
WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM: ONE
PERSON'S PRACTICE

Margaret Procter, Erindale College, University
of Toronto

This session focused on a current project at Erindale College that attempts to help students meet the demands of academic writing in various disciplines. Professors are frustrated at the poor quality of students' writing, and students complain that writing assignments impose arbitrary patterns on course material and expect impossible standards of language correctness. Conference participants responded to these comments. To illustrate my attempts to diminish these negative feelings, I exhibited some material used in the project to demonstrate that academic writing can develop and express thinking in specific subjects. Students in cultural anthropology, for instance, find that the standard patterns of exposition match anthropological methods of analysis, and commerce students recognize that accounting practice provides some basic structures for discussing the meanings of numbers. Indeed, data from the project indicate that students learn to revise more competently because they feel greater confidence and recognize an overall goal.

Participants agreed that the improvement and assessment of students' writing skills should be the responsibility of content-area professors, and they offered advice and parallel experiences. Some questioned the desirability of defining explicitly what is expected in a writing task rather than letting students explore possibilities. Suggestions focused on ways to help professors design assignments which would recognize the importance of stages in the writing process.