



THEORY INTO PRACTICE

THEORY: HIGH-IMPACT WRITING ASSIGNMENTS
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George Kuh (2008) posits that writing intensive courses are one of ten high-impact educational practices, a position adopted by The Association of American Colleges and Universities. But Kuh also asserts that “to engage students at high levels, these practices must be well done” (20).

So what does “well-done” mean in terms of writing intensive courses and writing assignments?

Based on Anderson, Anson, Gonyea, and Paine’s (2015) NSSE-supported survey of 71,436 undergraduate writers across a range of participating institutions, three particular behaviors in regard to student writing have positive bearing on learning:

MEANING-MAKING WRITING TASKS:	Requiring students to engage in some form of integrative, critical, or original thinking
INTERACTIVE WRITING PROCESSES:	Students communicating orally or in writing with others about an assignment at some point in the writing process
CLEAR WRITING EXPECTATIONS:	Instructors explicitly communicating what they want students to do and the criteria on which they will evaluate student work

Anderson, Anson, Gonyea, and Pain (2015) found that well-designed assignments increased:

HIGHER-ORDER LEARNING: Analyzing, synthesizing, making judgments, applying concepts

INTEGRATIVE LEARNING: Including the diverse perspectives of others

REFLECTIVE LEARNING: Thinking about the process of drafting and revising



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MEANING-MAKING WRITING TASKS: Students can...

- Summarize a class discussion or presentation
- Analyze or evaluate reading, research, or observations
- Describe methods or findings for data collection, field study, or lab work
- Argue a position from evidence and with reasoning
- Explain in writing numerical or statistical data
- Write in a discipline-grounded format and style

INTERACTIVE WRITING PROCESSES: Faculty can...

- Talk with students about their ideas before they begin drafting
- Facilitate conversations among students to generate ideas
- Provide students with oral and/or written feedback on drafts
- Model giving feedback on a student paper
- Ask students to provide each other with feedback on drafts
- Encourage students to visit the Writing Center
- Scaffold assignments so that they build on one another

CLEAR WRITING EXPECTATIONS: Faculty can...

- Offer clear instructions describing what student writers are trying to do or accomplish in an assignment
- Explain prior to drafting what student writers will learn in the process of writing
- Articulate in advance the criteria for evaluating writing
- Provide students with models

Anderson et. al (2015) found that writing assignments that asked students to make meaning, engage in an interactive writing process, and meet clear writing expectations were instrumental in helping students become “brighter, more socially adept, more tolerant, and more astute individuals than when they started college.”

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