

Improving Teaching and Learning through Writing Assessment

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Why We Love (Good) Writing Assessment

It interprets writing in local contexts

It creates site-specific assessments

It connects disciplines, genres, and audiences

It facilitates ongoing decisions about students, courses, and programs

Assessment Benefits: Inquiry

Site-based assessment generates useful information for local users

Writing assessment answers questions that stakeholders value

What holds students up in advanced comp?

What can our majors do?

How do students use sources, and why do they make choices about web materials that run counter to faculty advice?

Assessment Benefits: Formative Uses

Writing assessment supports the development of curriculum, assignments, and feedback

Writing assessment makes work samples and rating criteria public

Writing assessment facilitates debates about samples and criteria

Assessment Benefits: Research

Writing assessment brings together content specialists, practitioners, and evaluators, in interdisciplinary dialogue

Writing assessment builds public records over time

Writing assessment makes data-based decisions the foundation for program development

Writing Assessment and General Education

Writing in the disciplines is part of knowing the disciplines

Writing is a shared subject across disciplines

Writing provides a common vocabulary for conversation

Writing unites teachers and students

For more information see

Writing Assessment: A Position Statement. Conference on College Composition and Communication, 2006. Available at <http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/123784.htm>

Yancey, Kathleen and Brian Huot, eds. *Assessing Writing across the Curriculum: Diverse Approaches and Practices*. Greenwich, CT: Ablex, 1997.

Using Writing to Assess General Education Goals: Models & Resources

What we assess in students' work and how we assess it are among the most powerful and persuasive methods we have to teach students what we value as educators, what we want them to learn, what we think matters most.

What a student learns by assembling a robust portfolio, reflecting in writing on the merits of her work, and making a written argument explicitly linking the contents of her portfolio to specific general education outcomes provides some of the most sophisticated and powerful learning possible.

Faculty develop significant knowledge and skill by engaging in conversations about how they set up assignments and how they evaluate students' work. Comparing their assessments of students' texts, they become more conscious of and articulate about their criteria for judgment (what they value as educators), and they enrich their evaluative knowledge by hearing colleagues with divergent values make informed, principled arguments for their approaches to evaluation.

EMBEDDED ASSIGNMENTS

Course specific

Embedded in the curriculum (writing done as part of the regular course work)

Low stakes to specific students and faculty; usually sampling method used (e.g., random, purposeful, stratified)

Engages faculty

Faculty decide the assignment (e.g., research based essay, laboratory research report)

Faculty decide the evaluation criteria/standards (tied to outcomes)

Faculty apply the criteria

Examples

Seattle University, John Bean Consulting Professor of Writing and Assessment; For more information see <http://www.seattleu.edu/assessment/index.asp>

Frederick Community College, Kenneth Kerr, English Professor

Resources

Bean, John C., David Carrithers, and Theresa Earenfight. "Transforming WAC through a Discourse-Based Approach to University Outcomes Assessment." *WAC Journal* 16 (September 2005): 5-21.

Carrithers, D. and J. Bean. (Forthcoming). Using a client memo to assess critical thinking of finance majors. *Business Communication Quarterly*.

Carter, Michael. "Ways of Knowing, Doing, and Writing in the Disciplines." *College Composition and Communication* 58.3 (2007), 385-418.

Walvoord, Barbara. E. *Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education*. San Francisco: Jossey- Bass, 2004.

MID-CAREER PORTFOLIOS

Proficiency examinations (stake for all students)

Diagnostic (identifies students who need extra support in terms of writing)

Includes course-embedded work (papers submitted)

Includes multiple samples of work from several courses

Engages faculty

Faculty decide the appropriate assignments (e.g. research based essay, laboratory research report)

Faculty decide the evaluation criteria/standards (usually tied to outcomes)

Faculty apply the criteria

Examples

Washington State University, Diane Kelly-Riley Writing Assessment Office; Additional information is available at <http://www.writingprogram.wsu.edu/units/writingassessment/>

Carleton College, Dr. Carol Rutz, Writing Program Director; Additional information is available at http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/writingprogram/carletonwritingprogram/portfolio_requirements/

Resources

Rutz, Carol and Jacquelyn Lauer-Glebov. "Assessment and Innovation: One Darn Thing After Another," *Assessing Writing* 10.2 (2005). 80-99.

Haswell, Richard H., ed. *Beyond Outcomes: Assessment and Instruction within a University Writing Program*. Greenwich, CT: Ablex, 2001.

Principles and Practices in Electronic Portfolios. Conference on College Composition and Communication, 2007. Available at <http://www.ncte.org/cccc/announcements/128846.htm>

Sources Dynamic Criteria Mapping

Broad, B. (2003). *What We Really Value: Beyond Rubrics in Teaching and Assessing Writing*. Logan, UT, Utah State UP.

Charmaz, K. (2000). Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Methods. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage: 509-35.

Chinn, D. (2006). Discovering our Values as Teachers Through Our Students. Paper Presented at the 2006 University of Washington Teaching and Learning Symposium. Retrieved February 18, 2008, from <http://depts.washington.edu/sotl/2006/Chinn-sotl2006.doc>

Glaser, B. G. and A. L. Strauss (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago, Aldine.

Guba, E. G. and Y. S. Lincoln (1989). *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. Newbury Park, Sage.

Strauss, A. and J. Corbin (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

**All presenters are representing the Council of Writing Program Administrators, a national organization of higher education professionals that administer writing programs.*