

Re-envisioning Mastery Learning in the Composition Classroom

Utilizing MyWritingLab to Support Instruction and Learning



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Abstract:

Research tells us that developmental writers become better writers when they learn to revise, revise, revise. Even with smaller classes, meeting the needs of all students can be difficult and exhausting for composition teachers. In this demonstration, I will show how I use **MyWritingLab** to support my students' revision work, incorporate mastery learning, and decrease my work load in my composition classes.

The Problem:

Students were not getting enough writing practice. Grammar lessons were not translating into students' writing. Students had limited opportunities to read and analyze good writing examples. And worst of all, students were falling through the cracks.

I was overwhelmed with stacks and stacks of grammar assignments to grade. I only had enough time for one revision of student work. It took me forever to get grammar assignments and essays back to students. Whatever value students would gain from the assignments and essays was devalued by the amount of time it took me to get the work back to students. On top of all of that, I had to keep track of all the grades and attendance points. It became extremely difficult to identify students in trouble and intervene before it was too late.

The Solution:

Find a course management system that addresses my concerns and issues.

- provides meaningful practice of writing skills
- minimizes grammar homework grading
- helps students translate grammar lessons to their writing
- allows students to read a variety of high quality writing examples
- monitors students' progress

Additional Benefits:

- emphasizes mastery learning
- student-directed learning
- positive reinforcement
- immediate feedback
- clearly stated goals
- encourages critical thinking



Step 1: Off-load Grammar Homework to MyWritingLab

Instructors can set up their class so that students take a comprehensive diagnostic test first. Based on the results of students' diagnostic scores, the MyWritingLab system identifies the key grammar skills that each student needs to work on. The Recall and Reply exercises reinforce grammar lessons, provide immediate feedback, and motivate students to keep working.

Step 2: Set the Mastery Learning Level to 80%

The MyWritingLab system allows instructors to set a mastery level. What does that mean? It means that when students work on grammar exercises, they must achieve at least 80% on the exercises in order to complete the assignment. If students don't achieve at least 80%, they have to take another set of 10 questions, and another, and another, and another, until they reach 80%. This ensures that students develop a sense of high achievement and master the lesson. I have found that when students earn the blue check mark that indicates they have finished the lesson, it serves as positive reinforcement and motivates students to continue working.

Step 3: Require Students to Complete Writing Exercises

Writing Exercises are customizable. Instructors can use the writing prompts in the system or create their own. Instructors can create writing exercises to reinforce grammar lessons. For example, instructors can ask students to write a sentence that uses a colon correctly. Most importantly, instructors can engage students in the writing process by encouraging them to revise their work. The MyWritingLab system keeps track of the topic prompt students pick, what students write, instructor comments on the students' work, and each exchange thereafter. That means instructors do not have a stack of papers to lug around. Everything is maintained online. Students can work on multiple writing assignments at once without confusion. If instructors set the mastery level at 80%, they can assign any grade lower than 80% to require students to revise their writing again, and again, and again, and again, until students create a perfect (or near perfect) written piece.

Draft: 1 with Instructor Comments
Grade: 70
Date Submitted: Feb 8, 2009 12:47 AM

Michael Jordan, Michael Phelps, Lance Armstrong, Michael Johnson, Tiger Woods, Muhammad Ali, Wayne Gretzky

There are many great athletes of all time! The top three athletes in my book are Michael Jordan, (space) Lance Armstrong, and Muhammad Ali. I believe that Michael Jordan is the greatest basketball player to ever step on the court. If it was not for him (add a comma) the Chicago Bulls wouldn't be known for who they are today! (add a transition) Lance Armstrong overcame something nobody ever thought could come true. He is the only cyclist that has won a race with cancer let alone the (capitalize>tour (lowercase>De France. He has a fight inside of him that is very uncommon for someone with cancer. (space) Muhammad Ali is the greatest fighter of all time! (space) He has a very big impact on people today. (explain the impact with more details) I believe that these three athletes are the greatest of all time.

Step 4: Make Students Do the Work

Resist the urge to rewrite students' written work for them. Also, try not to overwhelm students with multiple corrections. Focus students' efforts toward singular pursuits for each successive revision.

- first revision – students should assess the effectiveness of their thesis statement and/or topic sentences
- second revision – students should assess the amount and effectiveness of their supporting points and supporting details
- third revision – students should focus on clarity issues such as wording, use of transitions, and grammar errors that hamper understanding
- fourth revision – identify grammar and punctuation errors

Whatever you do, don't let the students get away with sloppy, half-hearted, lazy, or incoherent written work. Many students will reason that they only need to do enough revisions to get 80%, but that is a cop-out. Help students develop a sense of integrity about their work and demand that they do their best on each and every assignment.

Step 5: Encourage Students to Imitate Writing Examples

The lessons on core writing skills feature writing samples that students must read, analyze, and evaluate for adherence to specific writing skills in order to master the overall lesson. These writing samples serve as wonderful examples for students to imitate.

Step 6: Utilize the System's Management Features to Monitor Student Progress

Set a schedule of due dates for completing lessons. Encourage students to meet deadlines and work ahead if possible. Use the system management tools to identify students who are not on schedule, who are behind schedule, or students who are exhausting exercises too quickly. These are students who need some extra support, instruction, and encouragement.

Course Topics					
Topic	Mastered	Time on Task	Recall	Apply	Write
Part 1: Getting Started with the Essay					
Getting Started	✓	00:14:22	90	80	100
The Writing Process	✓	00:30:34	80	80	95
Prewriting	✓	00:26:03	90	90	100
Thesis Statement	✓	00:29:49	80	80	95
Essay Organization	✓	02:20:38	100	80	100
Essay Introductions, Conclusions and Titles	✓	00:19:14	90	90	95
Revising the Essay	✓	00:30:43	90	80	100
Parallelism	✓	00:39:33	80	97	100
Editing the Essay	✓	00:56:41	80	100	100
Part 2: Essay Development					
Describing	✓	00:11:55	80	90	100
Narrating	✓	00:19:12	90	100	97
Illustrating	✓	00:43:55	80	80	100
Process	✓	00:34:53	90	80	100
Cause and Effect	✓	00:28:22	90	80	100
Comparing and Contrasting	✓	00:28:55	100	90	100
Definition	✓	00:39:27	100	80	100
Division / Classification	✓	00:42:36	100	80	100
Argument	✓	00:15:52	90	80	100