

ASSESSING WRITING AT THE MASTERY LEVEL

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WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

1. Discuss *general* practices in the teaching & assessment of writing
2. Discuss practices in the teaching & assessment of writing that are *specific* to mastery-level courses (such as capstones, senior seminars, and other advanced/upper-division courses)
3. Discuss how the teaching & assessment of writing in our mastery-level courses connects with program assessment

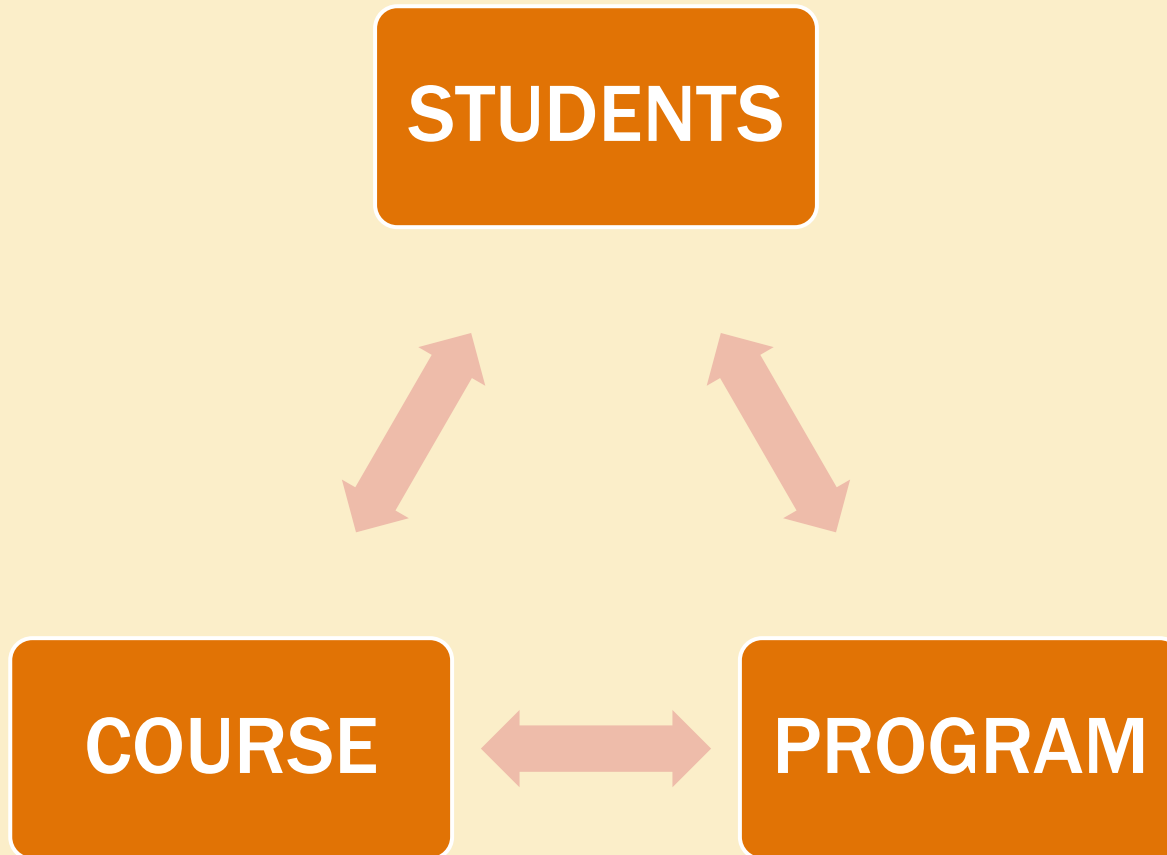
WHAT IS WRITING AT THE MASTERY-LEVEL?

- A senior-level, capstone, or other advanced course where, upon completion, students are expected to display mastery of the program's or discipline's ways of *knowing* and ways of *doing*
- This achievement is demonstrable through any number of products, such as portfolios, oral presentation, and exit exams
- Note: Projects within these courses are sometimes referred to as capstone or culminating experiences, even if the course isn't specifically designated as a "capstone course"

CHALLENGES

What have been (or what do you anticipate will be) your biggest obstacles or frustrations with teaching and assessing student writing at the mastery level?

WHAT ARE WE ASSESSING?



PURPOSES OF CAPSTONE EXPERIENCES

Mastery-level courses often involve capstone or culminating projects that serve one or more of the following purposes:

- 1. Integration** (pulling together the four years of college)
- 2. Breadth** (taking students beyond the increasing specialization of the major by offering a final general education experience)
- 3. Application** (using student expert knowledge to examine a discrete issue and produce a substantial product)
- 4. Transition** (preparing students to move from college to the world beyond)

Any of these purposes/approaches could yield a great deal of formal or informal writing!

EXAMPLES OF ASSIGNMENTS/ACTIVITIES IN MASTERY-LEVEL COURSES

- **Formal Writing:** research report, thesis, proposal, case study, project report, reflective essay, review of the literature, resume, progress reports
- **Informal writing:** notes, lab notebook, observation log, informal analyses, academic journal, etc.
- **Oral presentation**
- **Poster presentation**
- **Documentation of group work:** peer review/feedback, group progress reports, evaluation of group members/group effectiveness
- **Internship supervisor's evaluation/feedback on student performance**
- **Interview (e.g., mock job interview, oral defense)**
- **Meeting facilitation (e.g., students facilitate a community meeting)**
- **Exam**
- **Portfolio**
- **Simulated academic conference**
- **Curriculum mapping**
- **Learning-through-teaching activity**

ASSIGNMENTS WITH A CLEAR STUDENT-WRITING ELEMENT

- **Formal Writing:** research report, thesis, proposal, case study, project report, reflective essay, review of the literature, resume, progress reports
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ASSIGNMENTS WITH A *POTENTIAL* STUDENT-WRITING ELEMENT

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TYPES OF ASSESSMENT

Formative Assessment

Assessment during instruction or during a course of study; feedback is used to improve teaching and student learning for the rest of the course or program. Results may also indicate where changes are needed in programs of study.

Summative Assessment

Assessment at the end of the course or program. Results are used by faculty to determine whether changes are needed, and if so, what changes to make in the course or program.

COURSE-LEVEL WRITING ASSESSMENT

Peter Elbow:

Before engaging in any kind of writing assessment,
be it formative or summative,
we have to understand the difference between

Ranking, Evaluating, and Liking

COURSE-LEVEL WRITING ASSESSMENT

Ranking:

Grades

Explanatory or terminal Feedback

Often affiliated with summative assessment

Evaluating:

Substantive Feedback

Drafting, low-stakes, and/or ungraded writing

Portfolios

Non-grade ranking

Liking:

Focusing on the potential of the writing

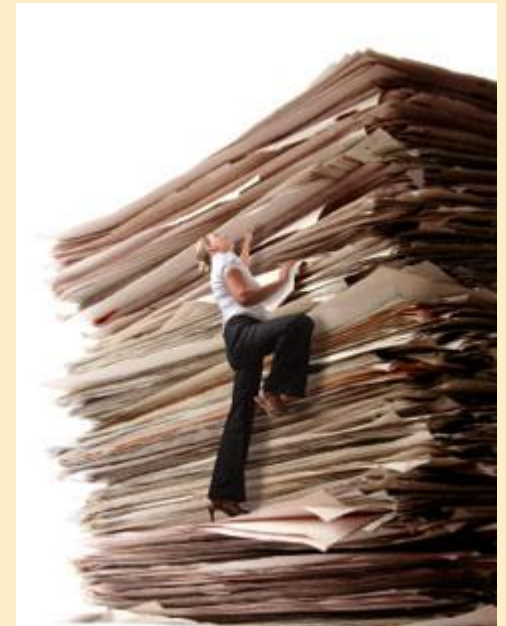
Give yourself a break (put the students to work)

RANKING, EVALUATING, & LIKING

End of semester. Professor X sits down at her desk with a stack of research papers...

Scenario One

She had assigned these two months ago, but she knows most were written hastily last night. She clicks her red pen, takes a shot of whiskey, and prepares herself for what she knows will be a barrage of typos, bad grammar, clichés, and unsubstantiated claims.

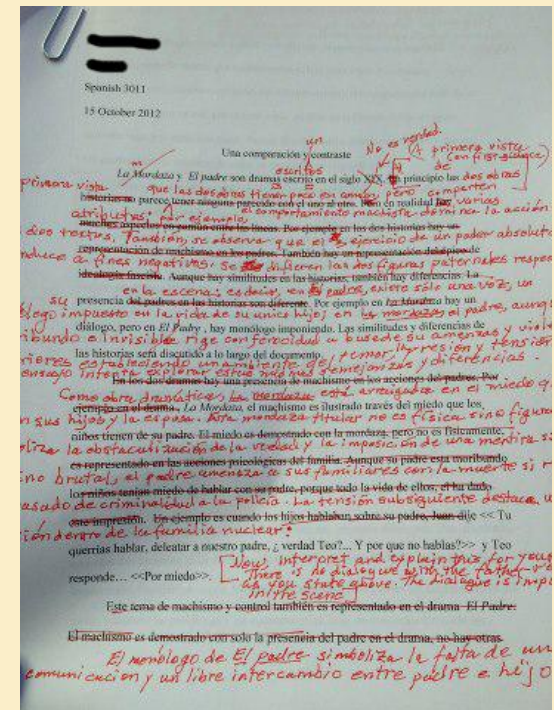


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Scenario Two

Two weeks ago, she read and commented extensively on everyone's drafts. She clicks her red pen, takes a shot of whiskey, and prepares herself for the reality that few students, if any, will have fixed the mistakes she pointed out.



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Scenario Three

A month ago, her students workshopped their drafts in small groups. A couple weeks later, she quickly read over the drafts and made critiques based on each paper's potential. "Your overall argument is compelling, but I keep getting lost in the organization. What's your next step for giving this a logical flow?" Or, "This is an interesting point. What sources could you use to really back this up?" She sets her pen aside, takes a shot of Diet Coke, and picks up the first paper, curious to see what the students ended up with.



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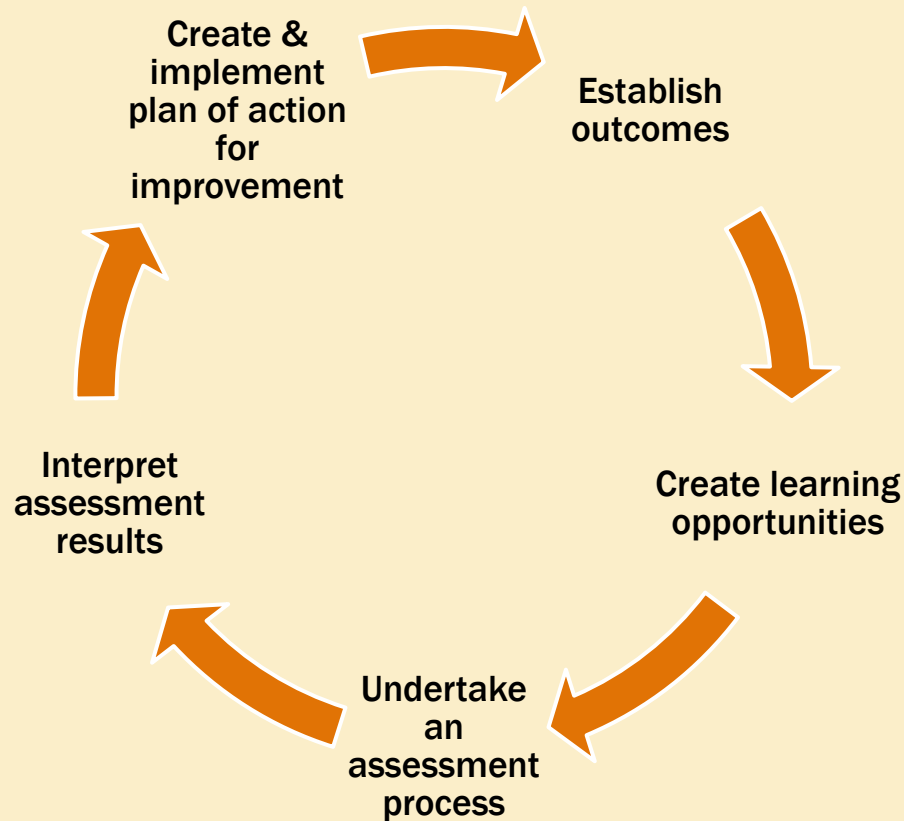
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PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

How do mastery-level writing assignments fit into the standard assessment loop?



COMMON STAGES OF ACADEMIC WRITING PROGRESS

An example of a Pacific undergraduate's writing progression:*

Pseudo-Academic Prose – High-School; PACS 1

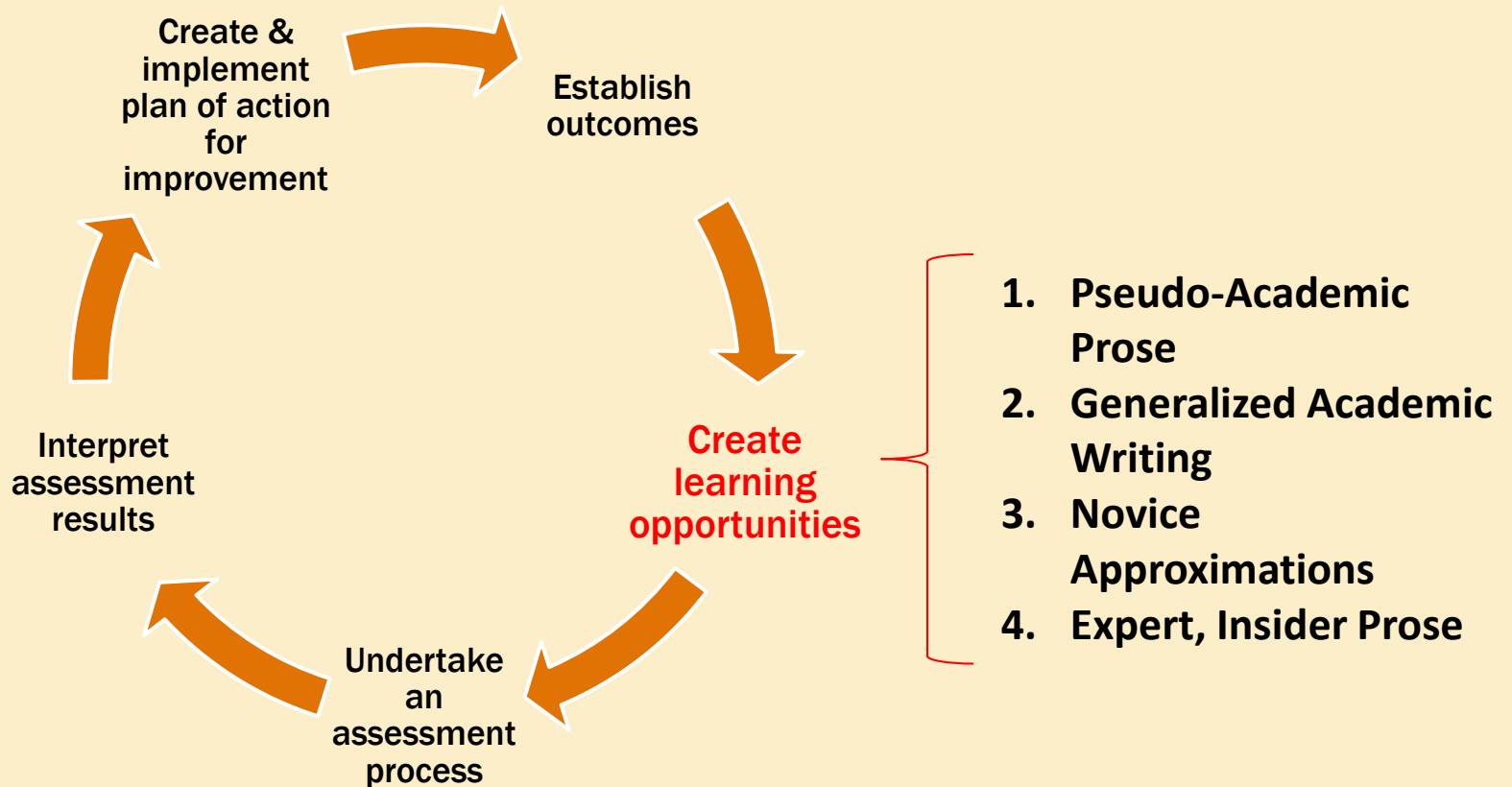
Generalized Academic Writing – End of PACS 2

Novice Approximations (of disciplinary ways of writing) – Sophomore/Junior-level courses, WID courses

Expert, Insider Prose – Capstone courses, senior-level courses, start of graduate work

*(for more info, See Susan Peck MacDonald's *Professional Writing in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, p 187.)

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT



EMBEDDED ASSESSMENT

The basic assessment act is the individual instructor's grading of students' performance on an assignment already embedded in a course. The instructor develops a rubric to grade the assignment and to report results to departmental faculty.

BEST PRACTICES IN WRITING ASSESSMENT

The NCTE and the CCCC have made a joint position statement on the best practices for the assessment of written literacy



<http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/writingassessment>

ASSESSMENT OF WRITTEN LITERACY...

should be designed and evaluated by well-informed current or future teachers of the students being assessed, for purposes clearly understood by all the participants

ASSESSMENT OF WRITTEN LITERACY...

should be solidly grounded in the latest research on language learning as well as accepted best assessment practices

ASSESSMENT OF WRITTEN LITERACY...

should engage students in contextualized, meaningful writing

ASSESSMENT OF WRITTEN LITERACY...

should be locally developed

ASSESSMENT OF WRITTEN LITERACY...

should use multiple measures: more than one piece of writing, in more than one genre, written on different occasions, for different audiences, and evaluated by multiple readers

ASSESSMENT OF WRITTEN LITERACY...

should communicate what is valued and expected in the writing

ASSESSMENT OF WRITTEN LITERACY...

should have criteria based on the writings' purpose

ASSESSMENT OF WRITTEN LITERACY...

should allow students to demonstrate what they do well in writing

OTHER GOOD PRACTICES IN PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

- Evaluate the work of a random sample of students
- Use a rubric
- Provide the rubric to the students
 - Have professors use the rubric in other courses that introduce or reinforce the SLO
 - Have each professor apply the rubric in the same way
- Have at least two faculty members evaluate the writing
- Consider getting IRB approval, even if you don't think you'll publish the results of your assessment. You never know!

**Thanks, and
Happy Assessing!**