

# A Writing Across the Curriculum Workshop

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How does a teacher of writing encourage colleagues in other disciplines to pay more attention to student writing? And, once encouraged, what specifically, can teachers of history, biology, or business do in their classrooms to promote student writing?

Most teachers in disciplines other than English understand well that writing, like reading and mathematics, cannot be the sole province of teachers in one discipline. As Dan Fader and James Britton have argued before me, writing is an interdisciplinary learning activity with a place in every classroom. But not all teachers know how to integrate writing instruction easily into their pedagogy, nor are they comfortable "teaching" it outright. Each teacher is already a professional, practicing writer in his or her own field, yet few have ever been trained to teach writing to others.

There is a wealth of knowledge about writing in the pool of content-area teachers who think they do not know how to teach writing. Who knows better than the geographer whether or not first person narration is acceptable in professional geography publications? Who knows better than the physics teacher whether or not to use passive construction in laboratory reports? Furthermore, most teachers have a fairly firm grasp of the "elements of style" according to Strunk and White or Turabian. It matters little that they can't label a particular modifier as "free" or "dangling"; it does matter that they can identify good writing appropriate to work in their field.

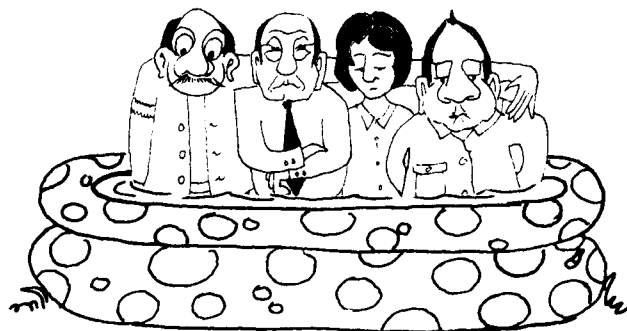
During the last several years, my colleagues and I have planned and staffed half-a-dozen writing workshops for teachers at **Michigan Tech**; we have also worked with high school and college instructors from other schools. The principles of conducting good writing workshops are remarkably consistent whether working with high-school English teachers or history professors. Showing works better than telling, induction better than deduction. By introducing

workshop participants to the complex nature of "the composing process," experientially rather than through lecture, we have been able to draw consistently on knowledge and ideas already present among the participants. The writing workshops work because the lessons are learned through personal experience and appeals to common sense.

Writing across the curriculum, as we conceive it, is based on principles which are second nature to most writing teachers: 1) people learn to write by writing frequently; 2) writers need critical feedback to improve their writing; 3) writers need to understand the audience for whom they write; 4) writers should not be punished for experimenting or taking risks; 5) writers need to distinguish between writing as heuristic and writing as communication. The workshop experience which we have developed explores these principles as they apply to teachers in all disciplines.

In my **Workshop** series I will ask members of my group to join me in some writing activities and then to examine the nature of our own composing to see what lessons we can discover. More specifically, I will ask participants in my **Workshop** to take good notes during the presentations on **Literacy in the 1980's** and to ask the presenters hard questions; then we will begin developing our own written responses to the **Conference** theme. Time will be provided during the **Workshops** for brainstorming, composing, receiving feedback, and revising; if the pieces are good, we will seek to publish them.

I believe strongly that writing workshops work for all teachers, regardless of discipline; I believe, furthermore, that language arts teachers must take a leading role in developing such workshops. In addition to opportunities for writing, this **Workshop** will also provide a forum for discussing how teachers can create successful programs at their own schools in writing across the curriculum.



Pool of content-area teachers