



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.

Shared Essay Scoring Rubric

AWPE Scoring Guide (2009)

In holistic reading, raters assign each essay to a scoring category according to its dominant characteristics. The categories below describe the characteristics typical of papers at six different levels of competence. All the descriptions take into account that the papers they categorize represent an hour of reading and writing, not a more extended period of drafting and revision.

A 6 paper commands attention because of its insightful development and mature style. It presents a cogent response to the text, elaborating that response with well-chosen examples and persuasive reasoning. The 6 paper shows that its writer can usually choose words aptly, use sophisticated sentences effectively, and observe the conventions of written English.

A 5 paper is clearly competent. It presents a thoughtful response to the text, elaborating that response with appropriate examples and reasonable reasoning. A 5 paper typically has a less fluent and complex style than a 6, but does show that its writer can usually choose words accurately, vary sentences effectively, and observe the conventions of written English.

A 4 paper is satisfactory, sometimes marginally so. It presents an adequate response to the text, elaborating that response with sufficient examples and acceptable reasoning. Just as these examples and this reasoning will ordinarily be less developed than those in 5 papers, so will the 4 paper’s style be less effective. Nevertheless, a 4 paper shows that its writer can usually choose words of sufficient precision, control sentences of reasonable variety, and observe the conventions of written English.

A 3 paper is unsatisfactory in one or more of the following ways. It may respond to the text illogically; it may lack coherent structure or elaboration with examples; it may reflect an incomplete understanding of the text or the topic. Its prose is usually characterized by at least one of the following: frequently imprecise word choice; little sentence variety; occasional major errors in grammar and usage, or frequent minor errors.

A 2 paper shows serious weaknesses, ordinarily of several kinds. It frequently presents a simplistic, inappropriate, or incoherent response to the text, one that may suggest some significant misunderstanding of the text or the topic. Its prose is usually characterized by at least one of the following: simplistic or inaccurate word choice; monotonous or fragmented sentence structure; many repeated errors in grammar and usage.

A 1 paper suggests severe difficulties in reading and writing conventional English. It may disregard the topic’s demands, or it may lack any appropriate pattern of structure or development. It may be inappropriately brief. It often has a pervasive pattern of errors in word choice, sentence structure, grammar, and

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:

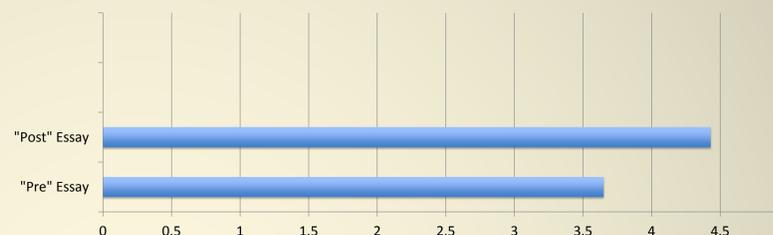
Twenty sample pre diagnostic essays and twenty sample post diagnostic essays from students who participated in the assessment project were scored using a shared rubric; each essay was assessed twice by faculty committee members. The average raw score of the pre essays was 3.65, and the average raw score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

QUALITATIVE:

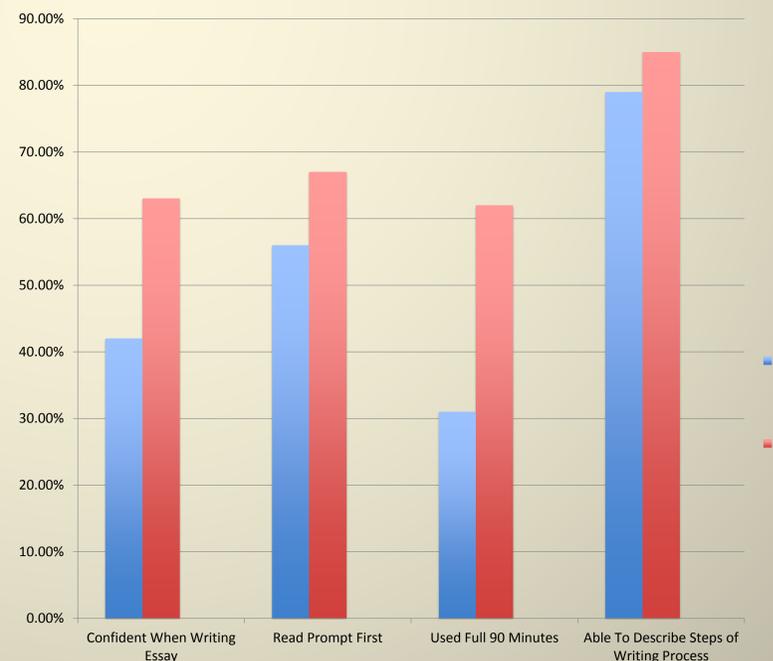
Writing 10 students who participated in the assessment project (135 total responses) were surveyed about their perspectives on process-based writing specific to their diagnostic essays. The student survey revealed significant improvements in the level of confidence, assignment analysis, and time management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

RESULTS:

Timed Essay Assessment with Rubric (Score 1-6)



Student Survey Results



Sample Diagnostic Essay Prompt

As noted in Keiron Monk’s “From Toilet to Tap,” re-using water has limited social acceptance. Please consider the following circumstance for writing a letter that addresses the key points in this article:

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 situate your argument in terms of this article’s main ideas, with at least two direct references to text.

Plan to write your response in about 90 minutes, perhaps dividing that time to allow for reading and annotating (10-15 minutes), planning (10-15 minutes), drafting (50-60 minutes), and editing and proofreading (during the remaining time). You may use a dictionary or thesaurus.

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 prewriting 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

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