STRENGTHENING THE WRITING COMPONENT OF COURSE WORK

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F ED B E A D D A E

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MARNIE BRANFIREUN

Environmental Science Program, Faculty of Environment, Simon Fraser University

"Good writing is clear thinking made visible."

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TIP ONE:
LET STUDENTS IDENTIFY THE VALUE OF WRITING

- To encourage students to value writing work, they must see the value of good writing from the point of view of 'power-users' of written work.

- Rather than beginning with assessing   writing, have them assess writing samples of varying quality and length.

- Survey the class on which writing was 'best' and have them articulate why they came to that conclusion.

- Discuss whether/how length, style, context or content influence writing quality.

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TIP ONE:
LET STUDENTS IDENTIFY THE VALUE OF WRITING

TOOL: range of writing samples in field of study
(could include student writing - used with permission)

TOOL: open-ended discussion of writing quality

TOOL: either a list of descriptor words or categories

TOOL: introduce key writing quality concepts (e.g. clarity, accuracy, thoroughness, relevance, utility, concision)

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TIP TWO:
PEER ASSESSMENT IS POWERFUL

- Continue to engage students as judges of writing quality in the

TIP TWO:
PEER ASSESSMENT IS POWERFUL

TOOL: student consent to have work reviewed by peers
(can extend to permission to use for future courses, redacted)

TOOL: Provide in-class time for peer reviews, or risk it not being done seriously

TOOL: Use the same rubrics for peer review as for grading

TIP THREE:
ASSESS WORK WITH RUBRICS

- Reviewing and grading written work is challenging, time-consuming and vulnerable to bias.

- Good rubrics help keep grading consistent, comparable, fair, meaningful and useful.

- Rubrics clarify expectations and reduce anxiety.

TIP THREE:
ASSESS WORK WITH RUBRICS

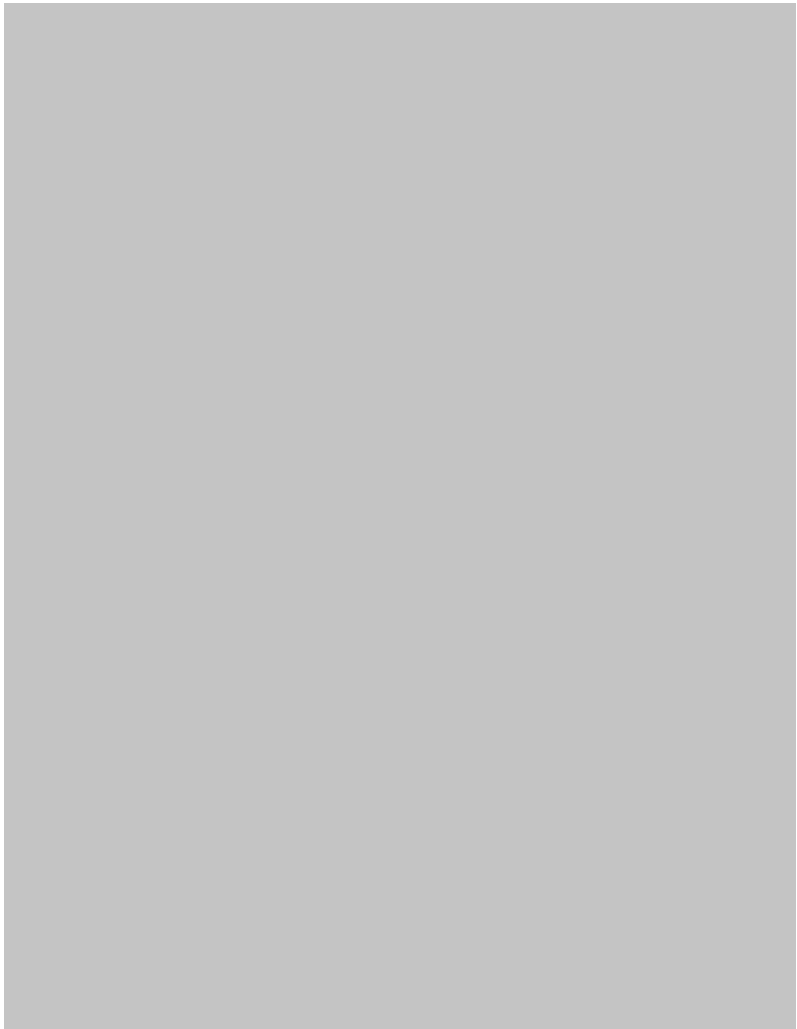TOOL: clear assignment instructions that include grading rubric

TOOL: rubrics that clearly assess work in a way that is useful to students

Sample EVSC100 Tutorial Grading Rubric

Criterion	Ratings						Points
Thoroughness (was exercise completed with reasonable thoroughness?)	5.0 pts High Thoroughness (all questions were answered)	4.0 pts Fair Thoroughness (most questions were answered)	3.0 pts Low Thoroughness (about half of the questions were answered)	2.0 pts Very Low Thoroughness (under half but more than a few of the questions were answered)	1.0 pts No Thoroughness (only a few of the questions were answered)	0.0 pts No marks (no questions answered) - automatic zero for whole assignment	
Effort (did answers reflect sufficient effort, were answers relevant?) (does not							

TIP FOUR:
PROVIDE TEMPLATES

- Having all work submitted in the same format helps keep grading consistent, comparable and fair. It levels the playing field.

- Getting into the habit of formatting according to instructions is part of academic life.

- Templates clarify expectations and reduce anxiety.

Group 5   First Name (anglicized first name if applicable here), Last Name
                                              Annotated Bibliography, EVSC 201
                                                            10 October 2017

Role of Physical Habitat Attributes in Salmon Survival, British Columbia, Canada

Booth D, Kraseski K, Jackson C. 2014. Local-scale and watershed-scale determinants of
summertime urban stream temperatures. Hydrol Process. 28 (4): 2427-2438.

"If you can't explain something simply, you
don't understand it well enough."

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TIP FIVE:
RESEARCH ANALYSIS… BEFORE WRITING

- Good writing style cannot compensate for lacking a grasp of the subject.

- Meaningful review and analysis of literature should be emphasized as much as the ultimate piece of writing.

- Article note-taking practice is the best opportunity to prevent plagiarism if you require notes in original, abbreviated language

- If you have to choose between assigning an essay or critical article review, choose the review.

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TIP FIVE:
RESEARCH ANALYSIS… BEFORE WRITING

TOOL: article analysis exercise (and peer comparison)

TOOL: annotation/abstract/summary exercise (and peer review)

TOOL: article comparison and/or synthesis exercise

TOOL: identification or context, relevance, utility of references

TIP SIX:
REFERENCES… BEFORE WRITING

- A poor set of references cannot lead to anything but a weak piece of writing: we can teach students how to find, identify and select appropriate references.

- One set of criteria for a strong reference list is depth (in time and topic), breadth, quality, relevance and utility.

TIP SIX:

"The beautiful part of writing is that you don't have to get it right the first time, unlike, say, a brain surgeon."

-                                    C

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TIP SEVEN:
DRAFT, ASSESS, REDRAFT

- If we truly want our students to be able to improve, we need to give them the opportunity to do so. Drafts are a great way to support learning, and measure (reward?) improvement.

- Use drafts for of all coursework, with at least peer review of drafts and TA/Instructor grading of final versions.

- Redrafts of smaller exercises should not be too far apart in time, and feedback should be prompt.

- Self-assessment becomes is important for later exercises (essays)

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TIP SEVEN:
DRAFT, ASSESS, REDRAFT

TOOL: have students bring hard copies to class for real-time peer review, or have rubrics on Canvas.

Peer reviewers should assess at least two other students' work to engender greater camaraderie and see a range of writing.

TOOL: students should have both categorical rubric ratings and on-paper notation for maximum utility. Article assessment tool works h 9m BCs1

"When writing about science, don't simplify
the science; simplify the writing."

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TIP EIGHT:
SMALL, SCAFFOLDED EXERCISES

- Small exercises reduce anxiety and allow students to build skills.

- Multiple, 'low-stakes' exercises gets students working at a steady pace and if they 'mess one up' it's not the end of the world.

- Scaffolding: each exercise builds towards larger, higher-stakes assignments in manageable increments that teach key skills.

- A scaffolded structure facilitates redrafting and re-crafting.

- Students become more independent as lower tiers of scaffolding support are 'removed' (e.g. no more formatting instructions).

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TIP NINE:
MAKE IT WORTH MARKS

Every effort they make towards developing writing skills should be rewarded, as every step takes time and effort, and does help skills develop. Positive grading is an important element here.

TOOL: forms for students to document their work

TOOL: online submissions that can promote both ongoing work, and working to deadlines

TOOL: reward independent pursuit of writing skills at SLC using participation forms

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TIP TEN:
USE SFU RESOURCES

SFU libraries, the Student Learning Commons and the Teaching and Learning Centre all have great people and tools and they are there to help us.

TOOL: library database tutorials

TOOL: SLC in-class workshops, writing mentors (*), resources materials for students

TOOL: TLC staff, resource library