

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

Workshop #7: Revising Your Writing Syllabus

Length: 45 minutes

Motive: Evaluating a writing syllabus at the end of the semester better helps faculty identify course strengths and weaknesses.

Objective: To identify best writing assignments and revise least successful ones.

5m	Say your name and one part of your syllabus you tend to keep from semester to semester.
7m	Activity 1: Course descriptions
3m	Process write about Activity 1
5m	Underline one sentence from your freewrite; a few volunteers read them aloud.
10m	Activity 2: the Reader Test
5m	Revision after Activity 2
5m	Bracket and share portions of questions and revisions.
5m	Wrap-up: Make a list of three things you will revise on your syllabus.

Materials needed:

- A copy of your writing syllabus
- Kerry Walk’s Ch. 5 “Crafting Assignments”
- Red, yellow, and blue highlighters

Activity 1: Course Descriptions

- 1) In small groups of 3-4, exchange your syllabi.
- 2) Looking only at the course description on your partner's syllabus, do the following:
 - Highlight in RED any "writing" words ("writing," "written," "rhetorical," etc)
 - Highlight in YELLOW any "not-quite-writing" words ("expression," "communicate," "interpret," "say")
 - Highlight in BLUE any "disciplinary" words ("ethics," "literary theory," "cognitive dissonance")
- 3) Return the syllabus to its creator. You should now have a marked-up course description that provides a kind of "heat map" of how your description integrates writing and course content. Reflect on your course description and write for 3-4 four minutes on one or more of these questions:
 - What kind of balance is there in my description between writing and course content?
 - Have I chosen the right verbs to describe the kind of writing and thinking students will perform in my course?
 - Are there "not-quite-writing" (yellow) words that I could revise to make the disciplinary writing goals of my course clearer?

Activity 2: The Reader Test

- 1) Exchange syllabi again with a different group member.
- 2) Revisit Walk's "Crafting Assignments," particularly this paragraph on The Reader Test:

Having drafted the assignment, you should try reading it from your readers' point of view—in other words, you should submit it to the Reader Test. Will students read the assignment and know what's being asked of them? Will they think they're supposed to answer several questions instead of just one? Will they know to limit their topic and write a coherent paper? What are the likely responses you can imagine to the assignment, and are these in any way problematic?
- 3) Look at any two of your partner's writing assignments, adopting the role of a very naive student. Make a list of 3 non-logistics questions you would ask about the assignment (i.e., not "when is it due," "what is late penalty," etc. "How many pages" is fair game though).
- 4) Return the list and syllabi to the original owner.
- 5) Looking at the questions you received, revise one of your writing assignments so that it is more clear.