Best ELL Practices for A&S First-Year Foundations (FYF)

Effective First-Year curriculum incorporates pedagogies that promote high-level literacy and critical thinking skills and designs learning environments that fit the diverse needs and abilities of all students. Consider the following principles and best practices in addressing the language learning aspects of First-Year pedagogy.

General Principles

- In designing Foundation curriculum and courses, follow the principles of *universal design*: the intentional arrangement of inclusive, flexible, versatile, and scaffolded learning environments, teaching materials, and assessment methods. Course activities and assignments should integrate reading, writing, listening, and oral communication and listening comprehension activities as modes of learning disciplinary content.

- When approached as modes of disciplinary learning, the activities of reading, writing, and oral communication function as global and local transferable skills: students learn organizational ability, control of diction, sense of audience, and syntactic fluency, but they also learn discipline-specific conventions, genres, styles, and vocabularies.

- Aim at expanding the students’ level of control and awareness, as well as their range of choices, in the process of appropriating the conventions and genres of your discipline. This is particularly important when approaching assessment: while traditional perspectives on assessment focus on how to address and correct deviations from hypothetical standard responses (written or oral), focus instead on enhancing the student’s potential to negotiate and engage critically with the dominant codes of academic writing in your discipline.

- All First-Year students are learning language: they are forming a new disciplinary lexicon, reading and writing in unfamiliar genres, and developing high-level literacy and critical thinking skills. Students develop their literacy skills in non-linear ways across a range of reading and writing processes. They may also experience progress and regress as they shift disciplines, subject matter, and types of assignments (Knott, 2017).

Best Practices

Here are some strategies to better integrate reading and to promote the transfer of skills between reading and writing:

- Students figure out early on in a course whether completing the assigned readings makes a difference in their course performance and grade. Integrate actively the course readings in students’ tutorial activities and design assignments and assessment methods that develop and evaluate reading skills.

- Teach students to approach reading as an act of composition—an active and dynamic interpretation of texts with potentially multiple meanings. This will facilitate the transfer of critical thinking skills between reading and writing. For this purpose, design assignments that encourage students to examine both the content and the form of a given text and to consider its context, purpose, and target audience.
• Expose students to different academic genres and rhetorical styles, address these differences explicitly, and prompt students to analyze and model their writing after mentor texts.

• Model close-reading and annotation practices in class or tutorials.

• Have students practice oral and written paraphrasing of excerpts from course readings.

• Ask students to use reverse outlining to identify the main points and “argument moves” in a discipline model essay. Reverse outlining can also be used as a revising technique for students’ own writing.

• Ask students to collaboratively create a glossary of relevant course concepts and to provide examples of these concepts’ use in their readings. Make available and encourage students to use the VEA application (Vocabulary Expansion Accelerator), available on Quercus for all courses in A&S.

• Promote “translation” practices by inviting students to report statistics, numbers, graphs, and formulas in spoken and written prose.

Suggested Further Readings

• Bawarshi, Anis S. “Sites of Invention: Genre and the Enactment of First-Year Writing.” Genre and the Invention of the Writer: Reconsidering the Place of Invention in Composition. 2003.

• Carrillo, Ellen C. Securing a Place for Reading in Composition: The Importance of Teaching for Transfer. 2015.


• Harper, Shaun R. & Quaye, Stephen J. (Eds) Student Engagement in Higher Education: Theoretical Perspectives and Practical Approaches for Diverse Populations. 2008


• Horning, A. & Kraemer, Elizabeth W. Reconnecting Reading and Writing. 2013.

