"Writing is a Constant Conversation"

Writing in First-Year Seminars

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The first-year seminar serves as the gateway to a student's writing experience at DePauw. In this course, students work on developing their writing skills and habits with the understanding that writing is a process that must be practiced over time in many different contexts, for different audiences, and in different genres. The first-year seminar is the beginning of that process.

By the end of the first-year seminar, students should:
• understand writing projects as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, summarizing, analyzing, and synthesizing sources.
• understand that writing is social and collaborative.
• appreciate how readers perceive and respond to different forms of writing.
• possess flexible strategies for generating ideas, proof-reading, editing, and revising.
• understand how to document both primary and secondary sources and why that is important.
• understand that the skills and habits learned in the first-year seminar can and should be transferred to other courses and writing contexts.
• be passionate about writing as a means for thinking, communication, expression, and action.

GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FACULTY

Every first-year seminar is different and there is no one way to design the course or to integrate writing assignments. The following are general guidelines and suggestions that both research and practice have demonstrated are effective in achieving the learning outcomes outlined above.

1. Course content
In choosing readings and other assignments, please consider the relationship between your course goals and your goals for student writing. First-year students are still developing their critical reading skills and need guidance and time to engage with the material. Ideally, some reading assignments should provide students with examples of good writing in a particular discipline and, thus, encourage students to appreciate the relationship between critical reading and developing their own writing.

2. The Writing Process
Faculty should guide students through the writing process, helping them develop good habits, by scaffolding assignments and building in staged revision as much as possible. To help students engage with the process, it is recommended that students reflect on their writing process during the semester. This may be done through class discussions and/or writing prompts that ask students to describe their approach to a particular assignment and what they consider to be their strengths and weaknesses as a writer.

3. Critical Thinking, Genre, and Audience
To the extent possible, students should engage with a variety of source material, practicing the evaluation and analysis of sources, as well as summary, paraphrase, and citation. Attention to genre and audience can help students hone their own rhetorical strategies.

Instructors are encouraged to coordinate with the library liaison assigned to their FYS for sessions on finding, evaluating, and documenting appropriate sources.
4. Writing Assignments
Instructors have flexibility in the number and types of writing projects they assign. Some instructors design their course around one major project that is broken down into a sequence of shorter tasks, others prefer to work with 3-4 discrete assignments. Typical seminars require a total of 16-20 pages of carefully revised formal writing. Instructors should also employ a variety of informal writing tasks to hone specific skills and/or prepare students for the formal writing project/s.

5. Feedback
Students benefit from prompt feedback. Faculty should incorporate a variety of feedback strategies into their assignment design, including: peer-review, in-class discussions of drafts, written commentary on drafts, and individual conferences. Conferencing is one of the best ways to provide students with directed feedback, individual encouragement, and an opportunity for intellectual engagement. Faculty should meet with students for at least two paper conferences during the semester.

ASSESSMENT

In assessing student writing, faculty should consider the development of individual students, recognizing that first-year students enter DePauw with a variety of writing experience.

Individual students should be evaluated on their effort at and progress towards the following skills:

• writing appropriately for different writing tasks, demonstrating control of focus and paragraphs.
• revising in ways that go beyond corrections to spelling and grammar, addressing higher order structural, argumentative, and stylistic elements.
• appropriate integration and documentation of sources.
• awareness of appropriate voice, tone, and formality.
• writing with fluency and concision, demonstrating control of syntax, grammar, vocabulary, and spelling.