



Teaching Critical Inquiry: A New Course in University Pedagogy

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In five seminars (85 hours), participating faculty...

- Gain insight into the principles and practices of the writing-across-the-disciplines (WAC) movement, which is based on the premise that writing promotes reflective thinking.
- Examine learning activities and scaffolding assignments for teaching targeted writing and thinking skills and consider how these might be incorporated into existing courses with the aim of engaging students and enhancing learning.
- Design learning activities and embedded assignments that support intended learning outcomes associated with inquiry, problem solving, critical thinking, and communicative ability in speech and writing—in developmental projects relevant to their own teaching.

What is writing across the curriculum (WAC)?

- It is desirable to integrate writing activities into disciplinary teaching because *communicative ability enhances disciplinary understanding*. **(WAC)**
- Writing is mode of learning that can be harnessed through writing. **(Writing to learn)**
- To write like experts in a field, students need to be introduced to disciplinary-specific genres and formats of writing and be given opportunities to practice disciplinary writing conventions. **(Writing-within-the-disciplines)**

Therefore, writing should be integrated into instruction across the disciplines.

Writing-to-engage pedagogy (WAC merged with critical thinking pedagogy)

- Writing is a form of engagement with knowledge and ideas.
- This engagement can be deliberately supported in learning environments through **activities, tasks, and embedded assignments** that challenge students to demonstrate critical thinking, solve problems, and engage in reflective processes.

What kind of activities, tasks, and embedded assignments?

Writing-to-learn activities that help students

- understand key concepts,
- read course literature in a critical manner,
- understand perspectives on complex issue.
- These are typically short, impromptu, and low-stakes writing activities that can be done during a seminar or assigned as out-of-class preparatory assignments.
- For example, Peter Elbow’s “Believing and Doubting Game,” a reading activity in which students practice reading *with* and *against* the grain.

- **Writing-to-engage** activities inspired by rhetorical pedagogy.
- For example, "shaped" exploratory exercises that scaffold student thinking. These typically feature
 - argument prompts and/or
 - argument templates.

Paragraph template (general writing course on entry level)

Directions: Create tension between your view and an alternative view with the subordinator *although*. This strategy allows you to summarize a counterclaim and then oppose it—all in one sentence. Model your topic sentence on the following template and then support your position:

Although some people think, I argue that

Example: “*Although* rationing health care at first seems inhumane, it may be the only ethical way to provide affordable health care to all citizens.”

Adapted from *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing*, pages 40-41

A thesis-statement development exercise using argument prompts (disciplinary course on entry level)

Write no more than one sentence in answer to each of the following questions. Include a reference to at least one literary work and/or literary device in your answer to the first question:

- What is your topic?
- What is your question about this topic?
- What is your answer to that question (your thesis statement)?

Adapted from *The Norton Introduction to Literature*,
“Writing about Literature”

A topic formulation exercise using argument templates and prompts (advanced level)

Complete the following three-step formula:

1. **Topic:** *I am studying* _____
2. **Question:** *because I want to find out*
what/why/how _____
3. **Significance:** *in order to help my reader better understand* _____.

From: *The Craft of Research*
by Booth, Colomb, and
Williams, page 48.

How can WAC goals be incorporated into existing courses?

By implementing curriculum planning principles such as **constructive alignment** (teaching should be aligned with learning outcomes). From a WAC perspective, this means

- adding communicative and critical thinking goals to course plans,
- examining those goals in examinations, and
- teaching these skills in seminars that give students opportunities to practice what they that will be expected to demonstrate in examinations.

How do we decide where to place these course elements in a progression?

By using curriculum planning strategies such as **backward design**: the skills needed to write expert prose at the summit of a program (such as the degree project essay) are

- identified,
- isolated,
- taught in lower-level courses in a progression that recognizes and responds to the developmental needs of students.
- The goal is to develop tasks, activities, and “scaffolding” assignments in lower level courses that can *improve student performance* by **teaching targeted writing and critical thinking skills**.

Pedagogical problem solving in Teaching Critical Inquiry

In short educational development projects *relevant to their own teaching*, participating faculty design learning activities and embedded assignments that support intended learning outcomes associated with inquiry, problem solving, critical thinking, and communicative ability in speech and writing.

- They can address
 - *any problem* related to writing development and/or critical thinking,
 - in *any context* (a course or a program progression),
 - with recourse to *any means* within the WAC domain (writing to learn, writing within the disciplines, writing to engage).