Writing Across the Curriculum Community of Practice (WAC-CoP)

Designing Effective Student Peer Review
January 12, 2016
Guest Speakers: Dr. John Sherman, Department of Chemistry; Dr. Peter Graf, Department of Psychology

Objectives of the WAC-CoP:

1) To connect people across the university that are involved in teaching writing in the sciences; 2)To facilitate sharing of experiences, challenges, ideas and best practices in the teaching and learning of writing in the sciences in an informal, risk-free environment.

Overview of this month's Lunch and Learn:

At this month's Lunch and Learn, John and Peter shared how they incorporate peer review into their classes (SCIE 113, PSYC 101). Helping students understand what makes "good" writing and how to provide and incorporate feedback has improved the quality of writing in their classes. Central to this success, is the importance of teaching students to become better reviewers and markers. Peter saw a 5% increase in essay grades with the introduction of a 2-hour online training workshop, if students completed the workshop prior to the start of the writing process (PSYC 101). John spends time in class to go through several example essays of varying quality and explains why the essays are high quality or not (e.g. logical argument, lack of evidence, clear thesis, etc.) (SCIE 113). In both classes, students all review a standard essay(s), which allows instructors or TAs to provide feedback (ungraded and/or graded), either in a written format or via a video online. Both John and Peter noted that students who understand the rubric and learn to evaluate and incorporate feedback become more engaged with writing process and better understand what makes "good" writing. For example, seeing several example of peer writing helps students learn that "good" writing comes in many styles and does not need to mimic an example essay. Both John and Peter's systems of peer review include grades to provide the extra motivation some students need to take peer review seriously.

Key suggestions for incorporating peer review:

1. Teach students how to review writing and how to use your rubric or grading scheme.
   a. John reviews example essays of varying quality in front of the class and explains why they received certain marks. He encourages in-class conversation about the review process.
   b. Peter incorporates a 2-hour online training workshop on how to do peer review.
   c. Time spent practicing reviewing increases the quality of the feedback they provide each other during their peer reviews.
   d. Remind students that "good" writing comes in a variety of styles.

2. Have students practice reviewing sample essays.
   a. John has students review an two example essay and the TA provides feedback on their reviews.
   b. Peter's online workshop provides students with video feedback on their practice reviews. The videos have been recorded by peers instead of the instructor. Peter finds that students have an easier time understanding a peer's mind, compared to the instructor's mind.

3. Set a standard for the quality by including a grade on their reviews.
   a. Setting an expectation for peer review quality keeps students accountable, encouraging them to provide better feedback.
   b. In Peter's class, the quality of the review is assessed by the TA and counts for 4% of the students' grade.
   c. In John's class, student reviews of the example essays are graded by the TA. The first review is ungraded, while the second contributes to their mark. Students also discuss the peer reviews face to face, which helps them to spend more time giving quality reviews.

4. Teach students how to evaluate and use feedback and set the expectation that will incorporate quality feedback into the writing.
   a. Having students show that they have used, or at least considered, the feedback of their peers encourages more interaction with the review and writing process, which improves student writing.

Additional Resources

- Science Writing Resources For Learning (SCWRL) Educator Resource: Using Peer Review http://scwrl.ubc.ca/educator-resources/strategies-for-teaching-writing/using-peer-review/

- John's Handout from the Lunch and Learn http://sciencewritingresources.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2015/11/WAC-Sherman-In-Class-Peer-Review-Jan-12-2016.pdf

- Peter's Handout from the Lunch and Learn http://sciencewritingresources.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2015/11/WAC-Jan-Graf-12-2016.pdf

Questions?

Email the WAC Coordinator, wac.coordinator@ubc.ca