

Abstract

For three semesters, I've used Blackboard to add weekly homework to my ENGL 1100 and 1200 classes to reinforce skills/concepts from the course objectives. In fall 2010, my ENGL 1100 students commented in groups about Garrison Keillor's *Writer's Almanac*. The experiment was successful, but needed revision. Since I needed different exercises for ENGL 1200 (spring 2011), I wrote ten assignments corresponding to the progression of the course's research concepts. The students worked individually, but could see each other's posts. For ENGL 1100 in Fall 2011, my students are using Blackboard's new Journals feature to post private reflections on textbook chapters.

LEANNE E. SMITH'S

ENGLISH
1100 - 1200

COME TO CLASS - DO GOOD WORK

ENGL 1100 Outcome Goals

- Discover significant questions to explore/address via writing
 - * identifying theme and making claims
- Explore different purposes of writing, including narrating, analyzing, investigating, evaluating, etc.
 - * requires analyzing readings and writing evaluations
- Increase awareness of organizational strategies and the ability to apply them via drafting and revising
 - * to create a complete/cohesive/quality piece of writing
- Become attentive to how audience and purpose affect content, tone, and style
 - * a form of personal writing, as a journal, but with some consideration for an audience who has not read the material
- Incorporate sufficient and appropriate details and examples
 - * so audience understands students' claims/support
- Express ideas with clarity and effective syntax/punctuation
 - * to practice basic skills necessary for any writing
- Gain competence in using computer technology in writing
 - * to use for other college classes and beyond
- Schedule and meet deadlines to conquer procrastination
 - * weekly deadlines helped students pace themselves

ENGL 1200 Outcome Goals

- Formulate significant research questions & develop a strong research proposal
 - * small tasks help students to build toward larger ones
- Establish work plans and timelines
 - * must pace selves with tasks of varying lengths
- Locate and evaluate a variety of sources (i.e., field-based, print, and electronic)
 - * some weeks' tasks specifically require this element
- Organize your sources & integrate source material in writing
 - * some students used their survey results in a paper
- Cite sources accurately/responsibly to avoid plagiarism
 - * several weeks' tasks required citations
- Apply research writing to problem solving & convey results of research to a variety of audiences
 - * various tasks applied for different audiences

While in-class discussions can be useful and engaging, the ability to express thoughts about reading material clearly and concisely in writing is a necessary skill as well, and Blackboard's online environment offers more equal and sometimes safer space than the classroom for introverted students to have a voice.



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Homeworkology

Three Semesters of Blackboard Homework Evolution



Fall 2010: ENGL 1100
Composition



<http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org>

Potluck Selections: Poetry & Prose -- Text & Audio

Goals

- integrate literature into the curriculum through a resource they could continue using beyond the semester if they chose to sign up for the *Writer's Almanac* e-mails
- expose students to historical and contemporary poets and prose writers, some of whom they have read in school and many of whom they have not (could read and/or listen)

Process

- 100 students, 4 sections of 25, collapsed on Blackboard
- divided by alphabet into groups of 7-9 to reduce the size of the discussion groups
- groups included students from different sections, but they could meet each other from the class Facebook group
- labeled groups by day of the week they were reading:
Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday
yadnoM, yadseuT, yadsendeW, yadsruhT, yadirF, yadrutaS, yadnuS

Assignment

- 15% of final grade--14 weeks--2,100+ words (8.5+ pages)
- write 100 words: thoughts on poem and/or prose historical notes + comment on group members' posts in following week
- after Fall Break: changed to eliminate comments/discussion since students couldn't comment on posts that were not there
NEW: expand individual posts to 200 words each week

Results

- mixed enjoyment for students
- may use *The Writer's Almanac* for short readings and critical writing occasionally, but not as a semester-long requirement

Spring 2011
ENGL 1200
Research-Based Composition

Research Concepts Exercises

Goals

- reinforce course lectures and implement skills on a small scale before applying them to larger assignments
- have less repetition of critical reading and writing than for the initial ENGL 1100 assignment, and more practical exploration of research-related tasks for ENGL 1200

Process

- 100 students, 4 sections of 25, collapsed on Blackboard
- used **Discussion Board**--no groups, just one long roster
- posted one assignment per week due the next week
- timed assignment content to correspond with lectures, and sometimes use notes from class, though students did not know the assignment content ahead of time
- due at the end of each Wednesday rather than at noon on Wednesdays like in ENGL 1100 (more on time)

Assignment

- 15% of final grade--accumulated in 10 weeks
- word/page count N/A since assignments varied widely:
 - grammar/punctuation review
 - introduction/thesis statement writing
 - differentiating popular, trade, and scholarly periodicals
 - website evaluation and Google search experimentation
 - find/cite/read an academic article, examine quotes
 - media outlet story comparison on a current event
 - read about a current event, write a thesis statement
 - choose a topic, a focus group, and conduct a survey
 - find/cite/read an academic article, write 200 words
 - find/cite/read an academic article and outline it

Results

- successful & will use again without much alteration
- wanted more private space for homework submission

Fall 2011: ENGL 1100
Composition

Textbook Reading Journal

Goals

- assign accessible, conversational readings from an affordable textbook that makes writing seem fun, doable, and part of life rather than just classes
- give students practice with critical reading, relating readings to their lives, and expressing claims and giving supporting evidence for the claims in writing

Process

- 100 students, 4 sections of 25, collapsed on Bb
- begin readings after grammar/punctuation review at the beginning of the semester so vocabulary for parts of speech, etc., are in recent memory
- make submission spaces available weekly in the **NEW Journals feature** of Blackboard 9, where students can only see their posts, not others'

Assignment

- 15% of final grade, accumulated in 10 weeks
- read 5 chapters per week (average of 25 pages)
- write a minimum 50 words per chapter discussing the writing "tool" on which Clark focuses in each and relating the content to one's interests and previous experience/lessons
- adds up to a minimum of ~25 pages of reading and 250 words of writing per week (most write more, even twice as much) and 10+ pages total
- after Fall Break: students have the new option of completing a "workshop"--exercises at the end of each chapter giving suggestions for practicing the concepts--rather than just writing 50+ words, and the option requires students to recognize which ones may be successful in the online environment

Results

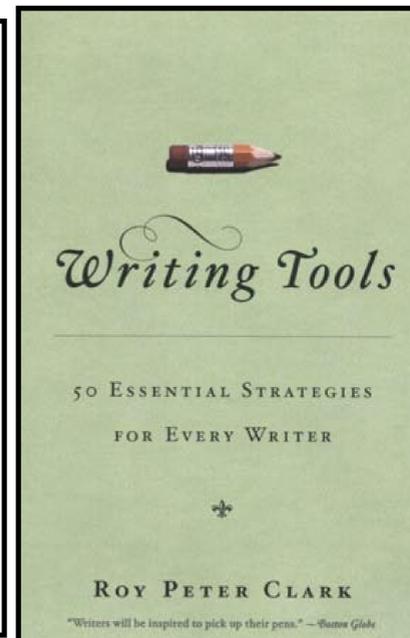
- fulfills the need for private homework submission
- perhaps too focused on journalism, but includes relevant advice for many writing styles/purposes o
- new space works for other short-term classwork and homework assignments to be outsourced from the busy ECU e-mail account

**PART ONE
Nuts & Bolts**
Tool 3. Activate your verbs.

**PART TWO
Special Effects**
Tool 22. Climb up and down the ladder of abstraction.

**PART THREE
Blueprints**
Tool 31. Build your work around a key question.

**PART FOUR
Useful Habits**
Tool 45. Break long projects into parts.
Tool 50. Own the tools of your craft.



New York: Little, Brown, 2006. 272 pages. \$12.99