) saves time in class and b) establishes patterns of conversation that carry through and they don't have to be negotiated every class. Also—I use this to have them email each other for class notes instead of me."
divide up work between groups: "One day during class I was running out of time, so I asked half the class to do the first few questions of a handout, and the other half of the class to do the rest of them. I was amazed at how much more intently they listened to one another when their peers were answering questions they hadn't had time to think about yet. Now I often give each group a separate task so that they don't all have to do all the work, but together we can cover all the material."

work out the logistics ahead of time: "I have been amazed at how difficult it can be to organize groups on the fly, so now I go into class knowing how many members a group will have, how they will form (counting off, working with the people around them, predetermined by me, etc.), where they will sit, when I will pass out the handout they need, and what they will say when they 'report out.'"

be aware of power dynamics (and make students aware): "It's simply true that power dynamics exist in student groups, as they do outside the classroom. Before small group work, I remind students that everyone is equally responsible for participating, and to be aware of the group dynamic. I also ask them to come and talk to me if they feel like they are being ignored or asked to do too much."

PRESENTATIONS & GROUP PROJECTS

Presentations, whether group or individual, offer students a real audience for their work. As a showcase for student assignments, presentations allow students to see what their peers are working on and perhaps respond to that work verbally or in writing. Presentations can also make a single student or a group of students responsible for a portion of the course material, allowing the class to cover more ground. Presentations can be part of scaffolding insofar as the material students present prepares them for paper projects, and presentations work most effectively when they are also scaffolded for, as students may need time to prepare the content and practice speaking in front of groups. Many instructors who assign group projects make presentations a component of these projects, but group projects can also consist of collaborative writing tasks. Either way, group projects build camaraderie, and ideally students both teach and learn from one another. At the same time that students accomplish the manifest task, they are practicing important interpersonal and metacognitive skills as they negotiate the assignment together. Because students are used to learning from the teacher but not as much from each other, it is worth taking the time to discuss with students how they should listen to each others' presentations and by giving them, for example, listening roles.

PREFERRED PRACTICES FROM INSTRUCTORS

assign roles: "I assign specific roles that each group has to have, and each person gets multiple roles (some are as small as note-taker, meeting-reminder). In the production of group writing tasks, each writes a section, and someone else is responsible for revising it to fit the document as a whole. Overall, I just give groups very specific guidelines that ensure that duties are clear, all participants contribute, etc."

use presentations to organize discussion: "In English 111, I like to use presentations as a way to break up a large novel. Groups know what section of the text they're responsible for presenting, and then leading discussion for the day. I also have them write a short paper, as a group, describing the main things they'll focus on in the text and how they plan to run the class. This short paper works well as a 'genre' paper—in the final portfolio, they can discuss how the stakes and audience differ from the traditional academic essay."

use presentations to integrate additional knowledge: "I use student presentations to bring in other scholarly and secondary criticism so as to introduce those ideas into the classroom without either 1) me lecturing or 2) students being burdened with lots of extra reading. For example, in 111 I assign a different work of secondary criticism to each group and only that group then reads the essay but all students are exposed to the ideas, which they can use for discussion or in their papers."

pair with visual work: "I use presentations always in conjunction with a visual student project—either a material text (such as a poster or collage) or multimedia production that the student has created in PowerPoint or posted on YouTube. These are specifically designed projects— economical and succinct arguments. I use them to both enable practice and class analysis of all four outcomes. The projects are always rhetorical, targeted, and effective texts."

use presentation to build class community: "I like to use presentations as an occasion to assign group work. I have students sign up in the first week and give them an opportunity to exchange contact information with each other at that time. Students tend to work with each other throughout the quarter and have a few
contacts in the class early on. Group presentations have the potential to be more dynamic and less nerve-wracking. I often assign topics to make sure that students cover the most important things for our class."

use GoPost afterward: "I often ask students to GoPost about a presentation they found persuasive or that challenged their thinking. This makes them more attentive during presentations and gives their presentation stakes when they can read about other classmates’ responses to their ideas."

**PEER REVIEW**

Peer review benefits students doubly: as reviewers, they hone analytical skills that they can apply to their own work, and when their work is reviewed they receive feedback from an audience that extends beyond the instructor. In both roles, this process asks students to think seriously about the purpose of an assignment and the criteria used to assess it. Students’ past experiences of peer review will likely vary, so while some students will have ample practice discussing and commenting on peer work, others may understand peer review as a final polish, meant to catch typos and grammatical problems, and some students may never have encountered peer review. Asking students about their past peer review experiences can be a useful starting point in explaining what a particular peer review is meant to accomplish, and clear logistical information can go a long way toward guiding all students through the process. Although instructors ultimately can’t control the quality of comments students offer one another, there are multiple factors—such as group formation, worksheets or other instructions, a clear articulation of assignment outcomes, and amount of time allotted—that can be used to maximize students’ success.

**PREFERRED PRACTICES FROM INSTRUCTORS**

prepare students for peer review: "Before peer review, I want to make sure students have a shared vocabulary for talking to each other about writing. So I share with them the assignment outcomes and my assessment rubric, and we practice using that shared language on a sample student paper." Here is a peer review lesson plan, with sample comment worksheet and review worksheet (LC1).

do peer review collaboratively and anonymously: "I put students in groups and then have them collaborate on giving feedback to anonymous papers. The collaborative part is the best: groups have to find a way to agree on the most important strengths and weaknesses, so when the student gets the paper back, they're getting observations and advice from an audience of 4-5 rather than a collection of single reviewer's (possibly idiosyncratic) readings." Here is peer review lesson plan for collaborative group feedback on anonymous papers (MB1).

peer review smaller components of a paper: "After repeatedly running out of time during peer review (even with a two-hour class), I decided it would be more effective to just peer review introductions. I will never go back to peer reviewing full major papers! After all, it can be frustrating for students to write a whole paper only to be told they don't have an argument, whereas having the introduction reviewed gives them time to adjust their argument before doing all the work."

assign peer review as a short assignment: "I wanted students to read and respond to peer papers for homework and save class time for discussion of their responses, so I decided to have students read the papers and write a short assignment that was a 'memo,' one to each author, summarizing their response to the paper. Then they gave a copy to me and a copy to the paper's author. Although this sounds like an assignment that would be difficult to revise, I've found that almost all students needed to be more specific, clear, etc. in their feedback. And revising this paper to better analyze their peers' work sets them up to write more specific and meaningful reflections for their own portfolios." Here is a peer review assignment prompt, including writer's memo and track changes instructions (HA11).

allow time for reflection: "After peer review, I like to bring the class back together to reflect on their experience and to address issues that may have come up. Additionally, the reflection period can be a good time to reinforce key skills before students start their revisions."

**LOW STAKES WRITING**

Low stakes writing, which is not revisable for the portfolio and does not necessarily require instructor feedback, can contribute to the scaffolding of a sequence without creating an unmanageable workload for students or the instructor. Low stakes writing can be especially useful as a half-step toward a short project if students brainstorm, plan, or complete a piece of the assignment beforehand. It can be an important way for
students to practice throughout the quarter the kinds of reflection and metacognition required for the portfolio. Introductory letters, journals, reading responses, writer's memos, brainstorming worksheets, research logs, GoPost comments, and revision plans are just some of the types of low stakes writing that can help students practice skills and build toward assignments. Whatever the type of writing, low stakes assignments work best when the task is clear, limited, and relevant to higher stakes writing assignments.

PREFERRED PRACTICES FROM INSTRUCTORS

use low-stakes writing to comment on sentence-level writing skills: "I ask for several very short pieces of writing (i.e. integrate a quote into a sentence) and this is where I comment on grammar, cohesion, and fine sentence-level writing skills. Then I refrain from commenting on sentence-level writing in longer papers."

use low-stakes writing to aid reading and prepare for discussion: "One low-stakes writing assignment I've found useful is reading notecards. Usually before new readings are due, I ask students to respond to the readings due for the day and on the other side to pose a discussion question. The discussion questions can be used to go over developing a line of inquiry by going over how to pose generative question that could lead into papers. Students can also be asked to pose questions during class discussion. Sometimes after I read through a batch, I pick out observations to share with the class later."

ask students to reflect before submitting work: "Before they turn in any assignment, I have students write on how they used an outcome in their writing and also what difficulties they encountered and either overcame or are still concerned with. This also guides my commenting."

assign low-stakes writing that will become part of an assignment: "I like to break paper assignments into two halves. The first assignment, due in the beginning of the week, is usually just the introduction. They bring it to class, and we do peer review. Then, they take it home, and the full paper is due later in the week."

SAMPLE STUDENT WRITING (E.G.)

Sample student writing makes concrete the reading, writing, and critical thinking skills discussed in the Outcomes, also giving students the chance to think about these skills from the reader's position. Examples of outstanding work can model key skills and demonstrate that "student writing" can be extremely engaging, persuasive, and polished; student writing can also be used for guided practice of revision, or as a test-run of the peer review process. Some instructors choose to present writing by students currently enrolled in the class to bolster student confidence or to make the revisions produced genuinely useful. Other instructors use writing by students from previous classes who have signed a course release form (DOC), or use writing published in e.g. (see below). Knowing that the author is not in the room may allow students to be more honest and forthright in their critiques, which can be beneficial but may also become a problem if students are overly harsh. Choosing examples with clear strengths (even when practicing revision) can help keep student feedback constructive, and also make the task of giving feedback and/or revising the writing more manageable. When approached with clear goals, using student writing in the classroom can make writing and revision central to the day-to-day activities of the class.


e.g., UW's online journal of 100-level writing, showcased outstanding student writing and offers suggestions for using this writing in the classroom. In 2017, the journal was transformed into Process: Journal of Multidisciplinary Undergraduate Scholarship. You can visit the new website here: Process Journal

PREFERRED PRACTICES FROM INSTRUCTORS

workshop sample papers when handing back assignments: "When I hand back each paper (mostly) I select sample paragraphs from solid student papers—or at least semi-solid—for us to workshop as a class. Usually the first paper I focus on introductions, so that we can try to pick out some important attributes—both for the specific assignment and more generally. Okay, then the workshop itself. The samples are anonymous—the first time I lay out the rationale (should be helpful for those who workshop even more so than the one whose paper it is, be respectful but honest, etc.). I handout the samples, each person reads it independently marking what's effective (with attention to why specifically) and what could use improvement (again why but also suggestions for how to improve). Finally, we discuss as a large group (the whole class). I interject and moderate."

project and annotate: "I prefer to use the overhead projector for showing example student papers. The entire class is involved, and I can model taking notes on the overhead."
use e.g.: "I always direct students to the e.g. website. By showing them that their papers could be public documents, it brings real-life stakes to their writing. They also can get a sense of what a strong undergraduate essay looks like."

**LIBRARY COLLABORATION & RESEARCH**

The UW Libraries have worked with the EWP to create the [Expository Writing Instructor Portal](https://example.com), a website to support 100-level composition instructors. Their site includes information about how to arrange librarian-led research workshops, consult with librarians on assignment design, create online library guides or tutorials for your students. Additionally, the portal includes sample research assignment prompts, links to other resources, student research tools, and a discussion of how the EWP Outcomes connect to library services.

**PREFERRED PRACTICES FROM INSTRUCTORS**

**scaffold research skills:** "My first quarter, I just thought 'I'll have a library orientation day and then my students will get it,' but I've found that research really needs to be scaffolded with brainstorming worksheets, research questions, information of primary and secondary sources, etc. Giving students ample time to conduct research is crucial to getting papers you want to read!"

**collaborate with a librarian:** "Librarians have so much expertise in guiding students in the research process, and they can do so much more than just show your students how to type keywords into a search engine. I worked with Amanda Hornby to design my 131 research sequence from the ground up, and it was amazing. We talked about the sequence and how it fit on the calendar before I wrote any of the assignments, and Amanda's feedback was really helpful—and really different from the kind of feedback that I could get from other EWP instructors."

**avoid extraneous research:** "You can't teach everything in every assignment sequence, and telling students to 'find two outside sources to support your argument' is not going to work unless those sources are necessary to write the paper. When I teach research, I make it central to the assignment, and build up to it. But if research isn't essential, I leave it out and just let students work with the course texts."

**SUPPORTING MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS**

Multilingual students bring unique strengths to composition courses, and often require forms of support that take into account their language backgrounds. English Language Learners may be immediately identifiable through their writing or speaking while other multilingual students may be much less visible, especially those who immigrated to the U.S. as children or whose parents came to the U.S. before they were born. Simply being aware of these differences and matching support to individual student needs will go a long way toward helping multilingual students navigate the course. Many instructors find that pedagogical choices originally made to support multilingual students (such as revising assignment prompts for clarity and concision, defining important terms, being explicit about in-class instructions, and writing notes on the board) end up benefiting the entire class. When it comes to student writing, multilingual students, like many native speakers of English, may confl ate good writing with good grammar and experience anxiety about the correctness of their sentences. Focusing on clarity rather than correctness—that is, temporarily overlooking errors that do not interfere with the larger goals of the writing—can help students of any linguistic background begin to redefine “good writing” and put energy where it most matters. When it comes to these larger goals, it is important to remember that ways of organizing ideas, making arguments, or addressing the reader differ by cultural context, and students, especially those who attended high school outside the U.S., will likely need explicit indications of the expectations for academic writing in a U.S. context. An understanding of these different expectations can become a real asset when it comes to reflection and metacognition, as multilingual students have often given a great deal of thought to the cultural differences that bear on writing conventions and education in general. In assignments that allow students to use personal experience as a form of evidence, multilingual students can make exciting insights about cultural and linguistic differences. Multilingual students often benefit from conferences and office hours, but for the sake of instructor workload, if a student needs intensive support, the instructor should not be the only resource used. Writing centers and other online and campus resources can complement the work that happens in composition courses at the same time as it helps students be self-sufficient learners once they have complete composition.

**RESOURCES**
PREFERRED PRACTICES FROM INSTRUCTORS

ask for an introductory letter: "I didn't initially do this with multilingual students in mind, but they turned out to be the biggest beneficiaries. I simply asked, for homework the first night, for students to write a 200-300 word letter telling me whatever they thought I needed to know to be an effective reader of their writing. Many students took the opportunity to tell me about their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including how long they had been in the U.S., in what context they learned English, what their first language is, how well their parents speak English, etc. Opening up this space felt way better to me than surveying them directly about their backgrounds."

use writing to support participation: "It often takes multilingual students longer to come up with a response to a question because of the translating involved, so I like to start each class by having everyone write a reflection on the reading, what we did last class, etc. I write this question on the board (ELL students have told me that writing on the board really helps them to keep up with the conversation so I'll put key ideas, questions, etc. up there as often as possible) and we discuss after 5 minutes of writing. Then, when ESL students mention concerns about participation during office hours or conferences, I'll remind them that that discussion time is a good moment for them to participate since they have already worked out a response. This doesn't guarantee participation, but it at least facilitates it. I also count go-post responses towards participation grades, which helps anyone who is not as comfortable speaking in front of the class."

encourage students to come to office hours in pairs or groups "I've had ELL students come to office hours together, and help each other with translation and writing. Not only does this cut down on TA labor, but it also helps to build connections within the class community."

WRITING CENTERS

Writing centers offer one-on-one help to students at all stages of the writing process. This help differs from the kinds of support instructors give during conferences and office hours, although it is complementary. Students may be more likely to admit not understanding an assignment or concept when they are with a tutor rather than the instructor, and tutors can also assist students in understanding and incorporating instructor feedback. Too, the challenge of explaining an idea or a writing choice to a tutor who isn't familiar with the specific requirements of the course can be an opportunity for students to refine ideas and adjust writing choices for an audience that extends beyond the classroom. Students may not know that on-campus writing centers exist, and they may have a very limited understanding of what kinds of services they offer. In particular, students may think writing centers are for getting a "grammar check," or that tutors will only want to look at a complete draft. Spending time introducing students to on-campus writing centers, or inviting a writing center representative to the classroom to introduce their services, can give students the information and confidence needed to seek out these resources. Instructors can also help students make better use of writing centers by informing themselves about the specific aims and practices of different writing centers; see below for links to UW writing centers. Asking students to report or reflect on writing center visits can amplify the effects of the session, as well as giving the instructor a sense of what kinds of work the student has been doing on a particular assignment outside the classroom.

- CLUE: The Center for Learning and Undergraduate Enrichment
- Odegaard Writing and Research Center
- Office of Minority Affairs' Instructional Center

PREFERRED PRACTICES FROM INSTRUCTORS

guide student use of the writing centers "I found it wasn't enough to just send students to the writing center. They needed help negotiating the experience, so I often ask them to write something up before and after they go. Before they go, I have them send an email describing where they're going, when they're going, what writing or assignment prompts they're taking with them, what questions they plan to ask. After they go, they send me another email describing what they ended up accomplishing, which suggestions were priorities, what they would ask in another session, or how they feel they could get more out of future writing center visits."

COMMENTING
Commenting links the Outcomes to student performance, providing students with written feedback on where they have succeeded and where they should focus their revision. Like grading, commenting involves evaluation of how well students have fulfilled the goals of an assignment, and this feedback is one of the primary ways that instructors guide student revisions and set up expectations for how students will be graded when they turn in their final portfolios. Evaluation, however, is only the first step of commenting; whatever the commenting strategy or tone, written feedback needs to offer guideposts for revision. Too little feedback may leave students lost and frustrated when it comes time to revise, and too much feedback may be too overwhelming for students to absorb. In either case, students may resort to making superficial changes (such as word choice or sentence construction) rather than really revising. Commenting, then, requires that instructors help students prioritize and focus on making the most significant changes first. Because commenting can be a time-intensive process, prioritizing is also an essential part of time management for instructors.

PREFERRED PRACTICES FROM INSTRUCTORS

connect and focus comments to course goals: "Make sure to tie comments to specific assignment goals and rubrics. Less is more! Also, tie commenting to scaffolding!"

time yourself: "I make myself stick to a set amount of time for responding to each paper and I generally have a sense of how much of that time I spend reading (usually 2/3) and how much I spend commenting (the remaining third). This forces me to prioritize in my comments, which ultimately is just as good for the students as it is for me -- they can only handle so much feedback at once before it all becomes jumbled."

index margin comments to the endnote: "I got tired of students focusing on minor marginal comments when they revised, so I started using marginal comments to point to examples of things I'd mentioned in the endnote. Margin comments would say things like 'here's an example of a source that needs to be introduced' or 'this is where the paper became descriptive rather than argumentative,' and then introducing sources and description vs. analysis would be described in detail in the endnote. It works like a charm! Students have to really revise when they can't rely on minor comments."

batch papers: "Throughout the quarter, I like to respond to related short assignments and low-stakes writing at once. For each individual student, I group a set of assignments, read through the drafts, make a few marginal annotations (mostly for the benefit of my own memory), and write a single cover note for the collection of work (sometimes accompanied by a little chart of targeted writing skills that were either 'Strengths' or 'Areas for Improvement'). Having more writing to read in one sitting can be daunting, but I find that it helps me limit and focus my commentary. I can always speak to comparative strengths and weaknesses within the student's own work with concrete examples. When I offer these kinds of comparative and concrete comments, students cultivate an awareness of their own competence and development." Here's a sample of batched commentary responding to two assignment drafts at once (LR11).

use a rubric: "I really like using rubrics for each assignment because I think they help me to structure my own feedback more productively, making sure my end comment emphasizes topics I identified as important when I designed the assignment. As a word of warning though, students do latch onto the rubric as a "grade" since they are so uncomfortable with the lack of assessment until the end of this class. I've even had athlete's tutors contact me in a panic that "based on the rubric So-and-so appears to be failing!!" Thus, I've learned to be more and more transparent in my use of the rubric. I emphasize that they can help students to identify areas of focus for their revisions but in no way reflect their portfolio grade. I point out that the rubric helps clarify which outcomes we are targeting in each assignment since I almost always use the language of the outcomes in my rubrics. My students have also continuously requested to have the rubrics in advance and since I consider any attempt at self-assessment on their part to be beneficial, I now always include my rubric with assignment prompts." For useful tips on rubric design, see Understanding Rubrics. Here is a sample assignment rubric with related prompt (LC2) and a sample blank rubric and lesson plan for filling it out as a class (SM3).

GRADING

Grading in Expository Writing Program courses applies to two forms of student performance: portfolios and participation.

Portfolios are graded based on student fulfillment of the Outcomes using the Portfolio Grading Rubric (DOCX). Be aware that the UW Grading System uses numerical rather than letter grades. For information on
communicating expectations and preparing students for the portfolio, see commenting.

**Participation** can be assessed in a variety of ways. Establishing clear expectations of students is essential; both the expectations and mode of assessment for participation should be recorded in the syllabus. For university-wide grading policies, please see the Faculty Resource on Grading.

Grades can be calculated (70% portfolio, 30% participation) and submitted (to the UW Registrar) through Catalyst GradeBook. You can submit and change grades without creating a GradeBook using the Registrar’s Online Grading Resources. Some instructors find this basic grade-calculating worksheet (XLS) helpful.

Instructors should also be aware that FERPA has strict guidelines regarding the disclosure of student grades, and that a student's grade should not be sent by or discussed in email under any circumstances. Questions about grading policies and best practices are welcomed by the EWP Director and Assistant Directors at any time.