

DESIGNING A FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION COURSE FOR NON- NATIVE SPEAKERS

This capstone project is designed to show how I have used "A Self-Directed Guide To Designing Courses for Significant Learning" by L. Dee Fink to improve my course.

*A CETL Capstone
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INTRODUCTION:

In reflecting upon all of the strategies for improving my instructional practices, I decided to take an excerpt from L. Dee Fink's guide for educators entitled "A Self-Directed Guide to Designing Courses for Significant Learning." I wanted to make sure that the course I was designing really did enable students to learn significantly. Presented below are excerpts from my syllabus to show how I have tried to implement each step in the design process to maximize learning. Here is an overview of the sections of this document:

Initial Design Phase: Build Strong Primary Components

- Step 1: Identify important situational factors
- Step 2: Identify important learning goals
- Step 3: Formulate appropriate feedback and assessment procedures
- Step 4: Select effective teaching and learning activities
- Step 5: Make sure the primary components are integrated

Intermediate Design Phase: Assemble the Components into a Coherent Whole

- Step 6: Create a thematic structure for the course
- Step 7: Select or create an instructional strategy
- Step 8: Integrate the course structure and the instructional strategy to create an overall scheme of learning activities

Final Design Phase: Finish Important Remaining Tasks

- Step 9: Develop the grading system
- Step 10: De-bug possible problems
- Step 11: Write the course syllabus
- Step 12: Plan an evaluation of your teaching and the course

INITIAL DESIGN PHASE: Build Strong Primary Components

Step 1. Identify important *situational factors*

There are 25 students in the class, all non-native speakers. The class is a four-credit English composition course for first-year students. It is a hybrid class that meets in a computer classroom (Armstrong 331) twice a week for 100 min. each time and has an online component (D2L) as well. Students are placed in this class according to their English abilities as shown by a placement exam. Some of them have taken ENG 264 to prepare them for this class. Some of them are new to MSU this semester and have just arrived in the country. This is a very important class for them because it will set up their writing abilities for the duration of their academic career in America. It is my job to teach them how American professionals expect them to write, regardless of their backgrounds. I have just finished teaching this class to a section of native speakers, so it will be a particular challenge for me to teach non-native speakers this semester.

Step 2. Identify important *learning goals*

These (Figure I) are set for me by the English Department. However, in addition to the ones listed below that I have to follow, I would also like to add that my personal goal for the students is to feel good about their writing, to feel confident that they know what they need to do and have the ability to do it. How they feel about their own writing abilities is very important to me in addition to the course competencies.

Figure 1: Course Description and Competencies

Course Description:

The goal of ENG 101 is to provide students with

- Strategies for working in new writing situations
- Opportunities to apply these strategies in specific writing situations
- Information about and experience writing for academic writing situations
- Occasions to reflect on the development of their writing knowledge and skills

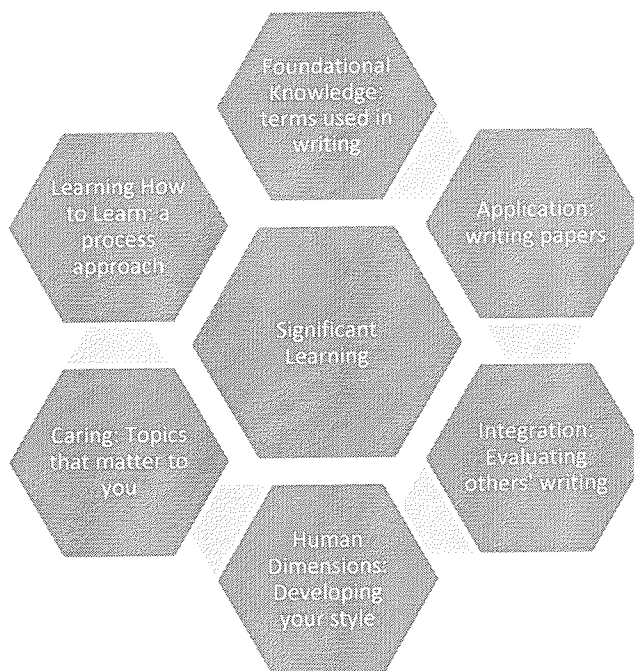
Course Competencies:

Students will be able to:

- (a) Draw upon strategies for idea generation, drafting, revision, design, and editing;
- (b) Analyze and produce texts guided by basic rhetorical concepts;
- (c) Practice critical reading skills, including the ability to identify genre conventions and evaluate the claims, evidence, and reasoning in a text;
- (d) Demonstrate effective research processes, including the ability to gather academic and non-academic sources and assess their quality and suitability for the writing situation;
- (e) Integrate sources in their writing to achieve specific aims, making appropriate use of summary, paraphrase, quotation, and citation conventions;
- (f) Explain their writing choices, using concrete examples to support their claims;
- (g) Employ syntax and usage appropriate to academic disciplines and the professional world.

The following diagram (Figure 2) shows how I have taken into consideration Fink's "Taxonomy of Significant Learning" (Table 1, p. 10).

Figure 2: Taxonomy of Significant Learning



Step 3. Formulate appropriate **feedback and assessment procedures**

Although these (Figure 3) are not set as-is by the English Department, the idea of having units centered around a major paper is highly recommended. That way feedback can be given for rough drafts and assessment can be recorded for final drafts. Because writing is skills-oriented and not content-oriented, there are no tests over content because the major papers demonstrate their mastery of the process.

Figure 3: Assignments and Papers

Assignments and Papers:

- Classwork:** Most days, you will be assigned writing tasks that must be completed and submitted to the D2L Dropbox or posted to a D2L discussion forum at the time that is specified.
- Quizzes:** Quizzes might occur at various times throughout the semester, but they will be announced in advance and will serve to check understanding. There are no tests in this class.
- Literacy Narrative:** You will write a biographical sketch on your own personal history with literacy both in your native language and in English. In this paper you will reflect on the

writing process itself, the skills you have developed in reading and writing, and the goals you hope to achieve in your writing for this semester and beyond.

- Argument Analysis:** You will analyze an argument according to the rhetorical situation, appeals, and conventions of the genre. You will be given specific readings for this topic.
- Oral Presentation:** In a group, you will prepare a presentation on a grammar topic, instruct the class, and assess students' understanding. You will also write a collaborative reflection paper on this experience.
- Research Paper:** You will compose a cause-and-effect research essay on a learning-related topic. For this paper, you will need to evaluate sources for their credibility and content.
- Final Reflection:** You will reflect on the skills you have developed in the course and provide evidence of this development from your coursework. This is, in effect, a portfolio.

As you can see from the "Final Reflection" paper, self-assessment is a critical part of this course as well.

Step 4. Select effective **teaching/learning activities**

The class activities will mostly involve having the students read the assigned textbook chapters or other readings, discussing them in class, and then having a hands-on writing experience in the classroom. Students will have to take what they read in the textbook about writing and reflect on what it means in their own lives personally, as well as dialogue with others about their reflections. Here is an example (Figure 4) of an active learning experience via worksheet. In this sample, students are asked to "do" something by reflection on their prior writing experiences. In this way, they are also dialoguing with themselves, and then as they discuss with their classmates, they are dialoguing with others.

Figure 4: An Active Learning Assignment from Unit 1

Fill in each box with this information: What kinds of writing do you do in each of these categories? How often and for what purposes? Do you notice any patterns about your writing in general? Would you do this writing more if you had better skills in each area?

Writing as a College Student

Writing as a Professional

Writing as a Citizen

Writing as a Family Member or Friend

Step 5. Make sure the primary components are **integrated**

I have decided to list the course competencies in my daily lesson plans to make sure this step is accomplished. For example (Figure 5):

Figure 5: Sample Lesson Plan with Course Competency Listed

| | |
|------------|---|
| Date: | Wednesday Jan. 18 (W2 D2) |
| Topics: | Generating ideas and drafting Answering essay questions |
| Objective: | Students will become familiar with and practice using strategies for generating ideas and drafting. Students will become familiar with and practice using strategies for answering essay questions in exams. Course competency (a) Draw upon strategies for idea generation, drafting, revision, design, and editing; |

Also, the following is an excerpt (Figure 6) from the final reflective paper (written by Dr. Heather Camp, Director of Composition) that shows exactly how the course is integrated.

Figure 6: Excerpt Relating Course Competencies to Skills

The left-hand column of the table below lists the skills taught in ENG 101. These are the skills you can select from as you compose your letter.

The right-hand column of the table provides examples of the kind of “evidence” you might supply in your reflective letter to substantiate your claims about what you have learned.

Students will be able to:

| Course Competencies Students will be able to: | “Evidence” you might use to demonstrate that you have developed the skills taught in ENG 101 |
|--|--|
| (a) draw upon strategies for idea generation, drafting, revision, design, and editing; | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of writing techniques (freewriting, graphic organizers, outlines, etc.) that have helped you come up with ideas and begin writing • Examples of significant revision on major writing assignments • Examples that show your mastery of MLA format • Examples of adapting formatting features based on the genre you are writing in |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of your ability to edit your work (fix grammar, punctuation, citation, etc.) |
| (b) analyze and produce texts guided by basic rhetorical concepts; | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excerpts from writing assignments in which you analyzed the audience, purpose, and context of a text • Excerpts from writing assignments in which you analyzed the pathos, ethos, or logos of a text • Excerpts from writing assignments that show that you can shape your writing for a particular audience and purpose • Excerpts from writing assignments that show that you can effectively use the rhetorical appeals (pathos, ethos, or logos) |
| (c) practice critical reading skills, including the ability to identify genre conventions and evaluate the claims, evidence, and reasoning in a text; | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples from your writing in which you provide a detailed description of a text's genre convention(s) • Examples from your writing in which you accurately summarize a writer's perspective on a topic and/or discuss whether an author's supporting evidence is sound |
| (d) demonstrate effective research processes, including the ability to gather academic and non-academic sources and assess their quality and suitability for the writing situation; | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence that you can determine whether a source is appropriate for you to use in a paper and can gather sources that are relevant and appropriate for the writing situation you are tackling. |
| (e) integrate sources in their writing to achieve specific aims, making appropriate use of summary, paraphrase, quotation, and citation conventions; | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples from your essays or assignments in which you effectively summarize, paraphrase, or quote from a source and smoothly integrate your use of a source into the content of one of your paragraphs • Evidence that you understand MLA citation |
| (f) explain their writing choices, using concrete examples to support their claims; | (This is what you will be doing in this assignment!) |
| (g) employ syntax and usage appropriate to academic disciplines and the professional world. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excerpts from your writing that demonstrate that you have learned new "rules" of grammar, syntax, and mechanics in this course and can apply them in your work. |

INTERMEDIATE DESIGN PHASE: Assemble the Components into a Coherent Whole

Step 6. Create a thematic **structure for the course**

My course consists of five units, with each unit centered around the major piece of writing that accompanies it. The unit schedule listed below (Figure 7) shows how the semester progresses according to each unit and its major writing piece.

Figure 7: Unit Schedule

Unit 1: Literacy Narrative (2-3 pages)

Assignment Given: W Jan. 25

First draft peer review: M Jan. 30

Second draft writing conference: W Feb. 1

Final draft due: Sunday, Feb. 5 at midnight in D2L Dropbox

Unit 2: Analyze an Argument (3-4 pages)

Assignment Given: W Feb. 29

First Draft Due: W Mar. 7 (Please note that this is during Spring Break)

Writing conferences: W Mar. 14

Final Draft Due: Sunday, Mar. 18 at midnight in D2L Dropbox

Unit 3: Oral Presentations and Reflections on Grammar Topic (3-4 pages)

Assignment Given: M Mar. 19

In-Class Work Day: M Mar. 26

In-Class Presentations: W Mar. 28

Reflection Papers Due: W Apr. 4 at midnight in D2L Dropbox

Unit 4: Research Paper (10-12 pages)

Assignment Given: W Mar. 28

Library Visit Day: M Apr. 9

First Draft Due: M Apr. 23

Writing Conferences: W Apr. 25

Final Draft Due: Sunday, Apr. 29 at midnight in D2L Dropbox

Final: Portfolio (2-3 pages minimum)

Assignment Given: M Apr. 30

Final Draft Due: W May 2 at midnight in D2L Dropbox

Step 7. Select or create an **instructional strategy**

This table (Figure 8) shows how each of my in-class activities relates to my out-of-class activities and how they all build on each other and give the course a sense of coherence. This just shows Unit 1, and the same goes for each of the other units. This excerpt shows that my instructional strategy is to have the students complete readings outside of class and then do

activities in class that require them to apply their knowledge in specific writing and thinking tasks.

Figure 8: Unit 1 Schedule

| WEEK: | DAY: | OUT-OF-CLASS READINGS: | IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES: |
|---------------|-------|------------------------|---|
| Week 1 | Day 1 | Chapter 1 | Introduction to Class and Rhetorical Situation |
| Jan. 9, 11 | Day 2 | Chapter 2 | Critical Reading and Summary |
| Week 2 | Day 1 | D2L content readings | President's Day (D2L reading assignment) |
| Jan. 16, 18 | Day 2 | App. B | Generating Ideas, drafting, and essay questions |
| Week 3 | Day 1 | Chapter 4 | Questions p. 61, 64, 69, 87 |
| Jan. 23, 25 | Day 2 | Drafting | Pre-writing activities |
| Week 4 | Day 1 | Revising | Peer Reviews in class |
| Jan. 30, F. 1 | Day 2 | No Class | Writing conferences |

Step 8. Integrate the course structure and the instructional strategy to create an **overall scheme of learning activities**

As is demonstrated by Figure 8 above, each week of the unit is planned out, along with each day the class meets. Each session has an assigned reading that must be completed beforehand, and each session has its own in-class activities associated with it. The schedule for the rest of the units in the semester are similar to the one above, so they do not bear repeating.

FINAL DESIGN PHASE: Finish Important Remaining Tasks

Step 9. Develop the **grading system**

The grading scale is given to me by the university, as in Figure 9. I have also included an excerpt from the syllabus that describes the use of rubrics as a grading tool for the major papers. Figure 10 shows the grading rubric for the first unit paper.

Figure 9: Grading Scale for the Course

Grading Scale for Course

- 90-100 A
- 80-89 B
- 70-79 C

60-69 D

59 and below F

Note: A "C" is the lowest passing grade that a student may receive in English 101. A grade of D or F will require the student to retake the course.

Rubrics:

The major papers of this course will be graded by rubrics that are created for each assignment individually and that will be covered thoroughly at the time the assignment is given.

Figure 10: Unit 1 Literacy Narrative Rubric (100 points)

Content: (25) Note that we are going for both quantity of ideas as well as quality.

| | Excellent to Very Good: (25-22) | Good to Average: (21-18) |
|--|---|---|
| | Provides an in-depth account of events in literacy as well as highlighting their significance | Provides a basic account of events in literacy with an attempt to describe their significance |
| | Weak: (17-11) | Failing: (10-5) |
| | Provides a weak account of events in literacy, although the significance of these events are under-developed. | Provides very few accounts or reflections of their significance |

Structure: (25) Organization of the essay

| | Excellent to Very Good: (25-22) | Good to Average: (21-18) |
|--|--|---|
| | Introduction sets up the context and grabs reader's attention. Body paragraphs consistently follow a logical order. Conclusion leaves reader with a sense of significance. | Introduction mostly sets up the context and mostly grabs the reader's attention. Body paragraphs mostly follow a logical order. Conclusion mostly leaves reader with a sense of significance. |
| | Weak: (17-11) | Failing: (10-5) |
| | Introduction may not completely set up context or grab reader's attention. Organization of body paragraphs may be difficult to | Introduction fails to set up context or grab reader's introduction. Body paragraphs lack organization. Conclusion |

| | | |
|--|--|---------------------|
| | follow. Conclusion may not leave readers with a sense of significance. | may not be present. |
|--|--|---------------------|

Rhetorical Situation and Conventions: (25) *Remember audience, purpose, and context? Appeals?*

| | Excellent to Very Good: (25-22) | Good to Average: (21-18) |
|--|--|--|
| | <p>Paper addresses appropriate audience, demonstrates a compelling purpose, and well-fitting contextual information is given.</p> <p>Use of appeals strengthens writing.</p> | <p>Paper addresses appropriate audience, demonstrates a purpose, and gives some contextual information.</p> <p>Use of appeals is present in the writing.</p> |
| | Weak: (17-11) | Failing: (10-5) |
| | <p>Paper addresses some aspects of audience, purpose may be somewhat unclear, contextual information may be insubstantial or missing.</p> <p>Use of appeals is not demonstrated.</p> | <p>Paper makes no attempt to address audience, purpose, or context</p> <p>Makes no attempt to use appeals.</p> |

Grammar, syntax, mechanics, assignment guidelines: (25) *Punctuation, spelling, sentences, etc.*

| | Excellent to Very Good: (25-22) | Good to Average: (21-18) |
|--|--|--|
| | <p>Sentence-level errors limited; citations accurate; format correct, page length satisfied.</p> | <p>Sentence-level errors generally managed but may begin to diminish clarity and polish; some problems with in-text citation and/or formatting; page length satisfied or nearly satisfied.</p> |
| | Weak: (17-11) | Failing: (10-5) |
| | <p>Sentence-level errors frequent and inhibit understanding; citation may be incorrect or missing; formatting and/or page length requirements not met.</p> | <p>Sentence-level errors dominate the essay; no attempt to meet citation and formatting expectations; page length not met.</p> |

TOTAL GRADE: out of 100

LETTER GRADE:

OVERALL COMMENTS:

Step 10. De-Bug **possible problems**

Figure 11 shows some of the possible problems I have anticipated for this course and my ways of dealing with them as described in my syllabus.

Figure 11: Possible Problems Anticipated (Excerpts from my Syllabus)

D2L Software:

Please update your profile information with a picture so we can all get to know you and consistently put faces with names.

Your technology problems are not my responsibility, so please refer to ITS for issues with your computer or software issues.

Please use your Mavmail account, because D2L is not always compatible with other accounts such as yahoo, gmail, or Hotmail.

Please note the fact that Firefox is the recommended browser and that your computer should be regularly updated in order to function best.

Classroom Policies:

- Please do not use your phone in class as a matter of courtesy.
- When computers are not in use during class, please leave the monitors turned off.
- Please no food or drinks in the computer lab.
- Please be considerate of others when socializing by keeping volume to a minimum.
- Please come to class on time, be prepared to learn, and leave distracting items at home.

Attendance and Tardy Policy: Students have two free absences. Please reserve these absences for sick days, inclement weather and other situations in which missing class may be necessary. When a student is absent, it is **his/her responsibility** to contact the instructor **before the next class period** and get caught up on homework and material covered. Assignment deadlines will still be enforced unless the student has made prior arrangements with the instructor. If a student reaches five absences, he/she will receive an F in the course.

Late Work Policy: All assignments must be submitted on or prior to the due date. Assignments that are not submitted on time will be downgraded one letter grade per class period unless the student has received prior written approval from the instructor.

Drafting and Revision Policy: Polished writing is the result of multiple rounds of writing and rewriting. Therefore, revision opportunities have been incorporated into every writing assignment. **Save all of the drafting materials you develop for each major assignment.** These materials might include

brainstorming exercises, notes or outlines, early drafts, peer-reviewed and teacher-commented drafts, and final versions of your essay. This material will play a role in how the assignment is graded at times.

Step 11. Write the course **syllabus**

Because I have included so many excerpts from my syllabus in this capstone paper already, I will not include any evidence here.

Step 12. Plan an **evaluation** of the course and of your teaching

Here are the areas I would like my students to give me feedback on at mid-term:

- Explanation of classroom policies and course requirements
- Clarity of expectations for writing assignments
- Use of class time
- Classroom environment (free to express ideas, ask questions, etc.)
- Effectiveness of writing conferences
- Quality of teacher feedback on student writing
- Teacher grading practices
- Teacher availability for questions/concerns
- Teacher interest in students' development as writers and human beings
- Overall level of satisfaction with the course.

To gain feedback from my students, I plan on creating a survey on D2L that uses a Likert scale (Very Satisfied-Very Dissatisfied) to give me information on how the students perceive the class.

Also, because I'm a T.A., I will have the Director of Composition observe me at some point during the semester and give me feedback on my teaching style and practices. All of this feedback should help me not only in this semester but in my future teaching career as well.

CONCLUSION:

I have learned a lot from this project and feel like my syllabus is designed for optimal significant learning. Thank you very much.