

CRITICAL READING ACTIVITY

Fernsten, L. A., & Reda, M. (2011). *Helping Students Meet the Challenges of Academic Writing*. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 16(2), 171-182.

This article briefly reviews a portion of basic writing history in order to familiarize readers with the common positioning and labeling of struggling student writers. By internalizing and taking up aspects of negative instructor discourses, some students, especially those with multicultural or disadvantaged backgrounds, may come to see themselves as ineffectual and inept writers. The first section of this paper explores the theoretical stance that supports our practice. We go on to describe pedagogical practices that can help students question the 'truths' they have accepted about their writer identities. These reflective practices can be easily adapted to content-area classes as a way of inviting students to counter and expand their understanding of writing in the academy. Academic writing is a process that can involve struggle and conflict for many, especially when genres and/or discourses are new.

Goldberg, N. (1986). *Writing down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*. Boston, MA: Shambala, 11.

Like running, the more you do it, the better you get at it. Some days you don't want to run and you resist every step of the three miles, but you do it anyway. You practice whether you want to or not. You don't wait around for inspiration and a deep desire to run. It'll never happen, especially if you are out of shape and have been avoiding it. But if you run regularly, you train your mind to cut through or ignore your resistance. You just do it. And in the middle of the run, you love it. When you come to the end, you never want to stop. And you stop, hungry for the next time.

That's how writing is, too. Once you're deep into it, you wonder what took you so long to finally settle down at the desk. Through practice you actually do get better. You learn to trust your deep self more and not give in to your voice that wants to avoid writing. It is odd that we never question the feasibility of a football team practicing long hours for one game; yet in writing we rarely give ourselves the space for practice.

Tardy, C. M. (2010). *Writing for the World: Wikipedia as an Introduction to Academic Writing*. *English Teaching Forum*, 48(1), 12-19.

As students move from writing personal essays to writing formal academic texts in English, they face several new challenges. Writing tasks in higher education often require students to draw upon outside sources and to adopt the styles and genres of academic discourse. They must conduct research, summarize and paraphrase, cite sources, adopt genre conventions that meet audience expectations, and select words and grammatical patterns that are characteristic of less personal and more formal genres of writing. These academic literacy skills can pose challenges when first introduced. To conduct research, students must learn to search for and evaluate sources in terms of credibility and reliability, developing skills of informational literacy. An additional challenge faced in academic writing is the issue of expertise. Academic writing often requires students to write from an expert position, even when they do not consider themselves to be experts on their topics.

REVISION PARAGRAPH

Writing like an educator isn't as hard as one might imagine. In fact, it would seem to be as easy as riding a bike – once you learn, you never forget. However when you haven't ridden in awhile, it's a challenge to start pedaling again and when you do, it might be a little painful, slow starting, and exhausting. With the right tools and consistent practice, educators can become strong writers. In fact, writers “make this job harder than is need to be when they think that there is only One Right Way to do it, that each paper they write has a preordained structure they must find. They simplify their work, on the other hand, when they recognize that there are many effective ways to say something and that their job is only to choose one and execute it so that readers will know what they are doing.” (Becker, 1986, p. 43). This task is often easier said than done. Writing in graduate school takes lots of practice. As Goldberg explained in her book, *Writing Down to the Bones*, “the more you do it, the better you get at it.” This reminds me of a PD I once attended on raising AYP and API scores for my high school students. The purpose of the PD was to help our students to become better writers and we learned how to teach paragraph structure, topic sentences, syntax and tone in order to help the students pass the writing portion of their CSET, which only 14% were passing in a typical year. In order to encourage students to practice for the exam, we also used a sport analogy – encouraging them to practice like students do on the basketball court. We learned how to lead practice drills, writing “sprints”, and how to teach students to exercise their writing power as much as they practice their hoops. It was really something!!! We didn't ever imagine that students would start practicing their writing like they practiced their dribbling. But low and behold, they did! Students writing began to really improve quite dramatically. I guess what they say is true, practice makes perfect!

