Teaching Guide for GSIs

Teaching Reading and Composition

Reading and Composition (R&C), in all of the many teaching units in which it is offered, presents complex challenges for instructor and student alike. The learning objectives for an R&C course force several sophisticated processes to the fore simultaneously: reading actively and critically; working through an interrelated set of questions about texts, art works, films, and other kinds of primary works; covering a lot of reading in a limited amount of time; processing all these new thoughts through class discussion and journaling about the readings; and, of course, composing drafts, substantively revising, and polishing formal essays.

R&C is also one of a very few teaching appointments in which GSIs may have responsibility for the design of the course as well as the learning activities and grading. Recognizing the complexity of the courses and the degree of responsibility the GSIs take on, this section of the Teaching Guide analyzes several aspects of R&C and offers some suggestions for designing and teaching them.

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What is R&C About?

The shape of a Reading and Composition (R&C) course is influenced by multiple agents: the College of Letters and Science (L&S), which created the requirement; the department or program in which you are teaching; the individual instructor (and the intellectual project you design for the course); and the students whose learning needs your course must address. These influences are addressed in this section.

The Function of R&C Courses

Guidelines of the College of Letters and Science

Department Guidelines

GSI Interests: Intellectual Project and Teaching Experience

Students' Needs

The Function of R&C Courses

With one or two majors as exceptions, all undergraduates are required to take two semesters of the course (A and B), though some satisfy the A course requirement through Advanced Placement (AP) or other testing. Through these courses students move beyond high-school models for paper writing (five-paragraph opinion essays with a funnel introduction) to become skilled college writers mastering critical analysis, interpretive arguments, longer and more sophisticated papers, and some research skills.

It is intended that students take these courses, in A-B order, as freshmen and sophomores, to enhance their learning and performance in upper-division courses later on.

If you are devising a syllabus for an R&C course for the first time, you are likely to think the most about choosing readings and defining an overall narrative for your course. These are, of course, exciting and essential. As you draft or re-draft your syllabus, though, you also need to consider how your course fits into the larger picture within your department and the University.

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Guidelines of the College of Letters and Science

The College of Letters and Science (L&S) sets the basic policy for Reading and Composition courses. The Reading and Composition Curricular Goals and Guidelines (pdf), newly approved by L&S in 2011, is based on the Reading and Composition Committee report of 1989 (pdf), which proposed the R&C requirement and described its intended practices and objectives.

The Reading and Composition Curricular Goals and Guidelines (pdf) is an essential document for R&C GSIs to be familiar with, though the 1989 report remains important. In relation to the 1989 report, the 2011 Goals and Guidelines document gives more explicit information about the differences between the first-semester and second-semester courses, updates the guidelines for reading lists, and gives new rules about the nature and due date of the final paper or project for the courses. **GSIs should become familiar with it as they prepare to teach an R&C course.**

The following are highlights from the 1989 report (pdf) and discuss a number of principles underpinning design and instruction in R&C courses.

- The aim of A and B is to improve the student's ability to write clearly, effectively, and accurately about subjects of intellectual complexity.
- Such writing — and the kinds of thinking that make such writing possible — is both a practical necessity for college students and a significant step in the life of the mind generally.
- The major emphasis of A and B will be on practicing the enabling skills of writing and reading, both in class and out of class.
- A and B should be designed to encourage students to write frequently and attentively enough for them to experience how writing extends thought.
- Through frequent writing, class discussions, and conferences, A and B will introduce relatively inexperienced writers to the process, pleasure, and discipline of composing.

A number of **skills** are advanced as essential to students' effective writing and reading:

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- Recognizing in their reading, and being able to express in their writing, a full and balanced presentation of ideas.
- Moving from concrete to abstract and vice versa; engaging the mind of the reader and involving the reader progressively in the development of the writer's idea.
- Practicing the distinction between observation and inference; replacing unsubstantiated opinionating with original perception sustained by pertinent evidence. This also trains students to establish increasing intellectual independence.
- Practicing rewriting: discovering ways to open up and clarify what is in their idea; knowing how to spend time reworking an idea until they make it their own — until, that is, they establish authority over it.
- Practicing rereading: cultivating the expectation, parallel with that of rewriting, that texts other than their own will provide a fullness of understanding and that students will discover and appreciate new dimensions of that fullness through rereading.

In addition to L&S, several other stakeholders are involved in the shape of an R&C course.

Department Guidelines

Each teaching unit offering R&C courses will express its own disciplinary orientation in the guidelines it generates for choosing readings. The diversity in orientations among disciplines enriches students' choices in fulfilling a course requirement; it also allows the participating departments an opportunity to introduce undergraduates to their disciplines.

Many of the larger R&C teaching units have written guidelines. Some do not have formal documents but will give helpful examples and offer comments on your proposal. If your department has a 300-level pedagogy course for R&C GSIs, that is the ideal source of this information. Consult with the instructor of record, the faculty member serving as GSI coordinator, the pedagogy instructor, or other R&C instructors in your teaching unit for guidelines and guidance. Further, the student affairs officer in your department may have a file of past R&C syllabi to look at.

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GSI Interests: Intellectual Project and Teaching Experience

The intellectual project you design is an exciting aspect of teaching an R&C course: leading a group of students through a set of visual or verbal "texts" you have already enjoyed, helping them make new conceptual connections. It's an important part of your formation as an academic professional, as well, and in that sense it's helpful to think of your job as translating your intellectual interests into a sequence of learning experiences for students. The payoff for students is that your enthusiasm for the material makes your teaching especially interesting and effective.

Some GSIs dislike guidelines that require them to teach genres and works that are outside their research specialties and would rather keep to what motivates them the most. It's important to remember, however, that your intellectual and professional formation are constantly enriched through teaching less familiar or perhaps (to you) less scintillating works. Think ahead to the teaching repertoire you will be able to show off to prospective employers when entering the job market. Many institutions may be interested in your range as well as your depth.

Students' Needs

GSIs teaching R&C need to keep in mind that Reading and Composition courses are, above all, courses that teach undergraduates important skills of college-level writing, critical reading, and, in the case of 1B, incorporating research into writing. While your own interests may help define the topic and texts for the course, you must make sure that the course is helping all your students develop the academic skills they need to succeed at Berkeley.

Coming from a variety of backgrounds, students will display a wide variety of assumptions and skill levels. As R&C instructors we need to address both — what the students initially believe about adequate reading and good writing, and their actual practices as they go about developing them.

Department of English   **University of California**

6 November 1989

To: Professor Anthony Newcomb
          Chair, Executive Committee
          College of Letters and Sciences

From: Professor Donald McQuade
          Chair,
          Reading and Composition Committee
          College of Letters and Science

Subject: Proposed Revision of the Reading and Composition Requirement
          in the College of Letters and Science

I am writing on behalf of my colleagues on the Reading and Composition
Committee. They are:

Professor Robert Brentano (Department of History)
Professor Mitchell Breitwieser (Dean, Freshman and Sophomore Studies)
Professor Anthony Cascardi (Department of Comparative Literature)
Professor Seymour Chatman (Department of Rhetoric)
Professor Barbara Christian (Department of Afro-American Studies)
Professor Louise Clubb (Dean of Humanities)
Professor Edgar Knobloch (Department of Physics)
Professor Warren Travis (Department of Dramatic Art)
Professor B.A. Van Nooten (Department of South and Southeast Asian
          Studies)

I would also like to acknowledge the members of the 1988-89 Reading and
Composition Committee who worked on the original draft of this proposal. They
are:
Professor Carol Christ (then Dean of Humanities)
Professor J.T. Monroe (Department of Comparative Literature)
Professor Margaret Wilkerson (Department of Afro-American Studies)

Background:

As you know, the Reading and Composition Committee has spent the past eighteen
months engaged in a thorough review of the current reading and composition
requirement in the College of Letters and Science. The Committee met frequently
during this period, and it also has consulted regularly with faculty in the eleven
programs and departments in L & S that offer courses that satisfy the R & C

requirement. In addition, the Committee conducted a broad-ranging survey of students currently enrolled in 1A/1B as well as drew on the information gleaned from both a recent campus-wide survey of faculty attitudes toward and instructional uses of writing and a similarly-focused survey of the June 1988 graduating class.

The Committee discussed four options:
1) abolish the requirement;
2) modify the requirement; that is, to reduce the requirement from eight to six or four-units;
3) redistribute the requirement over the lower and/or upper division;
4) reconceptualize the courses.

After extensive consultation and discussion, we decided that the third and the fourth options were best.

The Committee's Proposal:

The Committee's proposal is predicated on the assumption that students have satisfied the University-wide Subject A requirement, either by examination or by course work. The Reading and Composition Committee reaffirms the standards established by the Subject A requirement as well as the importance of intensive instruction in basic writing provided by the campus' Subject A Program for those students who do not satisfy those standards as they enter the University.

The integration of reading and writing in these courses should be driven by the premise that good writing is best developed in response to careful reading, and in recognition of the fact that the task of writing depends on prior interpretive and analytical tasks. In strengthening the coherence of the sequence, the work of reading done in 1B would build in depth and sophistication on the interpretive and analytical skills introduced in 1A, so that students would learn over the sequence how to adopt a series of increasingly complex stances with regard to the texts they read.

The Committee also assumes that 1A/1B will be taken in sequence.

We unanimously recommend the Executive Committee's approval of the following revisions in the current R & C requirement.

The 1A Requirement:

1) that 1A normally be defined as a four-unit course to be taken during the Freshman year requiring the composition of a series of short essays.

Writing: Faculty should assign a minimum of thirty-two pages of writing, to be divided among a number of short essays (2-4 typewritten pages). Students will be required to revise at least three of these essays. Faculty should normally assign a short essay at the beginning of the semester to assess the students' writing skills. The course will stress the recursive nature of writing and reading—as well as their instruction—and will offer students frequent practice in a variety of forms of discourse leading toward exposition and argumentation in common standard English, which should constitute the majority of the writing done for the course. The course will aim at continuing to develop the students' practical fluency with

sentence, paragraph, and thesis-development skills but with increasingly complex applications.

   Reading: Because learning to write cannot be done outside of a context of reading, frequent practice in both writing and reading should be the focus of 1A. Readings should be of two kinds: 1) published materials, of both a literary and non-literary character, including expository or argumentative works not unlike the sort that students are asked to read and write during their college careers; and 2) essays produced by students themselves. The inclusion of the latter is particularly important, to award the student essay the dignity of being included in the community of texts, and to demonstrate that the same kinds of issues—of audience, of organization, of style, etc.—are faced by student and professional writers alike.

   Among published material, a minimum of five works should be assigned, at least two of which should be book length. At least two of these works should be written originally in English. Reading should be chosen to facilitate student writing projects: for example, they might focus on issues of student interest, provide particularly good examples of writing skill, represent literary experiences which are valuable in their own right, or integrate reading and writing in any number of other, pedagogically-sound ways.

   The instructors of these courses are encouraged to construct focused reading lists that introduce students to a coherent area of intellectual inquiry.

   Departmental Course Chairs or Departmental Reading and Composition Coordinators should ensure that the requirements for each of their 1A courses are consistent with those outlined in this proposal, and that all course material is intellectually-accessible to lower-division students without prior work in the discipline. These Chairs or Coordinators should meet periodically to discus consistency in course standards and expectations.

The 1B Requirement:

   2) that 1B normally be defined as a four-unit course to be taken during the Sophomore year requiring less frequent longer essays with revision to be practiced throughout the semester.

   Writing: Faculty would normally assign a short essay (approximately three typewritten pages) to assess the students' writing skills at the beginning of the semester and to refresh the students' recollections of the skills practiced in 1A. Faculty would then assign two progressively-longer essays (totalling at least 16 typewritten pages), with at least an equal number of pages of preliminary drafting and revising. The course will stress the recursive nature of writing and reading—as well as their instruction—and will aim at developing the students' practical fluency with larger expository and argumentative units and at incorporating research results into argumentation.

   Reading: Because learning to write cannot be done outside of a context of reading, frequent practice in both writing and reading should be the focus of 1B. Readings should be of two kinds: 1) published materials, of both a literary and non-literary character, including expository or argumentative essays not unlike the sort

that students are asked to read and write during their college careers; and 2) essays produced by students themselves. The inclusion of the latter is particularly important, to award the student essay the dignity of being included in the community oftexts, and to demonstrate that the same kinds of issues—of audience, of organization, of style, etc.—are faced by student and professional writers alike.

Among published material, a minimum of five works should be assigned, at least two of which should be book length. At least two of these works should be written originally in English. Reading should be chosen to facilitate student writing projects: for example, they might focus on issues of student interest, provide particularly good examples of writing skill, represent literary experiences which are valuable in their own right, or integrate reading and writing in any number of other, pedagogically-sound ways.

The instructors of these courses are encouraged to construct focused reading lists that introduce students to a coherent area of intellectual inquiry.

Departmental Course Chairs or Departmental Reading and Composition Coordinators should ensure that the requirements for each of their 1B courses are consistent with those outlined in this proposal, and that all course material is intellectually-accessible to lower-division students without prior work in the discipline. These Chairs or Coordinators should meet periodically to discus consistency in course standards and expectations.

3) that Departments be encouraged to eliminate the content-specifications now imposed on 1A and 1B, with the proviso that the course content must be readily accessible to lower division students without preliminary experience of the discipline.

In effect, 1A and 1B will not be distinguished by topic or by kind of reading. The Committee here envisions focused seminars on intellectually coherent and specific topics of interest to the instructor and students rather than the broadly inclusive courses currently being offered. The departments will be expected to review regularly individual seminar offerings for their appropriateness to the revised R & C requirement as well as for their likelihood of attracting full enrollment.

4) that any faculty-led seminar in those departments not currently teaching 1A/1B that satisfies the above criteria would qualify to be included on a general list of freshman and sophomore seminars satisfying the Reading and Composition requirement. As is the case in any writing course, the instructor is expected to pay careful and sustained attention to student writing and to write a general comment on the final draft of each essay as a whole and such specific marginal notations as may be necessary as well as to return each essay before the next writing assignment is due.

The Advantages of the Proposed Changes:

The Committee envisions no major disadvantages to such a redefinition of 1A and 1B. We have thought this idea through at length, debated its merits, and concluded that it has many advantages over the present situation.

On the practical level, it would help with the problem of "the float." When the Berkeley campus shifted in 1983-84 from a quarter to a semester schedule, it also changed the Reading and Composition requirement from two quarters to two semesters. The practical consequence was that the College of Letters and Science immediately was unable to provide places for approximately one-third of the students required to complete the 1A/1B sequence. In the intervening years, this "float" of students unable to enroll for 1A/1B has swollen to nearly two thousand. (The infusion of special allocations during the spring 1988 and spring 1989 semesters has reduced the float to approximately one thousand students.) Our plan will help deal with the "float" because, during the first year that the new requirement is in place, new freshmen would each be seeking only one section of composition (approx. 4000 attempted enrollments rather than 8000), which would provide L & S with the opportunity to eliminate the float. Demand would return to the present full level during the second year and thereafter. In addition, any 1A or 1B courses coming from non-R&C departments—however few or many they might be—would satisfy the requirement for some number of students without drawing on the College's R & C budget.

In order to project the impact of the current proposal on the 1A/1B "float," let us consider the following hypothetical situation. Let us imagine, for example, that the budget for Reading and Composition courses in the College of Letters and Science is approximately $ 1.5 million annually. If the current proposal were approved for implemtation in the fall 1990 semester, the costs of the R & C courses over the next few years would be as follows:

1989/90	Fall 1990/Spring 1991	Fall 1991/Spring 1992 Years	Subsequent
Entering students required to take 1A (cost ca. $750,000)	Entering students required to take 1A (cost ca. $750,000)	Entering students required to take 1A (cost ca. $750,000)	Same costs as in '91/'92
Entering students required to take 1B (cost ca. $750,000)		Fall 1990 Freshmen required to take 1B as sophomores (cost ca. $750,000)	
Budget for '89/'90 $1,500,000	Budget needed for 90-91 $750,000	Budget needed for '91-92 $1,500,000	Later years $1,500,000

As this example illustrates, there would be a one-time saving of approximately $750,000 in 1990/91, which would be targeted at eliminating the backlog of students who are required—but who have not yet satisfied—the 1A/1B requirement.

However, the Committee considers this benefit to be an incidental advantage rather than the central strength of the plan. One of the major problems with the Reading and Composition requirement as it currently stands is that there is no meaningful sequencing of the two courses. 1B does not now build on the skills practiced in 1A. 1A and 1B in their new forms would be more closely tied to what composition theory has identified as the essence of teaching writing—frequent practice with meaningful revision, and a coherent sequence of tasks moving from smaller to larger and from simpler to more complex prose units as well as from

experience-based to abstract discourse—both within each course and between the two courses.

The redefined courses would offer the students a deeper and more intensive experience of one area covered by the relevant departmental discipline, thereby eluding the blandness and inertness that currently characterize too many 1A and 1B sections, through no fault of the instructors. The current course descriptions for 1A and 1B point toward a specious core curriculum breadth. There is ample testimony to support the conclusion that the current course configurations discourage innovative participation in the reading and composition courses by faculty outside current R & C departments and programs. Finally, the survey of students currently enrolled in 1B suggests that many students regard the courses in their current formulation principally as institutional impositions on their already crowded schedules, requirements that impede rather than enable lower-division students both to make progress toward declaring a major and to explore areas in which they will not major. The students would catch fire from the instructors' enthusiasm, the course would have a more intricate and credible integrity, and the sequence of writing assignments would have the continuity and development along a single line that characterizes writing in university courses at large, for which 1A and 1B serve as preparation.

The infrequency of seminars in the lower division has been identified as one of the campus's major curricular weaknesses: enhancing the intellectual reputability of the two seminar-format courses they *do* take would address this problem in an important, if not entirely sufficient way. At the same time, such seminars really reflecting the character of a department's course offerings would allow freshmen and sophomores to sample the natures of disciplines, whether for the sake of breadth outside the major, for the sake of reaching an informed conclusion in choosing a major, or for the sake of making progress within a major.

The Committee hopes, finally, that this redefinition of the requirement would encourage more ladder-faculty to become interested in teaching 1A and 1B, both within the current R & C departments and in the other departments as a result of the greater topical freedom permitted the instructor. Were there to be more interest inspired among the faculty in departments not currently offering 1A and 1B, by promotion and word-of-mouth, the teaching of writing would expand even further beyond its current boundaries, and to percolate into the Berkeley curriculum as a whole. This plan is of course only a first and enabling step toward such an end.

Implementing the Plan:

If the College were to adopt this new conception of 1A-1B, implementation of the plan would require two courses of action. Most immediately, the departments now teaching the courses would have to be convinced of the wisdom and virtue of the plan, and persuaded to adjust course descriptions and teaching resources to fit. Second, and in the longer run, contact would have to be made with departments not currently teaching 1A-1B, to interest them in the possibility of teaching writing seminars based on the material of their disciplines. The plan, however, would work even if, in the worst case, no new department responded favorably.

The R & C Committee would also like to note that it has consulted extensively with colleagues in the two-year colleges and examined thoroughly the question of the potential impact of its recommendations on articulation agreements between UCB and its "feeder" community colleges. Because there are no changes proposed in the amount of reading and writing expected of students who seek to transfer to the Berkeley campus, our Committee anticipates that there will be minimal impact on articulation agreements. The Committee is prepared to deal with whatever exceptions and/or problems might arise.

Principles to Underpin Curriculum Design and Course Instruction:

The aim of 1A and 1B is to improve the student's ability to write clearly, effectively, and accurately about subjects of intellectual complexity, on the assumption that such writing—and the kinds of thinking that make such writing possible—is both a practical necessity for college students and a significant step in the life of the mind generally. The major emphasis of 1A and 1B will be on practicing the enabling skills of writing and reading, both in class and out of class. By exploring the possibilities inherent in different forms of writing, students will learn how the choice of a different form helps clarify their subject and their purpose as writers. Depending on their experience, students may need initially to practice in 1A with forms that depend upon concrete language (descriptive and narrative writing, for example), but these forms will serve to introduce other kinds of writing better suited to abstraction and analysis.

Principles that underpin the proposed revisions:

* 1A and 1B should be designed to encourage students to write frequently and attentively enough for them to experience how writing extends thought. Through frequent writing, class discussions, and conferences, 1A and 1B will introduce relatively inexperienced writers to the process, pleasure, and discipline of composing. Because frequent practice in writing and reading is the focus of 1A and 1B, work produced by the students should serve as the primary text.

* There are a number of skills that are essential to effective writing and reading. These skills are learned by and for writing, and they are extended by and for reading. Among these skills are:

* establishing increasing authority over whole structures. For writers, this means expressing a full and balanced presentation of their ideas. For readers, this means needing—for enjoying, comprehending, and for remembering—to sense the relation of the parts to the whole. To recognize readily and to identify the kinds of order students encounter when they read is to read expertly and to enjoy the intellectual satisfactions of an expert.

* moving from the concrete to the abstract and vice versa. Writers control the interplay of the abstract and the concrete to engage the mind of the reader and to involve the reader progressively in the development of the writer's idea. In principle, what students practice as writers they heed as readers. They recognize the move from the abstract to the concrete not only in unfolding ideas but also in establishing patterns of analysis and evaluating the evidence they propose for their readings and analyses.

* practicing the distinction between observation and inference. This skill trains writers and readers to replace fruitless opinionating with original perception sustained by pertinent evidence; it also trains them to establish increasing intellectual independence.

* practicing rewriting. Writers discover in rewriting a way to open up and to clarify what is in their idea. Rewriting offers writers the opportunity to understand and to explain the fullness of their ideas. Habitual rewriting means that students know how to spend time working on an idea until they make it their own, until, that is, they establish authority over it.

* practicing rereading. (Rereading in this sense parallels rewriting.) Readers—with a similar appetite for the fullness and understanding that rewriting provides—come to expect such fullness and understanding from texts other than their own, and they reread these texts to discover and appreciate new dimensions of that fullness.

Practicing these skills regularly will result in prolific writing and reading marked by the student's ability to:

* control grammar by writing at will sentences suitable and correct;

* limit a topic, discover an idea about it, and formulate a thesis;

* develop and organize the whole essay through related paragraphs that exhibit the order of the parts;

* unfold the parts of the essay through outlining or writing rough drafts;

* support the logic of the thesis by subordinating some parts and expanding others;

* practice conventional structures and patterns in support of the developing thesis;

* integrate secondary sources in an essay by paraphrase, summary, and quotation as well as documentation of sources

The recent survey of UCB faculty suggests that the vast majority of faculty here readily agree that many, if not most, of their students need to improve their abilities to read, think, and write effectively. Articulating an idea and then developing it in writing are two of the most frustrating obstacles to effective and productive performance for many college students, and especially for those who in their first and second years of college must also adjust to the rigorous demands of substantive intellectual work in a variety of disciplines before they settle into the more specialized focus of their major field of study. First- and second-year students often complain that it takes them an unendurably-long time to think of "something to say" so that they can begin writing and that once they have finally begun they

discouragingly "run out of things to say" all too quickly. This problem is exacerbated by the current superficial breadth of many 1A and 1B reading lists. For many students, the act of thinking in writing within the special language of a particular discipline becomes a physically and mentally exhausting cycle of getting started and getting stuck.

A large part of the problem all students face when trying to express themselves fluently and intelligently is not how they think or how they write, but rather how they handle the continuous interplay between both activities while composing. If their tendency is to wait patiently for ideas to come to them fully expressed and "paper ready," they will sooner or later come to view writing as a kind of mental torture. Given such circumstances, they may never get started. On the other hand, if their tendency is to slap down whatever ideas come into their heads without paying attention to the structural patterns that can be generated from these ideas, then their writing will always remain haphazard and undeveloped—a form of mental torture for the faculty who read what they have written.

In their overall design and in their instructional activities, 1A and 1B should provide frequent occasions for students to practice the interconnectedness of reading, thinking, and writing. Thinking is, after all, a basic need—"reason's need." And writing, too, is a need—a powerful intellectual, humanistic, social, and professional one. In this respect, an important instructional principle for 1A and 1B can be stated quite simply: students think most rigorously and productively when they make the effort to express themselves in writing, and they write most fluently and maturely when they recognize the underlying critical and rhetorical patterns in their thinking. In this sense, thinking and writing can be considered interrelated mental processes that stimulate and reinforce each other. So closely intertwined are these two indispensable human activities that, as one well-known writer and educator has observed, "Learning to write is learning to think."

Students who like to see solid results after spending a reasonable amount of time working at reading and writing need to become conscious of how the interaction of reading, thinking, speaking, and writing can remarkably improve their intellectual motivation and momentum. They need to learn, for example, how they can extend and develop their ideas by seeing how small segments of writing contain the basis of larger organizational units. They need to recognize how a pattern of thought can lead to an essay structure, how single words and metaphors can often shape an entire piece of writing. This is not to suggest that thinking in writing is the only means to reinforce the spirited sense of intellectual inquiry that defines the primary work of a university. (Speech, for example, offers one useful alternative.) But thinking in writing is the most enduring means to strengthen the sense of intellectual community that distinguishes a university such as U C Berkeley. By creating a newly-invigorated context for 1A and 1B, the Reading and Composition Committee hopes not only to encourage faculty and students to consider the individual and collective benefits of thinking in writing in a variety of disciplines but also to celebrate the importance of thinking in writing as a central, rather than a marginal, activity in the life of this university.

Graduate Student Instructor
TEACHING & RESOURCE CENTER

Teaching Guide for GSIs

Reading and Composition Curricular Goals and Guidelines[1]

Curricular Goals

Reading and Composition (R&C) courses should be designed to encourage students to write frequently and attentively enough for them to experience how writing extends thought. Through frequent writing, class discussions, and conferences, lA and 1B will introduce relatively inexperienced writers to the process, pleasure, and discipline of composing. Because frequent practice in writing and reading is the focus of the requirement, work produced by the students should serve as a primary text.

In their overall design and instructional activities, these courses should provide frequent occasions for students to practice the interconnectedness of reading, thinking, and writing.

There are a number of skills that are essential to effective writing and reading. These skills are learned by and for writing, and they are extended by and for reading. They include:

- *Establishing increasing authority over whole structures*. For writers, this means expressing a full and balanced presentation of their ideas. For readers, this means comprehending the relation of the parts to the whole.
- *Moving from the concrete to the abstract and vice versa*. Writers control the interplay of the abstract and the concrete to engage the mind of the reader and to involve the reader progressively in the development of the writer's idea. In principle, what students practice as writers they heed as readers. They recognize the move from the abstract to the concrete not only in unfolding ideas but also in establishing patterns of analysis and evaluating the evidence they propose for their readings and analyses.
- *Practicing the distinction between observation and inference*. This skill trains writers and readers to replace fruitless opinionating with original perception sustained by pertinent evidence; it also trains them to establish increasing intellectual independence.

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[1] This document was excerpted and revised from the November 6, 1989 R&C Guidelines.

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- *Practicing rewriting*. Writers discover in rewriting a way to open up and to clarify what is in their idea. Rewriting offers writers the opportunity to understand and to explain the fullness of their ideas. Habitual rewriting means that students know how to spend time working on an idea until they make it their own, until, that is, they establish authority over it.
- *Practicing rereading*. (Rereading in this sense parallels rewriting.) Readers with a similar appetite for the fullness and understanding that rewriting provides come to expect such fullness and understanding from texts other than their own, and they reread these texts to discover and appreciate new dimensions of that fullness.

Guidelines

The first semester (typically 1A) requirement is normally defined as a four-unit course to be taken during the freshman year requiring the composition of a series of short essays. The second semester (typically 1B) requirement is normally defined as a four-unit course to be taken during the sophomore year requiring less frequent longer essays with revision to be practiced throughout the semester.

Writing

Both the first and the second semester courses stress writing and revision, reading and rereading.

The first semester course offers students frequent practice in a variety of forms of discourse leading toward exposition and argumentation in common standard English. The course develops the students' fluency with sentence, paragraph, and thesis-development skills, with increasingly complex applications. A short essay is normally assigned at the beginning of the semester to assess the students' writing skills. Students will be assigned a minimum of 32 pages of writing, to be divided among a number of short essays (2-4 written pages). The students will be required to revise at least three of these essays.

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The second semester course aims at developing students' fluency in writing longer and more complex papers, with specific attention to the development of their research skills and their ability to incorporate source material effectively. A short essay (approximately three typewritten pages) is normally assigned at the beginning of the semester to assess the students' writing skills and to refresh students of the skills practiced in the first course. Students will then be assigned two progressively longer essays (totaling at least 16 typewritten pages), with at least an equal number of pages of preliminary drafting and revising.

Reading

Because learning to write cannot be done outside of a context of reading, frequent practice in both writing and reading should be the focus of both first and second semester courses. Readings should be of two kinds: 1) published materials, of both a literary and non-literary character, including expository or argumentative essays not unlike the sort that students are asked to read and write during their college careers; and 2) essays produced by students themselves. The instructors of these courses are encouraged to construct focused reading lists that introduce students to a coherent area of intellectual inquiry. Readings should be substantive, chosen to spark critical thinking and model the elaboration of complex critical arguments, as well as to facilitate student writing projects. For example, they might focus on issues of student interest, provide particularly good examples of writing skills, represent literary experiences that are valuable in their own right, or integrate reading and writing in any number of other pedagogically-sound ways. Texts chosen for R&C courses should be intellectually accessible to lower-division students without prior work in the discipline, as well as complex enough to invite and reward rereading in the spirit of the R&C curricular goals.

Final Assessment

The final exam requirement for R&C courses should be satisfied through an alternative form of assessment (i.e. paper, project, portfolio) that demonstrates the students' mastery of the art of writing and revision in relation to the specific reading requirements of the course. This alternative form of assessment should be

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due no earlier than the first day of the final exam week, as required by the academic senate. The paper, project or portfolio may be included in the minimum 32 pages of writing stipulated above.

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Course Design for R&C

Many of us begin our teaching by imitating the activities and formats we experienced as students. We thoughtfully plan a selection of readings and construct an arc for the course, we draft a course description for our department and our class syllabus, and we get ready to respond to whatever issues come up in the students' writing. And it works.

Over time, experienced GSIs recognize that they can be more strategic in designing a course — that is, they know more about students in general and can count on addressing certain kinds of challenges their students will face as readers, thinkers, and writers. Planning a course becomes much more about what the students know and can do at the beginning of an R&C course and what they need to know and do by the end of the course. The design process recommended here involves three major components: course learning objectives; learning activities and assignments that will help students achieve those learning objectives; and evaluation of student learning. Additional logistics arise from these.

- Establish Learning Objectives
- Design Learning Activities
- Plan Assessments of Student Learning
- Gather Your Resources
- A Final Comment

Establish Learning Objectives
General Skill Objectives

To draft the overall learning objectives of the course, consider what students are capable of when they enter a reading and composition course, and what you want them to learn by the end of it. Here are some characteristics R&C teachers have seen, especially among freshmen, and basic suggestions for learning outcomes:

Writing: In high school, students may have been taught to write a five-paragraph opinion or descriptive essay or plot summary, often with a funnel introduction (for instance, a paper about *Hamlet* might begin, "From the dawn of time…"). Many have no idea how to "fill" five to ten pages. In the R&C series, they need to learn to write

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convincing five- to ten-page argumentative/interpretive/analytical essays with reasoning based on evidence on a topic of appropriate scope. Their writing must feature clear, standard academic prose.

Reading: Students may tend initially to read in a decoding fashion, to comprehend content and act as consumers of texts. They largely rely on the teacher (or the Internet) to supply information about relevance or what aspects of a text to question. An R&C course can teach many more sophisticated techniques for working with readings: scanning for structure and relevance, analyzing parts of an argument, close reading, attending to voicing and rhetorical situation, and generally putting to use the intellectual resources necessary to actively engage with a variety of texts and genres.

Thinking: Many beginning students make generalizations and choose examples to "prove" them; they judge based on personal values; or they may look for "contradictions." We might formulate our objectives for students' thinking as being able to independently question, analyze, make connections, contextualize, and understand the terms of others.

Of course, students come to R&C courses with a broad range of skills and some are very well prepared by previous courses to move on to more sophisticated work. What follows from this is that an R&C GSI has to take into consideration the learning needs of that full range of students.

Specific Skill Objectives

Once you have drafted general learning objectives regarding reading, writing, and thinking, try analyzing them into specific objectives. A sample worksheet (doc) may help you visualize how to do this, or you may wish to formulate your objectives on this model: "Students will be able to skillfully apply the concept of strategic essentialism to analyze [an unfamiliar performance or object or text], and tell why their findings are significant." (The first page of the worksheet is filled out with some examples; the second page is blank for your use. Note that the level of analysis shown in the example on the first page gets perhaps more granular than

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you would find useful for planning. It is meant to demonstrate that a given objective may involve much more than one initially thinks.)

If you are teaching an R1B (or R5B) course, what skills do you want your students to gain in incorporating research results into their writing? Objectives could include distinguishing primary and secondary sources, or scholarly and popular sources; finding appropriate sources for projects in your field; analyzing and evaluating sources; writing an expository overview of a field; and arguing for a particular position on an issue in the field, among others.

Many GSIs assign a complete traditional research paper, which, in a research-intensive university, is actually far more challenging to freshmen and sophomores than it might seem. In the face of such a demanding assignment, student attention tends to focus on finding any sources at all (regardless of quality), formatting, and the end product, rather than on the learning goals. (The level of challenge can also tempt some students to plagiarize.)

By choosing learning goals for the research requirement before defining the product, you can tailor an assignment that gets students to develop particular skills or knowledge: The research assignment might focus on contrasting popular and scholarly treatments of a topic, developing an original analysis of primary sources, analyzing the major differences in two scholarly interpretations of a text or artifact, reading and writing research abstracts, or combing through several potential sources for a research project and evaluating them with relevance to a research question. A handout of alternative research assignments is available at the GSI Teaching & Resource Center.

Conceptual Objectives

In addition to the skills students need to develop, your course will require students to gain fluency with some conceptual knowledge, along with some factual knowledge so they can work with the concepts in concrete ways. What are some of the overarching concepts or metaphors of your course? You might think of these in terms of the overall narrative arc of your course. What are the important concepts and the connections you want students to be able to make with the content? The

answers to these questions can generate another set of learning objectives. You can also work on the overall idea for your course by explaining it to others, especially others outside your department. This will help you develop it more fully and break it down for undergraduates.

Try drawing a mind map or cluster diagram of the elements of the course to experiment with how the texts, objects, and ideas fit together. Initially, do this without reference to course chronology. The purpose of the cluster activity is to come up with a lot of connections you might not initially see just by looking at a list or schedule of readings.

Once you have generated a lot of conceptual threads, think about the order of materials and topics.

With the large conceptual and cognitive content in mind, along with a rough ordering of content, you can now etch out the instructional units of your course. In R&C, instructional units are usually based on the subset of texts or objects about which students write each of their formal papers (though departures from this pattern can be effective). Which concepts and information come into play in each unit? What are the optimal places to introduce or expand on important concepts? Translate this information into a more detailed chronology for the course.

Pull Together the Objectives

You can now begin mapping more specific skill-learning objectives onto the units of the course. What should students know and do by the end of the first unit? In their writing, for example, what features should be sound in their first paper? What other features do you want to see in their second paper? For example, it would be reasonable to focus on the quality of the thesis or main question in the first paper and the use of evidence or quoted material in the second. For more on this topic see Assignment Design and Sequencing.

*This is a practical discussion of learning objectives. GSIs are also encouraged to consult the College of Letters and Science's Reading and Composition Curricular Goals and Guidelines (pdf).

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Design Learning Activities

What activities — in class or as homework, in groups or as a class or on an individual basis — are best suited to achieving or demonstrating each specific objective? What assignments? At this level you are working out a strategy, not each day's activities. Discussions, debates, presentations, group work, online discussions, in-class writing, and out-of-class writing are the most usual for these courses, but you can also think about other activities as well. GSIs have often incorporated field-trip activities such as museum visits, film viewings, and theater performances into their courses. They design an overall strategy, or an instructional unit, to prepare students to get the most out of the field activity. (For more on activities that require financial support, see the GSI Center's Course Improvement Grants page.)

A frequent question in course design is how much reading to assign per week. It is often phrased as pages per week. This is overly simple; all pages are not equal. The question of how much reading to assign needs to be answered in terms of the **time** required for students to read and analyze in the ways you want them to, and the University has guidelines about this. Students are expected to spend three hours per week per unit credit for each course they are in. This includes class time. So for a four-unit R&C course that meets three hours per week (three hours in class, twelve overall), students have nine hours for their homework. For the readings, you can probably count on students taking two to three times as long to read and interact with a selection as you do. Think not just about the length of the readings, but about the level of difficulty or the degree of effort you want your students to go to with the readings. (It will take much more time and effort to get through ten pages of a philosophical treatise translated from eighteenth-century German than ten pages of a twentieth-century memoir originally written in English.) For more considerations about assigning readings, please see the Reading section of the Teaching Guide for GSIs.

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Plan Assessments of Student Learning

Now that you know the learning **objectives** and the kinds of **activities** that will move students toward those objectives, it's time to think about **assessing** student achievement of those objectives. These three major elements should fit well together. That is, grades are based on assignments for which the learning activities adequately prepare them, and grades accurately show how well students have reached the course learning objectives. (Students also sense the fairness and usefulness of this arrangement when it is well done.)

In R&C sections, the major, letter-graded assignments are usually formal papers and revisions of papers. The GSI evaluates the papers and revisions using a rubric, which is often given to students early in the semester so they can see the traits of the formal papers they are expected to produce. For more on grading and rubrics, see the Grading section of the Teaching Guide for GSIs. For examples of grading rubrics for R&C sections, contact the GSI Teaching & Resource Center directly. Experienced GSIs are also often happy to share theirs.

In addition, each class session's homework assignment and the quality of students' participation in class learning activities are usually evaluated. The grades for these elements of the course motivate students to commit effort to them, and they provide the GSI with immediate assessments of how well students are doing with course material from day to day

One More Useful Assessment

The course itself should be evaluated during the term: consider soliciting feedback about the effectiveness of teaching and learning activities, fairness of grading, resources students wish they had had earlier in the term, whether students are spending too much or too little time on the assignments, and so on. A formal midterm evaluation instrument takes some planning to design and implement, but it is well worth the time. Students provide valuable feedback on the teaching and learning that take place in the classroom. For more detailed information about running a midterm evaluation, see Conducting a Midterm Evaluation.

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Gather Your Resources

What resources will you need in order to make your course succeed? What will students need to use? Resources include the readings, but also handouts, reference works, research exercises, sample student papers, announcements, and electronic or library reserves and films for streaming or screening. If your course features a research assignment, it will be essential to assess the availability of key library or museum holdings for student use.

Readings can be made available in several formats (specific editions of books, photocopies, pdfs, etc.). Be aware that copyright issues apply to photocopying and to uploading other peoples' work to your course website — even in bCourses. A good place to start informing yourself about the policies that apply here is the UC Berkeley Center for Teaching and Learning page Using Copyright Materials in the Classroom.

A Final Comment

It would be very difficult to achieve the perfect all-around course design in your first round of planning, so you don't need to be discouraged if your course is not planned to a fine level of detail before the semester starts. You might want to create the overall sequence and strategy at first, and then refine a couple of aspects each time you teach, based on your notes about how well different segments or activities have worked in the past.

Now that you know the elements of your course, you are ready to create the course syllabus.

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The R&C Course Syllabus

Once you have settled on the design of your course, it's time to formulate your plan for students to read in the course syllabus. (If you have not yet worked out the fuller design of your course, see the page Course Design for R&C.) An R&C syllabus should have the following elements at least; your department may ask for other items not listed here.

In addition to the items detailed below, you might also wish to consult the UC Berkeley Center for Teaching and Learning web page Syllabus Design.

A few examples of syllabi for R&C courses, along with some evaluation criteria, are available from the page Sample Syllabi for R&C Courses. Your department may have others you can peruse.

Contact Information
- Course name, course control number (CCN), class meeting times, and location
- Your name, email address, office location and hours, mailbox location

Brief Course Description
The course description on a syllabus needs to be an accessible and accurate indication of the questions and materials students can expect to work with in your course. GSIs are often tempted to write course descriptions on the models of course descriptions they have favored as graduate students. These descriptions may be elegant to an academic, but to a freshman or sophomore they can look impenetrable and thus unattractive. Try to capture in your description a central curiosity, metaphor, or paradox in your course. Try to keep it short. Avoid scholarly jargon. If you find that a technical term or phrase is central to your description, provide a brief explanation of it and connect it with other terms that students are likely to find more immediately intuitive or interesting.

Learning Objectives
In a sentence or two, indicate the overarching learning goals for your course in terms of reading, writing, and content.

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Readings

- Give a detailed list of books to procure, with editions specified where relevant.
- If readings are provided in a hard-copy reader, tell students where they can purchase it.
- If readings will be available on the bCourses site or other websites, let students know.

Assignments and Grading

- Major assignments with due dates and their value toward final grade
- A grading rubric, or at least a brief statement of the qualities of a successful formal essay in your course
- Any specific requirements you have about the form in which student work is turned in, including things that save you time such as consistent, readable formatting or stapling pages together
- Statement of your policy on late papers or other assignments

Policies

This section should at least include policies on class participation, diversity of views, accommodations for students registered with the Disabled Students Program, and plagiarism. For more information see Creating a Section Syllabus or Information Sheet.

Course Schedule

GSIs usually provide a chronological list or chart of the readings, activities, and major assignments for the course.

It can be useful to stipulate that this schedule is subject to revision, in case you find you need to make adjustments partway through the semester. If you do revise the schedule, give students the revised schedule as early as possible. They use this information to coordinate their work for all their courses.

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Sample Syllabi for R&C Courses

GSIs sometimes cultivate ideas for their syllabi by reading other instructors' syllabi. As you view the following sample syllabi, you might want to evaluate their effectiveness according to a variety of criteria.

- What elements of the syllabus do you like or dislike? Why?
- Is the course narrative clear and compelling for undergraduate students (not just the instructor)?
- Are the activities described in the syllabus clearly related to learning objectives?
- Is the logistical and policy information sufficient, or are there details you would add?
- Does the tone of the document reflect the tone you want to adopt when interacting with students? Are there spots where the tone is uneven? Does it sound overly casual, or jargony, or punitive?
- Do the workload and the grading scheme seem reasonable for a four-unit course? (You can assume, under university policy, that a student should expect to spend three hours a week on a course per unit credit, including the time in the classroom.)
- What other questions or criteria would you use?

Sample Syllabi

Italian Studies R5B: Form, Function, Fiction (pdf)

English R1A: Caribbean Voices (pdf)

Comparative Literature R1B: Journeys, Otherworlds, Monsters (pdf)

More syllabi by GSIs can be found at the bCourses project site **R&C Teaching Resources for GSIs**. They are intended for use by UC Berkeley GSIs and are therefore password protected. To gain access to this site, ask a GSI who already has access to add you to the roster or email a request to the GSI Center and we will add you.

If you have developed a syllabus that has worked well and you would like to share it, please send or bring it in to the GSI Teaching & Resource Center.

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From General to Specific Objectives, with Assessment and Teaching-Learning Activities

General Learning Objective	Specific Objectives in Service of the General Objective	How to Assess This Kind of Learning	Teaching-learning Activities to Achieve This Learning Objective	Resources
Students become competent writers in the academic context	Students know expectations of academic writing at college level for this discipline	Students can evaluate sample essays in class Students can describe the main features of a successful paper for this course Students write good essays	Work through grading rubric for course essays in class Compare and contrast these criteria with high-school ones Students write reflective logs about their writing	Sample student essays Grading rubric Handout on genre of academic-interpretive argument

Students write well organized argumentative essays of 4, 6, and 8 pages	Read their essays, evaluate them based on a grading rubric	Dissect a well written student essay together in class Share rubric with students Discuss students' blocks to writing at greater length	Sample student essays Grading rubric Relationship with students
Students effectively write both abstractly about ideas and concretely about details in a coherent unity	Assess detailed analysis passages in their papers Assess connections between analysis sections and overarching assertions	Practice detailed analysis in class in several ways Group exercise moving from large-scale assertion to details and back to large-scale idea	Primary texts to analyze and interpret Motivating topic suggestions Diagramming technique
Students can review, revise, and edit their papers for content, correctness, and style	Student revision plans Students turn in intermediate drafts along with final	Train for, conduct peer editing using rubric or specific protocol/worksheet In-class team games using writing manual	Writing manual Rubric Worksheets/protocols Prepared games, prizes

	draft of each paper		
Students write in a process: generate ideas, plan a paper, test the argument with evidence, draft the paper, get feedback, and revise	View work produced at each point in the process Talk with each student during the process	Students talk to me in office hours Students show me outlines, notes, and drafts	Time in office hours Appointment slots Assignment tool in bCourses

You might want to use the BLANK WORKSHEET on the next page for your own planning.

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General Learning Objective	Specific Objectives in Service of the General Objective	How to Assess This Kind of Learning	Teaching-learning Activities to Achieve This Learning Objective	Resources

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Engaged Reading

In-Class Activities
Productive Homework Activities

What are we asking students to do when we "assign" a text? Told to read *Heart of Darkness*, a lot of freshmen and sophomores will read it the same way they read a novel for pleasure, to follow the plot. A student who feels confused might resort to an Internet search to see what others say about it, or rely on you as the instructor to make sense of it. Reading in this way is largely a receptive process.

But what are you hoping your students will do as they read? What intellectual and affective processes are you anticipating? And do you want them to do the same thing with an Ishmael Reed poem as with an ethnography? It's essential to think through the kinds of goals, procedures, and strategies involved, and how these differ among different kinds of text. As scholars we all internalize some reading procedures, and we occasionally forget that our students may not yet have developed procedural knowledge. It helps them greatly when we make the procedures explicit to them.

In-Class Activities

When introducing a new text or genre, many GSIs provide a brief sample for students to analyze together in class. Instructors use these to demonstrate the kinds of questions they themselves ask when they analyze such a text or object. They direct questions to help students begin to articulate what's curious to them in the passage or object; they guide this discussion in the direction of some important tips that they have thought through beforehand. These tips the instructors compose as a handout, which they give to students to refer to in their first independent reading or analysis assignment.

It's helpful to return to these tips in class and expand on them throughout the semester. Keep the students focused on performing the procedures until they're second nature to them. You might give a workshop a bit later in the semester to consolidate the practices students have learned up to that point and link these

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practices to larger and more complex concerns and questioning patterns that interest well-informed people in your field.

For more on reading tips and making tip sheets for students, see: Developing a Reading Heuristic or Guide for Students

Productive Homework Activities

What kinds of activities teach students to interpret independently and to think of arguments about texts? We have several vague ways of describing what students need to do with a piece of writing. Read actively, take a questioning stance, probe for underlying assumptions, engage its complexity. While these work as guiding lights for some students, others need more concrete direction. Suggest activities such as the following:

- Mark the text: Use pencils and pens (highlighters tend to lead to purposeless and inarticulate recollections).
- Make notes: Use post-its, notebooks, or computers to record questions and thoughts as you read.
- Look up unfamiliar words and write synonyms for them in your text.
- Write down key words, metaphors, and concepts.
- Write a paragraph summary of the contents after you read a piece.
- Write down what the text seems to want to achieve, and list strategies used in the text to achieve its goals.
- Step back: How well does the text succeed, in the reader's opinion? Locate evidence and explain your rationale.

Guided activities of reading can be posed as a set of processes in steps, with the understanding that readers may jump back to previous steps at any time: noticing, posing questions, looking up unknowns, making inferences, making connections, challenging assumptions, constructing interpretations, negotiating among interpretations, and revising interpretations. For an example of a sequence of class

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activities for a specific text, please see the slide show What Does "Reading" Mean? (pdf).

For more information on this topic, please see:

Teaching Critical Reading

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Leading Generative Discussions

Most of the suggestions for discussion strategies offered in the Teaching Discussion Sections part of the Teaching Guide can be used directly or adapted for use in reading and composition courses. We strongly encourage you to explore that section.

Here we highlight a few ideas for discussions that GSIs have developed specifically for difficulties in teaching R&C. Each GSI received a Teaching Excellence Award; the award essays are posted and accessible through the Award-Winning GSI Teaching Ideas and the links below. (Once you are on that page, you can click the "reading and composition" tag on the right to see all articles and essays on that topic.) Some of the ideas are pre-planned, semester-long teaching strategies; others are interventions in an already running class.

It's good to read through examples such as these from time to time and choose something to implement in your class. Students usually slump toward the sixth week of the term and could use a change of pace. If you teach on a Monday morning, plan frequent activities such as group work to wake students up and keep the class time useful for them.

Free in Theory: Teaching Gender in Historical Perspective
Gina Zupsich, French

Gina taught an R&C course that worked with gender theory. Most of her students resisted reading theory both because the reading was daunting and because they didn't see the theory as relevant anymore — they assumed that the problems it addressed were all in the past. Gina designed a step-by-step, in-class activity to help students connect theory with their own time. Gina first led students to list gendered traits and actions (which are masculine, which feminine?) in two music videos they watched together. The next step was for the class to work with two pages of a theoretical text and translate the crux into their own idiom: "Gender is an unstable identity, constructed and reconstructed in history to appear natural." Gina then had the class compile their individual lists of gendered behaviors into a single T-chart on the board and discuss how students knew these elements were masculine or

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feminine. At this point the students were able to bring together their own cultural knowledge with theoretical concepts about gender. Their next task was a synthesizing activity: to view the videos again, locating moments in which the female performers' gender crossings were resolved back into a stable, "natural" binary. With mounting enthusiasm students analyzed these moments and demonstrated that, in fact, the theory remained relevant in their own cultural milieu.

Making it Fun: Framing Literary Discussion as a Social Practice

James Ramey, Comparative Literature

James was concerned with structuring his R&C course as a social (as well as intellectual) opportunity for his students. James had his students set up semester-long reading groups, each group responsible to take on one of the major authors on the syllabus. These became known as the Shelley Group, the Camus group, and so on. They were assigned to meet for an hour outside class in an atmosphere traditionally conducive to literary discussion — a café or dormitory lounge — with members taking turns recording the minutes. These they sent to James, who posted them to the class's course website, and there students could read and respond to each other's literary conversations. Each group researched and gave a creative presentation on its chosen author the first day the class began working with that author. Students came to class with strong opinions about the texts and ready for lively debate; at the end of a class period people sometimes vowed to carry the discussion further online later in the evening. Though this system asked them for more off-campus work than most R&C courses, the students gave positive evaluations of it. Moreover, the system of framing literary discussion as a pleasurable social activity generated many long-term friendships among the students.

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Becoming a Better Socrates

Benjamin Yost, Rhetoric

In the Socratic method of teaching, the teacher teaches through a series of questions to the desired conclusion. Benjamin's experience using this model highlights a problem with it: students may resist the process and want the instructor to stop using it and simply tell them what the point is. Although Benjamin prepared discussion questions carefully in advance of each session in order to bring students into a live process of inquiry and interpretation, students reported in evaluations their impression that discussions often wandered. They also suggested that Benjamin make the class even more GSI-centric by taking control of discussion and telling them the "right" interpretation of a text. Obviously this is not what an R&C course is for.

Benjamin's Teaching Excellence Award essay describes three major changes he made to his style of Socratic teaching. First, he stopped the discussion a few minutes before the end of the period to pull together the lines of inquiry in the discussion, addressing students' misperception of wandering. Second, he found ways to show the value of students' contributions by connecting them to create a framework for discussion. Finally, he capitalized on moments of disagreement or uncertainty in discussions by slowing the pace to validate differences and have students explore the assumptions made in advancing different points of view.

"Is Ariel the Same as the Little Mermaid?"

Selby Schwartz, Comparative Literature

This essay could be subtitled "Performance as Interpretation." Class discussions are sometimes derailed because students resist the text at hand. Give them something imaginative to do with it, however, and they flourish. Selby found her students struggling with character motivations and plot turns in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*; they seemed on the verge of dismissing the play, mocking it and "dispelling its magic for themselves." The title of Selby's TEA essay ("Is Ariel the Same as the Little Mermaid?") was one student's ironic jab at the play. Rather than ignoring this facile

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dismissal, Selby divided them into groups and gave them an interesting, multimodal task to do together. Each group received a few oddments as props, were sent out of the classroom for twenty minutes to prepare to stage one episode from the play, and were invited back in to perform the play before the class. The activity produced intense student participation, of course, but it also motivated some amazing student papers: "The stagings sparked interest in Caliban's use of language, in critiques of Prospero as an intellectual, ineffective ruler, in Ariel and Miranda's filial relationships to Prospero, and in the overlap between comedy and monstrosity."

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Teaching Composition Skills

This page provides a bit of background on ways composition experts have approached the teaching of writing. It then advocates an overall strategy for teaching writing that addresses students' motivation to improve their writing.

A Brief Introduction to Composition Pedagogy

In the mid-twentieth century the dominant approach to writing pedagogy focused on the written product. The practice required a single, final draft, comprehensive error correction by the teacher on that draft, and summative comments justifying the grade assigned. The teaching of writing was consigned to English and Rhetoric departments; it was assumed that such courses could give students a generic or neutral set of good writing skills to apply to whatever writing tasks they might encounter in other disciplines.

This traditional approach had drawn stiff critique by the 1970s and 1980s. The emphasis on eliminating error seemed adequate for students who were already skilled writers, but instructors working with students who made a lot of errors in Standard Written English found themselves pouring an excessive amount of time into voluminous markings and comments that students were too overwhelmed to learn from. Improvement from one assignment to the next was minimal.

Two important approaches have surfaced in the last few decades. One is process pedagogy, the other Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and the closely related movement Writing In the Disciplines (WID).

Process pedagogy emphasizes that good writing is achieved not in a single pass but through a series of activities involving multiple writing sessions and student reflection. The process, as well as the product, is important. Students learn from feedback they receive on their work at different points in the writing process and learn to make improvements on their own. As UC Berkeley's College of Letters and Science guidelines put it, the R&C courses at UC Berkeley "emphasize the recursive nature of writing." Developing an idea, crafting a thesis, creating supporting arguments, writing a draft, review, revision, and proofreading — with trips back

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through these steps as needed — all receive instructional time, review, feedback, and practice in the composition course.

Some critics confuse process pedagogy with affective or experiential pedagogy, in which students focus on their own opinions and lives in their writing. While process pedagogy can involve personal reflection, it is not at all a necessary component or a typical endpoint. Process pedagogy need not exclude working with evidence, reasoning, and disciplinary knowledge.

WAC works from the insight that writing can deepen student learning in any discipline because writing provides opportunities to recall, explain, apply, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate material learned; WAC also supports teaching students to improve their writing in all courses, not just "composition" courses. Excellent resources for a range of learning-by-writing activities for all disciplines include Davis's *Tools for Teaching*, Bean's *Engaging Ideas*, and the chapters on student writing in McKeachie and Svinicki's *Teaching Tips*.

WID, an offshoot of WAC, challenges the assumption in the traditional composition teaching model that any single department (traditionally English) can train students in a generic or neutral set of writing skills. Anthropologists value different aspects of writing from art historians, for example, and the style and formats students learn in their English classes might not be appropriate for their majors in anthropology or art history. WID researchers investigate how writing happens differently in different disciplines, the genres and discourses particular to individual fields, and (most especially) how to orient students to the writing tasks native to a particular field.

At UC Berkeley, R&C courses are given in several different departments, reflecting the WID approach. GSIs in German, Comparative Literature, Anthropology, Art History, African American Studies, and several other departments teach their R&C students to read different sets of texts and to write somewhat different kinds of papers, though they share the goal that students learn to devise persuasive analytical and interpretive arguments based on evidence in their formal essays. WID contextualizes the process of writing within each discipline.

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References

The books listed below are available for use in the GSI Teaching & Resource Center, 301 Sproul Hall.

Bean, John C. (2011). *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*, 2nd edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Davis, Barbara Gross (2009). "Helping Students Write Better in All Courses." In Davis, *Tools for Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 305–13.

Gottschalk, Katherine and Keith Hjortshoj (2004). *The Elements of Teaching Writing: A Resource for Instructors in All Disciplines*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's.

McKeachie, Wilbert and Marilla Svinicki (2006). *Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers* (revised edition). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

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Writing in a Genre

What kind of paper do you want your students to produce?

It often helps students if you are explicit about the features and rhetorical situation of the papers you want them to write. Remember that in some entering students' experience, "academic essay" may call to mind a five-paragraph paper giving a summary or opinion. How can you bridge from their previous understanding of formal writing to the understanding they need to develop in your R&C course?

One strategy is to work with the idea of genres. The five-paragraph essay is useful in some contexts, but in college work students are expected to write in multiple academic genres. What are the expectations of the genre you are assigning? You can make your expectations explicit by working through a handout such as the one reproduced below and analyzing an example paper as a class, using the description on the handout. This one emphasizes developing an intellectual voice and framework.

The Genre of Academic Interpretive Argumentation

Purpose

The task of an academic interpretive argument is to articulate a good case for seeing a text, event, or artifact in a particular way, using the best available evidence and valid reasoning.

Although in the school context it may sometimes seem that students write papers merely for an instructor to grade, really good essays explore an interesting or puzzling question or idea that you can share with others.

Audience

Assume that your audience is as well-educated as you are, takes a different perspective, and wants to challenge their understanding by reading your essay. In other words, you are an intelligent person in conversation with another intelligent person through your writing, and the topic interests you both.

Assume that your audience has read the same primary text you have. You do not need to summarize the plot for your reader. Instead, refer to passages briefly —

just enough to let the reader know what passage you are analyzing — and focus on what you have to say about the passage.

Interpretive Argumentation

Most really interesting questions or problems are complex and can be approached in a variety of ways. Multiple approaches are possible and yield multiple ways to pose and answer questions. Good interpretive arguments explain why a topic represents a problem from a certain point of view. Identify your argument and from what perspective it makes sense of the problem or question you have chosen.

While there may be many ways to approach a question, all possible answers are not equally good. Some arguments are more plausible and validly presented than others, and some arguments may ignore important, relevant evidence. In developing your question or issue around a topic, you discipline yourself to select the most relevant evidence and to use valid logic, and you anticipate questions your readers might raise and address them as part of your presentation.

Any given essay in this genre does not necessarily reflect its author's permanent opinion on the topic; the essay is usually more like a snapshot of the author's best thinking at the time of the writing.

How would you describe the elements of an essay that make sense in your field?

It is also important to show students examples of essays or articles and analyze them closely for the traits you want (and don't want) to see in students' work. The full-class discussion and analysis can be followed up with a small-group activity analyzing another short paper, or with a homework assignment in which students compare their own paper or draft with the description of the genre.

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Assignment Design and Sequencing

Vary the Stakes in Writing Assignments

Give students opportunities to write low- and middle-stakes assignments in preparation for the high-stakes assignments (McKeachie and Svinicki, 192–204). Low-stakes assignments, such as minute papers or quick think-pieces in class, help students get in the habit of writing in order to sharpen their thinking. Middle-stakes writing, such as one-page homework assignments, extend the writing/thinking process and require students to refine and edit their work a bit. Middle-stakes writing assignments are also a good medium for practicing particular writing tasks, such as crafting their reading response in the form of a direct paragraph or a particular set of sentence structures. The final drafts of formal papers that instructors grade constitute the high-stakes assignments for R&C courses.

A Pedagogically Valid Sequence

Sequence the writing assignments so that early low- and middle-stakes writings help students accumulate a number of small but important skills or develop an idea by degrees before they take on larger projects. For example, you can ask students to address particular kinds of questions in their low- and middle-stakes assignments that build toward the more sophisticated thinking you want to see in the subsequent formal paper.

Be aware of the sophistication of what you are asking students to do on formal papers. Some students will experience enormous difficulty and frustration with their first paper if they have to compare two or three texts — it's just too much material to handle right away. Instead, arrange assignments so that, for example, Assignment 1 analyzes how a single brief text produces one particular effect, Assignment 2 compares and contrasts two different moments in a larger work such as a novel, and Assignment 3 gives a synthetic argument about a question that comes up in two or more different texts.

Teach Writing as a Process

Take time to teach students how to break down the process of writing, especially of more sophisticated or demanding papers. This is developmentally important for

many undergraduates. According to the 2020 UC Undergraduate Experience Survey, when asked about obstacles to their academic success, 31% of the respondents reported poor study behaviors such as waiting to the last minute, while 18% reported inadequate study skills such as not knowing how to start an assignment, how to organize it, or how to find help (frequently or all the time). Forty-six percent reported that they have occasionally, rarely, or never revised a paper extensively. (The 2020 survey was the most recent in which these questions were included.)

R&C instructors can address these problems in students' writing by teaching the steps of an assignment and providing intermediate due dates and feedback. Use homework assignments as venues for (for example) cultivating an idea, wrestling with a thesis, relating passages to the issue the thesis treats, and drafting an introduction. This also cuts down on plagiarism, since the students are showing you their work as they develop it toward a formal paper.

In devising research projects for second-semester R&C courses, lay out for students a series of steps and give them feedback on selected steps. Topic choice, a short annotated bibliography, an introduction and outline, and a first draft are points at which you might make comments and recommendations to students. If you make these steps into assignments that you grade, students will be less likely to bypass the process method in their work.

Reference

Available for use in the GSI Teaching & Resource Center, 301 Sproul Hall.

McKeachie, Wilbert and Marilla Svinicki (2006). *Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers* (revised edition). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

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Review and Revision

See also Drafts, Edits, Revisions in the Working with Student Writing section of the Teaching Guide for GSIs.

Some students mistakenly think that good writing is supposed to happen in a single sitting. Professional writers and academics learn otherwise. As one science professor has said, "A first draft confronts you with the nature of your own confusion on the subject. Revision gives you a chance to recover from the confusion" (quoted in Gottschalk and Hjortshoj, 64).
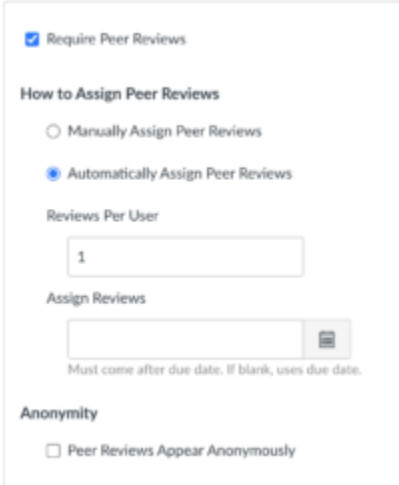
To produce good academic papers, students need to know how to revise drafts — and to differentiate this activity from mere proofreading. While proofreading eliminates surface errors, revision addresses structures of thought and presentation. One effective teaching tool for this is to show a page of a former student's marked-up first draft along with the next draft, with substantive changes. (Of course, you need permission from the student, preferably in writing, to use his or her work, and it's best to present it to the class anonymously.)

Explain to students how to evaluate papers based on a rubric that places global-level issues first (elements such as a thesis or overall argument; relationship among sections; overall coherence), mid-level issues next (such as paragraph construction), and small-scale issues last (word usage, sentence-level correctness, faulty parallels). Give them class time to practice on their own papers individually and on classmates' papers in peer review pairs. Then give them a few more minutes of class time to process the comments they have received.

An example of a peer review worksheet organized this way is available. There are two pages to the worksheet. The first is for the reviewer to write an evaluation of his or her partner's paper; the second is for the writer to sift through the reviewer's comments and make a revision plan. For an explanation of how to conduct an anonymous peer review activity, see Group Work: Techniques in the Teaching Discussion Sections portion of the Teaching Guide for GSIs.

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It is also possible to assign peer review through bCourses. When you create the Assignment in bCourses, you will find a Peer Review section at the bottom of the page. Check the box "Require Peer Reviews" and decide whether you want to assign reviewers manually or automatically. You can also choose to have the assignments sent to reviewers anonymously.

A fuller discussion of managing drafts, revisions, and proofreading appears in the Working with Student Writing section of the Teaching Guide for GSIs.

Reference

Available for use in the GSI Teaching & Resource Center, 301 Sproul Hall.

Gottschalk, Katherine and Keith Hjortshoj (2004). *The Elements of Teaching Writing: A Resource for Instructors in All Disciplines*. New York: Bedford/St. Martins. Available at the GSI Teaching & Resource Center.

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Typical Writing Problems and GSI Strategies

The following list of common writing issues was created by a group of GSIs who were teaching or preparing to teach R&C courses. What teaching and learning activities would you use to address the following issues? Where would you look for resources? It's a good idea to be on the lookout for materials that may help your students advance their skills in these areas.*

Simply recognizing these writing problems can be challenging, especially for GSIs who do their own confident writing by instinct and haven't had to explain the details until now.** Fortunately, the road from good writer to good writing instructor has been traveled by many GSIs who are eager to share their work with others.

R&C GSIs have developed a wealth of materials for their students to use in cultivating their skills as academic writers. The following teaching ideas and activities can serve as models for guiding a class through difficult processes. In each case, the GSI has designed the activity for a particular class and with that class's difficulties and content in mind. Feel free to modify them for your own teaching context.

Some of the materials can be found at the bCourses project site **R&C Teaching Resources for GSIs**. They are intended for use by UC Berkeley GSIs and are therefore password protected. To gain access to this site, please email a request to the GSI Center and we will add you.

If in the course of your teaching you have created learning activities that have succeeded for your students, consider posting them on the bCourses project site or sending them to the GSI Center. GSIs often expend a lot of time re-inventing materials that already exist, and they can benefit enormously from this kind of sharing.

Topic Choice

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Paper is organized around a topic that is too large to address meaningfully in the assigned page count, or around a kind of question that doesn't fit well in the course or the discipline.

- Making and Supporting an Argument
- To Risk an Argument: Tweeting towards Independent Theses in English R1B

Structure of Essay

If they have largely relied on the five-paragraph essay structure in the past, students will need instruction on how to deploy longer papers and make them cohesive. At this stage students may not be sure what a successful essay for an R&C course looks like — key features, quality of argument, audience address, use of evidence, and so on.

Thesis Statement

Students may need instruction on what counts as a productive thesis, how to develop one, and how to critique and improve one. The necessity of a specific thesis statement, at what point in the paper it should be placed, and what sort of question it answers can vary among disciplines.

- An Epic in Miniature: Collaborations on a Thesis
- Engaging with the Thesis Statement: Developing Metacognitive Skills
- To Risk an Argument: Tweeting towards Independent Theses in English R1B
- Thesis Statement Pretest (at bCourses project site **R&C Teaching Resources for GSIs** — for access contact the GSI Center)

Structured Argument

Essay either contains several somewhat unrelated observations or points, or contains several quotations or summaries strung together with a mere generalization, or doesn't deliver the kind of argument the introduction promises, or fails to provide transitions that link one part of the argument to the next. The argument may be weak or inadequately explored.

- Anatomy of an Essay

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- From Description to Analysis
- X-Axis, Y-Axis, and Zzzz's: Plotting Narrative at 8 AM
- Rhetorical Stases and Topoi (pdf)

Use of Quotations

An essay shows ineffective incorporation of quotations into the student's sentence structure or argument; it may include tangential bibliographic references (this is often done in an attempt to mimic the *appearance* of academic writing), or it presents quotations in place of the student's own analysis.

- Sources Into Evidence; or, Rethinking the Research Requirement in R&C Courses

Plagiarism

A paper uses someone else's ideas or words as if they were the student's own. Plagiarism can take the form of cutting and pasting bits of the writings of others and using them in one's paper without acknowledgement, turning in someone else's writing as one's own, or turning in a paper of one's own that was written for credit in a different class, without the permission of the instructor.

- Ethical Engagement: Practical Solutions for Addressing Plagiarism in the Writing Classroom

See also Plagiarism in the Academic Misconduct section of the Teaching Guide.

Paragraph Structure

Paragraph divisions may appear random, or paragraphs may lack topic sentences, or they may address too many points, or they may fail to link with the previous or following paragraphs in a logical way.

- What Makes a Good Paragraph? (at the bCourses project site **R&C Teaching Resources for GSIs**)

Appropriate Tone

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The tone is too colloquial, or the student has attempted to write so formally that the writing gets beyond his or her control.

- A People's History of the English Language: Dialect Communities

Unfinished Papers

The paper has several points that have not been adequately thought through or linked, or the order of presentation is not clear, or the paper needs thorough editing and proofreading.

Sentence Boundary Errors

There are frequent comma splices or run-on sentences, or confusingly combined complex/compound sentences, or sentence fragments. Punctuation mistakes are related to sentence boundary errors, not just "not knowing how to use a comma."

Incorrect Word Usage

Key words in the essay are misused; word choices lack precision; word choices have connotations the writer seems unaware of; language may not be gender-inclusive.

Incoherent Writing

Writing is so unclear that it's difficult to know what the point is, or it is difficult to discern whether the paper has a point because the ideas are incoherent or because the writing is incoherent.

Stigmatizing Errors

Essay includes errors that skillful writers fluent in Standard Written English would not make; for example, lack of subject-verb agreement, or lack of correct verb tense markers, or incorrect prepositions, or incorrectly used set-phrases.

Stylistic Errors

Essay includes consistent stylistic errors; for example, verb tense may shift unnecessarily between present and past; sentence rhythm may be choppy (all short sentences) or repetitive (same sentence structure used too often). The main claim

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may be buried in a prepositional phrase that's embedded in a dependent clause in a compound-complex, 80-word sentence.

- Critical Objectivity and Sentence Style Improvement

Notes

* Of course, many composition handbooks also give instruction and exercises (see Handbooks and Guides for Students). On this page we want to highlight ways UC Berkeley GSIs have addressed the specific population of UC Berkeley undergraduates.

** Materials are available for GSIs wanting a refresher on grammar to prepare them to discuss writing problems with students. For example, see Diane P. Freedman (1984), "Improving Sentences: Common Sentence Problems and Common Terms," chapter 7 in Fredric V. Bogel and Katherine Gottschalk, eds., *Teaching Prose: A Guide for Writing Instructors* (New York: Norton), 216–60. See also the Additional Resources page at the end of this section.

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Working with Multilingual Writers

This is a companion article to Working with the Writing of Multilingual ("ESL") Students: Frequently Asked Question**s** in the Working with Student Writing section of the Teaching Guide. Please read that article before this one.

GSIs often become concerned when they read student papers that don't seem to address the rhetorical intent of the assignment or that have pervasive linguistic errors. In R&C courses and in other writing-intensive courses for which improving student writing is a major learning objective, how can GSIs best work with multilingual students (also referred to as non-native [English] speakers [NNS])? What level of intervention is realistic or sustainable, given the limits of the GSI's job description and time?

Academic English

Sorting Error Types

Strategies for Improvement

Academic English
Like some native-English-speaking student writers, some NNS writers seem to miss the intent of an essay assignment because they are unfamiliar with academic language and writing conventions when they start at Cal. Students' expectations align with their previous education and experience.

Some expectations appear to be culturally defined. American English academic essays are said to follow a linear path of argumentation that privileges clarity for the reader. In some other literary traditions, the path may seem serpentine or recursive, and more demands may be put on the reader to make the connections and inferences. The best English academic writing tends toward conciseness and plain style; some other rhetorical traditions can appear more florid or allusive or lyrical. (It is possible, of course, to be lyrical as well as concise in English.)

Two kinds of learning activities that address rhetorical expectations and make those expectations clear to students include presenting contrasting passages that

treat the same topic in two different modes, and making full use of pre-writing, drafting, and revision.

In a Celtic Studies course, students were given three one-page excerpts about ancient chariot warfare. One was drawn from a popular book, the second from an introductory textbook for a college audience, and the third from a research article in archaeology. Students noticed similarities in factual content, but also differences in tone, treatment of evidence, citations, degree of analysis vs. description, and ease of reading. Directing close attention to **particular signal words or linguistic features**, especially ones that shape the tone or signal a specific turn of an argument, can help NNS students or any student learning how to write in an academic register. The gains of this exercise can be extended by having students try to write paragraphs in the first two modes and then describe their strategy for making each of the two paragraphs distinct. Having a few volunteers share their paragraphs and strategies with the class, along with other students' comments and your commentary and wrap-up, can further instill this lesson in students' way of writing and talking about writing.

In teaching pre-writing, drafting, and revision, you can give students permission to write initially in the forms and language that are easiest for them (pre-writing as thinking on paper), then to translate their forming ideas into an increasingly appropriate academic register in later stages. Once they have a draft or sketch of their paper, they can specifically reconsider the shape and linguistic register of their essay, making it better fit the expectations of academic writing.

For more information on orienting students to your expectations for academic essays, please see Writing in a Genre.

Sorting Error Types

Two pieces of advice up front: First, resist the urge to "correct" your students' writing. Students can learn to pick up linguistic **patterns**, but total correction is not effective for learning. (It also takes up far too much of a GSI's limited time.) Second, try to hold realistic expectations for progress. Becoming fluent in a foreign language and becoming proficient as a writer (even in one's first language) are both

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highly complex activities requiring many years of effort; in one semester students are likely to make significant gains only if they receive **targeted** instruction and feedback on a **limited** number of **significant** writing issues.

There are a couple of ways you can prepare yourself to give students effective feedback and well-focused instruction. One is to learn to apply a basic response "triage" for marking errors. The other is to target patterns of error that are more amenable to change within a short term.

Triage

Just as first-aid providers with limited resources sort (triage) injuries and treat the most life-threatening conditions first, before moving on to less serious problems, GSIs with limited time and energy can help students by addressing the gravest of their writing issues first and leaving other issues for later. Or, to put it positively, concentrate on the changes that will yield the biggest gains for the student's future academic writing. This approach is also recommended with native-English speaking students' writing. Composition specialists often recommend the following ranking of issues:

- Stigmatizing errors (the reader perceives the writer as an outsider on some level — e.g., social or professional — and becomes less likely to find the writing persuasive)
- Errors that interfere with coherence (the reader becomes confused or misunderstands the writer's point)
- Errors that may irritate readers but do not necessarily stigmatize or interfere with coherence (many instructor pet peeves fall into this category)
- Other errors that do not stigmatize, interfere with coherence, or irritate readers

When you run across a pattern of error, consider why it bothers you and which category it fits into before marking anything.

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Amenability to Correction

In addition to sorting out the severity of error patterns, consider which ones are relatively easy for students to change. (Early success with one pattern can help motivate work with other, more difficult patterns later on.) In general, patterns that are easier to change are rule-governed, are relatively easy to explain, and don't have a lot of exceptions.

Examples of errors that are amenable to change

(the writer can make quick, recognizable progress)

- Subject-verb agreement (plural with plural, singular with singular)
- Sentence structure and boundaries (basic subject-predicate pattern bounded by capital and period)
- Disciplinary terms or other very frequently used expressions about a topic
- Use of the wrong form of a word (noun-verb-adjective-adverb, e.g., ease-ease-easy-easily)

Examples of errors that are difficult to change

(student and instructor effort are not so quickly rewarded with obvious progress)

- Prepositions. These don't translate consistently from language to language and are notoriously difficult to learn for non-native English speakers (see Prepositions for Time, Place, and Introducing Objects). Tip: Often a verb is associated with a particular preposition, so it can be helpful to think of some preposition errors as phrasal verb errors (see Phrasal Verb Dictionary).
- Count/noncount nouns. "Chair," for example, is a count noun; more than one requires a plural, "chairs." "Furniture" is a noncount noun and can refer to any number of items. These often have to be learned rotely, one by one (see Count and Noncount Nouns).
- Absence or misuse of articles, i.e. **a**, **an**, **some**, and **the** (see **Using Articles**).
- Idioms. These expressions or set phrases have to be learned individually, by rote.

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Strategies for Improvement

Once you identify a pattern of error, you have a choice of strategies to recommend to students to learn to correct their writing.

- Suggest that students keep a log of errors or error patterns they are working on (just a few things at a time); this log can also function as a checklist for student proofreading. A student might make an entry, for example, of a particular sentence or group of phrases you marked on his or her paper where the error occurs.
- Suggest that students look up rules about a pattern you have marked, in a reliable reference work, and to apply the pattern correctly to the marked sentences.
- Suggest that students work with a tutor to master particular patterns that you have marked in their paper. Working through a pattern with an instructor or tutor has been shown to increase the likelihood of student self-correction. Tutoring for R&C students is available from the Student Learning Center, the Art of Writing Departmental Tutoring Program, Academic Services in the Residence Halls, and the Athletic Study Center. (Please see the Additional Resources page.)

In general, students can also catch errors by reading their papers aloud and correcting parts that don't sound right before turning them in. Often writers don't notice an error unless they hear it. They can also ask a friend or roommate who is unfamiliar with the essay to read it aloud. For an even more objective voice, they can have their computer's speech synthesizer read the paper aloud. Whereas humans tend to automatically gloss over mistakes when they read aloud, a computer will read exactly what the student has written, so errors are more obvious.

Note that while some of the issues that commonly arise may be different between multilingual and monolingual student papers, many of the strategies that are effective with non-native English speakers' writing are also effective with native English speakers' work; the converse is also the case.

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For a list of resources available to GSIs and to their students, please see the Additional Resources page.

Responding to Student Writing

As you craft comments to respond to student writing, you need to address students with a variety of skill levels and attitudes toward writing. Some students have never felt good about writing or simply have little motivation around it. Part of an R&C GSI's job is to respond to students' writing in ways that help them focus positively and purposefully on improvement.

For additional tips, see Grading Essays and Writing Comments on Student Work.

Promote Students' Self-Efficacy as Writers: Some Background

The concern for student self-efficacy addresses students' motivation to learn and to take charge of their role as learners. It refers to students' belief that they are capable of achieving a desired level of performance that will affect their lives (Bandura). An extreme example of a student with low self-efficacy in a writing class would be someone who assumes that her failure or success (the grade on a paper) is either entirely up to the subjective judgment of the instructor or fated by her perceived inefficacy ("I'm just a bad writer").

A student with high self-efficacy believes that she can learn what the instructor expects and understand why those criteria are important. If you show a grading rubric to a student with high self-efficacy, she will begin taking in the assessment criteria immediately, asking questions, and seeking examples to learn from.

A student with low self-efficacy may feel overwhelmed and — because of the way she feels rather than any intellectual shortcoming — shut down on the subject. This student needs convincing that although writing is a complex activity, it involves particular skills she can work at to improve her performance in concrete ways. She

needs encouragement to take charge of developing her skills, especially in the competitive environment of UC Berkeley.

You as an instructor can facilitate students' skill development by giving them the criteria you will use to evaluate their writing, giving frequent feedback on their writing, responding sparingly and strategically to their formal essays, and having students comment reflectively on their own writing.

Implications for Response to Student Writing

First, when you introduce your grading rubric for student essays — you may prefer to call it something like "features of successful academic essays" — give the class opportunities to **work** with it. Aim for a high level of facility with the criteria. Think through the different ways students need to "know" them — not just being able to define "thesis" and "argument," but being able to apply the criteria to concrete examples of theses and arguments to evaluate their effectiveness. Set the activities up in such a way that every student has to take part and you can assess everyone's ability to apply the criteria. Peer review training is the most obvious activity you can use here, but create opportunities for students to start applying at least the more global criteria (e.g., argument, coherence, tone) as they begin writing their first paper. You can then introduce peer review sessions on subsequent papers to highlight other criteria in your grading rubric (without neglecting the ones students have already worked with).

Second, be sure to give frequent and specific feedback to students on their writing. Since frequent brief written homework is expected for R&C courses, you can easily do this. For those students who appear discouraged, make a point of telling them what they're doing well in their writing as well as some specific feature that they can improve fairly easily (such as breaking up extremely long sentences or constructing a direct paragraph). Recognize when they start getting that feature right and congratulate them on their success.

Third, be strategic in the way you phrase marginal and final comments on their papers. Make it clear that you're a reader interacting with the writer's work and that

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the writer remains responsible for that work. (At the same time, it can be useful to address comments about student writing to the work rather than to the student: for instance, you might write "This paper did not provide a complete thesis" rather than "You did not provide a complete thesis.") Posing questions is often more useful than declaring judgments. For instance, instead of writing "Tangent!," try "How does this fit with your main argument?" Instead of jotting down "wrong word" or "awkward," ask whether the phrase means one thing or another. And choose your comments sparingly — address just a few **patterns** of error, not every kind of error, and mark no more than three per page. Otherwise the student becomes overwhelmed and has trouble deciding what to work on.

One more step can help students develop the sense that they are in charge of their ongoing development as writers: guided reflection. Have students keep a writer's log and require them to make certain entries during class. Good questions to address include what aspects of writing they like or feel good about, and why; what aspects they know they need to improve, and how they might go about that improvement; what processes or physical environments are best for them when composing; what sorts of things get in their way. It's especially useful for them to make an entry when turning in a draft or receiving feedback. If they've just undergone peer review, have them use journaling to process their reviewer's comments and come up with a writing or revision plan — what issues will they address in their revision? — and scheduling a time (or multiple sessions) to do the revisions. In this way students get used to regarding their writing as a craft they work at that can be analyzed without threatening their self-worth. The students' comments join yours as useful feedback on the quality of their writing.

Source Cited

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Handbooks and Guides for Students

Alongside the primary texts for a course, writing handbooks are extremely helpful in an R&C course. There are several kinds of resource books available to assist students in learning to write academically. Some departments leave this choice to the GSI while others order a standard text for R&C courses, so be sure to start by checking with your department. In addition to the information below, GSIs are encouraged to ask experienced colleagues how they evaluate the handbooks they have used.

If you are ordering textbooks for a course, please bear in mind the cost to students. Some textbooks are very expensive, but expenses can be shaved by using an earlier edition or making sure an electronic edition is available. Electronic editions are also helpful for some students with disabilities. The Center for Teaching and Learning Textbook Affordability & Accessibility page introduces campuswide deadlines for placing orders and provides tips for instructors and students.

Many of the items below are also available in web versions.

Grammar and Writing Handbooks

Manuals of Style

Reference Guides

Textbooks for Analysis and Argumentation

Grammar and Writing Handbooks

Teaching Guide for GSIs

While some GSIs prefer to introduce explanations of grammatical points in informal or ad hoc ways, students often find a GSI's explanations easier to accept and understand if the material is substantiated in a reference book students can use. In the long run, you want them to learn to find answers to their questions themselves, so assigning a handbook makes sense. Require students to procure a particular writing handbook and show them how to use it. Using the handbook in class activities is essential; increasingly, students opt out of procuring course materials that they do not see being used. Several serviceable textbooks are available; look at samples or ask experienced GSIs about which ones they use. (The GSI Teaching & Resource Center has a few on hand to examine.) Think about the kind of manual you want to use: a writing or composition manual with exercises, a guide to style, or an introduction to analysis and argumentation.

Whatever manual you choose, get to know it intimately so you are ready to talk about specific common mistakes, examples of good writing, and important stylistic features. Show students how the book is organized. Create some learning activities that get students using the handbook in class so that they know how it can benefit them. Ask them to locate where in the book to find answers about (for example) how to combine sentences without creating comma splices, or when to use "which" or "that" in a relative clause. You can come up with several questions like these based on their formal papers (address pervasive errors) or make a team competition out of the lookup exercise. (You might even bring some simple, inexpensive kind of prize for the winning team.) When it comes time to address types of errors on their essays, you can refer to the relevant sections of the handbook to see detailed explanations and examples in their own study time.

A few examples of grammar and writing handbooks:

Crews, Frederick. *The Random House Handbook*. New York: McGraw-Hill. Out of print; many editions available. Solid volume with clear explanations of stylistic as well as grammatical and punctuation issues. Still available and worth exploration for personal, and perhaps also pedagogical, use.

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Hacker, Diana. *A Writer's Reference*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. Well-organized; gives samples of papers in MLA, APA, and Chicago styles. Exercise modules and resources for multilingual writers are available in some editions or online for a student-paid fee. Available in many editions.

Lunsford, Andrea. *The Everyday Writer*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. Available in many editions. Similar to Hacker's material; Lunsford's explanations are perhaps a little more accessible. Has samples of papers in MLA, APA, Chicago, and CSE styles.

Manuals of Style

Manuals of style move beyond eliminating error to address the mode of expression in students' writing: how effective (or distracting) is their prose in conveying a particular idea? What alternatives should they consider? Some examples:

Glaser, Joe (2016, 2010, 1999). *Understanding Style: Practical Ways to Improve Your Writing*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kolln, Martha (2012). *Rhetorical Grammar: Grammatical Choices, Rhetorical Effects*. 7th ed. New York: Pearson Education. This interesting volume addresses non-native English speakers' writing and gives sample worksheets you can use with students.

Williams, Joseph M. and Joseph Bizup. *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. New York: Longman. Several editions available.

Reference Guides

A different kind of manual yet is a simple reference guide. These books do not help much to teach writing, but they do provide rules for correct formatting and concise explanations of style and source citations. A couple of examples:

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 8th ed. (2016). New York: Modern Language Association of North America. An introduction to doing library research as well as the logic and mechanics of source documentation.

Turabian, Kate L. (2007). *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. Revised by Wayne C. Booth,

Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, and the University of Chicago Press Editorial Staff. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Turabian/Chicago style is appropriate for several disciplines. This volume incorporates Booth et al.'s substantial *Craft of Research*, a highly valuable resource on the development and write-up of research projects for undergraduate and graduate students alike.

Textbooks for Analysis and Argumentation

Many GSIs work with students using an introductory guide to analysis and argument. (Some departments decide on a textbook and make sure GSIs get a copy.) Some examples:

Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein (2014). *They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*, 3rd ed. Helps students identify common rhetorical moves in academic readings and frame arguments in their own writing.

Rosenwasser, David and Jill Stephens (2014). *Writing Analytically*, 7th ed. Boston: Wadsworth. Gives many good models for introducing students to critical reading and analysis.

Weston, Anthony. *A Rulebook for Arguments.* Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing. Several editions available. This slim book provides a quick, traditional introduction to valid and invalid forms of argumentation.

Teaching R&C: Additional Resources

See also the Additional Resources page in Working with Student Writing.

Web Resources on bCourses Design

Web Resources on Student Writing

Working with Multilingual Writers

Books on Student Reading, Writing, and Thinking

Guiding Student Research Papers

On-Campus Support for Student Writers

Course Readings and Copyright

Grant Opportunities for GSIs Teaching R&C Courses

Web Resources on bCourses Design

Digital Learning Services, UC Berkeley. Course Design Tools. Step-by-step instructions for importing and modifying DLS' Core Template in bCourses.

Online Resources for R&C Instructors. Originally created in 2020 to assist R&C instructors in designing their courses for remote instruction, this bCourses site contains helpful resources for in-person instruction as well.

Web Resources on Student Writing

Center for Teaching and Learning, UC Berkeley. Teaching Resources: Reading & Composition. Web portal to a wide array of resources for R&C instructors.

Center for Teaching and Learning, UC Berkeley. Encouraging Student Writing.

College Writing Programs, UC Berkeley. Click upper-right "Resources" tab for separate lists of on-campus and off-campus resources.

Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL). Materials for students and instructors.

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Writing Across the Humanities, UC Berkeley. Guidance and resources for students taking — and instructors teaching — courses focused on reading, writing, and research in the humanities.

The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina. Materials for students and instructors. See faculty resources and handouts.

Working with Multilingual Writers

Center for Teaching and Learning, UC Berkeley. Resources for Non-Native English Speakers.

Ferris, Dana R. (2003). *Response to Student Writing: Implications for Second Language Students*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Leki, Ilona (1992). "Responding to ESL Writing." Chap. 10 in *Understanding ESL Writers: A Guide for Teachers*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook Publishers. See GSI Teaching & Resource Center's printed *Teaching Guide for Graduate Student Instructors*, 155–60.

Silva, Tony J. and Paul Kei Matsuda (2001). *Landmark Essays on ESL Writing*. Mahwah, NJ: Hermagoras Press.

UC Berkeley College Writing Programs Multilingual Student Writing Consultant for R&C Instructors. Available to discuss specific issues in working with multilingual student writers.

Books on Student Reading, Writing, and Thinking

Bean, John C. (2011). *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*, 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Available at the GSI Teaching & Resource Center.

Bogel, Fredric and Katherine Gottschalk, eds. (1988). *Teaching Prose: A Guide for Writing Instructors*. New York: Norton.

Crews, Frederick (1992). *The Random House Handbook*, 6th ed. New York: Random House.

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Davis, Barbara Gross (2009). "Helping Students Write Better in All Courses." Chap. 34 in *Tools for Teaching*, 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Hard copy available at the GSI Teaching & Resource Center.

Gottschalk, Katherine and Keith Hjortshoj (2004). *The Elements of Teaching Writing: A Resource for Instructors in All Disciplines*. New York: Bedford/St. Martins. Available at the GSI Teaching & Resource Center.

Hedengren, Beth Finch (2004). *A TA's Guide to Teaching Writing in All Disciplines*. New York: Bedford/St. Martins. Available at the GSI Teaching & Resource Center.

Walvoord, Barbara E. Fassler (1986). *Helping Students Write Well: A Guide for Teachers in All Disciplines*. New York: Modern Language Association of America.

Guiding Student Research Papers

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Columb, and Joseph M. Williams (2008). *The Craft of Research*, 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Harvey, Gordon (2008). *Writing with Sources: A Guide for Students*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

UC Berkeley Library. Guides and Tutorials. Short videos on conducting library and Internet research.

UC Berkeley Library. Instruction Sessions in the Library for R&C Courses (instruction request form).

UC Berkeley Library. Guide to Creating Effective Research Assignments.

University of Toronto, Reading and Researching.

On-Campus Support for Student Writers

Student Learning Center Writing Program. Tutoring available for R&C students on drop-in and appointment bases; also a variety of workshops for undergraduate students about developing their academic writing.

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The Art of Writing Departmental Tutoring Program. Upper-level majors provide one-on-on writing help to students taking R&C in Comparative Literature, English, Film and Media, and Rhetoric.

Academic Support in the Residence Halls: Tutoring. Writing tutors available for students in the residence halls on a drop-in basis; drop-in hours posted at website.

Athletic Study Center. Individual and group tutoring for student athletes.

Course Readings and Copyright

Association of Research Libraries. Know Your Copy Rights: What You *Can* Do.

UC Berkeley Library. Copyright: Classroom Uses.

UC Berkeley Library. Copyright: Use in bCourses. Options for using bCourses and other course websites to provide free or low-cost access to readings for your students.

Grant Opportunities for GSIs Teaching R&C Courses

Program administered by the GSI Teaching & Resource Center:

Course Improvement Grants for GSI-Led Sections. Provide modest funds for projects that will enhance student learning and increase a GSI's teaching effectiveness.

Programs administered by the English Department, but open to GSIs teaching R&C in any department:

Daniel E. Koshland, Jr. Course Development Grant. Provides funds to cover specific expenses incurred by graduate student instructors to develop new features for their Reading and Composition classes.

Daniel E. Koshland, Jr. Professional Self-Development Grant. Provides funds to cover specific expenses incurred by graduate students in the course of self-development as teachers of writing.