

# Writing Matters

Writing Across the Curriculum  
Southwestern Community College

November 2014  
Volume VI  
Number 7

## It's November—Give Thanks!

I want to send out a huge thank you to all SCC faculty for support of the Writing Across the Curriculum program. Because of you, this program is able to reach out to students of all levels and in all disciplines in order to support their ways of thinking and writing.

Because of your involvement in the WAC program, as of Nov. 12, the WAC Coordinator has given **22 workshops** and has reached **408 students** in this semester alone!

Thank you!

## Making the Invisible Visible, Part II Disciplinary Thinking and Writing

When we think about the variety of courses that college students take, especially early on in their college careers, it becomes clear exactly what students inevitably bump up against. They are experiencing a wide pool of disciplines and ways of thinking, and they are often not prepared for the constant “shifting” they must do as they move from course to course. It doesn't help that the various disciplines often “talk past” one another, saying the same ideas, but in very different ways or with a different focus.

This brings us to the fact that we, as instructors, need to clarify first for ourselves what exactly are the ways our fields pose questions, value knowledge, etc. Then, we need to develop ways to introduce our students to those discipline-specific ways of learning so that they can be successful in our courses and on our assignments.

## Making Visible the Thinking of Your Field

Each discipline has a unique perspective on thinking, learning, and knowing. In other words, disciplines have their own way of “doing” them. There is a way to think and learn like a computer engineer, and it is different from the way to think and learn as a historian. Those two fields have different values when it comes to what they think about, how they think about it, and what it all means. Sure, there are basic ways of critical thinking that cross all disciplines, but our

students keenly experience the differences, and they often need help navigating them.

This unique way of knowing is important for each field. It's how we know who we are; it's what separates us from other disciplines. One look at our catalog reveals the various groupings. We are grouped into divisions, and then more specifically into disciplines. Some disciplines of study are further grouped according to credential or degree being sought. Each group asks its

own questions and has a unique sense of what “counts” as knowledge and insight within that field.

There are two ways of learning within each discipline: specific content knowledge and ways of reasoning that are considered appropriate. For example, I wouldn't want to approach a document in civil engineering with the exact same reasoning that I approach a poem or short story in literature. I wouldn't read that document searching for symbolism, plot, and

character in the same ways as I would in English class.

Furthermore, insiders in each discipline share experiences and knowledge that increases the “distance” between disciplines. Labs, research papers, specific techniques, and projects all become common experiences that enforce disciplinary relationships. Each paper written or lab performed further solidifies the identity of students in that discipline.

*cont'd pg. 2*

If everybody is thinking alike, then somebody isn't thinking.

—George S. Patton

# Writing Matters

Writing Across the Curriculum  
Southwestern Community College

November 2014  
Volume VI  
Number 4

## Thinking of Your Field (cont'd)

Therefore, the assignments we give and the ways we teach our courses become the important pathways to support our students as they become learners in our fields. First, we must determine for ourselves what our fields value in terms of thinking, reasoning, and knowing.

What does that look like in your field? How do professionals “do” the work of your discipline?

Once we have clarity for ourselves, we must also recognize that we often “default” into teaching discipline-specific content without also explicitly discussing our fields’ ways of knowing and thinking.

Teaching content feels safer and easier than wading into murky waters of thinking and reasoning.

Finally, we should help initiate our students into our fields’ ways of thinking to help them become “insiders.” We can enhance this initiation by carefully considering the writing, labs, and projects we

assign. How do they introduce our students to our ways of thinking? How do they help students begin to move and reason within our discipline?

If we keep our students’ point of view in mind when developing our assignments, we can strengthen their identities within our fields.

## WORKSHOP SHOWCASE REVISING AND EDITING

The Workshop Showcase is a place to introduce the most popular in-class workshops (by faculty request) that the WAC program provides for students. You can request a workshop for your class at any time! Contact the WAC Coordinator, Jenn Hippensteel, at [jb\\_hippensteel@southwesterncc.edu](mailto:jb_hippensteel@southwesterncc.edu)

Perhaps one of the most difficult tasks any writer faces is revising and editing his/her own writing. When we go back to re-read our own writing, our minds often make corrections and fill in blanks so that we are blind to our mistakes. Revision is a skill that all writers need to practice frequently in order to “cure” this error-blindness.

This workshop gives students practical strategies to use in “looking again” at (literally re-visioning) their writing. First, we discuss the difference between revision and editing. Revision asks “big picture” questions of the writing—did I have a clear point? Did I organize my thoughts logically? Did I actually make my point successfully? On the other hand, editing looks at “little picture” issues on the sentence level—spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc.

Students leave this workshop with hands-on, practical ways of questioning their writing and looking for ways to improve it.

**Writing, to me, is simply thinking through my fingers.**

**—Isaac Asimov**