

A SIMPLER AND MORE EFFECTIVE WAY TO TEACH WRITING: SYLLABUS

Dates of Course

TBD

Course Description

This course is designed to provide teachers with a simpler framework for teaching writing (and enhancing critical thinking) skills in the classroom. The focus will be on helping students to improve their writing by providing effective feedback that dispenses with jargon and helps students focus on the three primary tasks of any good communicator: making a strong point, backing it up, and telling us why we need to know it. Good writing isn't complicated. But much of what is written about how to teach writing over-deconstructs the process: This makes it harder for teachers to teach and students to learn, and it does nothing to ease the grading burden.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, participants will be able to:

1. Integrate writing into the curriculum using the tools of professional writers, specifically:
 - Dispense with the jargon too frequently associated with the teaching of writing and thereby help students make the connection between clear writing and logical thinking
 - Distinguish structure from style in writing and recognize why structure must come first
 - Gain proficiency in techniques that help students think more critically and write with a logical structure and interesting style.
2. Gain proficiency in activities that will enable them to “lighten their load” in the teaching of writing, specifically:
 - Design a peer-editing program in which students provide useful feedback
 - Retool the approach to grading written assignments, with the objective of being able to assign more writing without spending appreciably more time grading

Topical Outline:

- 1: How Do You Get Students to Care About Writing?
 - Recognize the writing crisis in the country
 - Recognize weaknesses in the way writing is traditionally taught.
 - Discover the far-flung benefits of writing well
- 2: What is Good Writing?
 - Identify the basic components of good writing
 - Define structure in a written work
3. What is Style?
 - Revisit the value of the five paragraph essay
 - Familiarize yourself with “!0 basic rules for Adding Bling” to a bland piece of writing
4. What about Vocabulary and Grammar?
 - Practice techniques for teaching writers how to use richer language
 - Explore a more efficient way to teach grammar.
5. What is the most effective feedback?

- Distinguish between feedback about structure and feedback about style
- Acquire proficiency in determining the right amount of feedback
- Practice effective "holistic" assessment of written works

6. How can you save time?

- Define the elements of a successful peer-editing program
- Design a "win/win" (more writing without more grading) plan for assessing writing

NYS Standards Addressed

ELA Standards: Grades 7 – 12

Standard 1: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding

Standard 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression

Standard 3: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation

Standard 4: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for social interaction

Contact Information

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Prerequisite Skills/Requirements

1. Participants should be prepared to submit during the first week of class, 8 non-fiction writing samples on any topic from their students:
 - Three of these samples should be essays (personal memoir assignments are OK)
 - The other five should be no more than 3 pages in length.
 - Two of the samples should be from writers who need a great deal of assistance.
 - One should be from the very best of your writers.
2. Participants should know how to use Microsoft Word (Mac or Windows) for creating, attaching, and downloading documents and should practice using the “*Track Changes*” feature of Word.
3. Participants should be able to access the Internet and use e-mail.

In-Service Credit : 15 hours.

Recommendation for granting of in-service credit will be based on thoughtful and complete participation in class discussions, required readings and posting completed assignments on time.

About the Instructor:

Kathy Gevlin is a teacher of writing and a professional writer with more than two decades experience writing for executives at some of the largest firms in the world. Several years ago, after teaching English at a prominent Public Middle and High School, she was struck by the challenge teachers, with limited time and an already full plate of responsibilities, face in teaching students to write. For the past several years, she has been researching what works and what doesn't in the teaching of writing. Through assessment of writing programs, private teaching, in-school workshops and regular exchanges with teachers and highly-regarded professional writers, she has concluded that much of what is written about how to teach writing is at odds with how professional writers actually write. Kathy holds an AB in English Literature from Cornell, an MBA in Finance from NYU's Stern School of Business, and 30 graduate credits in Education from Mercy College.