

Module

3

Writing in the Content Areas

Estimated Time: 1 hour

The goal of this module is to help participants view writing in the content areas as an essential component of effective learning. The module will examine participants' current concerns about writing in the classroom and then guide them to see that writing is a tool for thought that can greatly impact their students' development of complex knowledge as well as serve as a springboard for inquiry. Feedback given *during* the writing will be presented as an effective way to redirect students' thinking as well as to provide an authentic form of formative assessment. Participants will end the session by comparing the types of writing common to the four major disciplines.

Materials You Will Need:

- Chart paper
- Markers
- PowerPoint Slides **3.1-3.12**
- A piece of chart paper headed *Concerns about Writing in the Content Areas*
- A piece of chart paper divided in half vertically (T-chart) with *Celebrations* written as the heading for the left column and *Challenges* written as the heading on the right
- Handout 1: Sample Prompts for Providing Feedback to Student Writers
- One envelope for each four participants containing the 29 Disciplinary Writing Sort strips, **already cut apart. This will need to be prepared BEFORE the session.**
- Copies of the Key to the Disciplinary Literacy sort for each participant—to be provided at the end of the sort.
- Paper and pens/pencils for participants (optional)

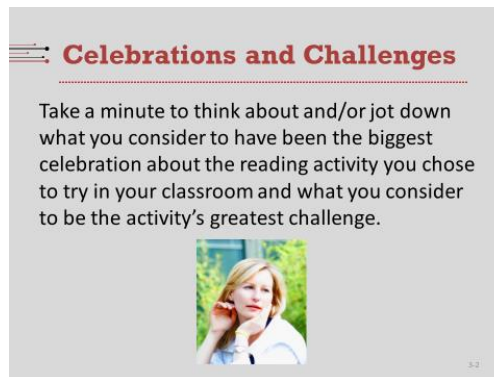
- Highlighters for participants (optional)

Overview of the Session: All times are approximate.

- SEGMENT 1: Reflecting on the Bring It Back Activity (Approximately 15 minutes)
- SEGMENT 2: Establishing the Purpose of the Session (Approximately 5 minutes)
- SEGMENT 3: Approaching Writing as a Tool of Thought (Approximately 15 minutes)
- SEGMENT 4: Characteristics of Disciplinary Writing (Approximately 20 minutes)
- BRING IT BACK ASSIGNMENT (Approximately 5 minutes)

➤ SEGMENT 1: Approximately 15 minutes Reflecting on the Bring It Back Activity

- A. Project **PowerPoint Slide 3.2** about 5 minutes before the scheduled start time.

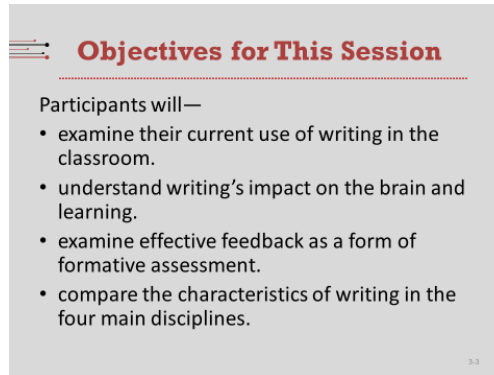


- B. Prompt participants to begin their conversations at the scheduled start time.
- C. After 3-4 minutes, prompt participants to finish the first discussion and give the second partner 3-4 minutes to talk.
- D. While participants discuss the Bring It Back activity, post the chart paper with headings *Celebrations/Challenges*.
- E. After posting the chart paper, walk through the room listening in on discussions, answering questions, and coaching as needed.
- F. At the end of the 10-minute discussion period, project **PowerPoint Slide 3.3**.
- G. After giving participants a minute or so to consider their activities, ask for volunteers to share celebrations and/or challenges. Post them on the chart paper, offering solutions when you can or soliciting ideas from other participants.

➤ **SEGMENT 2: Approximately 5 minutes**

Establishing the Purpose of the Session

A. Project PowerPoint Slide 3.4.



The slide is titled "Objectives for This Session" and lists four objectives for participants. The slide number "3.4" is in the bottom right corner.

Objectives for This Session

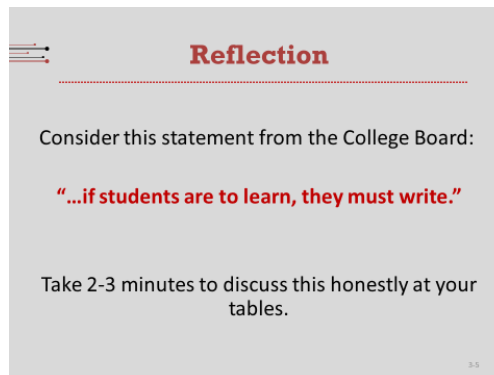
Participants will—

- examine their current use of writing in the classroom.
- understand writing’s impact on the brain and learning.
- examine effective feedback as a form of formative assessment.
- compare the characteristics of writing in the four main disciplines.

B. Go over the objectives for the session.

➤ **SEGMENT 3: Approximately 15 minutes**
Approaching Writing as a Tool of Thought

A. Project PowerPoint Slide 3.5.



The slide is titled "Reflection" and contains a quote from the College Board. It asks participants to discuss the quote at their tables. The slide number "3.5" is in the bottom right corner.

Reflection

Consider this statement from the College Board:

“...if students are to learn, they must write.”

Take 2-3 minutes to discuss this honestly at your tables.

B. Give participants 2-3 minutes to discuss this at their tables.

C. As participants discuss, post the chart paper headed *Concerns about Writing in the Content Areas*.

D. Ask volunteers to share their concerns about writing as a regular part of the classroom; post these to the chart, tying them to later learning whenever possible.

E. Project PowerPoint Slide 3.6.

Relief from ReLeah

- “Where did we get the idea that every word students write has to be assessed, assigned a grade, and duly recorded to create a score that somehow reflects the writing worth of a student?...students should have many, many opportunities to write—with reduced pressure on the teacher to formally assess each piece of writing.”

3.6

F. Make the point that students should write much more than we would ever have time to grade. The writing should be a way to build complex knowledge.

G. Project PowerPoint Slide 3.7

Formative vs. Summative Assessment of Writing

Formative assessment occurs *during* instruction to give students feedback that redirects their thinking and deepens their knowledge about both content and written expression. It offers guidance at the moment of need.

Summative assessment is provided *after* the learning to evaluate what the student has actually learned.

3.7

H. Point out that *grading* is a form of summative assessment, evaluating what students have learned. *Feedback* given *during* learning helps students construct complex knowledge by meeting them at a point of confusion and helping *them* work through it. It is an example of instruction resulting from a formative assessment.

I. Project PowerPoint Slide 3.8.

What is Feedback?

According to ReLeah Lent, feedback is—

“...comments you would make to an adult in the field who asked your advice about a piece of writing.”



3.8

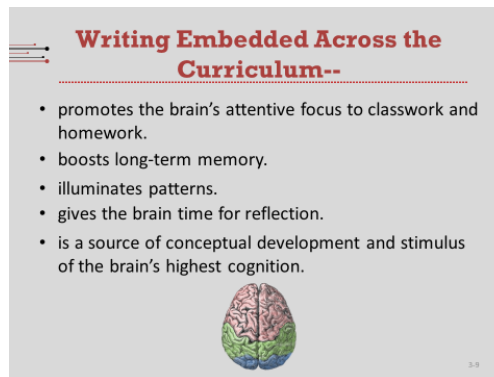
J. Stress that when you are giving feedback on writing, you are asking questions and offering comments to help the student clarify the *content* of their writing, to make their

thinking clear. Mechanics such as spelling, capitalization, and punctuation are addressed only *after* the content is effective. Every teacher needs to teach the type of writing common to his/her discipline—but not every teacher has to actually teach grammar. That is part of the language arts discipline.

- K. Distribute copies of **Handout 1: Sample Prompts for Providing Feedback to Student Writers**.
- L. Point out that feedback can be given by both the teacher and peers.


➤ **SEGMENT 4: Approximately 20 minutes** **Characteristics of Disciplinary Writing**

- A. Project **PowerPoint Slide 3.9**.



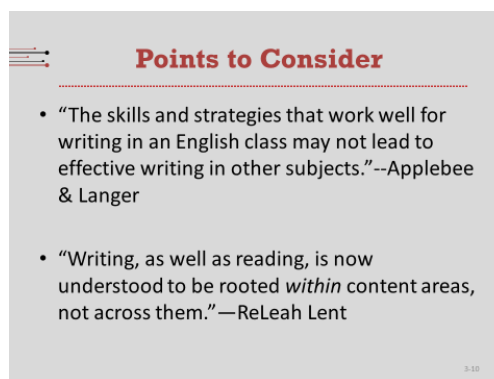
Writing Embedded Across the Curriculum--

- promotes the brain's attentive focus to classwork and homework.
- boosts long-term memory.
- illuminates patterns.
- gives the brain time for reflection.
- is a source of conceptual development and stimulus of the brain's highest cognition.



3.9

- B. Make the point that writing across the curriculum can actually improve learning in *every* subject because of its tremendous impact on the brain.
- C. Project **PowerPoint Slide 3.10**.



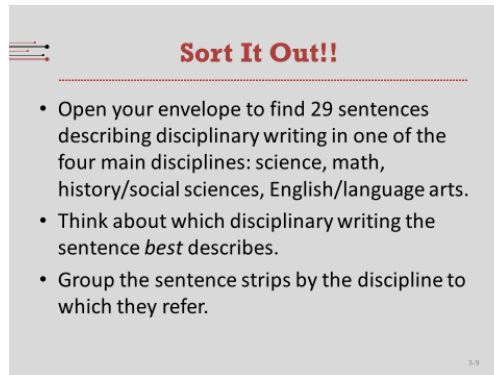
Points to Consider

- “The skills and strategies that work well for writing in an English class may not lead to effective writing in other subjects.”--Applebee & Langer
- “Writing, as well as reading, is now understood to be rooted *within* content areas, not across them.”—ReLeah Lent

3.10

- D. Drive home the point that, just like reading, the writing done in a classroom should be the same type of writing done by experts in the discipline.
- E. Explain to participants that they are going to explore the characteristics of writing in the four main disciplines: science, math, history/social studies, and English/language arts.

- F. Have participants arrange themselves in groups of 4. Interdisciplinary groups would be best, but they are not required.
- G. Project **PowerPoint Slide 3.11.**



Sort It Out!!

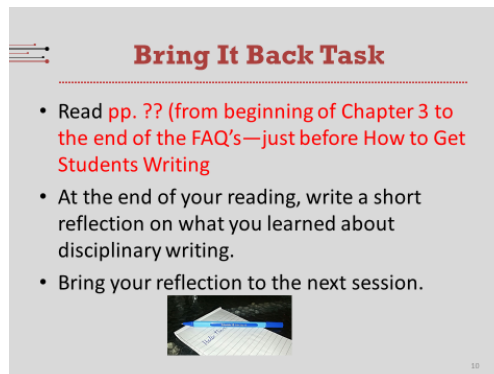
- Open your envelope to find 29 sentences describing disciplinary writing in one of the four main disciplines: science, math, history/social sciences, English/language arts.
- Think about which disciplinary writing the sentence *best* describes.
- Group the sentence strips by the discipline to which they refer.

3-9

- H. Give participants about 10 minutes to complete the sort.
- I. At the end of 10 minutes, provide the key to the sort and have participants compare their groupings to the key. Stress that some of the sentences could be interpreted differently by different people, so their grouping does not have to be exact.
- J. Ask volunteers to share how the thought of writing in a manner that is consistent with their discipline changes their view of writing in the classroom.

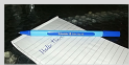
Bring It Back Task: Approximately 5 minutes

- A. Project **PowerPoint Slide 3.12.**



Bring It Back Task

- Read pp. ?? (from beginning of Chapter 3 to the end of the FAQ's—just before *How to Get Students Writing*)
- At the end of your reading, write a short reflection on what you learned about disciplinary writing.
- Bring your reflection to the next session.



3-10

- B. Go over the assignment on the slide. Tell participants that the substance of what they write in their reflection is what counts; they do not need to worry about having it look perfect. The purpose of the writing is to reflect on the learning.