In this model, writing activities are woven into the fabric of the course. More formal papers and projects are the culmination of class work, discussion, informal writing, oral presentations, group work, etc. Readings and topics become material for written reflection; students work constantly with text. The teacher frequently collects the outcomes of informal writing activities, responding to them as a group. Unique topics emerge from the collision of ideas, reflection, and work with text.

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Plagiarism-Proofing Assignments

According to the WPA Statement on Plagiarism (www.wpacouncil.org), true plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately and consciously passes off someone else’s words or other intellectual property as his or her own. Many novice writers in academic settings are accused of plagiarism when they are trying in earnest to cite sources responsibly but have not been taught the proper conventions (which are complex and vary from field to field, genre to genre, and situation to situation). The following suggestions are designed to help you “plagiarism-proof” your writing assignments by making it difficult and unnecessary for students to represent as their own work whole papers or parts of papers written by others. It does not address the important need to teach students how to work with sources in your course or in your academic field.

1. Articulate one or more learning goals for an assignment. What do you want your students to learn, experience, or acquire? How do these goals fit into your larger course goals/outcomes?

2. Now work on the design of the assignment. Decide on a level of formality and length, and stakes (high or low). Typically, single or less complex goals can be realized through short, informal papers that don’t require a lot of time to assess. Multiple or complex sets of goals are better achieved—if you want students to acquire or experience them together—in higher-stakes, more formal, longer assignments and projects.

   • What can you do to make your assignment unique?
   • Can you weave class discussion or coverage into the assignment somehow?
   • Can you create a unique “case” or situation for students to respond to?
   • Can you add material after the project is started and ask students to incorporate it?
   • Can you play with the genre or audience of the assignment?

3. Consider what support you want to provide for the assignment. The longer and more complex the assignment, and the higher the stakes, the greater the responsibility to support it through in-class and out-of-class activities.

   • Can you break down a large assignment into smaller parts or help students to build a project from shorter assignments?
   • Can you create activities in your class that help students acquire or practice skills that they must use in completing the assignment? Can you use informal tasks to do that?
   • Can you build in opportunities for students to revise their papers (using one or more rough drafts) and work on those in peer-response groups?
   • Can you provide sample responses that are problematic (not just wonderful or terrible—that have both strengths and weaknesses) and help students to analyze those? The operative words for unique design are creativity and imagination.

4. Decide how you will assess the results, based on the goals. Create unique, assignment-specific rubrics and guides that you give to students before they begin the project.

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