



How to WID a Course

...a step-by-step guide

WID *transitive verb*. To redesign a course in accordance with the principles of the *Writing In the Disciplines* teaching philosophy.

1. Have students write every week

WIDing a course isn't just about assigning a big essay. Some of redesigning your course is about making small, day-to-day changes to how your classroom operates. The grading involved in this step probably sounds daunting, but this is where the next two steps come in.

2. Assign informal and low-stakes writing

Informal writing is done without revision primarily to help a writer generate, extend, deepen, and clarify thinking. An informal writing assignment can be short and off-the-cuff; it could be a one-paragraph critical response to a reading, or a quick summary of one or more of the day's topics at the end of class. Low-stakes writing assignments can be graded quickly (or not at all), without necessarily giving detailed feedback.

3. Have students read each other's writing

Rather than taking all of your students' assignments home, marking them up, and giving them back a week later, lighten your grading load and give your students immediate feedback: follow up informal, and low-stakes assignments by having students read and comment on each other's papers. This needn't take long if the assignments are short and each student reads only one or two.

4. Count writing for at least 20% of the grade

For instructors in the humanities and social sciences, this may not seem like much. For others, it will require a shift in focus. But remember: the 20% can include small, informal, and low-stakes assignments. This and other grading criteria should be clearly indicated on the syllabus.

5. Have students revise more than one paper

Good formal writing requires revision that goes beyond mere editing and proofreading; it requires careful reading and rethinking, and takes practice.

6. Include a substantial formal writing assignment

A big part of WIDing a course is including at least one substantial, 8–10 page writing assignment. There are a couple of ways to do this. Either option should include a component that asks the students to write something about their own writing process—in WID terminology, a 'reflective synthesis'.

Option 1: A single staged and revised paper

A staged writing assignment is one with multiple, related parts, designed as a continuous project that evolves during the semester. The assignment should include an 8–10 page final draft and a reflective synthesis. Which other stages you include are up to you. Here are some possibilities:

- Low-stakes brainstorming assignments
- An essay abstract or outline
- Interviews, a research summary, or an annotated bibliography
- A penultimate draft (to be graded and revised)

Each stage should build on prior stages, leading the way to a better final product. The final essay draft should be about 8–10 pages long.

Option 2: A writing portfolio with multiple components

The second option is to have students create a portfolio of shorter pieces of formal writing over the course of the semester. The portfolio may be composed of pieces of various length, but the total should add up to 10 pages including the reflective synthesis. Each component should be staged and revised (as glossed above, under Option 1).

Writing Fellows can help you to WID your course!

For help incorporating any of the above features into your syllabus, get in touch with one of the Writing Fellows who is assigned to your strand.

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