

Evaluating Writing in History
and Classics Courses:

Designing rubrics that work

Roger Graves

Director, Writing Across the Curriculum

Who am I?



Roger Graves

Director, Writing Across the Curriculum

Professor, EFS

rr
7
A

April 17, 2009

wac

c4w

writing initiatives

webmail

efs

I'm new to the University of Alberta, having come from the University of Western Ontario where I was Director of the Program in Writing, Rhetoric, and Professional Communication in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. In my new position here I'll be working with faculty and students across the university as part of the Writing Across the Curriculum initiative. I will also be working with students and faculty in the Department of English and Film Studies.

I am the author, co-author, or editor of five books and 29 articles, including Writing Instruction in Canadian Universities. My current research interests include the development of doctoral student writing, writing assignments across disciplinary fields, and rhetorical approaches to text encoding. Currently I serve as co-Vice-President of the Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing (CASDW) and a member of the Executive Board of the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Literacy (CASLL/Inkshed).

Recent presentations

This page contains links to pdfs of slides displayed at presentations I've given.

Books

This page displays the covers and descriptions of books I've authored, co-authored, or co-edited



Blog: Thinking About Writing

A new blog on writing-related issues at the U of A and beyond.

<http://www.ualberta.ca/~gravesl/index.html>

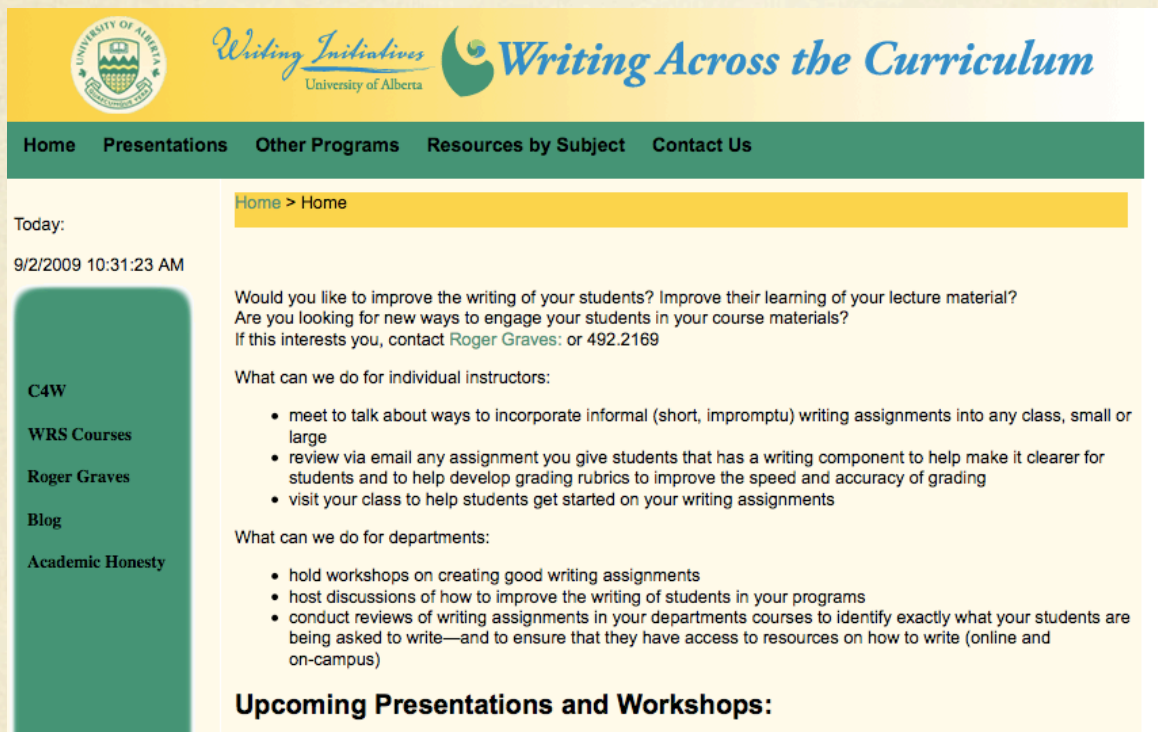
Writing Studies
New Course: WRS 500

WRS 500 Academic Writing

(Winter, 2010)

This class will focus on teaching graduate students about academic writing with the goal of helping them to improve their ability to construct clear, concise, and well-supported arguments in the documents that they write as part of or associated with their degree programs.

Writing Across the Curriculum



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Writing Across the Curriculum website. At the top left is the University of Alberta logo. To its right is the text "Writing Initiatives University of Alberta" and a stylized logo. Further right is the main title "Writing Across the Curriculum" in a blue serif font. Below this is a green navigation bar with links: "Home", "Presentations", "Other Programs", "Resources by Subject", and "Contact Us". The main content area has a yellow header with "Home > Home". Below this, a text block asks if the user wants to improve student writing and provides contact information for Roger Graves. It then lists resources for individual instructors and departments, each with a bulleted list of services. A sidebar on the left contains links for "C4W", "WRS Courses", "Roger Graves", "Blog", and "Academic Honesty". The page ends with a section for "Upcoming Presentations and Workshops".

Today:
9/2/2009 10:31:23 AM

[Home > Home](#)

Would you like to improve the writing of your students? Improve their learning of your lecture material? Are you looking for new ways to engage your students in your course materials? If this interests you, contact [Roger Graves](#): or 492.2169

What can we do for individual instructors:

- meet to talk about ways to incorporate informal (short, impromptu) writing assignments into any class, small or large
- review via email any assignment you give students that has a writing component to help make it clearer for students and to help develop grading rubrics to improve the speed and accuracy of grading
- visit your class to help students get started on your writing assignments

What can we do for departments:

- hold workshops on creating good writing assignments
- host discussions of how to improve the writing of students in your programs
- conduct reviews of writing assignments in your departments courses to identify exactly what your students are being asked to write—and to ensure that they have access to resources on how to write (online and on-campus)

Upcoming Presentations and Workshops:

[C4W](#)
[WRS Courses](#)
[Roger Graves](#)
[Blog](#)
[Academic Honesty](#)

<http://www.humanities.ualberta.ca/WAC/>

Centre for Writers



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Centre for Writers at the University of Alberta. At the top left is the University of Alberta logo. To its right is the text "Writing Initiatives" in a script font, followed by "University of Alberta" in a smaller font, and a green leaf-like icon. To the right of the icon is the text "Centre for Writers" in a large, green, serif font. Below this is a green navigation bar with white text links: "Home", "Appointments", "Contact Us", "Location", "Coaches", "Resources", "FAQ", and "WAC". Below the navigation bar is a green breadcrumb trail: "Home > Home". The main content area has a heading "Welcome to the Centre for Writers" followed by a paragraph: "We offer free one-on-one writing coaching and support to all students, instructors and staff at the University of Alberta - in any faculty or at any level of study." Below this is another paragraph: "Our writing coaches are available to assist clients with higher order concerns in their writing, such as thesis formation, organization and idea development, as well as more specific details, like grammar and documentation style. Clients can bring in any writing project at any stage of development: essays, lab reports, creative pieces, scholarly articles, thesis drafts, application letters - and more. Our coaches will also help students read instructor comments on already-graded papers. ESL and EAL students are welcome!" Below that is a red link: "Request a class room visit by a tutor." and another paragraph: "Welcome back for the Fall 2009 term! Tutoring hours will begin on Monday, September 14. The online appointment-booking schedule will be available to clients as soon as possible prior to this date. We look forward to working with you!" On the right side, there is a date and time: "9/2/2009 10:34:15 AM", a section titled "Express News", a section titled "Twitter Updates" with a message: "The Centre for Writers will open for the fall term on Monday, September 14! 5 days ago" and a link "follow me on Twitter", and a section titled "GramWOW" with a video player showing a person holding a sign.

<http://www.c4w.arts.ualberta.ca/>

C4W



Over 1300 students last year

Work with graduate students as well as undergraduates

Free to students

GRAM WOW!



Strategies for Improving Student Writing

- **WAC:** Short, brief writing in class (unmarked or minimally graded)
- **Centre for Writers:** Facilitate Peer Response in writing groups and one-to-one tutoring at C4W
- **Rubrics:** Clear statements of evaluation criteria

Key = Assignment Sheets

- Assignment sheet, peer response sheets, and grading rubrics all communicate the evaluation criteria
- They all must be consistent with each other
- They should change with the genre being evaluated
- They can be tailored to fit the topic

Peer Response:

Generic response criteria

- Introduction
- Thesis
- Organization
- Sources
- Standard Edited English

Rhetorical issues criteria

- Audience
- Purpose
- Argument
- Style
- Tone

Argument structure

Claim

Stated reason

Grounds/evidence

Unstated assumptions

Evidence supporting unstated assumption

Rebuttal

Qualifiers

- evidence you found that perhaps qualifies or suggests the alternative readings are of limited value or useful in only certain circumstances

Criteria specific assignment

- Include phrases and criteria that were stated in your assignment
- Phrase them as questions
- Ask them the kinds of questions you ask yourself when reading student assignments:
Where is the reference to that quote?
Where is the other part of the comparison?

Criteria for editing

- Connections between sentences
- Wordiness
- Active verbs vrs. “to be” verbs
- Attitude: adjectives and adverbs
- Specific language
- Inclusive language

RUBRICS DEFINED



- Rubrics describe your criteria for evaluating student performances

As promised! Feedback from your session.

Do you VALUE having access to learning opportunities such as this?

This workshop assisted in two ways:

- it make me think about my written communication in more focused way AND
- it made me aware of more of the resources available to assist me with my writing.

Very much!

very focused and manageable within other time constraints- thank you!

I would like to see more workshops focusing on writing skills.

What additional topics would you be interested in?

- 1 More specific writing topics - grant proposals, letters, etiquette reminders...
- 2 converting technical writing/jargon into layman's language would be helpful.
- 3 Grammer

KINDS OF RUBRICS

Holistic

Descriptions of overall achievement and effect
Faster to use

Analytic

Separate scores for each criterion
Precise

or

General description

- General criteria applicable to all assignments

Primary trait scoring

- Criteria specific to an assignment

TYPE A: HOLISTIC SCALES

Writing Program General Grading Rubric

Grade Ranges

| Below 50 | 50-60 | 60-70 |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Grades in this range identify assignments with problems sufficiently severe and/or pervasive that they significantly compromise the document's ability to communicate.</p> <p>Grades in this range generally indicate ONE or more of the following characteristics:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Plagiarism.2. Failure to follow the assigned topic.3. Severe systematic problems | <p>Grades in this range identify assignments that, while generally acceptable, have AT LEAST ONE of the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ a significant global deficiency (mistaken audience, inconsistency in purpose)▶ several major problems (see list below)▶ numerous minor problems | <p>Grades in this range tend to be fairly common in writing courses.</p> <p>These grades identify a generally good performance on the criteria listed below with minor problems of various kinds throughout the assignment or in more than one category.</p> |

Please note that these descriptions are guidelines only, and do not cover all situations.

TYPE A: HOLISTIC SCALE

Holistic Grading Rubric for Writing Assessment (GERM 111/112) A

“A” DEMONSTRATES HIGH PROFICIENCY

Excellent command of the language:

Addressed the topic; appropriate to the writing prompt (also in format, e.g. a letter requires greeting and conclusion); all expected elements are included; text flows; comprehensible; writing is appropriate to current level; length is appropriate

Word choice is appropriate and varied; sentence structure shows variety if possible on this level of writing (e.g. sub- and coordinating sentences, not only S-V-O structure; use of transitions);

Some errors which do not interfere with comprehension (i.e. word order is correct most of the time; subject-verb agreement is accurate most of the time, minor slips; spelling and punctuation are mostly accurate); learner demonstrated control of the forms focused on in this exam with very few mistakes

TYPE B: ANALYTIC SCALES

Oral Presentation Grading Sheet

Visuals

Size
Brevity
Informative titles
Appropriateness

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

Presentation Skills

Face audience
Speak clearly
Clear view of visuals
Elaborated on visuals
No excuses offered
Handling of questions

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

SAMPLE RUBRICS

- See handout
- The original is holistic
- The revised one is analytic

| | |
|----------|---|
| A | <p>DEMONSTRATES HIGH PROFICIENCY Excellent command of the language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Addressed the topic; appropriate to the writing prompt (greeting and conclusion); all expected elements are in writing is appropriate to current level; length is appropriate ● Word choice is appropriate and varied; sentence structure level of writing (e.g. sub- and coordinating sentences; transitions); ● Some errors which do not interfere with comprehension; subject-verb agreement is accurate most of the time; punctuation are mostly accurate); learner demonstrated exam with very few mistakes |
| | <p>CLEARLY DEMONSTRATES PROFICIENCY Good command of the language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Generally addressed the topic; generally appropriate |

Analytic Rubric for 111/112

| | | | |
|--|---------------|---|----------------------|
| 1. Answered the question/addressed the topic | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | Unclear | | mostly |
| 2. Format appropriate and correct | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | Inappropriate | | few errors in format |

WEIGHTING THE RUBRIC

Which categories are more important to the overall grade?

This is another way of asking what are the most important factors for you when you evaluate a student's assignment.

Not all categories have to be or should be evenly weighted.

Rubrics should be different from first year to fourth year as expectations change.