



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

Reducing Jargon in Science Writing

April 12, 2016

Guest Speakers: Anka Lekhi, Department of Chemistry; Dr. David Oliver, Department of Microbiology and Immunology.

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.

Summary of this month's Lunch and Learn:

At this month's Lunch and Learn, Anka Lekhi and David Oliver shared their experiences incorporating writing to learn (low-stakes writing) into their courses. In David's, 4th year experimental research course (MICB 447), students write a scientific article based on their research, as a team. David scaffolds their writing in the discipline and reinforces their learning with a variety of techniques, including writing to learn assignments. While conducting their experiments, students submit a weekly summary report. By completing these half-page assignments, students practice writing regularly and connect with the course TA(s), for feedback, support and encouragement. David designed these weekly assignments based on the deliverables required of industry scientists. In addition, students complete a reflective journal (10 entries per term), using the Blogs in Connect. In these journals, the students write what they have learned about teamwork, the research process, reflect on seminars, etc. to help them connect with the learning process and their beliefs regarding problem solving, research, and acquiring knowledge. David periodically checks these journals and follows up on them in class. In Anka's 2nd year analytical chemistry course (CHEM 211), she uses writing to learn assignments to help students construct scientific arguments and support the arguments with reasons and evidence. Anka gives the students a series of open-ended questions related to analytical chemistry (e.g. doping in professional cycling) and has them write 3 to 5 sentence arguments that include a claim, a reason(s) for the claim and supporting evidence (an example). She scaffolds these assignments, by spending more time marking and giving feedback on their argument and writing for the first one, and following up (in-person) with each student that failed. These one-on-one meetings ensure that students read and understand the feedback. On later assignments, she reduces the feedback and has TAs do more of the marking. Thus far, she has found that students write more concisely on similar questions on exams, making her exam marking easier.



Additional Resources

- Anka's Handout from the Lunch and Learn
http://sciencewritingresources.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2015/11/WACCoP_writetolearn_resources.pdf
- WAC Educator Resource: Writing to Learn in Undergraduate Science Education
http://sciencewritingresources.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2015/11/WACCoP_writetolearn_resources.pdf

Questions?

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