

Coaching Student Writing

1. Start off by crafting a thorough, informative writing assignment that the students can consult when they have questions.
2. Take some time in class or in discussion section to go over the assignment orally.
 - Explain the purpose of the assignment.
 - Point out the important tasks that need to be accomplished.
 - Emphasize what they should be learning while they do the assignment.
 - Explain the concept of audience and designate an audience for them.
 - Explain the grading criteria carefully to help the students see how the final product will be judged.
3. Help them focus the subject area down to a topic and then to a thesis statement.
 - Do a focusing exercise in class. Give the students strategies for developing ideas to help them decide on the scope, content, and approach of the paper.
4. Break the paper down into intermediate, smaller tasks that will help students approach the task in stages; have them e-mail you at certain milestones (see below).
5. Hold short conferences with students, after they have completed one of the stages, to help them move on to the next stage.
 - Make it clear that you expect the students to participate. Encourage the students to prepare for the conference by thinking about what they've accomplished and what still needs to be done.
 - In the conferences, get the students to articulate their problem assessment.
 - Ask questions that challenge the students before you tell them your perceptions.
 - Be sure to encourage as well as critique.
 - If you see a common writing problem on a piece of student writing (organizational, logical, grammatical), get the student to do a revision (rewriting a sentence, rewriting a paragraph, drawing up a reorganized outline of a draft) right there in the office. Then discuss it with the student and make him/her responsible for identifying and fixing other such problems.
 - Don't get bogged down in proofreading students' work.
 - Encourage students to make global changes if necessary.
6. Use papers from previous classes to show students a variety of introductions, conclusions, logical paragraphs, and thesis statements. Discuss their merits and faults.
7. Give students help, and time in class or discussion section, to revise drafts (tailor handout on revision after the first draft).
8. Encourage students to proofread by reading out loud for better punctuation and grammar, and swapping papers with other students to help proofread.
9. Give students good, constructive, helpful feedback on their papers, whether or not they will have a chance to revise. Tie your comments to particular ingredients of the original assignment.

For more information, contact the [Writing Across the Curriculum](#) program.