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Write Connections is a publication of the Corporation for Educational Technology and is distributed at no charge to Indiana educators. Find more great info about writing instruction and sign up for free email delivery of this newsletter in PDF format at

<http://thewritingsite.org>

Recommended Reading. . .

A Lesson from the Teacher Man

"Here they come.
And I'm not ready.
How could I be?
I'm a new teacher and learning on the job."
~ Frank McCourt, *Teacher Man*

This compelling memoir is a tribute to teachers everywhere, but it will particularly resonate with those who are teaching high school English and composition classes. Moving from school to school, attempting to teach students with little interest in schooling and even less in learning to write, Mr. McCourt eventually lands a position teaching English at Stuyvesant, a prestigious New York public high school where he notes that the students "had words to spare."

*If you asked all the students in your five classes
to write three hundred and fifty words each then
you had 175 multiplied by 350 and that was 43,750
words you had to read, correct, evaluate and grade*

(cont. *Teacher Man*, pg. 2)

Writing Across the Curriculum: A Dialogue by Amy Schultz

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) is an approach that attempts to weave writing assignments throughout all content areas. Whether an English teacher, other content area specialist or are in a self-contained full curriculum spectrum classroom, you undoubtedly already implement WAC to some degree. The question is, should you be more intentional about it?

What is WAC, anyway?

The infusion of Writing Across your Curriculum is said to improve writing skills, thinking skills, and understanding of content. WAC is most often implemented in schools through one of the following two approaches:

- *Writing in the Disciplines (WID): Writing in the disciplines is premised on the idea that students become better readers, thinkers, and learners in a discipline by working with the forms and conventions specific to it. A biology teacher might ask students to write lab reports, for example, while an art teacher might assign artists' statements or gallery reviews. Journalistic articles, business plans, memos, and oral histories are additional examples of genres common to particular fields.*
- *Writing to Learn (WTL): Rejecting the notion that writing serves primarily to translate what is known onto the page, advocates of writing to learn suggest teachers use writing to help students discover new knowledge—to sort through previous understandings, draw connections, and uncover new ideas as they write (NWP & Nagin, 2003). WTL activities may also be used to encourage reflection on learning strategies and improve students' metacognitive skills. Examples, ... include journals, learning logs, and entrance/exit slips. (Brewster & Klump, 2004)*



Isn't it just another fad movement that will soon fade-away?

In fact, WAC was first begun in the mid-1970's as a way to improve undergraduate literacy in our nation's universities. After 20 years on the education scene, WAC is now being used and expanded upon in K-12 classrooms as well as colleges across the country.

What's the point?

One middle school project in Texas proclaimed, "that school wide writing across the curriculum efforts do appear to produce significant improvements in student writing ability." (van Allen, 1992, p. vii) Also, the National Commission on Writing confirms an "impressive positive correlation between the frequency of informative writing assessments and academic achievement in every subject area." Consequently, the Commission urges increased use of writing across the curriculum (in math classrooms, too!). It states, "Writing is not simply a way for students to demonstrate what they know. It is a way to help them understand what they know. At its best, writing is learning." (National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, 2003)

(see *WAC Resources* on pg. 2)

Teacher Man (cont. from pg. 1)

on evenings and weekends. That's if you were wise enough to give them only one assignment per week. ... If you gave each paper a bare five minutes you'd spend, on this one set of papers, fourteen hours and thirty-five minutes. ...

You hesitate to assign book reports. They are longer and rich in plagiarism. (McCourt, 2005)

When telling the story of his work with other, less motivated classes, he shares some wonderful class projects. One was inspired by his desk drawer full of excuse notes, purportedly from parents, but usually penned by the students, and mostly lies. "Isn't it remarkable," McCourt writes, "how they resist any kind of writing assignment in class or at home. ... But when they forge these excuse notes they're brilliant."

- "His sister's dog ate his homework and I hope it chokes him."
- "A man died in the bathtub upstairs and it overflowed and messed up all Roberta's homework on the table."
- "Her big brother got mad at her and threw her essay out the window and it flew away all over Staten Island which is not a good thing because people will read it and get the wrong impression unless they read the ending which explains everything."

Mr. McCourt showed samples of the excuse notes to his class and announced that he was going to take examples of their "best writing, the excuse note, and [turn] it in to a subject worthy of study." The writing prompt: "You'll be making excuses the rest of your life and you'll want them to be believable and original. . . Imagine you have a fifteen-year-old son or daughter who needs an excuse for falling behind in English. Let it rip."

He remarked that the class didn't dawdle in getting started with this assignment. "They produced a rhapsody of excuses, ranging from a family epidemic of diarrhea to a sixteen-wheeler truck crashing into a house to a severe case of food poisoning blamed on the McKee High School cafeteria." The lesson was so successful that he contrived an extension (a homework assignment, to be started in class then completed at home): "An excuse note from Adam to God" or "An excuse note from Eve to God." Later, class discussion expanded a list of people in the world today who "could use a good excuse note." (continued.)

Finish reading this story at <http://thewritingsite.org/articles>

— *Teacher Man* is published by Scribner, c2005 by Green Peril Corp.

The Collins Writing Program

The *Collins Writing Program* presents a model for writing-across-the-curriculum and writing to learn. Founder Dr. John Collins draws from extensive research and twenty years experience working with teachers and students to create a practical program that requires students to engage in curriculum content as they improve writing, thinking, listening, and speaking skills. The program defines five types of writing assignments with clear methods of evaluation for each:

1. **Capture Ideas** (brainstorm, outcomes evaluated by \checkmark or -)
2. **Respond Correctly** (to a specific question, grade as a quiz)
3. **Edit for Focus Correction Areas** (substantive content, read aloud)
4. **Peer Edit for Focus Correction Areas** (2 drafts, peer critiqued then author revised)
5. **Publish** (quality writing, multiple drafts, published work)

More details at <http://thewritingsite.org/resources/approaches/collins/>



A writer has a facility with words. A good writer can also think.

— Cynthia Ozick

W A C Resources

References . . .

"Dialogue" (pg. 1)

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van Allen, L. "The Effect of Writing Across the Curriculum Programs on Student Writing Improvement: A study of selected middle schools in Texas" (Doctoral dissertation, Univ. of Texas at Austin, 1991) *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 52(07), 2398.

"Implementing WAC" (pg. 3)

Bazerman, C. et al. *Reference Guide to Writing Across the Curriculum*, Parlor Press and the WAC Clearinghouse, c2005.

Kelley, S. *Writing-to-Learn / Writing-to-Think Activities*. Retrieved February 25, 2006 from <http://emedia.leeward.hawaii.edu/writing/WTL-WTTideas.htm>

NWREL: "At the Classroom Level: Writing in the Disciplines and Writing to Learn" Retrieved on February 25, 2006 from <http://www.nwrel.org/request/2004dec/classroom.html>

Other Resources . . .

The Writing Corner (Writing Across the Curriculum) <http://www.pesd.org/wac> Content provides a useful framework of writing across the curriculum expectations for all K-12 learning environments.

The Writing Fix and WAC http://www.writingfix.com/Writing_Across_Curriculum.htm This site has free ready-to-use WAC lesson ideas for classroom teachers.

Ready, set, write!

In Math

Challenge students to write, in paragraph form, instructions to solve an Algebra equation or Geometry theorem. (technical writing)

In Science

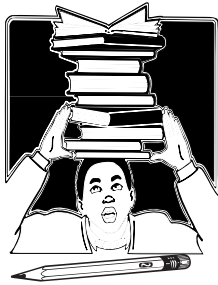
Encourage students to write a complete description of the parts of a cell, the water cycle or other scientific process as a quiz to check their understanding of a topic presented in a recent lesson. (descriptive writing)

In Social Studies

Students, in small groups or teams, nominate, discuss and draft a petition to right a perceived wrong in the school or community. (persuasive writing)



Implementing WAC in Your Middle or High School Classroom



Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) is an approach that attempts to weave writing assignments throughout all content areas. Writing to Learn (WTL) is a supporting method, "based on the observation that students' thought and understanding can grow and clarify through the process of writing." (Bazerman, 2005) Try some of these writing-to-learn tools to build better writers and better thinkers.

Quick Writes are short pieces of writing designed to focus students' thinking. Teachers can:

- Assess prior knowledge before instruction to set the stage for new information. Read these "Entrance Slips" anonymously before instruction to set the stage for new ideas. (create a list of keywords, a list of questions, 3 things I know/don't know)
- Give students time to write briefly on the day's topic before contributing to class discussions.
- Pause in the middle of instruction to check for understanding, or to make connections and predictions. (paraphrase, ask a question)
- Summarize main points, form opinions, or reflect on what was learned after instruction. ("Exit Slip" 3-Things I Learned, 2- Things I Wonder About, 1- Thing I Could Teach Someone Else)

Evaluation Tips:

- Model "poor", "adequate", and "excellent" responses (check minus, check, check plus). Look for content, quantity, appropriateness, elaboration, etc.
- Assess as done/not done, correct/not correct, or trade for peer review.
- Evaluate content only, never for grammar.

Journals or Learning Logs give students an informal place to explore and interact with class content. Students can:

- Summarize newly acquired knowledge.
- Write vocabulary terms in your own words.
- Define what was most interesting or confusing.
- Create a list of questions or possible topics for future research.
- Explain math or science problems or terms in writing.
- Make connections (between new information and prior knowledge, experiences, or opinions).
- Write your own study or test questions (trade for peer response).
- Write to content-focused prompts for homework.
- Take notes during lectures.

Double-Entry Explorations are more involved journal entries, in which the paper is divided into two columns. On opposing sides of the column students can:

- List math problems, theories, science experiments, vocabulary words, student or teacher generated questions, drawings, copied or summarized passages from text, etc.
- Explain importance, draw connections, make applications to real life, solve problems, create a running list of questions, re-write in their own words, etc.

Journal Evaluation Tips:

- Define grading requirements. Well-kept journals could be a boost to final grade or could be a given test grade status.
- Evaluate content only, never for grammar.
- Collect a different half or third of your students' journals at a time.
- Consider using a loose-leaf binder to more easily collect writing.
- Ask students to highlight favorite entries before turning in journals.
- Occasionally respond with your own writing or comments. Use different color highlights for most thoughtful entries, ideas for possible exploration, or needs more attention.

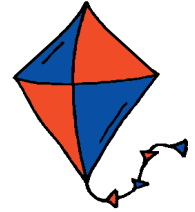
See more via WAC links at <http://thewritingsite.org>



Literature Links

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini

A dark, vivid, redeeming and forgiving first novel, *The Kite Runner* is a gem. Read before using this in class. While you may choose not wish to assign this for student reading, be sure to pick out passages to share. The imagery and language is beautiful yet haunting, foreshadowing yet hidden: "Baba and I lived in the same house, but in different spheres of existence. Kites were the one paper-thin slice of intersection between those spheres." Great use of metaphors and similes as well as an excellent story.



Khaled Hosseini Official Web Site:
<http://www.khaledhosseini.com/>

Cartoons with Class



"I TURNED IN MY HOMEWORK TWO DAYS LATE, BUT NORMALLY IT'S FOUR DAYS LATE, SO TECHNICALLY IT'S EARLY!"

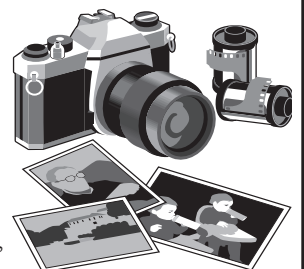
Write at Home!



Enlist the help of your students' parents to encourage and practice writing skills. Promote this "at home" activity.

Family Photo Stories

Peruse your family album and select a photo that shows details of action, dress, or scenery (rather than a formal portrait). Brainstorm, with all family members, a list of colorful descriptors, including outrageous adjectives and adverbs evoked by the image. Using input from all, write a descriptive paragraph to accurately describe the scene. Take the photo and paragraph to school to compare with other's efforts.



For more *Write at Home* suggestions, go to <http://thewritingsite.org/resources/parent/intermediate.asp>.



Frakeshurd rases

The syntax or the exact structure of what we write plays an essential role in establishing meaning. Change the structure and you have changed the meaning, at least slightly. Examples from the local newspaper headlines:

- “Enraged Cow Injures Farmer with Ax”
- “Miners Refuse to Work After Death”
- “Woman Improving After Fatal Crash”



Noodle Tools

<http://www.noodletools.com>

A suite of interactive tools designed to aid students and teachers with online research. Most of the tools are free, but users must register to interact with some of them.

Writing Topics

<http://thewritesource.com/topics.htm>

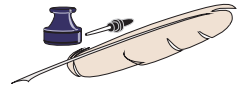
Though a commercial site, it includes a nice section suggesting writing topics as well as presenting model papers for grades 1-12.

Teachnology Writing Ideas

<http://www.teach-nology.com/ideas/subjects/writing/>

Find and share teaching ideas for writing and other content areas at this site. It also includes an online forum to discuss issues of teaching and learning at various grade level groupings.

Celebrate Writers!



The following authors have birthdays in April and May.

- Washington Irving, author of the stories, “Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle” was born on April 3, 1783.
- Lois Duncan, acclaimed teen suspense author of *Down a Dark Hall*, *Summer of Fear* and *Killing Mr. Griffin*, was born on April 28, 1934.
- Gary Paulsen, award-winning author of *Sarny*, *The Quilt* and other young adult fiction was born May 17, 1939.

Celebrate these author’s birthdays by reading a passage aloud to your class sometime during their birth months from your favorites of these authors’ stories.



writing calendar

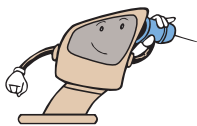
March 15, 44 B.C. Julius Caesar is stabbed!

“Beware the Ides of March,” the soothsayer urges Julius Caesar in Shakespeare’s *Tragedy of Julius Caesar* (act I, scene ii). Despite the forewarning, Caesar is stabbed in the back by his friend Marcus Brutus. Caesar falls and utters his famous last words, “Et tu, Brute?” (And you, Brutus?) Write about a recent event when friends or colleagues turn against one another.

April 14, 1818 Webster’s Dictionary is printed

Noah Webster, a Yale-educated lawyer with an avid interest in language and education, publishes his *American Dictionary of the English Language*. Think of some words, that perhaps you or your friend use, that are not recognized in the dictionary. Choose one then write a persuasive argument that it should be added to the dictionary.

(Events and descriptions retrieved February 26, 2006 from <http://www.historychannel.com>)



Technology & Writing Blogging: New Journal or Old Bulletin Board?



In 1988 through 1994 many Indiana students (and their parents) used something called BuddyNet. It was basically a bulletin board where users could post their writings electronically. We watched as students eagerly wrote poetry, stories, and expressed their opinions to others. Students engaged with real audiences for their writing. They met and discussed issues with others from their community and from across the state. Today, classrooms connect worldwide using a similar technology, called Blogs.

Blog is short for Web log, or an online journal where others can view and comment on an individual’s writing. Blogs can be private (accessed if you have the required login and password) or public (no login needed). Blogs can be created and regularly updated directly using any web browser and managed from any computer with an Internet connection, anywhere in the world. More than 12,000 new blogs are created every day.

You may ask, “Why should my class blog?” Blogs offer a way for students to engage in reflective writing on any topic. Students know they have an audience other than their teacher, often producing more thoughtful (yes, better) writing. Peers can respond to their blogs, providing immediate feedback. It’s also a great way for parents to be connected to their child’s classroom. They can see class assignments, as well read their children’s postings, perhaps gaining new insights about their offspring. The blog can serve as a natural writing portfolio, visibly displaying writing skill improvement as the year progresses. As a teacher, you can quickly respond at the student’s blog, providing immediate feedback not feasible by traditional paper evaluation methods, and it takes less time to manage!

Getting started with blogging is easy, but some schools are hesitant to use the “open” sites such as blogger.com and livejournal.com. You can also buy blogging software to set up classroom and school network blogs that provide local control. Check out Moveable Type or Manila blogging software; both offer licenses at special rates for educational institutions. Visit <http://thewritingsite.org/articles> to read more about using blogs to encourage writing.

Remember: Sign up to receive future copies of this newsletter at <http://thewritingsite.org/list/form.asp>