

40% Rule

All General Education Tier One and Tier Two courses must abide by the 40% rule. This means that 40% of the students' grade points should be completed by the 8th week of classes (the mid-point of the term) so that students have ample feedback on their performance prior to the 10-week deadline to drop a course. So when you are proposing a new course or modifying an old one, make sure that your point totals add up and that students will have plenty of time to determine whether they should drop with a W or stay enrolled. This semester's drop deadline is March 28. Withdrawal dates for courses with non-traditional start dates can be found [here](#).

BOOK RECOMMENDATION

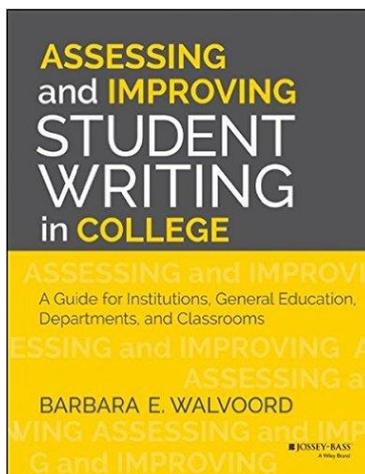
Assessing and Improving Student Writing in College ***A Guide for Institutions, General Education, Departments, and Classrooms*** by Barbara E. Walvoord

Effective communication is a critical skill for many academic disciplines and careers, and so colleges and universities and their faculty members are rightfully committed to improving student writing across the curriculum. Guiding and assessing student writing in classrooms, general education and departments takes knowledge, planning, and persistence, but it can be done effectively and efficiently.

Written in the concise, accessible style that Barbara Walvoord is noted for, *Assessing and Improving Student Writing in College* includes concrete suggestions for articulating goals for student writing, measuring student writing, improving student writing, and documenting that improvement.

Step by step, the book explores four basic concepts: what we mean by writing, what we mean by "good" writing, how students learn to write, and the purposes of assessment. Walvoord also explains the various proven approaches and methods for assessing writing and suggest employing a combination of approaches and adapting them to an individual institution's purpose and culture. The chapters will help a wide array of educational players to work together for the enhancement of student writing and, more broadly, for the empowerment of the writers in general.

This vital book will help readers create a cohesive, institution-wide system that keeps students, faculty and administrators on the same page.



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D2L TIP OF THE MONTH

Did You Know?

You can strip out any formatting from copied text by using CTRL+Shift+V when you paste text from a Word document into the D2L html editor.

1. Highlight the text in the Word document you want to paste into D2L
2. To copy the text, hold down the CTRL button and press C (CTRL+C). On a Mac hold down the CMD key and press C (CMD+C)
3. In D2L click into the HTML Editor box where you want to paste the text. On a PC hold down the CTRL and Shift keys and press V key (CTRL+Shift+V). On a Mac hold down the CMD and Shift keys and press the V key (CMD+Shift+V)

Instructors have contacted us wondering why the formatting of the questions they build by copying and pasting out of Word have inconsistent formatting. The above steps will strip any Word formatting from the text and create consistent text formatting in D2L. You can use the HTML Editor to add any needed formatting after pasting the text.

The January issue of the GE News included a list of ways that the GE classes fulfill the writing requirement. As promised, here is a more detailed look at one of them: **Peer Review**.

Having students give feedback to one another on their papers can have many advantages:

- the students get opportunities to develop their ability to give constructive feedback,
- they receive advice on their drafts,
- they have a broader audience for their work than just a single instructor,
- they see different approaches other students have taken in responding to an assignment.



However, peer review has to be carefully managed in order for students to take the process seriously; students tend to be skeptical of the value of receiving feedback from their fellow students rather than instructors. They can regard peer review sessions that provide vague or tangential feedback as "busywork." Described below are general considerations that can help improve the quality of the feedback students offer one another, as well as several strategies for managing peer review. Here are a few key strategies:

1. Identify and teach the skills required for peer review. As you are planning your course, make a list of the skills that students should be learning and putting into practice when participating in peer review. These might include reading skills (discerning a writer's main point, locating key points of support or relevant data, etc.), writing skills (writing clear, specific comments and questions), and collaboration skills (phrasing critiques in a descriptive, constructive way). Articulating what you see as the core skills involved in peer review will help you develop a coherent plan for integrating peer review into your course and will make more clear the specific instructions your students will need as they learn how to review a peer's paper and how to use the comments they receive during peer review.

2. Teach peer review as an essential part of the writing process. Emphasize to students that peer review is not just a course requirement: it is an essential part of the writing process that all successful writers engage in at some point. Your students may not realize the extent to which scholars and other professionals practice peer review as an integral part of producing effective writing in their fields. Consider explaining why, as a scholar, you find peer review helpful—even when you do not agree with or appreciate every comment made by a peer-reviewer. For example, you might tell them about a specific instance when a reader's comments helped you to clarify and strengthen your writing.

Remind students that the process of producing academic and professional writing generally involves three steps: drafting, revising, and editing. Peer review is often most helpful to student writers when it is utilized between the drafting and revision stages, or after each student has produced a complete draft, but while there is still time to make substantial changes. A writer might learn from peer-reviewers, for example, that a paper's introduction is its strongest point, or that the paper's main point or thesis is not yet clear, or that there are "gaps" in the logic or the support that detract from the paper's effectiveness, or that a paper's conclusion presents an interesting idea that leaves the reader with unanswered questions. The purpose of peer review as a prelude to revision is to help the writer determine which parts of the paper are effective as is, and which are unclear, incomplete, or unconvincing.

3. Describe peer review as an opportunity for students to learn how to write for an audience. Undergraduate students often do not perceive how completing academic writing assignments will prepare them for work in the professional world. One way to help them make this connection is to point out a fact that many instructors take for granted but that undergraduates need to be reminded of: no matter what university students end up doing after graduation, the quality of their ideas and their work will be judged, in a large measure, by how well they can communicate in writing to diverse audiences. Participating in peer review can help them learn to shape their written language as a medium of communication with readers. For example, seeking out peer feedback can help one student construct a convincing argument by anticipating and answering counter-arguments that his readers might pose, while peer review can help another student determine how to explain the significance of her research to readers who are not experts in her field.

4. Define the role of the peer-reviewer as that of a reader, not an evaluator. Develop guidelines for peer-reviewers that ask them to complete specific tasks: examples include indicating the strongest part of a paper; identifying or rephrasing the thesis; listing the major points of support or evidence; and indicating sentences or paragraphs that seem out of order, incompletely explained, or otherwise in need of revision. Some of these tasks are descriptive and others are evaluative. However, those that are evaluative should put the emphasis on the reader's impressions and responses and should not require the peer-reviewer to pronounce a judgment on the paper as a whole. This approach should help you develop specific instructions to students that will clarify how they should respond to one another's writing and should also help you pare down your expectations of what students can realistically accomplish during in-class peer-review sessions. Defining the role of the peer-reviewer as a reader will also help you underscore the fact that it is up to the writer to decide whether and how to make changes to the paper through revision. In other words, the writer should think about all of the reviewers' comments, but may decide to ignore some of the comments and to make changes in response to others.

Resources:

[The Teaching Center at Washington University in St. Louis](#)
[University of Michigan Sweetland Center for Writing](#)

OIA Workshop, still time to register!!!!

[Designing Student Peer Review Activities](#) |
 Thursday, March 2nd | 2:00 – 3:30 pm | ILC
 136 | [Register here](#)

Baker, Kimberly "Peer Review as a strategy for improving students' writing process". *Active Learning in Higher Education* 2016. Vol 17(3) 179-192.

Writing Tip of the Month: Grading low-stakes writing assignments

In low-stakes writing, the goal is to learn or explore course material. It is important to assess these assignments based on students' engagement with the task, not the quality of the writing. There are two aspects to consider: 1) how you will assess the assignments, and 2) how you will manage the workload.

Here are some suggestions for assessing low-stakes writing without making yourself crazy:

- Grade for completion: if the student did the assignment, they get credit.
- A simple rubric: for example, a 1-5 scale; check/check plus/check minus, and so on.
- Minimal, noncritical response: praise only -- "keep doing this", or underlining strongest idea(s)/passage(s).
- No grading!: allow students to keep their writing private. In this case it's important to emphasize how completing the assignment will help their learning.
- Collect and grade occasionally: this could be randomly or on a schedule.
- Collect without grading: read a handful to assess student learning and use examples in class to show students you are reading their work.
- Grade in batches: collect a certain number of low-stakes assignments each week, for example 10 of 100 students (D2L can make random groups).

Resources:

Bean, J. (2011). *Engaging Ideas: The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom* (2nd. ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Elbow, P. (1997). High Stakes and Low Stakes in Assigning and Responding to Writing. *New Directions for Teaching & Learning*, 69, 5-13.

Another Just Because!



It was a sensational 7-6 Arizona football victory over Pomona College on Thanksgiving Day, November 6, 1914, that led to the building of the "A" on Sentinel Peak, west of Tucson.

In what was doubtless a burst of enthusiastic pride for his alma mater, Albert H. Condron, a member of the 1914 team and a civil engineering student, suggested to one of his professors that a class assignment be made to survey Sentinel Peak for the location of an "A".

The site was cleared of shrubbery and cactus, trenches dug to outline the letter's foundations, rock at hand was mixed with mortar and water hauled up the mountain by six-horse teams. The total cost of materials, equipment, and transportation was \$397. The back-breaking work was done by the students themselves, Saturday after Saturday, with many difficulties and discouragements, but the "A" was finally whitewashed on March 4, 1916. No one called it Sentinel Peak anymore. It was known thereafter as "A" Mountain. The "A" is 70 feet wide and 160 feet long (or "tall").

The basalt rock quarried from the construction site was used to build the rock wall surrounding most of the university's historic district.