

Best Practices in W2 Courses

With guidance from the faculty, the First-Year Seminar and Writing Committee has outlined five pedagogical goals for W2 courses. Below, the staff of Writing at Bates suggests some practical ideas for achieving these goals, drawing from best practices in the field of teaching writing, as well as from dedicated and innovative teachers of writing here at Bates. (Note: Statements in bold are the pedagogical guidelines; statements in italics offer more details from the committee about the goals.)

Writing is taught, not just assigned.

Some class time is devoted to discussion of the writing process and craft, practical exercises, or workshops that teach discipline- or assignment-specific writing concepts and skills.

1. Set aside a half-hour (or more) period each week devoted to class discussion of writing. Possible uses of this time are almost limitless:

- Analyze model texts for writing style, disciplinary conventions, and development of argument
- Workshop short passages (such as introductions) of students' own papers
- Workshop potential thesis statements
- Discuss common problems in students' drafts
- Have students complete writing process memos (for example, write a note to you or peer readers to accompany their drafts, or write a reflection on their final submissions)

2. Arrange for in-course workshops led by Writing at Bates staff. Workshops are most effective when timed to coincide with an assignment. Writing staff can create workshops on almost any topic for your courses. Some of the most frequently requested workshops:

Crafting Thesis Statements	Integrating Evidence
Summary vs. Analysis	Disciplinary Expectations
Effective Peer Review	From Paper to Presentation
The Literature Review	Revision Strategies

The W2 offers a variety of writing assignments—varying, for example, in purpose, genre, sequencing, and complexity.

A W2 course asks students to take on several different assignments, or one substantial assignment with components scaffolded across a semester, equaling approximately twenty to twenty-five pages of finished prose. (A course that assigns one large paper without stages for feedback and revision would not meet the expectations of a W2.)

1. Use writing assignments to help students learn content along the course of the semester while simultaneously gaining more practice in writing skills. For example, short summaries of texts early in the term help you see how well students understand the material; a subsequent assignment to analyze a text gives you an opportunity to discuss the difference between summary and more substantive analysis.

2. Look for connections between assignments to help students learn from one to improve on the next. This might mean focusing on the same text or topic for a series of increasingly complex tasks (from summary to analysis to research-based argument); this might also mean interrelated assignments that build on each other in some way (incorporating revised sections of a first paper into the third, for example).

3. A large writing assignment can be broken into several different components that go through drafting and revision throughout the semester: thesis statement, prospectus, outline, introductions, methods section, opposing viewpoints, or annotated bibliography, for instance.

4. Consider assigning writing in different genres or for different media—such as grant proposals, web pages, print publications, or conference posters.

W2 courses include significant revision and rewriting opportunities.

When taught as part of the scholarly writing process, revision allows students to revisit their ideas and rethink their rhetorical choices.

Students receive feedback on multiple assignments from faculty and peers; this feedback focuses on rhetorical issues (such as argument, evidence, and style) in addition to content.

Feedback from readers (whether faculty, peers, writing assistants, or Writing Specialists) is key to guiding this rethinking.

1. Ideally, students will get feedback from an instructor on and revise one complete paper at some point during the semester. In large classes, this might mean dividing the class so that the instructor gives comments on the draft of the first assignment to one half of the class and comments on the second assignment to the other half.
2. Along with feedback and revision of a complete assignment, incorporate revision tasks for portions of assignments. For example, one simple but effective exercise asks students to share, get comments on, and revise just their introductions; similarly, you could give focused feedback on methods sections, literature review, opposing viewpoints sections, or conclusions.
3. Peer review from classmates, when done well, can be an especially powerful tool. (Students are often struck by the similarity between readers' comments—yours and their peers—and might attend better to suggestions when they see patterns of response.) Be aware that peer review works best when treated as an out-of-class assignment with very clear expectations. Please contact Hillory Oakes for a packet of resources on out-of-class peer review.
4. Many faculty share examples of their own peer-reviewed work with students to give them a sense of the importance of feedback and revision in their own scholarly endeavors.

The W2 course deepens and broadens students' understanding of research and writing as modes for creating and communicating knowledge.

In the W2, students strengthen their skills with the research and writing process through assignments and class dialogue that encourage them to ask, research, and answer questions of interest and significance.

1. Arrange one or more workshops with a Research Librarian. These workshops always work better when they are timed to coincide with an assignment and when students have an authentic task to complete during the workshop.
2. Consider ways to make the students' work public beyond the bounds of your classroom so that they could communicate what they've learned through research and writing in your course (Encouragement toward Mt. David participation? Online publishing of final projects? Soliciting peer review from students in another course?)