



English: Writing about writing

A writing course by Dr. Toby Fulwiler, the University of Vermont (1997)

Course Design:

In both his undergraduate and graduate writing courses, Dr. Fulwiler engages in a weekly letter writing dialogue with his students. The principle behind this course design is that writing, especially writing about writing, prompts students to learn more about what they know, what they do not know, and what they can focus on in order to refine their work. The course begins with a letter from Dr. Fulwiler explaining the goals of the course and inviting students to respond with forthright and personal comments on the intellectual issues raised in the course, the readings, and the other writings. Students describe new ideas and raise questions, and in his response to the group, the instructor highlights common themes or unique points by quoting individual students and suggesting further topics for reflection. The letters over the course of the semester enable students to rework their ideas on writing in general and their own writing in particular.

Unlike the more formal text analyses also written for the class, the letters allow students to recognize the relevance of their uncertainties. Students keep up with the pace of the reading schedule and have the opportunity to examine their own progress toward a better understanding of writing. The goal of Fulwiler's course is to encourage students to continually reflect upon and revise their writing. Accordingly, at the end of the term student letters are converted into a formal assignment. The students' final portfolio for the course includes the original formal analysis assignments as well as an edited collection of the weekly letters with an introduction describing their significance. Reviewing the letters reveals to students the development and patterns of their thought processes.

Higher Level Learning:

The correspondence component of Dr. Fulwiler's is designed not only to address specific course-related questions as a group (**Thinking**), but also to model literary self-analysis (**Thinking, Self**). Students are encouraged to continually reflect upon their work, to integrate their self-discoveries into subsequent projects, and to evaluate their changing perspective on their own writing processes (**Thinking, Acting, Learning**). The importance of self-evaluation is emphasized at the end of the course with the

compilation of a writing portfolio, including all formal and informal writing and a self-assessment letter. (**Learning**).

Active Learning:

Although using letter writing as a vehicle for self-reflection in a writing course seems foreign to students at first, the letters enable students to explore certain literary concepts (**Doing**) and to compare their results and experiences (**Observing**). Students gain insight into their own thinking (**Dialogue with Self**) as well as into the thinking of others (**Dialogue with Others**) by participating in this unique out-of-class discussion.

Fulwiler, T. (1997). Writing back and forth: Class letters. New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 69 15-25.