

Writing Across Hispanic & Italian Studies Curriculum

9/04

In the Department of Hispanic and Italian Studies, it is our collective view that writing is a crucial part of the teaching of language, literature, and culture. Writing instruction in the Hispanic and Italian Studies curriculum serves distinct purposes at each level, from elementary language learners to advanced students of literature and culture. Writing assignments in the target language can include such objectives as assessing student command of the language, targeting particular problem areas, and providing instruction and opportunities for practice on specific grammar points. In the teaching of literature and culture, we use writing assignments to assess student comprehension of texts and audiovisual materials, as well as to develop students' analytical and critical skills. Frequently, writing assignments in our courses include several of these objectives at once. Our courses provide different types of writing instruction at each level and include a variety of types of writing assignments.

100-Level:

At this level, instruction emphasizes developing students' ability to self-correct, acquire vocabulary, and perfect the sentence. Compositions are relatively short, with students receiving continuous instructor feedback about their writing. To enhance students' awareness of audience, several instructors also use interactive or collaborative writing (e.g., beginning a story and having all students contribute to it) and various types of performance.

Several instructors use in-class writing, sometimes as a prompt for in-class discussion, sometimes as a form of informal writing, sometimes as a means of establishing knowledge of a student's "raw" (unrevised) writing ability.

At the upper 100-level, some instructors work towards teaching students to produce final drafts that will not receive instructor comments in the preliminary phase.

Instructor response ranges from underlining specific errors to making marginal and/or final comments to coding errors. At least one instructor uses Word's Track Changes (Reviewing Toolbar) feature to respond. Students are generally not encouraged to seek tutoring help with their writing in the foreign language at this level.

200-Level:

At this level, composition instruction becomes more complex and nuanced, with more attention devoted to argumentation and global coherence. Students are introduced to stages of revision and levels of analysis.

Typical assignments at this level include expository and analytical compositions, postings on student discussion boards, informal journal entries, short reaction papers, essay-style exams, and short research papers. Some instructors incorporate peer editing assignments at this level, especially in courses focused on composition.

Instructors at this level almost always require rewriting as another facet of their instruction. Feedback in preparation for re-writing depends on the instructor, with some instructors coding errors and others preferring to flag them and make marginal comments.

Tutoring at this level can include comments and critique from the peer tutor or the Foreign Language Teaching Assistant, but care must be taken to insure that the student does not bring the paper in for "proofreading" and "correction." Students should approach the tutor or TA with specific questions and areas they wish to develop or re-write and not simply hand the tutor a draft. Tutors and TAs likewise must take care not to re-write or simply "correct" the paper for the student. Tutors and TAs should flag problems they see, but ask the student to try to suggest corrections, clarifications and alternative wording themselves.

300-Level:

Students at this level receive further instruction in research and interpretation. Students receive guidance in stages of research writing, including locating and evaluating sources; introducing and contextualizing borrowed material; and documenting sources accurately. In-class instruction includes explanation of the various components of a formal research paper as well as discussions on the process of preparing a longer piece of writing.

At this level, students begin to use writing as a method of creative discovery, often in the context of literary and cultural analysis and research papers. Several formal papers of varying lengths are almost always required at this level. Other types of assignments are also used such as reaction papers, discussion boards, in-class essay exams and short, in-class informal writing. Students are sometimes asked to prepare papers in stages (e.g. handing in a proposal, annotated bibliography and multiple drafts before presenting the final version of the paper).

Response to papers at this level most often takes the form of commentary by the instructor in the margins as well as detailed feedback on the overall scope and success of the paper at the end. Instructors still address issues of mechanics and style as needed. For some students, specific, additional instruction is needed to assure proper formatting of quotations, footnotes and bibliography. Instructors often use office consultations or conferences with students at this level to explore some aspect of the student's writing (e.g. defining a topic, performing research, developing an argument, reviewing drafts etc.) .

Peer tutoring at this level can be of use, although the same caveats from the 200 level apply.