

Write-to-learn and writing in the disciplines (WID)

Two touchstones of WAC theory and pedagogy are writing to learn and writing in the disciplines.

Writing to Learn

The writing to learn approach refers to the idea that writing is a method for learning. In this framework, students complete short, informal writing activities and assignments that allow them to think through important ideas from the class. This kind of writing improves critical thinking and comprehension while giving students a chance to work through new, difficult, or confusing concepts. Examples of writing to learn assignments include annotations, summaries, response papers, problem analyses, practice tests, and journals.

Writing in the Disciplines (WID)

Writing in the Disciplines (WID) refers to writing that meets discipline-specific conventions, formatting, and style. A core tenet of this approach is that “good writing” means something different in every discipline, and part of effective writing instruction is teaching students the conventions, formatting, and style of “good writing” in their particular discourse community. WID activities and assignments are meant to introduce students to the thinking and writing that is valued in their discipline while giving students an opportunity to practice communicating in their discipline. Examples of WID assignments vary widely between disciplines, but might include things like lab reports, annual business reports, project proposals, case studies, and journal articles.

Ideas for integrating writing-to-learn and WID into your writing instruction

Improve student comprehension and prepare students to write in their discipline by:

- *Incorporate low-stakes, informal writing activities and assignments frequently. These can be impromptu (in-class summaries or responses to readings), ungraded (reading annotations), and practical (summarize key ideas from a prior class; define key terms; practice for an upcoming class).

- *Don't assume your students know the rules and expectations of your discipline. Instead, introduce formatting and style conventions early and simply. In addition to reading academic writing from your field, have students practice discipline conventions through discipline-specific writing activities and assignments (ongoing lab notebooks; summarizing and analyzing professional articles; working in groups on mock or real project or grant proposals).