The Best Things That Educators Do

From the On Course newsletter; compiled by Skip Downing. Faculty from across the nation submitted the following responses for nomination.

1. At my college, faculty teaching schedules vary greatly, making it difficult to find a time when we can get together to chat about our work. We therefore created a virtual Faculty Lounge site within our learning management system (Blackboard) where faculty can post documents, web links, copies of professional development presentations they have given, etc. The site also includes a discussion board where faculty can share their experiences and wisdom with one another.

2. The most important things that successful teachers/trainers do right is involving the learners actively in both the learning process and the practical application. Successful teachers/trainers create an environment where learners feel comfortable to contribute to the planning phase, implementation phase and the review phase of any long-term learning project. Where the project is as short as a 2-hour session, the successful trainer outlines the learning strategy intended to be used and provides the opportunity for others to suggest changes and when asked is prepared as far as practical to build those changes in.

3. One thing that many faculty do well in the classroom is avoid PowerPoint pitfalls. We keep our slides simple, avoiding excessive décor and distracting colors. We employ the 6x6 industry guideline by making sure that slides have no more than 6 lines of text each with 6 or fewer words. We use PowerPoint to support our words. Slides offer increased clarity, retention, and/or interest for our students and we deliver from brief notes (not from large projection screens). We take the time to learn how to use equipment in classrooms before showing up. We arrive with a back-up plan in case the technology fails. We understand that presenting a speech (classroom lecture) is a process, which includes practice.

4. Getting students to ask questions can be difficult, even when they look confused. Instead of asking students whether they have questions (when I know they do), I prefer to ask, "What are your questions?" I do this to reinforce for students that I expect them to have questions, and that asking their questions is safe.

For the full article please CLICK HERE.
When writing papers for their college courses across disciplines, students often get stuck at various stages in the writing process: as they struggle to begin a paper, run out of ideas quickly, work to organize several ideas, run out of time, become overwhelmed when they think about revising, editing, or proofreading, and, at times resort to plagiarizing inadvertently or intentionally.

Except for occasional meetings or with tutors in the writing lab, as instructors, we are not there with them most of the time as they attempt to write their papers. Their writer’s blocks can cause further frustration, resistance to more writing, decreased confidence and enthusiasm for education, and resorting to cutting and pasting papers, and plagiarizing.

However, providing a mechanism for them to identify their personal writing blocks, and access and utilize strategies to address them can reverse these negative effects and open the gates to their writing and educational success.

In my English courses, I found myself asking students to articulate when and how they would get writer’s block when writing their papers at home. I spent an increasing amount of time discussing those blocks, their causes, and possible strategies to address them, many of which I designed for individual students and classes. From this, two goals emerged for me: to conduct primary and secondary research on writer’s block for college students and to increase accessibility to these strategies to more students at Delta College.

One of my three sabbatical projects in 2006-07 was on writer’s block. I surveyed more than 850 Delta College students; interviewed and/or collected assignments from twenty Delta College instructors and two Los Angeles City College instructors; and interviewed five students each at CSU at Los Angeles, UCLA, and two community colleges—Los Angeles Valley College and Los Angeles City College. I also read several books on writer’s block for creative writing since there is none for college writing.

After analyzing the research, I prepared a booklet that includes a 100-question questionnaire of the most common writing blocks students face, and specific strategies to address each. Following a Matriculation grant that allowed us to offer students access to this information through orientation courses, I have continued the project by offering workshops on writer’s block to my colleagues and their classes, and making copies of the booklet available to students.

In the workshops, eight fundamental precepts about writing are presented:

1. Writing takes time. Although our world continues to increase its speed and the subsequent demands upon us, our brains have changed relatively little over the course of thousands of years. Simply allowing enough time to write can make an enormous initial difference in approaching the task of writing. We accept that athletes and musicians spend hours every day learning to play their sport or instrument and developing their skills; however, we often fail to apply the same expectation to writing.

2. Everyone has writer’s block—even those who love to write and make their living doing it. My favorite example is Tennessee Williams, one of the three greatest American playwrights of the twentieth century. After yet another of his successful plays had opened on Broadway, he would return to his hotel room, put a blank piece of paper into his typewriter and wonder how one writes a play. That happened to such a successful writer highlights one of the issues inherent in writing itself.

For the entire article, including tips on how to help students in all disciplines with writer’s block, please CLICK HERE.

When assigning a paper, inform students of the resources available to help them through writer’s block. The Delta College Library has put copies of the booklet on writer’s block, titled, “Yes, I Can—Write!!: Strategies for Overcoming Writer’s Block and Writing Quality College Papers”, in their collection (Call #PN171.W74 D66 2007).