

Courses that *Use Writing* vs. Courses that *Teach Writing*

You don't have to be a writing teacher to make effective uses of writing in any course that you teach. That is, you can make writing assignments that are extremely valuable in terms of your students' learning without any of the specialized knowledge that faculty with professional expertise in writing theory, research, and pedagogy might have. Perhaps even more importantly, you can make these helpful writing assignments without adding tremendous amounts of time to your teaching.

Faculty who teach writing courses per se (that is, courses whose primary focus is on developing student writing) must know current research in the development of writing abilities, both the social and cognitive dimensions, in assignment design, in response to and evaluation of student writing, in error analysis, in rhetorical analysis, and so on. There is, after all, a vast body of popular lore about learning to write that is wholly unsubstantiated by research, as George Hillocks's massive meta-analysis *Research on Written Composition* demonstrates. Graduate coursework in rhetoric and composition (there are some 75 PhD programs in this area) generally includes study and research in the areas of rhetorical theory and history; linguistic and discourse analysis; the development of student writing abilities; assessment; the analysis of individual student writing needs; composition pedagogy; and so on, as well as extensive "clinical experience" working with writers.

But you don't need that expertise to teaching writing intensive content courses or to use writing as a mode of learning in any course. It's useful to think of three sites of writing in the university. Some courses that include writing primarily as a teaching/learning strategy; these may be any course in the university. Some courses have, as one of their pedagogical goals, acculturating students in ways of writing important in a particular discipline or on a particular content area; for example, Writing Intensive Core Courses or Capstone courses in the Major. Some courses are directly and specifically designed to develop student writing abilities; for example, WRIT 1122 and 1133. The following table provides a few differences between courses that use writing to foster learning and courses in which learning to write is a main focus. (I've forced some distinctions for clarity; a blurry continuum would be more accurate.)

	Writing to Learn	Learning to Write
1	Emphasis on teaching course content through having students actively engage information and ideas.	Emphasis on students developing writing skills and strategies.
2	"Getting better" as a writer is an indirect side benefit.	"Getting better" as a writer is a direct and primary goal.
3	Class time features relatively little direct instruction on writing.	Class time features direct instruction on writing (teaching strategies, workshopping, etc.)
4	Frequent shorter writings are prominent.	Frequent shorter writings are prominent.
5	Students generally don't revise much writing after professor feedback.	Students are often required to revise writings after professor and/or peer feedback.
6	The focus of the course is on assigned readings, practices, or topics.	The focus of the course is on the students' texts.
7	Response tends to focus on quality and accuracy of student thought and engagement.	Response tends to focus on both quality and accuracy of student thought and engagement and on matters of presentation (rhetorical effectiveness, adherence to conventions, etc.)
8	Types of writing assigned may be characteristic primarily of academic settings and assigned in order to facilitate learning (microthemes, journals, reading responses, etc.).	Types of writing assigned may, additionally, emulate professional or civic discourses.
9	Can be used in any class, large or small.	At some point requires relatively fewer students because of time involved.
10	Presumes no special knowledge about writing on the part of the instructor.	Asks instructors to gain some modest knowledge about the development of writing abilities and conventions of the "target genres."