Question 22

What strategies have you found successful in helping students engage in writing?

Summaries---

- Three strategies are especially successful:
    - 1. drill--many writing assigmnents
    - 2. perspective--having students write other than from their personal point of view
    - 3. structure--form follows function, and word choice follows from an understanding of audience

- I use short writing assignments at first and then lengthen. It is easier for students to concentrate on "skill building" with short pieces. It is also easier for the prof. Get to the hard work of correcting major faults with less time consuming assignments. Then move into longer pieces later.

- NEVER assign writing exercises for "busy work" and ALWAYS provide feedback on the students' work.

- Require it. Guidelines. Deadlines for sections on extensive assignments.

Write often----

- The main strategy is to get students to write often and to give them a variety of assignments, i.e., research reports, speech stories, ad copy, analyses of book chapters, etc.

- Using short directed writing (one paragraph) early and often.

Have students rewrite---

- The only way one learns to write is to write! The ultimate teaching tool is to have the student re-write something and submit it again, but I rarely if ever do that with undergraduates. It's the time and numbers issue.

- I have students submit projects and other work in stages. Then I can comment on content, grammer and writing style. The students then correct the work for the final assignment.

- Having students start early and revise, revise.

- Provide opportunities for revision only after a conference with me--otherwise, students believe that they can "fix" a paper simply by responding to individual marginal comments.

- One technique I have tried with some success is to tell the students when I return their first papers to study my individual comments. To help them avoid feeling overwhelmed by the number of red marks, I ask them to see if they can identify two or three mistakes

that I have marked several times. I urge them to think in terms of eliminating their most common errors as a way to achieve the greatest improvement with the least effort. Then, when they write their second papers, I ask them to list at the end of the second paper the errors I marked most frequently on the first. I find that when I force them to be conscious of errors they have made in the past, they do a better job of avoiding those errors.

Share with peers---

- If I don't have time to grade them, I can have students respond to the content of a short paper written by other students with a series of short questions. For example the assignment might be to (1) describe a method of construction that is considered "sustainable" (2) identify factors that contribute to it being considered sustainable (3) describe its current use and the potential for its future use, including limitations for use. I can give students a list of these three objectives of the writing assignment and then ask if they found the content of the paper they are reading to address all three adequately. The interesting thing about this is that when students write they learn, but when they read they learn and they enjoy it.

- Formal peer-editing is sometimes helpful. Both the recipient of the peer-critique and the critiquer learn from this experience. However, it is essential to provide very clear guidance for the students: what to look for in a peer critique; specific topics or questions to address.

- Have them at least review and at times formally critique others' papers in the course. This provides a lot of learning both to the reader and the author.

- I've implemented my own message board system so that students can comment on each other's work. Furthermore, I able to grade their assignments electronically with my system. Originally, I tried to use K-State Online's message board to do this but it was not flexible enough for what I was trying to do.

- I like to have them get together in small groups (two or three) to create a written product. Besides making my workload more manageable, it gives them them a chance to see their peer's writing and get feedback and revision segestions. Then learn more about writing from that iterative process than the few comments that I make.

- Peer review of writing - sharing either all responses or four excellent responses. With student permission, I include their name on works shared with the class. This is part of having them be part of a scholarly community, where ideas are valued and acknowledged. So far everyone has given permission and reaction has been favorable.

Guides and directions---

- Explain very clearly "what" I want them to say, then they decide "how" to say it.

- I show them how poor wording can subvert their efforts to convey their views by giving in-class illustrations. I never just say "vague" but explain in detail how the wording a student offers may not be effective.

- It's crucial that teachers TEACH writing, the whole process from invention to researching, outling, and drafting to revision. Simply expecting our students to write well -- without teaching them exactly what we want and then allowing them to practice those skills and then asking them to write -- is a poor strategy for ensuring high-quality written work from our students. If we want good writing from our students in whatever discipline, then we should be prepared to teach them how to write for that course/discipline.

- Provide either a well defined structure for the students to follow or develop a scoring rubric that helps students critiques their own work before handing it in.

- I use a "check list" for papers, with 12 areas for which I provide feedback. I go over the check list in detail at the beginning of the course. Sometimes I have the students conduct a self-evaluation (of paper), based on the check list. I also offer general comments after I have provided the more specific comments in relation to all 12 areas. Those 12 areas are: 1. Scope 2. Structure & organization 3. Introduction 4. Argument/thesis 5. So what? 6. Roadmap 7. Theory 8. Methodology 9. Internal logic 10. Style 11. Documentation 12 Conclusion.

- Show examples at the beginning of a course of (a) unacceptable, (b) terrible, (c) poor (d) mediocre, (e) fair, (f) good, and (g) "curve-buster" writeups. Have the students in groups evaluate these examples and indicate what are the good features and where improvement should be made.

- My students write mathematical proofs. I give them example proofs to learn from, and give them feedback on the writing they do.

Relevance of assignment----

- Emphasizing writing that results in a real- world outcomes. The scenarios I use in my writing assignments emphasize the role of written communcation as a tool that enable readers to reach decisions and perform concrete, specific actions.

- Providing writing prompts that allow students to relate course content to their own interests is helpful.

- Each student is asked to pick articles on topics for which concepts covered in class can be used to explain the phenomenon in the article. They are to write about each event and explain how the concepts in class relate to the economic or business phenomenon associated with the event.

- A recognition of the student's personal style is important too. I think some profs seek to inflict their own signature on the student's piece. Improve the writing but retain the qualities unique to the student - - they have a much healthier reaction to this approach.

- I try to find ways to get them to bring in their own interests and experience to the writing assignments.