

## Center for Instructional Development and Research

100 Gerberding Hall  
Box 351265  
University of Washington  
Seattle, WA 98195-1265  
Phone: 206.543.6588  
Fax: 206.685.1213  
Email: cidr@u.washington.edu

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb>

Information for People who Teach  
at the University of Washington

## Helping Student Writers Succeed

When we ask faculty and professionals what helps them write successfully, they identify three areas: (1) a clear sense of the writing task and audience, (2) familiarity and practice with the kind of writing task, and (3) opportunities for feedback during the writing process. When you are teaching, designing these features into writing assignments will help your students write better and learn more through the process of writing.

### STUDENTS WRITE BETTER WHEN GOALS FOR THE ASSIGNMENT AND CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS ARE CLEAR.

When you're planning the writing assignment, ask yourself:

- What do I want students to learn from doing the assignment?
- How does the assignment relate to the rest of the work students are doing for the course?

When you're writing the assignment instructions, be explicit about:

- **Purpose:** Why are students writing the paper and how does it relate to the course?
- **Audience:** A hypothetical audience often helps students focus their writing
- **Evaluation Criteria:** What are you looking for? What will distinguish an excellent paper from others?
- **Models:** What guidance can students find in the readings, lectures, or work previously done?
- **Logistics:** Format, Length, Due Dates

### STUDENTS WRITE BETTER WHEN THEY ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE TASK AND HAVE OPPORTUNITIES TO PRACTICE.

When writing academic papers, students often need to

- Understand and use new terminology
- Apply new concepts, models or methods of analysis
- Synthesize or evaluate different perspectives
- Use unfamiliar conventions and formats

Short, ungraded writing can give students practice in these areas. For example:

- In class or overnight, ask students to write a paragraph or two using new terminology or applying an analytical method they will need to use in their papers
- Design study questions that focus students on conceptual frameworks, methods, and formulation of arguments, in addition to focusing on the information presented.

Continued on back >>



## **STUDENTS WRITE BETTER WHEN GIVEN FEEDBACK AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO RESPOND.**

There are several efficient ways to provide students with feedback on this writing. For example, if you assign short, ungraded practice writing,

- Ask students to read and discuss what they've written with a partner or small group; as they summarize their discussion for you and the class, you can respond.
- Read through their writing quickly after class and respond later to the whole class; note general strengths and weaknesses, with examples from their work.

If you require drafts,

- Read the drafts quickly and offer oral feedback to individuals or to the whole class
- Show students a typical paper and demonstrate in class how and why you mark it as you do.
- Organize peer writing groups in class or on-line. For on-line peer review, visit UW's Catalyst web site:  
[http://depts.washington.edu/catalyst/quick/peer\\_review.html](http://depts.washington.edu/catalyst/quick/peer_review.html)
- Ask students to visit your department's writing center

---

## **HOW CAN CIDR HELP?**

At CIDR we can help you apply these suggestions in your class and integrate writing into your course design. We can also offer additional print and internet resources on writing:  
<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/resources/writingtools.html>

To learn more about other ways CIDR can assist you with your teaching, see:  
<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/>



## **Center for Instructional Development and Research**

CIDR promotes excellence in teaching and learning at the University of Washington through its work with individual faculty and TAs, departments, campus-wide initiatives, and University leaders. CIDR staff are available year-round to collaborate on the design, implementation, and assessment of ways to advance teaching and learning for all students in the diverse UW community. Consultations are confidential and offered at no charge to UW faculty, TAs, and departments.

If you have questions about teaching and learning, or you would like to find out more about working with CIDR, you can call us at 543-6588, send a message to [cidr@u.washington.edu](mailto:cidr@u.washington.edu), or visit our web site:

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/>



UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

---

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL