

Saving Time When Teaching Writing

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Consider the possibility of focusing the topic and objectives of your course.

Although writing assignments and instruction can reduce the amount of content you can cover in a course, it can also deepen what you do cover in ways that are meaningful and lasting to students. Writing enables students to engage actively with and to gain a personal perspective on course material in ways that reading another chapter in the textbook or taking another objective exam cannot do.

If you are unable to focus the course enough to allow for a number of different writing assignments, try only assigning one or two.

Make sure that the assignment is challenging enough to warrant multiple drafts. Require students to seek feedback on early drafts and to revise.

Rather than you, the instructor, commenting on each draft, encourage peer responses.

In order to increase students' ability to comment meaningfully on one another's paper, give them critique guides, a list of questions or a scoring rubric (based on your evaluative criteria) for them to complete as they read their peer's writing.

Invite students to visit the writing center for feedback on drafts.

Communicate with the center director about your assignments and expectations. Take a field trip to the center; or invite some tutors to visit your class to introduce themselves. Or contact the director about conducting an evening workshop for your students on a writing topic of your choice.

Minimize the amount of time you take reading drafts or final versions of student papers:

- Insist that students word-process, "spell-check" and proofread their writing before submitting it. If they fail to do this, return it to them for revision or lower their grade substantially.
- Don't edit or rewrite the paper for students. Not only does it not help them to write, it also can end up discouraging or overwhelming them.
- Focus your comments on one (or two) points that are related to your evaluation criteria. Center on the area that is most successful and the one that most needs improvement. If you feel a need to let the student know that this issue needing improvement is not the only area of concern, make a comment such as, "Once you have a better grasp on how you want to organize your thoughts, we can begin working on supporting your claims." Listing all of the flaws in the paper can be debilitating for the students as well as unnecessarily time-consuming for you.

Offer students some choices on assignments or vary the mode and audience of some of your assignments.

Variation can make reading student papers more enjoyable and easier to read.

Create handouts on common writing problems or require students to buy a writing handbook.

Give individual students pertinent handouts or refer them to certain handbook chapters rather than writing out all of the rules and guidelines on each paper.

Consider the possibility of assigning writing portfolios.

Students write a number of different papers throughout the semester and receive feedback on them from peers, the instructor or tutors. At the end of the semester, they select which papers shall be evaluated for a grade. This method expands students' opportunities for writing but does not demand that the instructor reads and comments on all the writing produced.

Create a rubric (or checklist) scoring guide that you can complete as you read the papers.

Identify the traits that you most value and least value in the paper, then "check" each one off as you encounter it.

Stagger assignment due dates so that you are not reading one hundred papers at once!