

## Example: Self-assessment of prior award recipient

My experience as a TA at UNH has been rewarding and wide-ranging. Over the past two years, I have taught First Year Writing and two 500 level survey courses: British and American Literature, respectively. Though content shifts from course to course, my classes all emphasize active reading and writing, creative and critical thinking, and animated class discussion. To help realize these goals, I offer students a variety of homework assignments and in-class activities and dialogue about their work outside of class in scheduled conferences and office hours.

As a teacher of Composition and Literature, I encourage students to view reading and writing not just as a skill set but as an art form to which they can contribute. Reading can be an active process, if we slow down, probe and savor the choices an author has made, discover what is hidden inside a text, and detect what is omitted. To help students engage literature in this way, I assign readings that acquaint students with familiar contexts and concepts, while opening new and exciting philosophies and vantage points. This semester, for example, my Early American Literature syllabus includes both canonical texts and contemporary interpretations of original works. Reading John Smith's "General History of Virginia" (1624) alongside Neil Young's ballad "Pocahontas" (1979), Disney's animated film, *Pocahontas* (1995), and Chief Roy Crazy Horse's complaint (1995) helps demonstrate how history is de- and re-constructed over time, shaping the ethos of even contemporary American culture. Interpreting multimedia texts (e.g., films, paintings, and songs) in this context also enables students to read historical documents as living narratives rather than mere records of the past.

Like reading, writing incorporates both skill and artistry. To help my students develop in both these areas, my courses are writing intensive. In Composition classes, I assign "low stakes" response papers and three different types of "high stakes" writing: the personal, analytical, and persuasive essay. Together, these papers help students style clear, beautiful prose; synthesize the ideas of others; distill their own views; and convey the significance of their theories. Because I believe that better reading results from re-reading and better writing from re-writing, revision is a fundamental element of all courses. Composition students submit multiple drafts of papers to be discussed in class, individual conferences, and writing workshops. Literature students may meet independently with me about their work and revise essays before (and sometimes even after) they turn them in. This process-oriented approach reflects my conviction that careful attention to the practice of reading and writing benefits not only a student's end product but the quality of one's overall academic development.

Finally, I strive to stimulate excitement about reading and writing by fostering lively in-class discussions. As in the methodologies outlined above, conversations are designed to help students push their thinking forward, to take chances, to discover what they can accomplish, beyond what even they thought possible. As their teacher, I too embrace this drive, willingly revising syllabi and lesson plans, even within the course of a given semester. Last term, for example, my students requested that we replace less demanding poems on the syllabus with T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Inspired, I reworked our schedule to take on this difficult piece, without abandoning the themes I had hoped to address in other works. If I were to teach Composition again, I may include lessons in writing across disciplines, as what qualifies as "good" writing can vary from the sciences to humanities to business administration, though differences in expectations often remain unaddressed.

In the end, I hope that my instruction helps clarify for my students not only the subject matter at hand but their own ideas and ideals: in short, that I may teach a course that motivates its participants to want to keep reading, writing, thinking, and talking about Composition and Literature, long after our class is through.

**Fall 2009: 401.36 Freshman Composition.**

**Overall Rating: Mean: 4.63/5.00 St. Dev.: 0.597**

**Comments:**

Students indicate that the class was “challenging” but rewarding. They learned not only about writing strategies but of what they were “capable of.” They developed into more “mature writers” and plan to “use the techniques” they learned in “many other classes.”

They characterize the instructor as “fair” and “talented,” a “skilled” and “developed” teacher, who was “clear,” “organized,” and “helpful.” The work he/she put into the class was “evident,” and he/she made his/her students feel “welcome and comfortable.” He/She cared “how well” his/her students were doing both in and outside of class. Several note that 401 was their most positive English experience and that they would like to take another class with him/her.

**Spring 2010: 401.40 Freshman Composition.**

**Overall Rating: Mean: 4.82/5.00 St. Dev.: 0.501**

**Comments:**

Students write that they enjoyed the variety of essays assigned and that this class marked the first time they wrote papers they “have been proud of.”

They describe their instructor as a “tough” teacher whose rigor has “pushed [them] to do better.” They note that he/she was “helpful and made himself/herself available.” As a result, they feel they have become “well-rounded” students, who “will carry what [they] have learned with them” into future classes. Many indicate that 401 was the first English class they enjoyed.

**Fall 2010: 514.02 British Literature.**

**Overall Rating: Mean: 5.00/5.00 St. Dev.: 0.00**

**Comments:**

Students describe him/her as “knowledgeable,” “always prepared and enthusiastic,” “kind and respectful,” and “personable”: an instructor who “always treats his/her students in a fair way” and “encourages everyone to do their best.” His/Her assignments were not “petty” but “effective motivation for learning.” They appreciate that the instructor “inspired” the class “to pursue more difficult literature” and encouraged them to “get excited” about midterm and final examinations.

Some note that his/her opening lectures were “fast” and that they had trouble writing down everything he/she said. Others indicate they would have liked more writing assignments to help balance some of the bigger projects. Ultimately, however, most acknowledge that they have “never learned more about literature than from him/her” and hope to take future classes with him/her.