

Writing & Critical Reading Learning Goal

CAA Writing-Reading Learning Goal Subcommittee
Tuesday, February 25

Today's Schedule

- Introductions & the Learning Goal
- Where We Are
- Principles & Best Practices from Bean's *Engaging Ideas*
- Questions to Consider
- Small Groups—Discuss within & then Large Group
 - Strategies That Foster Critical Reading
 - The Writing Process
 - Response & Evaluation
 - Short Writing Assignments
- Takeaway Points & Resources

Introductions & the Revised Learning Goal

EIU graduates write critically and evaluate varied sources by:

- Creating documents appropriate for specific audiences, purposes, genres, disciplines, and professions.
- Crafting cogent and defensible applications, analyses, evaluations, and arguments about problems, ideas, and issues.
- Producing documents that are well-organized, focused, and cohesive.
- Using appropriate vocabulary, mechanics, grammar, diction, and sentence structure.
- Understanding, questioning, analyzing, and synthesizing complex textual, numeric, and graphical sources.
- Evaluating evidence, issues, ideas, and problems from multiple perspectives.
- Collecting and employing source materials ethically and understanding their strengths and limitations.

Where We Are

- 63% of seniors report they were asked to memorize facts and repeat information “very much” and “quite a bit.”
- 42% of faculty report the majority of exam questions required primarily recall or comprehension.
- From years of reviewing EWP submissions, papers are often focused on summarization or personal reflection.

Where We Are

- From the CLA, data suggest EIU seniors are below (24%) or well below (38%) where they should be on tasks related to critiquing or making an argument.
- From the CAA Faculty Survey:
 - The least common assignments were research papers and papers that use multiple sources.
 - Over a quarter of faculty respondents—28%—affirmed they “never (0% of the time)” use a rubric or evaluation criteria when responding to student writing.

Where We Are

- The faculty survey showed there is *some* emphasis on the writing process and revision:
 - Instructor sequenced writing assignments so they would build on each other: 27%
 - Students revised papers based on instructor feedback that was not graded: 27%
 - Students revised papers after instructor assigned a grade and gave feedback: 26.0%
 - Students revised papers after peer review: 13%

Principles & Best Practices

- The following principles and best practices come from “Chapter 1: Using Writing to Promote Thinking: A Busy Professor’s Guide to the Whole Book” in John Bean’s *Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*.

Bean's General Premise

- “My premise, supported by an increasing body of research, is that good writing assignments (as well as other active learning tasks) evoke a high level of critical thinking, help students wrestle with a course’s big questions, and teach disciplinary ways of seeing, knowing, and doing. They can also be designed to promote self-reflection, leading to more integrated, personally meaningful learning” (p. 2).

Step 1

- Become familiar with Some of the General Principles Linking Writing to Learning and Critical Thinking:
 - Critical Thinking Rooted in Problems
 - Disciplinary Domains for Critical Thinking
 - The Link Between Writing and Critical Thinking

Step 2

- Design Your Course with Critical Thinking Objectives in Mind:
 - 2. “Problems, questions, or issues are the point of entry into the subject and a source of motivation for sustained inquiry.”
 - 3. Challenge and Support
 - 4. “Courses are assignment centered rather than text and lecture centered.”
 - 7. Courses “nurture students’ metacognitive abilities”

Step 3

- Design Critical Thinking Tasks for Students to Address:
 - A “disciplinary content-driven view of critical thinking” implies that students need to address tasks that “range from enduring disciplinary problems to narrowly specific questions about the significance of a graph or the interpretation of a key passage in a course reading.”

Step 4

- Develop a Repertoire of Ways to Give Critical Thinking Tasks to Students, such as...
 - Small group tasks tied to reading
 - Activities connected to questions, problems, and reading material
 - In-class writing that's exploratory and/or writing-to-learn
 - Formal writing assignments supported by explicit instruction, drafts, and revision

Step 5

- Develop Strategies to Include Exploratory Writing, Talking, and Reflection in Your Courses

Step 6

- Develop Strategies for Teaching How Your Discipline Uses Evidence to Support Claims:
 - Focus on a discipline's use of evidence and types of argument
 - Create writing assignments *you want to read* that are rooted in the context of your discipline and/or profession

Step 7

- Develop Effective Strategies for Coaching Students in Critical Thinking:
 - Talking about Your Own Learning, Reading, and Writing Process
 - Risk-free Exploratory Writing
 - Comments on Drafts
 - Conferences
 - Sample Papers
 - Scaffolding Assignments—Assignments that Build on Each Other & Long Assignments Broken into Stages of Development
 - Revision and Multiple Drafts

Step 8

- When Assigning Formal Writing, Treat Writing as a Process:
 - “Teachers can get better final products, therefore, if they design their courses from the outset to combat last-minute writing, to promote exploratory writing and talking, and to encourage substantive revision” (p. 10).

Principles & Best Practices Distilled

1. Disciplinary Problem Solving Through Writing
2. Assignments Centered on Learning
3. Critical Thinking within a Disciplinary Framework
4. Activities & Assignments For Student Growth
5. Class Time for Discussion, Activities, and Exploratory Writing
6. Focus on Disciplinary Evidence and Argument
7. Coaching Critical Thinking via Writing
8. Writing as a Process

Disciplinary Conversations

- Academic writing is joining a conversation.
 - What are your discipline's academic moves?
 - What are the structures of arguments in your discipline?
You might know them, but your students probably need to learn them.
 - How is writing a mode of inquiry in your discipline?

Moving Beyond Summary

- Can we create assignments that provide “ill-structured problems” that don’t cater to specific right answers?
- How do we move beyond summary and facile reflection?
- What about analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and argument?

Structuring for a Messy Process

- Critical thinking via writing assignments typically requires a messy process.
 - How do we structure assignments that foster true revision of ideas and support, not just editing?

Small Groups

- In small groups (3-5 people), we'd like you to look through handouts and share what you could use in your classrooms and why. Questions to consider:
 - What works?
 - What do you want to try and why?
 - Other points and ideas from your own teaching?

Strategies That Foster Critical Reading

- In your group, look through this handout. Share what you could use in your classrooms and why.
 - What works?
 - What do you want to try and why?
 - Other points and ideas from your own teaching?
- Share with Large Group

The Writing Process

- In your group, look through “The Writing Process” on page 14 and pages 15-18. Share what you could use in your classrooms and why.
 - What works?
 - What do you want to try and why?
 - Other points and ideas from your own teaching?
- Share with the Large Group

Response & Evaluation

- In your group, look through “Criteria for Evaluation” on page 14, pages 19-22, and sample rubrics in the appendix. Share what you could use in your classrooms and why.
 - What works?
 - What do you want to try and why?
 - Other points and ideas from your own teaching?
- Share with the Large Group

Writing Assignments

- In your group, look through pages 9-13. Share what you could use in your classrooms and why.
 - What works?
 - What do you want to try and why?
 - Other points and ideas from your own teaching?

- Share with Large Group

Takeaway Points

Resources