College Writing

How to Transform a High School Writing Program Into Real College Preparation

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MICHIGAN FUTURE SCHOOLS

The High School Accelerator for Metro Detroit

Table of Contents

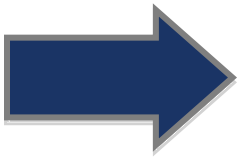
Chapter 1: Transitioning from High School to College Writing: Four Key Paradigm Shifts

For high school students "to meet the expectations of university writing, [they] will need to unlearn some of the rules [they] learned in high school" (Vogan 1). This belies the success of supposedly college preparatory high schools at achieving their mission. What if, instead, high school graduates entered college *ready* to meet the standards of a non-remedial college level writing class? For this to happen a complete paradigm shift around how high schools teach writing is necessary. If high schools are able to reimagine what writing could look like and refine their practice in a few key areas, students could enter college ready to meet these higher expectations.

This chapter will outline several shifts in thinking that should occur in order for high school students to become college-ready writers (see figure 1).

Figure 1:

In High School
Writing to Demonstrate Learning (summarization)
Writing is product oriented
Form dictates content
Little in English class



In College
Writing to Learn (analysis)
Writing is process oriented
Content dictates form
Extensive writing in all classes

Shift 1: Writing to Demonstrate Learning → Writing to Learn

High School Writing

Take a minute to reflect on a recent writing assignment that students in your class or school completed. Chances are the teacher was looking for a specific answer. Chances are the student was able to find the answer in a reading, in class notes, or by some other means of research. If this was not the case with the writing assignment you were imagining, your school is already ahead of the game. Unfortunately, at most high schools, and in many classrooms, writing is used as a way for students to show what they have learned. They memorize what was taught in class and then reproduce that information for the teacher to assess. The teacher most often knows the answer she is looking for and is

reading students' writing to assess whether students learned what she taught. In other words, *a majority of the writing at the high school level asks students to summarize what they have learned or read*.

College Writing

At the college level, students are asked to move beyond summarization. Writing is no longer used to assess if students learned what was taught, but to provide an opportunity for students to learn something that was *not* taught. A high school teacher is pleased when she receives the answer she was expecting. A college professor, on the other hand, expects to be surprised and informed when reading a college-level paper.

The first mindset shift must be around how the purpose of writing at large is viewed. While using writing to assess student learning is appropriate, teachers must also begin to provide students with opportunities to learn through writing. Instead of seeing writing as an assessment of learning, educators must begin to see it as an outlet for learning.

Making the Switch

Schools need to begin thinking about how they design classes so students and teachers view "writing as a way to study, learn, and go beyond – as a way to construct knowledge or generate new networks of understanding" (Applebee 26). Schools should begin envisioning how to reorient writing to be a vehicle for the exploration of ideas as opposed to a means of reporting them.

Return to the same writing assignment you recalled at the beginning of this chapter. Given the same unit of study, could you have provided students with time to write as a means of formulating new ideas? Could you have tweaked that initial assignment to be an avenue *for* learning instead of an assessment *of* learning? These are the types of questions that you or your staff should begin thinking through to better prepare your graduates for college-level writing.

In the rest of this chapter, and in shifts two and three in particular, we lay out some of the primary ways schools need to shift their thinking around writing if they intend to best prepare their students for college-level writing.

Shift 2: Writing is Product-Oriented → Writing is Process-Oriented

Before we explain how to move students from product-oriented writing to process-oriented writing, it is important that we clarify exactly what each means.

What is Product-Oriented Writing?

In product-oriented writing, students are concerned with "correctness" and the end product. The more mechanical aspects of writing, such as syntax and grammar, are the focus of composing. Product-oriented writing instruction focuses on "sentence-level writing and paragraph organization. Students are often given a framework which illustrates a pattern of rhetorical organization" (Thurgood). The instructor generally determines both the content of the piece and the form it will take.

What is Process-Oriented Writing?

On the other hand, in a process-oriented approach, "writing is considered a process through which meaning is created" (Thurgood). While the end product must be grammatically and organizationally sound, the idea of writing "correctly" the first time does not interfere with the process of writing. Anne Lamott, author of *Bird by Bird*, offers this guidance on process-oriented writing:

> Almost all good writing begins with terrible first efforts. You need to start somewhere. Start by getting something – anything – down on paper. A friend of mine says that the first draft is the down draft – you just get it down. The second draft is the up draft – you fix it up. And the third draft is the dental draft, where you check every tooth to see if it's loose or cramped, or decayed, or even, God help us, healthy (7).

In Lamott's framework, multiple drafts are encouraged with the idea that "the product of writing will improve with the discovery involved in composing" (Thurgood).

There are numerous benefits to a process-oriented approach. It acknowledges that what is initially put on paper does not need to be what is eventually evaluated. This allows students to feel safer, and therefore more willing to begin writing – they do not get mired in ensuring that every sentence put on paper is grammatically correct, but rather understand that it is a first attempt at an end goal. Process-oriented writing also allows students to see their progress, which can be an affirming experience. It encourages students to be self-reflective by examining drafts and identifying points of weakness as well as strengths. In the end, it encourages a growth mindset in students by showing them that if they keep at something, they will indeed improve.

While it would be difficult to argue against having students engage in more process-oriented writing, educators may immediately (and naturally) question (1) how to make this shift and (2) what type of demand this sort of writing will put on an already full teaching schedule. Both questions will be addressed below.

To some extent, students are most likely already engaged in process-oriented writing, so remember that the idea of process-oriented writing is not just to start practicing the various strategies outlined in this section, but for both you

and your students to literally begin seeing writing as a process that encourages the development and revision of ideas. With that said, we will now delve into the nuts and bolts of process-oriented writing.

At the very heart of process-oriented writing is the idea that writing does not actually begin with writing. Williams and McEnerney from the University of Chicago describe this idea quite well:

> Most of us begin our research with a question, with a puzzle, something that we don't understand but want to, and maybe a vague sense of what an answer might look like. We hope that out of our early research to resolve that puzzle there emerges a solution to the puzzle, an idea that seems promising, but one that only more research can test. But even if more research supports that developing idea, we aren't ready to say that that idea is our claim or point. Instead, we start writing to see whether we can build an argument to support it, suspecting, hoping that in the act of writing we will refine that idea, maybe even change it substantially.

Again, writing is viewed as a way of discovering ideas. Prior to students engaging in any writing they will need to conduct research or reread class texts to begin formulating the general topic of their papers. It is only once they begin writing that this vague notion will become more fleshed out into an actual argument. Notice that there was no mention of the form the end product should take nor did an instructor as narrowly define the topic as is often done with product-oriented writing. The end product will develop through the process a student engages in.

Once students actually embark on the writing process there are several ways instructors can structure the experience to make it more process-oriented.

Research on Process-Oriented Writing

In 2008, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) partnered with the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) to measure "the extent to which engaging in certain types of writing instruction measures up to NSSE's benchmarks" (Addison and McGee 153). Given that NSSE measures "the extent to which institutions engage in practices that lead to high levels of student engagement" (Ibid. 152), one could use some of the findings in NSSE's collaboration with the WPA to begin looking at if involvement in more process-oriented writing leads to higher-levels of student engagement.

The table below reproduced in its entirety from Addison and McGee (2010) shows college students' responses to the WPA/NSSE survey. I include this here not for reflection around the results, but for us to take note of the metrics in their survey.

Table 1. National Survey of Student Engagement Results

	First-Year	Senior
For how many writing assignments have you:		
Talked with instructor to develop ideas before drafting	67%	67%
Received feedback from instructor about a draft	75%	63%
Received feedback from classmate, friend, family about a draft	74%	64%
Visited campus-based writing center to get help	31%	19%
In how many writing assignments did you:		
Analyze or evaluate something you read, researched, observed	91%	91%
Argue a position using evidence and reasoning	80%	73%
Explain in writing the meaning of numerical or statistical data	43%	50%
Create the project with multimedia (web page, poster, etc.)	45%	68%
In how many writing assignments has your instructor:		
Explained in advance what he or she wanted you TO LEARN	84%	82%
Explained in advance the grading criteria he or she would use	90%	91%
Asked you to do short pieces of writing that were not graded	54%	36%
Asked you to give feedback to a classmate about a draft	65%	38%

Most of the metrics the survey assessed are part of a process-oriented writing approach. Instructors can begin to shift their practice by incorporating these types of structures and activities into their classes.

Applebee and Langer use a similar set of criteria when evaluating instructors during their 2009 study of writing at 20 middle and high schools selected for their excellence in writing instruction. Again, for the purpose of determining how to teach process-oriented writing, the results of the survey are less important that the criteria they were assessing. The metrics and results are found in the table below.

TABLE 1. Approaches to Writing Instruction in Classes that Assign Writing of at Least Paragraph Length

	PERCENT OF TEACHERS REPORTING FREQUENTLY OR ALMOST ALWAYS			
	English (n = 176)	Science (n = 117)	Social Science/ History (n = 155)	Math (n = 71)
Clearly specify the specific parts that must be included in a particular kind of writing assignment	94.4	82.0	79.4	69.4
Spend class time generating and organizing ideas or information before writing	90.6	37.5	60.7	25.2
Teach specific strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and organizing written work	90.1	29.0	41.4	28.4
Provide models of effective responses for students to read, analyze, and emulate	84.6	36.7	56.2	36.9
Provide rubrics that highlight the characteristics of good responses	82.2	59.0	62.6	51.6
Ask students to work together to plan, edit, or revise their work	60.4	37.6	40.1	44.2
Base writing on inquiry tasks involving immediate, concrete data as the basis for writing	44.4	68.3	42.6	36.8
Organize a "workshop" environment in which students receive individual attention as they engage in learning the content, allowing for cycles of investigation, writing, and revision	43.9	16.2	12.9	8.4

Examining the points of inquiry for both the NSSE/WPA study as well as Applebee and Langer's study, three points emerge as integral to process-oriented writing:

- Students are given time to research and discuss before engaging in any prewriting activities.
- The instructor does not narrowly define paper form and content; rather these are arrived at through research and conversation.
- Drafts of an assignment are not only required, but students receive feedback on those drafts from instructors and potentially their peers. Comments are holistic and reference the paper's content, not the mechanics. For more on giving feedback see chapter 3.

Process-Oriented Writing: Classroom Resources

To help with the transition from a product-oriented classroom to a process-oriented classroom, the following section will provide resources for the research, planning, drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading phases of the writing process.

Research and Close Readings

Traditionally, students are given a topic to write about or come up with their own topics and then try to find resources to back up their argument. In order for students to become independent thinkers, however, the process should be

conducted in reverse. Teachers should first set aside time in class for students to perform research and then generate topics that have personal relevance for them.

Text Based Classes *(text provided by teacher)*

If students are writing an argumentative essay based on a class text or something that has been provided by the teacher, students do not necessarily need to do outside research, but rather they need to do a close reading of the text to generate unique ideas for their thesis.

Below are two handouts from MIT's open courseware website that instructors use when asking their freshmen students to perform a close reading. We do not recommend giving these handouts to your students in their entirety, but rather that you review them to establish your own understanding of what students are going to be asked to read for in college and the types of ideas that will lead to a strong argumentative essay.

- Close Reading Handout 1
- Close Reading Handout 2
- Using Storyboards for Close Reading (NYT Learning Network Lesson)
- Guide to Close Reading (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor)
- Table of terms for close readings

"Research" in this case—where the text is provided—refers simply to a deeper reading of a class text, rather than research using outside sources. Similar to traditional research, it is expected that an idea for an argument will emerge after conducting several close readings of the text.

Non-text Based Classes *(outside research required)*

For a paper that requires additional research, you want to consider how your students will (a) select a topic, (b) narrow their topic, and (c) research their topic using appropriate resources. Before students actually delve into research for their papers, they should be familiar with how to conduct research on the internet. Many students will just type in their entire research question into Google and feel that blog posts or chat boards are reliable sources of information. It is recommended to spend one or two classes on research practices before delving into content specific research.

Effective Research Skills

Video 1: Using Precise Key Words and Synonyms during Research
Companion Materials

Video 2: Evaluating Websites
Companion Materials

C.R.A.P Website Evaluation Checklist (Currency, Reliability, Authority, Purpose and Point of View)

Selecting and Narrowing a Topic

Once students are slightly more familiar with the basics of on-line research, it is time for them to begin researching their topic.

The two main areas that novice writers struggle with in choosing a strong topic for research is ensuring its specific enough while being a unique perspective on the idea. Assuming that students are given some guidance for their research, the next step before they start mindlessly plugging key words into Google is to come up with a strong narrow topic. Think about a general topic students might research for your class. From the direction you provide students (an infectious disease, a revolutionary invention, a turning point in American History, gay rights, immigration, inflation), they will have to narrow down the initial focus you provided them with. One of the best ways to do this is by having them brainstorm. Once they have spent sufficient time brainstorming they can start to search for patterns in their thoughts that will help them narrow their initial topic into a nuanced thesis statement worthy of further investigation. As they research, they might change their thesis, but at least now their initial efforts are more focused.

The University of North Carolina's website has extensive description of numerous brainstorming techniques. We recommend visiting their site and selecting a few unique techniques to introduce to your students.

Planning

As students are researching, they will need a way to organize the information they find. They can try recording their ideas in one of the formats mentioned below, but it will most likely be easier if they organize information by website and then look back at their research.

The Writing Center at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has a short video that is worth watching on various ways for students to organize their ideas. You could show this to you students, but it is more likely to help you become familiar with various ways of organizing a paper.

In addition to a creating a mind map, flow chart, timeline, power point, or note cards students can also organize their ideas through color-coding. They can look at their notes and circle all of the related sub-topics or ideas with one color. Once they notice any patterns in their research, they might refine their thesis, do more research, or move onto the drafting stage of the writing process. Again, the idea is to slowly introduce your students to these prewriting strategies until they are comfortable selecting the best strategy for them on a particular paper.

Drafting

If students have a strong plan, drafting should be relatively easy. Again, help them keep in mind that this is a "down draft" – they are just getting their ideas down; they need not worry about grammar and spelling. As an introduction to "down drafts" you might have students read "Shitty First Drafts" by Anne

Lamott and reflect on what the writing process is for her as a way to help students begin internalizing the idea of drafting and revising.

McEnerney at the University of Chicago elaborates on Lamott, suggesting that there a two ways to draft – fast and slow. "Fast Drafters" are focused on getting ideas down on paper – they are not concerned with mechanics and often will not both typing out entire quotes for fear of losing their train of thought. They work on getting ideas down and spend time revising. "Slow Drafters" obsess over every sentence, refusing to move on until they will the sentence expressing the idea perfectly. Since neither approach is correct, it might be worth sharing with your students that writers draft in various ways.

Drafting particular parts of an essay will be addressed more in the "Ideas Dictate Form" section of this chapter.

Revising

Once students have a "down draft" of their writing, it is time for them to revise their work. Revision means to "see again." Many students confuse proofreading or editing with revising. Revising is a much more involved and time-consuming task (hence why students want to avoid it,) and it requires writers to reconsider their overall argument, evidence, and organization. The revision process is a chance for writers to look critically at their writing and determine if what they have written:

- is worth saying,
- says what they wanted to say, and
- will be understandable to a reader. (The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).

These guiding questions are a good way to introduce your students to the idea of revision. Before beginning the revision process, it is good if students can have some distance from their papers so they are judging what is written on the page and not what they remember. This should be at least a class period, but could also be longer depending on the pacing of your unit. Also, help your students understand that revision is about big changes, not small adjustments.

Revision is highly valued at the college level. In many courses, the final paper is often a revision of an earlier paper students wrote. Here are some sample assignments that ask students to revision earlier drafts of papers:

Revision Assignment 1 (MIT)

The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, also has some more specific questions that students can consider as they revise their papers. They should not tackle all of these questions at once. Depending on the level of your students and what you are noticing about their writing, you might want to suggest one or two questions for the whole class or for each student.

The goal would be for your students to eventually know which of the questions they most need to focus on during the revision process.

Ideas for Revision
(*taken in entirety from The Writing Center at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)*

- Check the **focus** of the paper: Is it appropriate to the assignment? Is the topic too big or too narrow? Do you stay on track through the entire paper?
- Think honestly about your **thesis**: Do you still agree with it? Should it be modified in light of something you discovered as you wrote the paper? Does it make a sophisticated, provocative point, or does it just say what anyone could say if given the same topic? Does your thesis generalize instead of taking a specific position? Should it be changed altogether?
- Think about your **purpose in writing**: Does your introduction state clearly what you intend to do? Will your aims be clear to your readers?
- Examine the **balance** within your paper: Are some parts out of proportion with others? Do you spend too much time on one trivial point and neglect a more important point? Do you give lots of detail early on and then let your points get thinner by the end?
- Check that you have **kept your promises to your readers**: Does your paper follow through on what the thesis promises? Do you support all the claims in your thesis? Are the tone and formality of the language appropriate for your audience?
- Check the **organization**: Does your paper follow a pattern that makes sense? Do the **transitions** move your readers smoothly from one point to the next? Do the **topic sentences** of each paragraph appropriately introduce what that paragraph is about? Would your paper work better if you **moved some things around?**
- Check your **information**: Are all your facts accurate? Are any of your statements misleading? Have you provided enough detail to satisfy readers' curiosity? Have you cited all your information appropriately?
- Check your **conclusion**: Does the last paragraph tie the paper together smoothly and end on a stimulating note, or does the paper just die a slow, redundant, lame, or abrupt death?

Again, do not give this list in its entirety to your students. Give them a targeted question and **<u>model</u>** what the revision process should look like.

One way of having your students revise is to give them one of the focus questions above; however, there are numerous ways of revising that we recommend introducing to students over the course of the year. As with the prewriting process, you want to expose students to various techniques for revising, planning, etc., and help them learn how to select the frame that is best for them for their current paper.

Strategies for Revising

The majority of these strategies are taken from the Writing Center at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

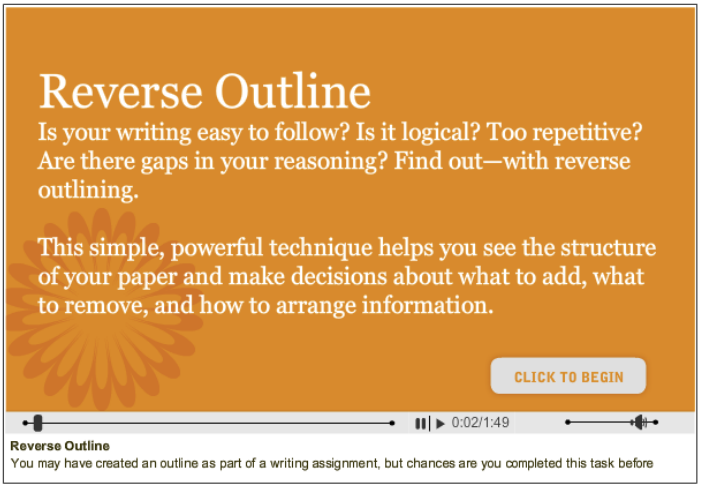
I. Reverse Outlining

Reverse outlining is to be done once students have a completed draft of their papers. This helps students consider if all of their paragraphs are connected to the thesis and the overall organization of the paper.

Steps for Reverse Outlining:

1. Read through your paper, writing the main idea of each paragraph in the margin.
    a. Pay attention for paragraphs that have no purpose or "Monster" paragraphs – those with several main ideas.
    b. Compare the main idea of each paragraph to your thesis – asking does this paragraph support my thesis? If the answer is 'no,' you might need to rewrite the paragraph, delete the paragraph, or consider revising your thesis to include the ideas expressed in the paragraph.
    c. For "Monster" paragraphs work on finding the two or more main ideas and turn each idea that is relevant to your thesis into a separate paragraph.
2. After looking at each paragraph, look at the order of paragraphs. Ask yourself, does the current order make the most sense?
3. Now look at the transitions between paragraphs. Is it clear where you are going? How are the paragraphs connected to your thesis and one another? Consider revising where necessary.
4. Finally, make sure none of your paragraphs repeat the same idea. If they do, combine the key points within each paragraph or delete paragraphs if they do not offer any new information. (https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/support/writingcenter/resourcesforwriters/revision/reverse_outline).

The below video from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill describes Reverse Outlining.



II. Talking it Out

This is a great partner activity for students to engage in after they have a draft of a paper. Have students bring two printed copies of their papers to class. Each student will talk through his or her paper, stating the thesis and then summarizing the main points. The student can use her paper as a reference, but should not just read the paper aloud. As the student is talking through her paper, the partner is taking notes on the order in which his partner is sharing ideas and writing down any questions he has. You or your classes will have to experiment with whether questions should be asked immediately or held until the end. Once the student is done talking through her paper, they will compare the order she presented her paper to her partner with the order in which her paper is written. The idea here is that we are generally more comfortable presenting ideas orally, so if the oral presentation differs from the written one, the writer might consider reordering the paragraphs of her paper. After the pair considers the order, the partner who was listening should ask all of his questions, as there might be points that need elaboration or clarification. After one paper is reviewed, the partners should look at the other paper. This activity could be done in conjunction with the first step of a reverse outline (marking the main ideas in the margins).

III. Sectioning

This strategy works especially well for longer papers.

Steps for Sectioning:

1. Split your paper into sub-topics. Write each of these subtopics at the top of a piece of paper. Number each paragraph of the essay except the introduction and conclusion. For example, if your paper was arguing that the Civil War was fought for economic, political, and social reasons, you would have three subtopics.
2. Read each paragraph and determine which of the subtopics it falls under. Put the paragraph number under as many subtopics as it's addressing.
3. If a paragraph falls under more than one subtopic, you need to revise that paragraph to have a more narrow focus or split the paragraph into two parts and place each paragraph in the appropriate section of the paper.
4. If you find that a paragraph does not fit in any of the subtopics, you most likely need to delete that paragraph.
5. Once you've determined that all of the paragraphs are related to the overall argument, look at each section of your paper: Are any paragraphs repetitive? Are the paragraphs in the most logical order?
6. Once each section of your paper is clear, look at the sections together: Does the current order make sense or should I reorder the subtopics? Are there clear transitions between each of the sections?

IV. Listing and Narrowing

This strategy is especially helpful for comparative analysis or if a student needs to focus his argument.

For explaining this technique, we will borrow directly from the Writing Center at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Let's say students were writing a paper with the thesis: "While both sides fought the Civil War

over the issue of slavery, the North fought for moral reasons, while the South fought to preserve its own institutions."

You could have students list out the arguments for each side:

North	**South**
Slavery	Slavery
Moral issues	Self government
Humane treatment	Right to property
Against tyranny	Against tyranny
Against oppression of slaves	Against federal government oppression

After listing the two sides, students can see where the similarities are and where the differences lie. This will help them see if their thesis is still accurate and can even help to revise the thesis. Students, some with assistance, could come to the conclusion that the ideas of 'tyranny' and 'oppression' appear on both sides. With that discovery, they could revise their thesis to more clearly state the similarities and then differences. A revise thesis might look like: "Both sides believed they fought against tyranny and oppression, but while the South fought for the political and economic rights of slave owners, the North fought for the human rights of slaves."

Once students revise their thesis, they then want to consider the order of their paragraphs. Given that the thesis was revised to state the similarities firsts, the paragraphs discussing the similarities between the North and South should come first in the paper. While there are several differences, those that the student feels are most important should come earlier in the paper than less meaningful differences.

The listing and narrowing technique is used to:

- Assess the structure of a paper
- Provide a visual to help with thesis revision
- Prompt additional restructuring by having students look at the structure of their paper compared to their revised thesis.

V. Reading Aloud

This will initially feel awkward to students, but if they can get over that and begin to read their work aloud to themselves or a partner it will help them get better, and quicker, at the revision process.

Tips for Reading Aloud:

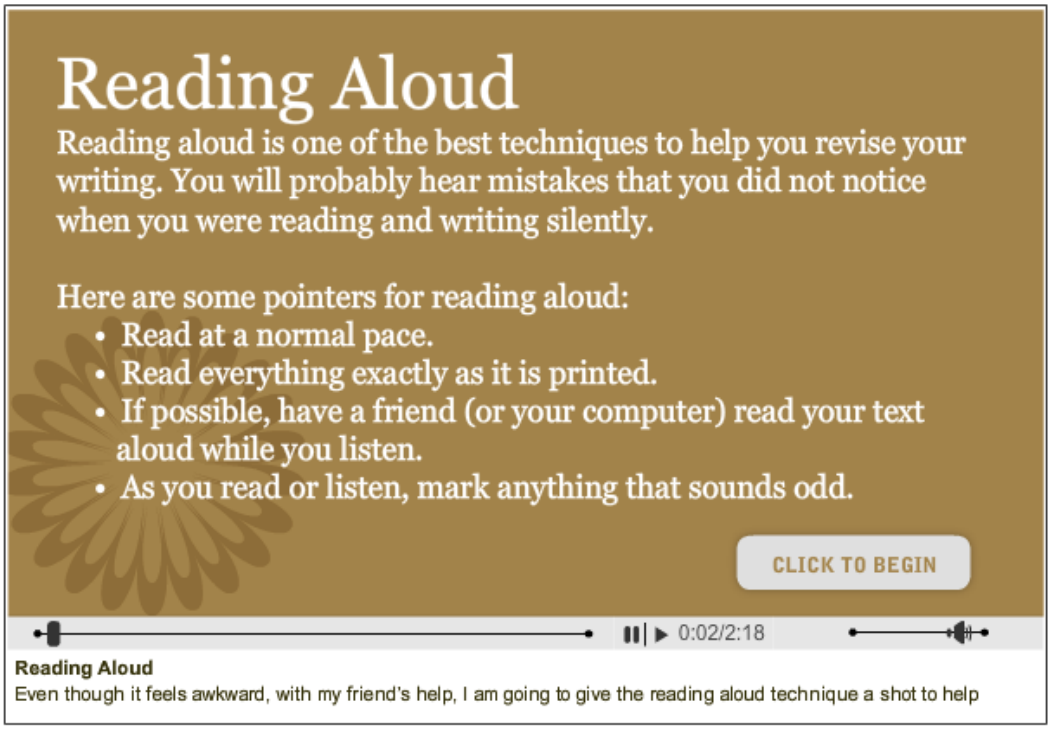
- Read from a printed copy.
- Read exactly what is on the page. Point to each word or drag your finger along the sentence as you read. You need to read what your paper says, not what you want it to say.

You could also have students do this in pairs during class. Have each student bring two printed copies of his or her paper to class. Student A reads the partner's paper aloud. The author of the paper takes notes on where the reader is struggling and corrects small errors as the paper is

being read. Students would then switch roles. When the paper is being read aloud, the reader must read exactly what is on the page and be patient while the author fixes smaller mistakes.

Consider showing the video below of a student using the "read loud" technique to revise her work. As you show them the video, have them note

- What does the reader do?
- How does she read?
- What does she notice about her writing?



Finally, there are several computer programs that students can save their papers to that will then read the papers aloud to them. iSpeech and Yakitome are two of the better free web-based options.

VI. Visualizing

This strategy employs some of the mapping techniques discussed in the planning section of this chapter. You can have students create maps or webs to show how their ideas are connected and to help them visualize the extent to which an idea in a paragraph is developed.

Here is an example of a paragraph in three different stages. Consider sharing the different iterations with your students to help them internalize the differences between editing and revising and the time intensive nature and importance of the latter.

These strategies for revision should be slowly rolled out to your students. You might mandate that they try each strategy at least once, but then will have freedom to choose which strategy works the best for them on their future writing projects.

Editing

Revising requires students to examine the overall structure of their paper and improve upon the way their ideas, at the paragraph level, fit together to support their thesis. Editing requires students to examine their work at the sentence level. At this level, students are determining if sentences within a paragraph are as clear and powerful as possible and even if words within given sentences are truly the best choice. Grammar and spelling are still not the focus of editing, which comes later in proofreading.

The Writing Center at Harvard University has an extensive list of questions that can prompt students as they work through the editing process. Below is an abbreviated version of that list focusing on the components that are most essential for novice writers.

Editing Focus Areas (adapted from "Editing the Essay, Part One and Part Two" from the Harvard Writing Center)

- Determine if all words are necessary – delete repetitive or extraneous information.
- For example: "In my own personal opinion," the words "own personal" are not needed because that is what 'my' means.
- Analyze word choice – is your language clear and precise or are you speaking in generalities because it "sounds sophisticated"? Revise sentences or phrases that do not convey a very specific idea.
- Similarly, do not use overly inflated language, jargon, or clichés solely for the purpose of "sounding more intelligent."
- Ensure that all sentences support your point – don't just keep a sentence because it is well-written.
- Vary sentence structure – do not start all sentences the same way.
- Do not over quote – only use quotes to illustrate your most essential points. If you over quote it appears as if you do not have any of your own thoughts.

Proofreading

Proofreading requires knowledge of grammar, spelling, and punctuation. If you notice students struggling with particular areas of mechanics or conventions, consider doing a mini lesson on this before going into the proofreading process.

Tips for Proofreading:

- Proofread only after you have revised and edited your paper
- Proofreading does not mean run the spell checker and grammar checker
- Read aloud slowly and read every word
- Proofread for one error at a time. For example, read your paper once looking for grammar errors. The next time read it for punctuation errors.

- If you know you struggle in a particular area, read your paper looking only for mistakes in that area.
- Look at one sentence at a time: If you are reading on the computer, press 'enter' after every sentence. Then focus on proofreading every sentence. If you are working from a paper copy, cover up every sentence except the one you are proofreading.
- Read your paper backwards: To check for spelling errors, start with the last word in the last sentence of your paper – read each word aloud. This forces you to focus on spelling, as content and grammar will not make sense. If you want to check for grammar start by reading the last sentence of your paper, then go to the second to last sentence and so on. Doing this prevents you from getting distracted by content (http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/editing-and-proofreading/).

As students become more experienced at the proofreading process, it will become more efficient for them because they will know the type of errors they should be on the look out for.

Once students have revised, edited, and proofread their own paper they can work with a peer to get additional feedback. For background and resources on peer editing see Chapter 4.

Sample Timeline for Process-Oriented Writing Project

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Weekend
• Introduce Project • Mini Lesson on a research technique or Close Reading • Research time / Close Reading time	• Mini Lesson on a research technique • Research time	• Mini Lesson on brainstorming techniques • Research time/topic formulation	• Mini lesson on planning • Planning time (outlining, mapping, etc.).	• Planning time • Mini Lesson on "Down Drafts" • Drafting time*	• Drafting time
• Drafting time (come with finished draft to next class)	• Mini lesson on revision vs. editing • Mini Lesson on at least 2 revision strategies • Revision time	• Revision time (come to class with next draft)	• Mini Lesson on peer editing • Peer editing session (work time – reading papers)	• Peer editing session (feedback) • Revision time • Mini Lesson on Editing	• Next draft due Monday

• Papers collected for teacher feedback	After the teacher provides feedback, students should have time revise their papers again and resubmit for a revised grade. The grade should reflect both the final product they handed in and their ability to take feedback into account when revising.

** Depending on the skill level of your students, drafting could be broken into several class periods around the different parts of an essay (thesis, intro, body paragraphs, conclusions, etc.).*

While shifting the writing students do to be more process-oriented seems wise, the initial question of how to manage the increased grading demand is still looming. Take a moment and recall all the papers you collected from students in the past week, month, or quarter. Now consider how much of that informed your instruction or was an accurate assessment of student learning as opposed to a check for compliance. Some of it was probably the latter, and some work may always need to be especially at the lower grades. However, now imagine that for weeks prior to a final paper being due students are engaged in research, conversations, drafting, revising, and editing. Instead of grading countless worksheets for each student, what if you graded more thoroughly several drafts of a paper. Would this be more time – potentially- but would it be time better spent – probably. Would these earlier grading sessions help students writing improve and also make the grading of the "final" paper more streamlined? Hopefully. Teaching and grading writing is time consuming, but if you begin to redesign how you structure not only your class to allow students to engage in this type of work, but your grading to reflect growth, everyone might feel more successful.

For this shift in grading practices to be most effective not only should drafts of single papers count towards a student's grade, but the final paper-grade should also reward students who took into consideration the suggestions made through the revision process.

MFS is not trying to make this shift in practice or grading seem overly simplistic. Start making changes where you can and encourage others at your school to engage in conversations around grading practices that encourage the formation of a growth mindset encouraged by process-oriented writing.

While shifting our mindset to be more focused on process-oriented writing is essential, it is equally as important to consider some of the more structural differences between high school and college level writing. The next section elaborates on the notion of ideas dictating the form of a student's essay as opposed to an instructor imposing a form for students to adhere with.

Shift 3: Form Dictates Content → Content Dictates Form

Every high school English teacher has assigned numerous five-paragraph essays. In fact, English faculty at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill even

agrees, “the five-paragraph theme [essay] is a good way to learn how to write an academic essay.” However, they go onto argue “that doesn’t mean you should use it forever. Once you can write well without it, you can cast it off and never look back.” They encourage the five-paragraph essay to be seen as training wheels – an essential piece of scaffolding for later success, but not something that should be used indefinitely (The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).

The question then becomes how do we transition our novice high school writers, who benefit from the structure of the five-paragraph essay, to more skilled writers who allow their ideas to dictate the form their essays take? All essays, regardless of length, have them basic form of:

- Introduction
- Body
- Conclusion

In the five-paragraph essay, there must be three body paragraphs. The requirement of three body paragraphs dictates that a thesis must be easily supported in three paragraphs – traditionally one point in each paragraph. In the five-paragraph model, form dictates how content and ideas are organized. This leaves little room for original thought. While this might be appropriate for high school freshmen, students quickly need to move away from this model and learn how to let their ideas determine the form their essays will take.

To move students from the basic five-paragraph structure consider how each element of an academic essay can be made more sophisticated as students progress through four years of high school writing.

The Introduction

A typical high school-level introduction consists of three parts: a hook, background on the topic, and a thesis. Writers proceed from stating very broad information about their topic (hook/background) to more specific information on the topic (thesis). Instead of following this formula, in college an introduction should generally provide specific background information on the topic and then state a thesis that makes a nuanced argument (Williams and McEnerney).

In high school writing, students try to “hook” a reader, by posing a question, offering a personal anecdote, stating a startling fact or famous quotation, or defining a key term that is relevant to the topic of the essay. While these all might serve to develop more novice writers these techniques are too broad for college-level writing. Instead, college professors expect an introduction “to give a brief statement about the question or problem that you are answering or solving. You do this by suggesting something that is puzzling, not entirely understood, perhaps overlooked, not noticed, undervalued” (Williams and McEnerney).

Instead of having students "hook" their readers through a writing technique, you want to have them begin their papers by showing that they have something new and interesting to say that the reader would not have independently considered.

Activity: Visit The University Of Chicago's Writing Program page. Navigate to section 4 "Effective Introductions." Read the two sample first sentences and the analysis that accompanies them. Consider how you can move your students to become more proficient at starting their papers.

In addition to rethinking how students should start their papers, rethinking the thesis statement is essential to reorienting students' writing. In high school, a thesis is often a restating of the prompt or a declarative statement followed by three points with each point then being addressed in one of the body paragraphs. Again, this format becomes repetitive and leads to very little original thought. The assignment to write a five-paragraph essay is dictating the student's approach to the assignment. Students need to learn how to have their ideas dictate how they respond to an assignment.

Below are two thesis statements from mock introductions that The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has as an on-line resource for incoming students. As you read the excerpts, note the differences. Consider not only the level of sophistication in writing, but also what was necessary for Student B to craft his thesis statement, what this does for the reader, and how this prepares him to move forward in his essay.

Traditional High School Thesis Statement (Student A)	**College Level Thesis Statement (Student B)**
"The North and South fought the Civil War for many reasons. In some cases, these reasons were the same, but in other cases they were very different. In this paper, I will compare and contrast these reasons by examining the economy, politics, and slavery" (2013).	"In that [the civil] war, both Northerners and Southerners believed they fought against tyranny and oppression, but Northerners focused on the oppression of slaves while Southerners defended their rights to property and self-government" (2013).

Did you notice how Student A, the high school student, went from a strikingly general and vague claim to a statement that simply listed three points? We all know that these points (economy, politics, slavery) will predictably turn into three body paragraphs. Again, we see form dictating content. If you continue to examine Student A's thesis statement, you are unaware of what this paper is arguing because there is no argument. In college, implicit in every thesis statement should be an argument. Not only should a thesis statement make an argument, but it should also set out to argue an idea that is nuanced and defendable. A reader should learn something by reading your students' papers. Moving to Student B's thesis, perhaps you also picked up on the fact that Student B would have had to conduct a great deal of research before articulating his point. (High school students often start writing by writing; in

college, one has to start the writing process by reading and analyzing. See "Writing as a Process" for more information on this). Finally by crafting such a specific thesis statement, Student B knows exactly what the rest of his paper will be about. On the other hand, Student A has no guidance going forward – he is just as confused as his reader.

Let's recap: Thesis statements should avoid just listing topics or making an overtly simple claim. To construct a strong thesis statement, students will have to research or conduct several close readings of class texts before even attempting a draft of a successful thesis. Once they have collected sufficient information, their thesis should aim to make a unique argument that can be supported by textual evidence.

Reflect
How will what have you learned about helping students craft an introduction change your practice? How should the introduction that first semester freshmen write differ than the introduction your seniors, who are months away from graduation, compose? Who are the key stakeholders in discussing how writing should be scaffolded from freshmen to senior year?

Body Paragraphs

The major mind shift that students need to make when writing the body of an essay is that the content of their ideas should dictate the form and number of body paragraphs that comprise their essays. Rather than trying to fit ideas into three body paragraphs, as formerly done in a five-paragraph essay, the content of the ideas should dictate how many paragraphs students construct. If we return to the thesis statement composed by Student B, he would not just have one paragraph about Northerners and one about Southerners. He would let his research dictate how many paragraphs were necessary to fully explain his point.

The other main difference between college-level and high school-level body paragraphs becomes apparent when more closely examining the structure of an individual body paragraph. In high-school-writing, the structure of a body paragraph seems to be fairly repetitive: A topic sentence that expands on one of the three points stated in the thesis, a lead into textual evidence, one piece of evidence, and potentially some analysis. Students are often focused on the number of sentences that the paragraph should have. This same formula is then repeated two more times until all three points laid out in the thesis have been addressed.

At the college level, the forms of body paragraphs differ. Students are not writing to hit a sentence number, but to convey a point. Paragraphs will often include multiple pieces of textual evidence, not just a student's opinion, and much more time is spent unpacking the quotes that students have carefully selected. (Williams and McEnerney). The evidence offered throughout the body of an essay should attempt to appeal to a readers' ethos, pagos, and logos (ethics, emotions, and logic) rather than just targeting one category or evidence

solely being drawn from the writer's personal experience as is often done in high school. Body paragraphs should strengthen the initial argument that students set out to make, not merely summarize a related point or piece of evidence.

Finally, in college-level writing, students will constantly acknowledge and address the limitations of their claim. As a way of building credibility (ethos), they want to show readers that they have thought through potential objections to their claim and are open to engaging in an academic dialogue, albeit in written form, to find a common ground. At the college level, argumentative writing is viewed "less like disagreeable wrangling, more like a lively and amiable conversation" (Williams and McEnerney) where the writer is in search of a deeper understanding for both him or herself and the reader.

Conclusions

At the high school level, students have been instructed to restate their main points in the conclusion. Again, this comes off as a fruitless task and feels repetitious to a reader. At the college level, in addition to restating the main point, a conclusion should do one of three things:

1. Explain the implications of the conclusion. Have students answer the question, "So what?" This will help them articulate the importance of their findings.
2. Have students explain what larger questions they are now grappling with as a result of writing this paper.
3. Have students add a "quotation from the text that brings [their] paper to a graceful close. The quotation should be striking, gnomic, epigrammatic--a quotation that is especially graceful or figurative" (Williams and McEnerney).

Titles

The University of Chicago's Writing Program has articulated the art of writing a title especially well. That section has been reproduced in its entirety below.

"*After* you've revised the text and, especially, *after* you've reworked both your introduction and your conclusion, you're ready to write (or revise) your title. The least useful kind of title is one that anyone knowing your assignment could predict from the language of the assignment. If the assignment is, "Discuss the logical structure of the Declaration of Independence, particularly those assumptions on which Jefferson based his argument," do not create the title:

The Assumptions Behind the Logic
of The Declaration of Independence

A useful title tells the reader what the central conceptual elements in your paper are. Those elements are most likely to appear in your conclusion. So go to

your conclusion, particularly to the main point sentence in your conclusion, and circle six or seven key words, particularly words that did not appear in the assignment. Now out of those words, construct a two-part title on the model of

xxxxxxxxx:
yyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy

Something like:

Logic in the Declaration:
Timeless Ideals and Immediate Realities

The first line ends in a colon, the second line can be longer or shorter than the first. The reason for writing a two-part title is that if you don"t get it right in the first part, you might get it right in the second. Avoid using words in your title if those words are not prominent in your paper. The point of a title is to anticipate key concepts, not to be clever" (Williams and McEnerney).

Voice

While only tangentially related to the form of an academic essay, the idea of voice continues to come up as a struggle for students transitioning to college-level writing, so it will be addressed here. As quoted in Crank's article "From High School to College: Developing Writing Skills in the Disciplines", Aker and Halasek argue that "high school teachers typically encouraged students to create voice in personal essays … but discouraged them from using that same voice in academic pieces ... The distinction was generally not one made by college teachers" (Crank 58). In college, students must write with a sense of authority conveying the tone that they have some expertise in the area they are writing about. At the same time, teachers do not want to instruct high school students to express all their claims as if they are universal truths without any room for disagreement. This can come off as narrow-minded which serves to destroy the writer's credibility. On the other hand, students should not appear noncommittal in their claims. To begin finding their academic voice, students need numerous opportunities to explore balancing a tone of authority with one of humility (Williams and McEnerney). As writing instructors, do not limit your instruction around voice to just personal pieces.

Activity:
The three excerpts below have been taken in their entirety from the Writing Program at the University of Chicago.

Consider the three claims below. One is too authoritative, one tries too hard to find a common ground, and the other is a good combination of authority and modesty. See if you can identify which claim is most successful and which fall into the common traps.

Claim 1	Claim 2	Claim 3
For a century now, liberals have been arguing against the censorship of art and/or entertainment, and in the last 20 years, courts and the legislatures in Western nations have found these arguments so persuasive that few now remember what the rebuttals to these arguments were. Today, in the United States and other democracies, overt censorship by the central government has largely ceased to exist.	For more than a century now, every liberal has vehemently argued against any kind of censorship of art and/or entertainment. And in the last 20 years, the courts and the legislatures of Western nations have found these arguments so persuasive that no one remembers any rebuttals to these arguments. Censorship has simply ceased to exist.	For almost a century now, many liberals have argued against the censorship of art and/or entertainment, and in the last 20 years, courts and the legislatures in most Western nations have found these arguments fairly persuasive. Few people now clearly remember what the rebuttals to these arguments were. Today, in the United States and other democracies, censorship has just about ceased to exist.

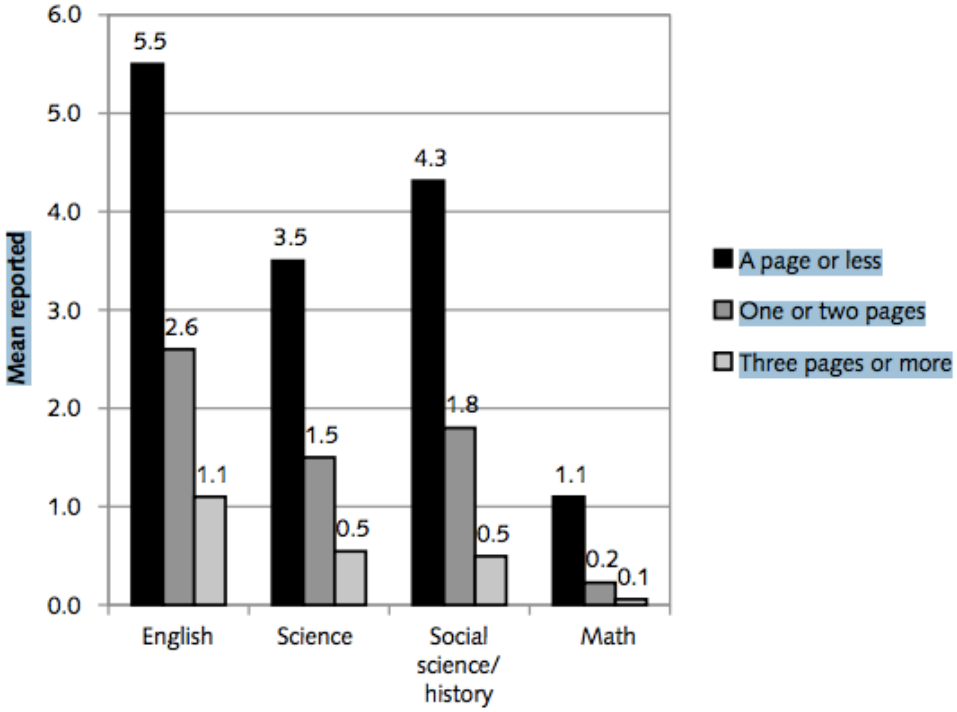
> Did you succeed? Claim one was neither too authoritative nor overly vague. Claim two was overstated, while claim three was understated. Consider having students do this activity where they first discuss which paper (assuming the voice remained the same as in the initial claim) they would best respond to and why. Then have them compare the key words and phrases that create the variety of voices in claims one through three. Then, of course, have them apply this idea to a piece of their own writing.

Shift 4: Little Writing in English Class → Extensive Writing in all Classes

In 2005 two professors at the State University of New York at Albany, Arthur Applebee and Judith Langer, set out to research the changes in writing instruction over the past thirty years. They visited twenty middle and high schools with reputations of excellence in writing. They visited 260 classrooms, spoke with 220 teachers and administrators, and conducted a national survey of 1,520 randomly selected students (Applebee 14). I would like to begin this section by sharing some of their findings around both the quantity and content of writing they found at these schools.

The graph below from Applebee and Langer (2009) summarizes the number of writing assignments (as reported by the teacher) students did in a nine-week period in the four core subjects.

FIGURE 1. Writing Assignments in a Nine-Week Grading Period



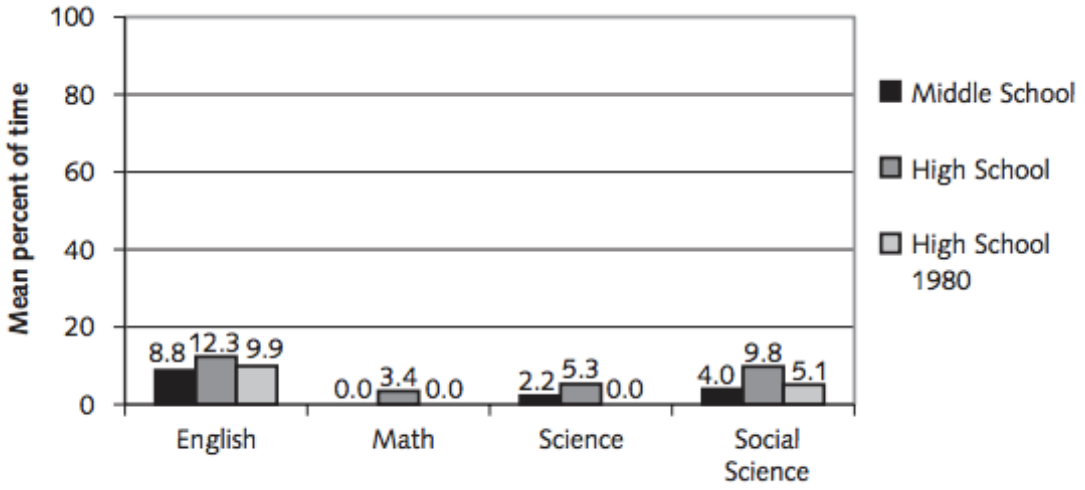
There are a few interesting takeaways here:

- Not surprisingly, students are writing more in English than in any other class. However, students are writing more in their other class combined than in English.
- Additionally, students are not writing a lot: "The typical student would be expected to produce approximately 1.6 pages a week of extended prose for English, and another 2.1 pages for the other three subjects combined" (Applebee 15).
- Finally, the amount of writing students do that is over three pages for any subject is significantly lower than that of the shorter writing assignments.

Given that students are not engaged in extensive writing, one might wonder what they are engaged in. Applebee and Langer collected over 8,000 assignments from 138 students in the schools in this study. Of the assignments collected, only 17.6% of the work for high school students was extended writing of a paragraph or more. "The rest consisted of fill in the blank and short answer exercises, and copying of information directly from the teacher's presentation" (15).

Figure 2, reproduced below from Applebee and Langer (2009), shows the amount of time they observed students involved in extended writing during classroom observations.

FIGURE 2. Writing of Paragraph Length or More during Classroom Observations



Despite the fact that there is marginally more writing at the high school level now than in 1980, the amount of time students are engaged in extensive writing is still quite limited.

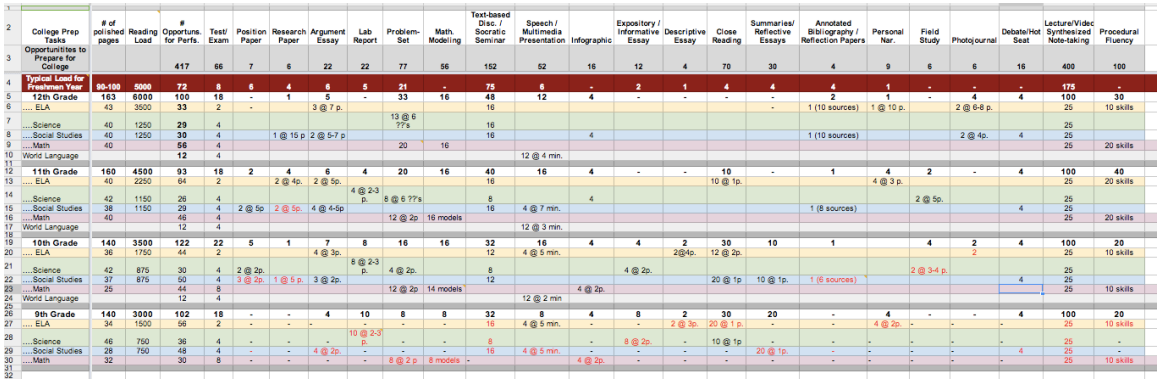
Applebee and Langer also looked at the type and quantity of writing instruction that was occurring at these twenty schools identified for their reputation of excellence in writing. They found that "in a 50-minute period students would have slightly over three minutes of explicit writing instruction – this amounted to just under two-and-a-half hours in a nine-week quarter" (21). The amount of explicit writing instruction in the three other core subjects was less.

Applebee and Langer were the first to acknowledge that the lack of writing instruction is primarily due to the fact that it is not what is valued on the high stakes exams that assume to measure what students have learned and thereby attempt to evaluate the quality of teachers. While this fact is not something that one can ignore, given that the ultimate goal is college graduation and not proficient on a state test, all teachers, not just English teachers, must find a way to embed more extensive writing and writing instruction into their courses.

This mindset shift encourages teachers to begin assigning more authentic performance tasks to students that require extensive thinking and writing. This performance map outlines the potential performance tasks that could make up four years of high school, the frequency with which students could engage with each type of task, and the length for each task. If all teachers begin having

students engage in richer activities and move away from worksheets that require minimal thought, the amount that students are writing thoughtfully would increase dramatically.

(Note this will be a video on how to use the Performance Task Map).



College Prep Tasks	# of polished pages	Reading Load	# Opportuns. for Perfs.	Test/ Exam	Position Paper	Research Paper	Argument Essay	Lab Report	Problem-Set	Math. Modeling	Text-based Disc. / Socratic Seminar	Speech / Multimedia Presentation	Infographic	Expository / Informative Essay	Descriptive Essay	Close Reading	Summaries/ Reflective Essays	Annotated Bibliography / Reflection Papers	Personal Nar.	Field Study	Photojournal	Debate/Hot Seat	Lecture/Video Synthesized Note-taking	Procedural Fluency
Opportunities to Prepare for College			417	66	7	6	22	22	77	56	152	52	16	12	4	70	30	4	9	6	6	16	400	100
Typical Load for Freshman Year	90-100	5000	72	8	6	4	6	5	21	-	75	6	-	2	1	4	4	4	1	-	-	-	175	-
12th Grade	163	6000	100	18	-	1	5	-	33	16	48	12	4	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	4	4	100	30
.... ELA	43	3500	33	2	-		3 @ 7 p.				16						-	1 (10 sources)	1 @ 10 p.		2 @ 6-8 p.		25	10 skills
....Science	40	1250	29	4					13 @ 6 ??s		16												25	
....Social Studies	40	1250	30	4		1 @ 15 p	2 @ 5-7 p				16		4					1 (10 sources)			2 @ 4p.	4	25	
....Math	40		56	4					20	16													25	20 skills
World Language			12	4								12 @ 4 min.												
11th Grade	160	4500	93	18	2	4	6	4	20	16	40	16	4	-	-	10	-	1	4	2	-	4	100	40
.... ELA	40	2250	64	2		2 @ 4p.	2 @ 5p.				16					10 @ 1p.			4 @ 3 p.				25	20 skills
....Science	42	1150	26	4				4 @ 2-3 p.	6 @ 6 ??s		8		4							2 @ 5p.			25	
....Social Studies	38	1150	29	4	2 @ 5p	2 @ 5p.	4 @ 4-5p				16	4 @ 7 min.						1 (8 sources)				4	25	
....Math	40		46	4					12 @ 2p	16 models													25	20 skills
World Language			12	4								12 @ 3 min.												
10th Grade	140	3500	122	22	5	1	7	8	16	16	32	16	4	4	2	30	10	1		4	2	4	100	20
.... ELA	36	1750	44	2			4 @ 3p.				12	4 @ 5 mn.			2@4p.	12 @ 2p.				2			25	10 skills
....Science	42	875	30	4	2 @ 2p.			8 @ 2-3 p.	4 @ 2p.		8			4 @ 2p.						2 @ 3-4 p.			25	
....Social Studies	37	875	50	4	3 @ 2p.	1 @ 5 p.	3 @ 2p.				12					20 @ 1p	10 @ 1p.	1 (6 sources)				4	25	
....Math	25		44	8					12 @ 2p	14 models			4 @ 2p.										25	10 skills
World Language			12	4								12 @ 2 min												
9th Grade	140	3000	102	18	-	-	4	10	8	8	32	8	4	8	2	30	20	-	4	-	-	4	100	20
.... ELA	34	1500	56	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	16	4 @ 5 mn.	-	-	2 @ 3p.	20 @ 1 p.	-	-	4 @ 2p.	-	-	-	25	10 skills
....Science	46	750	36	4	-	-	-	10 @ 2-3 p.	-	-	8		-	8 @ 2p.	-	10 @ 1p	-	-	-	-	-	-	25	-
....Social Studies	28	750	48	4	-	-	4 @ 2p.	-	-	-	16	4 @ 5 mn.	-	-	-	-	20 @ 1p.	-	-	-	-	4	25	-
....Math	32		30	8	-	-	-	-	8 @ 2 p	8 models	-		4 @ 2p.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	25	10 skills

To help students leave high school ready for college writing reflect on where your school is for each of the paradigm shifts.

In High School
Writing to Demonstrate Learning (summarization)
Writing is product oriented
Form dictates content
Little in English class

In College
Writing to Learn (analysis)
Writing is process oriented
Content dictates form
Extensive writing in all classes

Then begin to initiate conversations and make changes to help narrow the gap between what is being taught in high school writing classes and what is necessary for success at the college level.

Chapter 2: Defining College-Level Writing

Preparing high school students for college-level writing seems like a herculean task. The task is made harder when we are met with murky definitions of what college writing actually is. The purpose of this chapter is to clearly define both what college writing means in broad strokes and in terms of the individual assignments our students are most likely to face.

College Writing Assignments

Lawrence McEnerney, the chair of the writing program at the University of Chicago, claims that the reason so many students have trouble with writing in college is that "what your instructors are asking of you is not something *better*, but something *different*," from what you did in high school. The "typical" college assignment, McEnerney writes, will ask a student to "*analyze* a reading, to make a worthwhile *claim* about it that is not obvious (*state a thesis* means almost the same thing), to support your claim with good reasons, all in four or five pages that are organized to present an *argument*."

Examples of *worthwhile claims*, will be addressed later in the chapter; however, students' theses should state something not readily obvious to all readers. For example, "Romeo's downfall was due his tragic flaw of impulsivity" is not a *worthwhile claim.* Most readers could come to this conclusion on by themselves. However, a thesis that argues, "Romeo's impulsivity is a manifestation of the lack of involvement by Sir and Lady Montague. Since it is this impulsivity that eventually leads to his death, Romeo's parents are to blame for their son's death" shows more original thought and is not something most readers would arrive at, or even agree with, independent of reading that paper.

Now, you may be thinking, "I already do that in my class (school)," and if that's the case, then that's tremendous. But it's worth diving further into McEnerney's definition to ensure that all the nuances are being addressed.

The most significant difference is the emphasis on *making a worthwhile claim that is not obvious*. This seems to be the first order of business in most every college writing program we have come across. This is a change for high-school students, who are used to making fairly obvious claims, summarizing material to display understanding, or just stating their opinion. In college, students will need to *interpret* readings in an original way, to essentially help the reader see something that they may not have seen before. This is incredibly challenging, but this is the first criterion on which many student papers will be graded.

After a compelling thesis, a premium is then placed on evidence; a student's opinion means little if it's not backed up with evidence from the text.

Finally, a quality college paper will demonstrate rigorous thinking. The teacher will want to see that you've not only made a claim, and backed it up, but also thought about the limits to your claim, and/or potential objections to your claim, as well as possible rebuttals to those objections. This is a level of thinking that goes far beyond what most high school students are asked to do.

So at their core, college assignments will ask students to make an original claim, back it up with evidence from the text(s), and consider and refute the potential arguments against that claim.

College Assignments (In General)

Before we jump into the various types of papers that students will be asked to do in college, we can start with two broad types of prompts students are likely to receive. The first type of prompt is one in which a student is asked to consider two opposing claims, and figure out which side of the argument she falls on and wants to defend. Quoting McEnerney, some examples of these prompts are:

- "Agree or disagree: 'Freud misunderstood the feminine mind when he wrote…;
- Was Lear justified in castigating Cordelia when she refused to…?
- Discuss whether Socrates adequately answered the charge that he corrupted the youth of Athens."

McEnerney goes on to write, "For questions like these, you start (but it's only a start) by considering two opposing claims: Freud understood the feminine mind or did not, Lear was or was not justified, Socrates did or did not answer the charges against him." This type of prompt at least gives you a jumping off point – you must choose one side or the other. However, the student's argument won't just be to agree or disagree; instead they must agree and add the *why*.

More likely, students will not be given an either/or prompt, but will instead see a broad prompt in which they have to craft their own arguments. Here are some examples of broad prompts that McEnerney gives:

- "Discuss the role that honor plays in *The Odyssey."*
- "Show how Moliere exploits comic patters in a scene from *Tartuffe*."

As you can see from these prompts, this type of assignment doesn't lay out a jumping off point; students instead must discover on their own the role that honor plays in *The Odyssey*, and craft an argument about *what* role honor plays, and *how* it is used. Quoting McEnerney:

> …these assignments ask you to spend four or five pages explaining the results of an analysis. Words such as 'show how' and 'explain' and 'illustrate' do *not*

> ask you to summarize a reading. They ask you to show how the reading is put together, how it works. If you asked someone to show you how your computer worked, you wouldn't be satisfied if they simply summarized: 'This is the keyboard, this is the monitor, this is the printer.' You already know the summary – now you want to know how the thing does what it does. These assignments are similar. They ask you to identify parts of things – parts of an argument, parts of a narrative, parts of a poem; then show how those parts fit together (or work against one another) to create some larger effect.

Even these prompts, however, still demand an argument to be made. Even if you're illustrating or analyzing, you still need to tie everything back to support a central claim that you're making with your paper.

A final type of prompt is perhaps the scariest of all. This final prompt is a broad question about a text, in which you can take your analysis in what seems like almost endless directions. The example McEnerney gives is "Analyze the role of a character in *The Odyssey*."

How do you respond to a prompt like that? This prompt is *wide* open, and students are given little to no direction. So how should a student proceed? McEnerney recommends that students read a text with an eye towards looking for things that perplex them, things they have further questions about, or things they don't quite understand. Starting from something they don't understand is, counter intuitively, where we want to start from when writing a paper. As McEnerney writes, "The best place to begin thinking about any assignment is with what *you* don't understand but wish you did."

College Writing Assignments (More Specifically)

Thankfully, we have even more information on the types of assignments students will likely meet in college, and therefore the type of work they should be getting practice on in high school. Below is a summary of the major types of assignments students will see in college, the core components of each assignment, sample prompts for the assignment, and links to exemplar papers.

At the heart of most college assignments is the argument. Again, instructors will be asking students to stake an original claim, to make an argument, and back up that argument with evidence from the text(s). Below are the various types of argumentative essays students are likely to see.

Position Paper

The position paper is an assignment in which the student is presented with a dilemma, and needs to come down on one side or the other, and make the case for their side while refuting the other side, still with support of research and evidence. This is essentially the first type of writing prompt that McEnerney describes, in which students are making an argument, but given two potential options, and must come down on one of them. The trick, however, is to make

an argument by coming down on one side and explaining why, with evidence, rather than just coming down on one side because it's your opinion. Additionally, you must not only explain, with evidence, the side you are arguing, but argue against, with evidence, why the either side is not as logical.

Example Prompts:

- "Agree or disagree: 'Freud misunderstood the feminine mind when he wrote…'"
- "Was Lear justified in castigating Cordelia when she refused to…?"[1]

Additional prompts from 100 – level history courses at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT):

- "The primary reason for the victory of revolutionary socialist parties in Russia and China was the leadership of Lenin and Mao. Do you agree or disagree?"
- "Would McCarthyism have existed without Joe McCarthy?"
- "Which moment in Athenian history do you consider to have been the most revolutionary: 594 BC, 508 BC, or 462 BC?"

For each of these prompts, students must determine their position, rationalize their position by supporting it with evidence, and refute why the other stance is less logical.

Position papers could be a good first paper for students to tackle as it provides more structure than some of the broader topics associated with argumentative essays or research papers.

Evaluative Essays

In addition to the more traditional position paper, in history classes in particular, students are often asked to evaluate if an author successfully made an argument. In essence, students are taking a position on whether the author's point was persuasive. This type of writing could be done in response to any informational text.

Example Prompts:

[1] writing-program.uchicago.edu

- Write a review of Fred Anderson's *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years' War*. The challenge here is to summarize the book carefully and accurately and then to evaluate the persuasiveness of the argument or arguments that the author makes (http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/history/21h-101-american-history-to-1865-fall-2010/assignments/)

- From the perspective Dublin described, Lowell was a latter-day product of the American Revolution, a man-made industrial community designed to avoid the demeaning class divisions of England and manifest the equality of republican society. To what extent do you think the claim was justified? And, to the extent it was at one time justified, did Lowell cease to have that idealistic character by 1860? If so, how and why; if not, how did it remain true to the supposed original vision of its creators? And is the story of what happened to Lowell of any larger significance for American history? (http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/history/21h-101-american-history-to-1865-fall-2010/assignments/).

- Most of the texts we have read in this class make either implicit or explicit arguments about food or an issue relating to food. Choose one text on the syllabus and evaluate the strength, validity, and effectiveness of its argument (U of M – Argumentative Essay 125).

Argumentative Essay

(https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/685/05/; http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/)

The argumentative essay encompasses the second and third type of prompts that McEnerney talked about. This is an assignment in which the prompt gives you varying levels of direction, but the student needs to create an original argument out of the infinite possibilities. These essays will generally be in response to a text or several texts that students have read in class, and the writer must review the text(s), collect evidence, and make a not-obvious claim within the guidelines of the prompt.

Example Prompts:

- (narrow) "Discuss the role that honor plays in the *The Odyssey.*"
- (broad) "Analyze the role of a character in *The Odyssey.*"[2]
- (narrow) "When was the Middle Passage over?"[3]

[2] ibid.

[3] http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/music-and-theater-arts/21m-630j-black-matters-introduction-to-black-studies-fall-2009/assignments/

The Writing Center website at Harvard University breaks the argumentative essay into two different major types that students will see again and again: the *discuss* essay and the *analyze* essay. It's no coincidence that the example prompts taken from the University of Chicago writing center website, also led off with these two verbs.

Discuss Essays

The Harvard Writing Center says that when a prompt asks you to "discuss" a paper, they're really asking you to "construct an argument that considers and responds to an ample range of materials," or in other words, to "make a broad argument about a set of arguments you have studied." This is far different than how we normally picture discussions, which are more free flowing and meandering. In writing language, to discuss means to make order out of all that you've read and heard. Below is another sample prompt:

"Discuss the role of gender in bringing about the French Revolution."

So this is obviously something that students need a ton of practice at. Given a single text (in the Odyssey prompt above), or significant subject they've studied (the French Revolution), students need to bring all that they've learned together, including the sometimes opposing arguments of other writers, and make into a broader, more comprehensive argument, that in a sense produces new knowledge. Think of discuss papers as (1) a synthesis of the arguments you have studied and read about through class and (2) an offering of a new statement that you have arrived at through your synthesis.

So how do students do this? The Harvard Writing Center recommends some potential ways to respond to the above prompt on the role of gender in bringing about the French Revolution. Students can respond to this prompt by:

- "pointing to consistencies and inconsistencies in the evidence of gendered causes of the Revolution;
- raising the implications of these consistencies and/or inconsistencies (perhaps they suggest a limited role for gender as catalyst);
- evaluating different claims about the role of gender; and
- asking what is gained and what is lost by focusing on gendered symbols, icons, and events."

As you can see, the options for piecing together a coherent argument are fairly broad, though the options don't include a simple restatement of the assignment prompt, and pointing out the places where we see gender playing a role in giving rise to the French Revolution. Students are not summarizing the class readings; they are synthesizing their learning by looking for commonalities, patterns, or differences among their various sources. We already know that gender played some role in bringing about the French Revolution; it says so in the prompt. Students need to say something *about* the role of gender in the French Revolution, both based on their own knowledge of the actual events,

and based on the similarities and differences in the arguments of the authors they've read during that unit. More from the Harvard Writing Center on what would be thought of as a weak response:

"A weak discussion essay in response to the question above might simply list a few aspects of the Revolution—the image of Liberty, the executions of the King and Marie Antoinette, the cry*"Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite!"*—and make separate comments about how each, being "gendered," is therefore a powerful political force. Such an essay would offer no original thesis, but instead restate the question asked in the assignment (i.e., "The role of gender was very important in the French Revolution" or "Gender did not play a large role in the French Revolution")."

A strong response, on the other hand, would go beyond restating the question (did gender have a role or not), and create some unique argument that would not be immediately obvious to the reader.

Analysis Essays

The seemingly much harder essay is the analysis essay. These are argumentative essays in which students are not given much direction at all, except for maybe a text or two. While *discuss* essays require students to offer a new idea through synthesis of texts, *analysis* papers are asking students to create a nuanced argument by deconstructing and interpreting a text. *Analysis* papers should always start with several close readings of a text or texts.

In the example prompts above, from the University of Chicago writing center, the *analyze* prompt reads:

"Analyze the role of a character in the Odyssey."

This requires students to examine in detail, to dissect, and then generalize that purpose the character serves in *The Odyssey.* Does character help the plot progress? Are characters commenting on the economic, historical, or political issues of the times? This analysis is asking students to take something apart (how characters function, what they symbolize, etc.) and then create original thought (they serve as…) based on their examination of the initial text.

Below is an example of an assignment for a history course at MIT.

"Write a 3–page analysis of a primary source document. Your analysis should incorporate insights from the readings on the early middle ages assigned for the previous week…The fundamental point of this exercise is for you to do a close reading of some primary sources and to see what you can discern from within the text itself" (http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/history/21h-134j-medieval-economic-history-in-comparative-perspective-spring-2012/assignments/).

While the English assignment asked students to focus specifically on character, this assignment gives even less direction. Again, however, the thought process is the same: Students must analyze – scrutinize a text, this time a primary source, look for patterns, make generalizations, and then share a new idea they have uncovered through the process of analysis. Outside research is not recommended, rather this prompt is assessing students' abilities to closely read and analyze a text.

Close Read

The "close read" could be thought of as the first-step of most college-writing assignments. Close reading is the skill that instructors will assume students will do on every paper: closely read a text, focusing on language, claims, and the structure of arguments, and then interpret observations into a coherent argument. In many first-year courses instructors will assign a close-read as a stand-alone assignment, to give students practice for something they'll have to do quite frequently in future classes.

High school students are rarely familiar with this type of attention and analysis being paid to a text (or a few lines of text), and getting students to practice this sort of critical reading and observation is essential and should be one of the first steps in a high school writing curriculum.

Example Prompts:

- "…choose a brief passage from (Shelley's *Frankenstein*) and analyze its technical features – such as diction, sentence patterns, tone, figurative language, and structure, as appropriate."[4]

- "Why, precisely, and in what ways can (Agamemnon) be read as unsympathetic? Do you agree with such assessments or not, and why? Does this character evolve over the course of the reading to this point? You have the entire first half of the *Iliad* to use as data…"[5]

- "Select one passage of a half page to a page or so from the story or novel that holds some charge or meaning or questions for you and that you think will bear up under closer study. Approach the passage through a close study of what this microcosm of the larger work signifies about character, actions, setting and of course, language (style, vocabulary, images, patterns of syntax, grammatical marks – any given passage will have much to discover)" (http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/literature/21l-003-reading-fiction-fall-2008/assignments/paper_1.pdf).

[4] http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/literature/21l-000j-writing-about-literature-fall-2010/assignments/

[5] http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/literature/21l-001-foundations-of-western-culture-homer-to-dante-fall-2008/assignments/close_read_exer1.pdf

Student Sample Paper 1
Student Sample Paper 2
Student Sample Paper 3

- "Write a 3-5-page paper about one of the following poems: Stevens' 'The House Was Quiet and the World Was Calm; Hopkins' 'Pied Beauty'; Donne's 'Holy Sonnet 14.' You have been noticing such elements as tense/time, pronoun/point of view, sentences (the grammatical structures) and such other things as repetitions and patterns of syntax and of emphasis, shapes, parts, abstract/concrete (the rhetorical structures)" (http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/literature/21l-004-reading-poetry-spring-2009/assignments/MIT21l_004s09_assn02_paper2.pdf).

Student Sample Paper

- "One assigned close reading of a passage from *Medea*, 5-pp. This will be revised" (http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/literature/21l-005-introduction-to-drama-fall-2008/assignments/).

Student Sample Paper

- "Locate a photograph, work of art, or *short* text that portrays food in some way. Perform a close analysis that offers a reading of the work's approach to its subject" (University of Michigan Close Reading – 125 – need to link entire prompt).

- "Find a copy of a newspaper published on the day that one of your grandparents was born, the day one of your parents was born, and the day you were born. Look carefully at the entire issue of all three newspapers. In five or six pages, compare a single theme or topic on all three dates…" (http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/history/21h-102-the-emergence-of-modern-america-1865-present-spring-2003/assignments/secondpaperassignment.pdf).

Time and time again, all professors stress the notion of the close reading revealing a nuanced idea about a text, and that a close reading is about a *student's* ideas not about researching what other scholars have discovered about the text in question.

Here is a sample close read by an MIT professor demonstrating thorough annotations that she expects in a close read paper (http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/literature/21l-007-world-literatures-travel-writing-fall-2008/assignments/close_analys_sam.pdf).

It is worth clicking on the citations for each of the prompts and reading the assignment sheet for each paper in its entirety. They provide excellent insight

into what professors are looking for in student work. The last two prompts could serve as possible ways to introduce the idea of close reading to students.

We also found it helpful to note the literary elements that college professors were encouraging their students to notice. Below is a list of the terms one could pay attention to when doing a close reading of a literary text. The majority of the content has been taken from MIT's Open Courseware System.

Active Reading Strategies	Questions to Ask	Literary Elements to Consider
• Ask questions • Circle words/phrases that jump out to you, confuse you, remind you of a larger idea • Comment on statements you agree or disagree with	Who is the speaker/author? Who is the audience? How is the piece organized? What is the literal meaning of the text? How does this passage relate to the text as a whole?	Tone Mood Stylistic Choices: Long/short sentences, rhyme, word choice, diction, figurative language, description/sensory details Dialogue Character actions Setting Point of View Punctuation

Research Paper

(Alma English department resources)

The research paper could be a position paper or an argumentative essay. The major difference between the argumentative essay or position paper and the research paper, as we've described them, is whether your research is directed by the teacher, or whether you have to track down your own sources. In the argumentative essay or position paper, you're analyzing a text or set of texts you've read as a class, and forming an argument out of that analysis. In the research paper, you're given a topic or a question, and the skills of tracking down your own sources, judging the quality of sources, and garnering needed information from sources, are added to the mix. In the research paper students are still responding to prompts and forming a major argument, only now the prompts are potentially even broader, as are the potential source materials.

Example Prompts:

- (narrow) "The federal government should be required to operate with a balanced budget. Agree or disagree?"[6]

- (broad) "Write a research paper on a topic of the students' choice that deals with American urban history and relies largely on primary sources."[7]

- (broad) "The final paper will be a research paper on a riot, strike, or conspiracy not discussed in regular class meetings, but which applies the analytic techniques developed there"

[6] Alma English department Rogerian argument assignment.

[7] http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/urban-studies-and-planning/11-013j-american-urban-history-i-spring-2010/Syllabus/

(http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/history/21h-104j-riots-strikes-and-conspiracies-in-american-history-fall-2010/assignments/).

Student Sample Paper

- (broad) "The final obligation in this subject is the preparation of a final paper, about 10 pages in length, 'on a notable historical work that was not assigned as required reading,' as the syllabus puts it (http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/history/21h-105-american-classics-spring-2006/assignments/).

Sample Student Paper

While the above prompts give you an idea of the type of prompt students will need to respond to in college, they shed little light on *how* to get students to respond *effectively* to such rigorous prompts. For more on incorporating research skills and writing into your classroom see "Research and Close Readings," and "Narrowing and Selecting a Topic" in chapter one. If you want more information on the writing process see "Planning", "Drafting", "Revising", "Editing", and "Proofreading" also in chapter one.

Non-Argumentative Essays

While the majority of what students will be asked to do in college revolves around argument, they will still be asked to do some work that is more descriptive in nature. It's necessary for students to get practice at this in high school as well, as it fundamentally represents a different style of writing.

Descriptive Essay/Personal Narrative Essay

In a descriptive essay, the student is asked to describe something, be it an object, a person, a place, an emotion, etc.[8] This type of essay is something different for our students, because there are so *few* restrictions on how they should go about doing it, and creativity is essential.

Closely related to the descriptive essay, the personal narrative is essentially what students are asked to do in their college admissions essays. Students are asked to describe an event or experience, or talk about an object or place, and tease out some implicit understanding of what the experience, object, or event says about them.

Example Prompts:

- "Select a brief passage – a sentence of two – from one of these three pieces (Didion's "Why I Write," Updike's "Why Write?", and Louis Menand's "Bad Comma") and respond to it. NOTE: I am not asking you to explain the

[8] Purdue Online Writing Lab

passage but to amplify it, extend it, question it, talk back to it – in short, to think about it in relation to something you know or have experienced."[9]

- "Your essay should take the form of a personal narrative in which an encounter with the natural world plays a prominent role… A successful essay cannot, however, simply record subtle shifts in perception. An essay is not a platter of mental food to be handed over to the reader. You need to take an active role in reflecting upon your experience…The essay should not sound like an overgrown journal entry…You can and should develop the most revealing details and omit those that are distracting or unproductive."[10]

- "Write a letter to me introducing yourself to me as a writer: What's your relationship to writing? What are your hopes (and fears?) for this class? What happened with you and writing in high school (or elsewhere)?"[11]

- "…choose one (paradigm shift you've experienced) to write about. First, describe what happened to cause the shift; then explain the significance of the shift to you" (Alma College Faculty).

- "Write a short (6 pages) mini-memoir of your life growing up and as a student at MIT. Specifically, I would like you to reflect on what experiences shaped your understanding of the term 'Asian American,' and how this understanding changed (or didn't change) after arriving at MIT" (http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/foreign-languages-and-literatures/21f-043j-introduction-to-asian-american-studies-literature-culture-and-historical-experience-fall-2005/assignments/).

While the majority of writing at the college level will require students to use text to make an argument, it is still important that they be exposed to narrative writing assignments throughout their high school careers.

[9] http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/writing-and-humanistic-studies/21w-730-2-the-creative-spark-fall-2004/assignments/homework_1.pdf

[10] http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/writing-and-humanistic-studies/21w-730-3-writing-and-the-environment-spring-2005/assignments/essay1_spr2005.pdf

[11] http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/writing-and-humanistic-studies/21w-730-2-the-creative-spark-fall-2004/assignments/homework_1.pdf

Chapter 3: Teacher Feedback

When we asked the Alma English department to come down to give a presentation on writing to teachers from MFS high schools, the first thing Laura Von Wallmenich, chair of the Alma English department, mentioned was teacher feedback. She believes that the greatest student gains in writing can be made as a result of teacher feedback. Teacher feedback offers a unique opportunity to focus on the unique strengths and weaknesses of every student – the key leverage points that will shift student writing from high school to college quality. And as an added bonus, Laura claims that teacher feedback, done properly, should make the teaching of quality writing easier, not harder.

According to the Alma faculty, the goal of feedback is to help students identify a manageable set of next steps for improving their writing. This means that while you might point out some grammatical errors or issues with sentence structure, the key is to focus on one or two major priorities, consistent patterns you find in the paper, for the student to focus on.

The table below, adapted by Alma from the Ebery Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning from Carnegie Mellon University, might be helpful in framing the conversation on teacher feedback. The table tries to parse out the differences between how novice teachers respond to writing, and how experienced teachers provide feedback.

Novice Teachers of Writing	Experienced Teachers of Writing
Read to find errors, mistakes, or other faults. They focus on the paper as a product.	Read to understand the student's argument, their approach to the assignment, their way of thinking.
Frequently stop reading, even mid-sentence.	Tend to read large units of text without stopping.
Comment on all levels of the paper without first prioritizing what issues are most important for improving the paper.	Focus comments on identifying major strengths and weaknesses.
Tend to focus and comment on surface details.	Tend to emphasize meaning and organization. Make suggestions for major reorganizations of ideas, expansions, etc.
Edit sentences.	Identify patterns.

In sum, the novices spend their time mired in the details, while the experienced teachers look for broader themes, to try to identify ways they can improve students' writing in large strokes.

This inevitably leads to the question: "So wait, you just forget about grammar?" The Alma faculty's response was of course not. However, even at the college level, if the focus remained on grammar, you'd never get to ideas, arguments, and the real meat of writing. Instead, the professors said that they focus on

grammar and mechanics in short bursts through classroom exercises, treating it almost as a separate skill, far different from the skills of reasoning and critical thinking that make up quality papers.

What does this look like?

The image that we generally have of a rigorously graded paper is one covered in red ink. And for certain students, who can handle all that criticism and figure out what to focus on, this might be appropriate. However, for most students, this is likely the wrong approach. Instead, we need to be strategic both with what we say, and where we say it.

Marginal Notes

The first type of notes that the Alma professors mention is margin notes. These notes are to be used to focus the writer's attention to specific parts of the paper – specific grammatical errors or certain parts of an argument.

The problem with these types of comments is that they can feel overwhelming to the writer, and can lead the writer to address only those small changes, without looking at the paper as a whole.

However, these notes can be used to great affect in a few ways. First, if a problem continues to appear throughout the paper, so that a pattern of mistakes emerges, pointing a few of these out in the margins is definitely worthwhile. In addition, margin notes can also be used to show how you are in dialogue with the student's argument. If certain parts of the argument are unclear, inconsistent, or make you think certain things, be sure to point those out in the margin notes, generally written as questions back to the author. More will be written about that later. But in addition, also make sure that if parts of a student's argument are really clear, or their structure makes perfect sense, that you point that out too.

End Notes

As opposed to the margin notes that focus on specific points in the paper, endnotes should be used to help the writer view the paper as a whole. Again, the idea here is to focus on two or three major priorities, maybe that the author is already working on, and maybe new things that you're just finding.

While these notes can be time consuming, because it forces the teacher to think deeply about the patterns that are emerging in the paper, and what can be done to address them, they allow for individualized feedback that can produce big gains in students' writing.

Rubrics

Another method of giving feedback is through grading rubrics. The good news about rubrics is that they provide very clear expectations for writing assignments, and what composes a student's grade. The problem, of course, is that a rubric points out the problems, but not necessarily next steps, so rubrics need to be paired with concise endnotes to focus the writer's attention.

Sample rubrics can be found in the appendix.

Descriptive vs. Prescriptive Comments

So those are all the different types of notes you can make on a student paper, and some reasons for making different types of notes. But just as important as the notes you make is the way those notes are written.

The key difference in how comments are written is the difference between *descriptive* and *prescriptive* comments. Prescriptive comments are likely the most common type of comment made by teachers. These comments point out a problem, and prescribe a solution: this should be a new paragraph, put the thesis statement here, etc. In essence, these statements are saying that there is a set of prescribed rules in writing, and this is how you execute them. And while there definitely are some prescribed rules in writing, and there may be times when prescriptive comments are necessary, the faculty at Alma point out that these types of comments "don't engage the student in a process of understanding the *why* and *when* of a particular writing choice, and so they can be less effective at producing long-term changes in writing."

Descriptive comments, on the other hand, do just the opposite – they attempt to engage students in the reflection process, and the choices they've made as writers, by describing to them the experience of the reader in reading their work. For example, a descriptive comment might say, "it is hard for a reader to understand why this evidence matters because we have not seen a thesis yet." These comments are designed to get the student to reflect on their writing, the choices they've made, and wrestle with the differences between average and quality writing.

Below is another table from the folks at Alma to help differentiate descriptive versus prescriptive language:

Prescriptive language	Descriptive Language
Focuses on the writer or the product	Focuses on the reader's experiences
Focuses on providing a label	Describes the patterns in the paper
Focuses on rules	Focuses on effects
Offers solutions	Asks questions

Below are a few more suggestions from the folks at Alma. As they note, when providing feedback, you're rarely going to want to actually "correct" anything,

but instead share your own reflections, ask questions, and engage with the student to help them learn more about their own writing, and how to make it better in the future (reproduced form Alma guide to writing feedback):

- Circle errors, but do not correct or comment on them. Give the student an opportunity to revise. This could be a revision of the whole paper or an exercise where they copy the sentence with the error, describe what the error is, and revise it to address the problem;

- Identify the *pattern of error or style issue*. For instance, telling a student they have lots of punctuation errors is not very helpful. However, if you can tell them that many of the punctuation errors in the paper are due to comma splices, then they can review that one concept or rule and try to edit the next paper for that error;

- Edit or correct a paragraph, noting what type of errors are there, then suggest the student review the next few paragraphs looking for those same errors;

- Work with students to develop an error profile. Have students identify their personal list of 3 issues they want to improve. Require a final revision or editing review that reviews the paper *just for those three issues*. Have students reassess their top three periodically.

- Think of style as a matter of choice, audience, and effect, not absolute rules. Use short classroom activities to show students how to play with style choices to generate different effects.

Individual Attention

While more time consuming than simply writing comments, we should never underestimate the value of sitting down with individual students to go through their writing, line-by-line. According to Daniel F. Chambliss, a sociologist at Hamilton College whose made his career by researching what makes a college experience meaningful for students, few interventions have the same impact as working through a paper one-on-one with a student. According to Chambliss, "In learning to write, it made a lasting difference if students had at least one experience of sitting down with a professor to go over their work, paragraph by paragraph; for the students it was someone serious saying their writing was important."[12]

[12] http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/13/education/edlife/what-makes-a-positive-college-experience.html?ref=edlife

Rubrics

In the appendix are a set of rubrics to get a sense of the hierarchy by which college professors judge student papers. You'll notice that all of the rubrics are organized a bit differently, but some definite themes begin to emerge. The major components to use in assessment are summarized below, taken summarized from the Harvard Writing Project.

- **Thesis:** Is there one main argument in the paper? Does it fulfill the assignment? Is the thesis clearly stated near the beginning of the paper? Is it interesting, complex? Is it argued throughout?

- **Structure:** Is the paper clearly organized? Is it easy to understand the main pToint of each paragraph? Does the order of the overall argument make sense, and is it easy to follow?

- **Evidence and Analysis:** Does the paper offer supporting evidence for each of its points? Does the evidence suggest the writer's knowledge of the subject matter? Has the paper overlooked any obvious or important pieces of evidence? Is there enough analysis of evidence? Is the evidence properly attributed, and is the bibliographical information correct?

- **Sources:** If appropriate or required, are sources used besides the main text(s) under consideration? Are they introduced in an understandable way? Is their purpose in the argument clear? Do they do more than affirm the writer's viewpoint or represent a "straw person" for knocking down? Are responsible inferences drawn from them? Are they properly attributed, and is the bibliographical information correct?

- **Style:** Is the style appropriate for its audience? Is the paper concise and to the point? Are sentences clear and grammatically correct? Are there spelling or proofreading errors?

Notice once again that the emphasis is on the thinking, with grammar not mentioned until the end.

Key Points

In sum, below are the three major things to keep in mind with teacher feedback:

- **Focus on Patterns.** With both margin notes and end notes, every college writing center advises their faculty to focus on broad patterns that emerge throughout the paper, rather than focusing on a disjointed set of grammatical, stylistic, and structural errors.

- **Focus on 2 or 3 main themes of student writing.** Out of those patterns, focus on 2 or 3 major themes that you want the student to improve upon in their next paper.

- **Descriptive versus Prescriptive.** And finally, engage the writer in the feedback process by writing questions and wonderings, rather than statements and instructions.

Chapter 4: Peer Editing Overview

Good peer editing requires time and practice. If done well, peer editing can be an empowering and immensely helpful tool for both the editor and writer. Below is a brief overview of some of the benefits and pitfalls associated with peer editing followed by some suggestions for implementing peer editing in your classroom. This section is borrowed heavily from Mark Phillipson's 2007 article "Encouraging Peer Editing."

Pros

- Can help students identify weaknesses in their own writing
- Provides an opportunity for students to write for a broader audience than just their instructor – this could create more investment on the front end
- Builds confidence in students by having them be "the expert" and critique someone else's writing.

Cons:

- Students tend to focus on surface level errors – mainly grammar and spelling rather than content and organization
- Some students are too polite to critique a peer's writing, while other students see peer editing as an opportunity to attack a peer's writing or ideas
- Some suggestions a peer editor makes can actually weaken the paper.

Below are some general tips to help ensure that students are getting the most out of a peer editing session and are steering clear of the common pitfalls listed above. Most of these suggestions boil down to the teacher creating the right environment and then modeling how peer editing should look.

Suggestions for Peer Editing

- Peer editing, especially initially, should be done during class time. This allows for the instructor to monitor the process, intervene when necessary, and highlight groups that are successful.
- Model what peer editing looks like. Consider editing a piece with the entire class where you model the types of comments that are most helpful in the peer editing process. Debrief the whole-class experience – asking what was done throughout the editing process and what was avoided as editors.
- Provide students with a checklist or rubric for what they should be focusing on.
- If you are using a specific rubric or checklist, model how to use that resource while reading and commenting on the piece of writing.
- Have students hand in the peer–edited draft both so you can assess the degree to which they incorporated their peer's suggestions and so you can identify strong editors in your class.

- Have students complete a reflection on the peer editing process, focusing on what was helpful and what they would like to see changed (Phillipson).
- If students will be critiquing a lengthier piece, you might consider having them read and prepare their thoughts ahead of time. You could allot time for this in class or it could be homework. Students would have to provide a printed copy of their paper, email it to their editor, or could share it over Google Docs or another electronic platform.

There are few ways to address peer critique if the piece is being read for the first time:

- The author could read the piece aloud while the editor(s) make notes, or another member of the group could read the piece aloud while the author and editors make notes. Either way, the piece should be read slowly.
- The entire piece could be read through, or the reader could stop after each paragraph, page, or section and allow time for commenting and/or discussion.
- Everyone could read silently making notes, and then the paper could be discussed section by section or as a whole. The writer should also reread his or her paper looking for areas to improve or thinking of focus questions for the group (Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).

Below are some tools to help focus and maximize the benefits of peer-editing sessions.

Peer Editing Resources

Peer Editing Checklists

Below are some sample checklists that you could give to students. I would not give them the entire checklist. Pick and choose, and possibly add, questions that outline the focus areas for this paper.

University of Missouri Peer Editing Checklist
Writer's Web Peer Editing Checklist

Peer Response Worksheets

The peer response worksheets provide focus questions for the editor as well as space for written feedback. These will increase accountability and help focus more novice editors. The third option advocates for students' writing a letter to the author outlining specific changes. The last option provides a structure for commenting directly on a student's paper. Again, these samples are used at the college level, so consider revising for the specific criteria a paper will be graded on.

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Response Worksheet

University of Michigan Peer Critique Handout / Grading Criteria for Peer Critique
University of Michigan Peer Critique Letter
University of Michigan Structured Commenting Protocol

Self-Reflection Forms

Here are some ideas that allow the *writer* to reflect and focus the areas that he or she would like feedback before the feedback is actually given. These forms should be attached to the draft of the paper and given to the peer editor.

University of Michigan Self Reflective Comments
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Writing Feedback Request Form

Lesson Plans / Structures for Peer Editing

University of Guelph Peer Editing Workshop Lesson
University of Michigan Group Work Protocol for Peer Editing

Students will not become experts in peer editing overnight. It is a process that needs to be modeled, implemented, and reflected on in order for it to become a meaningful experience for both the writer and editor. If done consistently, it will help students transition their mindsets from writing for a grade to writing as a skill they can improve upon over time.

Close Reading Resource

While much of "close reading" involves gathering information and noticing specific details about a text, its goal should always be a deeper and fresher understanding of the work as a whole. Close reading is a process that will help your ideas push beyond a mere description of a piece of writing to a claim about why these details matter in the context of the entire work.

Step 1: Active Reading. Read the text through once. Mark up the text as you read, circling words or phrases that jump out at you, putting question marks next to things you don't understand, and making short responses to things you agree or disagree with.

Step 2: Ask Questions. Answering these questions will often require you to reread a poem or review certain paragraphs of an essay or short story. What words or concepts do I not understand? Take a moment to look up these words.

- Who is the speaker or author? What do we know about him or her?
- Who is the audience of this piece of writing?
- What is the general tone or mood of the work: funny, wistful, sarcastic, serious, educational, etc?
- How is the work organized? If it is an essay, how are the evidence and claims outlined? If the piece is a poem or story, is there a particular narrative order (ie, straightforwardly chronological, flashbacks, fragmented memories, etc)?
- What stylistic choices does the author make? Are the sentences short or long? Does the poetry rhyme? Is there a lot of descriptive detail? Does the author play with sounds (alliteration, onomatopoeia, etc)? Does the author's word choice (diction) jump out at you?

Step 3: The Point. This step includes two more questions.

- What are the central ideas or main arguments of the work?
- How does the information gathered in step 2 support (or resist) this conclusion?

Step 4: Forming Your Own Argument. After you have carefully read and considered the piece of writing, think about your own questions and responses to it. We all bring unique experiences and backgrounds to the texts we read. Good writing will respond to a text in a way that not

everyone else can. Often the best writing comes from an attempt to answer a question, present a problem you see in the text, or offer an alternative interpretation. Consider the following questions as a few potential jumping-off points for your own writing:

- Was I surprised by the way the text communicated its main points? Why?
- Is there a confusing point in the text that I can attempt to figure out?
- Does the text contain specific problems or limitations?
- Is the text effective at reaching its audience or presenting its central ideas?
- Is there a congruity or discrepancy between the content and form of the work?

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