Diagnosing Process: Timed Writing as a Classroom Assessment Tool

The UC Merced Merritt Writing Program Assessment Committee is a subcommittee of the MWP Curriculum Committee, which works towards meeting the following outcomes: (1) supporting curriculum development and (2) assisting with development and implementation of Program Learning Outcomes for MWP courses. The MWP Assessment Committee focuses upon long-term data collection that informs annual assessment planning and reporting.

INTRODUCTION:
During the Fall 2014 semester, the MWP PLO “Process – demonstrate through engagement with the iterative processes of reading, writing, and speaking” was assessed. Writing 10 courses complete a diagnostic essay at the beginning of the semester (pre) as well as at the semester’s end (post). This project used a sample set of these essays to assess students’ perception and command of the writing process: 1) brainstorming/prewriting, 2) drafting, 3) revising, 4) editing, and 5) publishing/submission.

AIM:
The MWP Assessment Committee examined timed-writing diagnostic essays to determine their effectiveness as measures of student learning in regard to the writing process. A secondary goal was to gauge students’ perceptions of timed-writing activities and of their knowledge regarding the writing process. Findings will be shared with the larger Merritt Writing Program faculty.

METHODS:
ACTIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES
All faculty who participated in the assessment project facilitated learner-centered activities and shared these teaching practices relating to the Writing Process:
• Assignment / Prompt Analysis
• Brainstorming / Pre-Writing
• Multiple Drafts (feedback provided)
• Peer Review / Peer Feedback

QUANTITATIVE:
Twenty sample pre diagnostic essays and twenty sample post diagnostic essays from students who participated in the assessment project were scored using a shared rubric; each essay was assessed twice by faculty committee members. The average raw score of the pre essays was 3.65, and the average raw score of the post essays was 4.43 (scale of 1-6).

QUALITATIVE:
Writing 10 students who participated in the assessment project (135 total responses) were surveyed about their perspectives on process-based writing specific to their diagnostic essays. The student survey revealed significant improvements in the level of confidence, assignment analysis, and time management when engaging in the post timed-writing diagnostic essay.

RESULTS:

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<th>Sample Diagnostic Essay Prompt</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As noted in Kristin Mank’s “From Toilet to Tag,” wars have limited social acceptance. Please consider the following circumstance for writing a letter that addresses the key points in this article:</td>
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<td>As a representative of student government, you are drafting a letter to the UC Merced’s Sustainability Committee in which you discourage or endorse recycling waste water for campus consumption. Using the claims from Postel’s article, what are some of the key considerations? You are encouraged to be creative in developing this letter; it is important to state your argument in terms of the article’s main ideas, with at least two direct references to text.</td>
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<td>Plan to write your response in about 90 minutes, perhaps dividing that time to allow for reading and annotating (10-15 minutes), planning (18-15 minutes), drafting (50-60 minutes), and editing and proofreading (during the remaining time). You may use a dictionary or thesaurus.</td>
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CONCLUSIONS:
This project confirms the efficacy of the timed diagnostic as a tool for measuring students’ engagement with the writing process. This study highlights the importance of prereading and revision as fundamental steps in the writing process, as these were shared teaching practices among the faculty whose students participated in the project. Although the timed-writing essay does not allow for extensive revision, it is a useful measure of students’ overall improvement over the course of the semester.

RECOMMENDATIONS:
• Timed-writing diagnostics should be valued as a method of assessing student engagement with the writing process.
• MWP faculty should consider using the timed-writing diagnostic as a teaching tool, in addition to its use as a program assessment tool.
• Active learning strategies related to the steps of the writing process should be used regularly in the classroom to help students meet the outcomes related to Process.
• Further studies to compare the efficacy of timed-writing assignments with those of traditional, take-home assignments would be beneficial.

MWP Assessment Committee Co-Chairs: Angela Winek, Michelle Tocconis
Piloted by: Alexandra Block, Grace Rocha, Mariana Abuan, Jane Wilson
Contributors: Baylynn Van Wagenen, Cher Finley, Helen Sandoval, Matt Snyder, Pam Gingold, Stan Porter

Shared Essay Scoring Rubric

MWP Scoring Criteria (2015)

- Inclusion of explicit analysis or evaluation in the essay.
- Integration of evidence from multiple resources.
- Proofs of understanding of the key terms and concepts.
- Use of appropriate citation and documentation.
- Coherence and organization of the ideas.
- Use of specific, concrete language.
- Accuracy of facts and figures.
- Overall quality of the essay.

A paper that integrates evidence from multiple sources,analyze the key terms and concepts, and provides a logical and coherent argument, with explicit analysis or evaluation. The essay is well-organized, uses specific, concrete language, integrates evidence from multiple sources, and is free from errors of grammar and spelling.

B paper that demonstrates understanding of the key terms and concepts, uses evidence from multiple sources, and has a logical and coherent organization. The essay is well-written, uses specific, concrete language, and is free from errors of grammar and spelling.

C paper that demonstrates some understanding of the key terms and concepts, uses evidence from multiple sources, and has a logical organization. The essay is well-written, uses specific, concrete language, and is free from errors of grammar and spelling.

D paper that demonstrates limited understanding of the key terms and concepts, uses evidence from multiple sources, and has a logical organization. The essay is written, uses specific, concrete language, and is free from errors of grammar and spelling.

E paper that demonstrates minimal understanding of the key terms and concepts, uses evidence from multiple sources, and has a logical organization. The essay is poorly written, uses specific, concrete language, and is free from errors of grammar and spelling.

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Confident When Writing
Read Prompt First
Used Full 90 Minutes
Able To Describe Steps of Writing Process

Confident Writing

0 0.5 1 1.5 2 2.5 3 3.5 4 4.5 5
Pre Essay
Post Essay

0 0.5 1 1.5 2 2.5 3 3.5 4 4.5 5
Pre Essay
Post Essay

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