

INCORPORATING WRITING INTO AN INTRODUCTORY GEOGRAPHY COURSE

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THE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:

Developed in consultation with Rita Kranidis,
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1. Informal writing: Journal assignment

- 2-3 paragraphs per week in order to explore topics
- Graded ✓+, ✓, ✓- for clarity and understanding of geography
- 10 “✓” = 100% completion, 7% of course grade

Sample journal questions:

- What food do you associate with a certain place? Why?
- Where would you go on a life-changing dream trip?
- Write a letter to the editor explaining why Americans need to be more concerned about the fate of the world's tropical rain forests.
- How would you teach the energy imbalance caused by the Earth's angle of inclination and revolution about the Sun to a class of first graders?

2. Formal writing: *National Geographic* assignment

- Summarize and cite an article from *National Geographic*.
- Critical evaluation of the writing, maps and images
- First draft graded with a rubric and not marked up
- Editing workshop with draft in Writing and Reading Center
- Final draft submitted after self-editing
- Extra credit for visiting the WRC for tutoring outside of class

HOW AM I TO GRADE MORE WRITING?

I used **minimal marking** to indicate language errors with check marks, marked up only a paragraph, or listed recurring errors.

- Prioritizes comments on content
- Saves time!
- Focuses on the positive
- Gives responsibility for correcting errors to the student
- Did I mention 'saves time'?

(Do students *really* learn when we **bleed** all over their papers?)

WHY GIVE MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO WRITE?

Time is limited. Geography is visual. Introductory courses spew forth facts, definitions, and concepts to memorize.

Why bother with writing, too?

- Writing is another path of learning that works well for many students.
- Writing gives students a chance to explore concepts from class.
- Writing is not rote memorization.
- Writing is a skill that improves with practice.
- Many developmental and ESL students in GE101 need practice writing.
- Writing is essential for success in college and on the job.

*“If you would hit the mark, you must aim a little above it.
Every arrow that flies feels the attraction of the earth.”*
-Longfellow, “Elegiac Verse,” 1882



WHY COLLABORATE WITH WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES AND THE WRITING AND READING CENTER?

- I learned how to improve assignments.
- I learned how to be more effective in evaluating students' work.
- I learned that learning about learning is valuable and never-ending.

THE VALUE OF REFLECTION

Peer Review: sharing Journal Entries

- Students' own writing wasn't as clear as they first thought.
- Students gave immediate feedback to each other.
- Low-risk stake to their effort; not just busy work.

Journal Summary writing assignment

- Students picked out their best work.
- Students realized how their writing evolved over the semester.

Editing Workshop at the Writing and Reading Center

- Students learned techniques for editing their own work.
- Students learned that there is no ONE correct version.
- Students learned to come back to their writing with fresh eyes.

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESULTS

Successes:

- Writing doesn't need to burden the instructor.
- Students enjoyed writing, particularly when it was personal.
- Students learned about campus resources such as the WRC.
- There are pros on *my* campus who want to help me.
- Writing helps me learn more about my students. Every week they reveal something I didn't know about them.

For Next Time:

- Start journaling immediately.
- Traditional geography exercises are still necessary.
- Hold Editing Workshop earlier in the semester.
- Evaluate writing assignments with a SALG.
- SENCER-ize formal writing assignments: for example, calculate carbon footprints, write on how to diminish them.