Sample Syllabi

The sample syllabi offered here are presented only as models to demonstrate ways in which you might adapt Writing with a Purpose to suit the needs of your students. Many variations are possible, depending on the focus and theme of your course. Although the syllabi are categorized as “process-centered,” “task-centered,” “modes-centered,” and “reading-centered,” learning to write demands all these interrelated activities. To some extent, the particulars of the composition program in which you teach—placement/exit policies, course sequencing, grading guidelines—will determine the organization of your syllabus. Nevertheless, even a prescribed syllabus offers some latitude and requires some choice. Each of the syllabus organizations suggested here reflects a slightly different conception of how writing is learned. Each syllabus involves discussion of the writing process in general and the processes involved in academic writing in particular, but each does so in a different sequence. Some plans suggest particular writing assignments from Writing with a Purpose, but you may see other possibilities. Any of the writing assignments could be adapted for a particular sequence.

PROCESS-CENTERED SYLLABUS

The process-centered approach focuses on the writer’s process, both its idiosyncrasies and its identifiable commonalities. Behind this approach are two assumptions: first, that writing is best learned by conscious engagement with all phases of the writing process, and second, that writing is a self-reinforcing activity. Through writing and rewriting, students build a repertoire of composing strategies, and through peer response groups and teacher conferences, they develop a language for talking about writing. Instead of writing a new essay each week, students write and revise a small number of essays—perhaps only five or six in a sixteen-week semester, or three or four in a ten-week quarter. The
sequence of assignments moves from personal to public topics. In addition, you might want to ask students to keep a journal, recording the evolution of each essay and their responses to the readings.

Process-Centered Assignment Sequence: Sixteen-Week Semester

Paper 1  Writer’s profile (writing assignment 1 in Chapter 1)—can be written in class as an early exercise.

Paper 2  Personal memoir (writing assignments 1 and 2 in Chapter 2) or profile of a place (writing assignments 4 and 5 in Chapter 2). Students work in class planning, drafting, and revising their work; they also respond to the writing of other students as they share their work in groups.

Paper 3  Investigative report (writing assignment 3 from any chapter or another appropriate writing assignment). Students begin to incorporate outside reading into their texts. Plan a class trip to the library.

Paper 4  Editorial (writing assignment 10 from Chapter 6).

Paper 5  Critical essay (any writing assignment from Chapter 12 or Part Four).

Paper 6  Chapters 13 and 14: research projects (about 3 weeks to complete).

Journal assignment  Spend 5–10 minutes at the beginning of each class freewriting on assignment topics and ideas, writing descriptions of the processes involved in developing each essay, giving updates of progress, defining research questions, and shaping hypotheses. Use journals for writing revision agendas.

Apportionment of Class Time and Assignments:
Sixteen-Week Semester

Week 1  Read Chapters 1 and 2 (overview and planning).
In-class writer’s profile

Week 2  Read Chapter 3: Drafting.
Planning paper 1 (any writing assignment at ends of Chapter 1, 2, or 3); discussion and drafting in groups.

Week 3  Read Chapter 4: Revising.
Bring drafts to class; work in groups on revision.
Complete paper 1.
Week 4
Read Chapter 5 (whole class discussion on methods of development).
Plan paper 2; library trip.

Week 5
Read Chapter 6: Argument.
“Our Side” paper; class discussion on evidence and appeals.

Week 6
Continue Chapter 6.
“My Side” paper.

Week 7
Complete paper 2.
Begin Part Four: Strategies 1–3.
Reassess first two papers and begin paper 3 (any writing assignment from Chapters 5–6 or Part Four).

Week 8
Draft and revise paper 3.
Assign Chapters 7, 8, 9, 10 as needed for individual students.

Week 9
In-class writing assignment (paper 4).
Choose any chapter and focus discussion and writing assignment.

Week 10
Reading and writing about literature.
Short critical paper (Chapter 5).
Any writing assignment from Chapter 12.

Week 11
Students choose and plan topics for research project (paper 6).
In-class assignments from Writing with a Purpose.

Week 12
Chapter 14: Writing the Research Paper.
Journals: write to discover topic.
Students explore resources and gather data.
Summarizing and paraphrasing in class.

Week 13
Continue writing and research.
Work in groups: organizing outlines, developing a thesis.
Write the first draft. Create the introduction.

Week 14
Documenting sources: discuss quoting sources and plagiarism.

Week 15
Final drafts of research papers (paper 6).

Week 16
Reassess all papers, revise early papers, prepare final portfolio.

Process-Centered Assignment Sequence: Ten-Week Quarter

First exercise: Writer’s profile (writing assignment 1 from Chapter 1).
Paper 1 Personal memoir (writing assignment 1 or 2 from Chapter 2).
Paper 2 Investigative report (writing assignment 3 or 5 from any chapter).
Paper 3 Argument (writing assignment 9 or 10 from any chapter).
Paper 4 Research project.

**Apportionment of Class Time and Assignments: Ten-Week Quarter**

Week 1 Read Chapters 1 and 2 (overview and planning).
Writer’s profile in class. Plan personal memoir (paper 1).

Week 2 Chapters 3 and 4 (drafting and revising).
Draft and revise personal memoir; work in groups.

Week 3 Chapter 5 (methods of development).
Complete personal memoir; groups comment on drafts.
Begin investigative report (paper 2).

Week 4 Chapter 6 (argument).
Read and revise paper 2.
Begin paper 3 (argument). Plan and draft in class.

Week 5 Complete argument (paper 3).
Part Four: strategies.
Select one or two complete reading sequences.
Journals: response to readings.

Week 6 Chapter 13: Planning the Research Paper.
Students write in journals to discover topic.
Writing assignment 1 to begin research paper.

Discuss development of papers by Jamie and Blythe.

Week 8 Chapter 14: Writing the Research Paper.
Draft paper: write the introduction.
Revision agenda.

Week 9 Continue writing and research.
Refer students to guidelines on front papers of textbook.
Confer as necessary.

Week 10 Complete paper 4, research project.
Prepare portfolios; assess all four writing assignments.

**THE THEMATIC SYLLABUS**
The thematic syllabus focuses on rhetorical context and its effect on writing. This approach centers on particular themes and presents a series of sequenced tasks usually arranged in order of increasing complexity. You might begin with topics such as personal narratives and memoirs and move toward less personal topics such as gun control, affirmative action, or literary analysis. Of course, all topics possess something of a personal nature, which students sometimes overlook.

**Semester Theme: Social Problems and Public Policy**

Many of the readings offered in *Writing with a Purpose*, 13th edition, introduce topics of current social and political interest: the death penalty, affirmative action, mental health, class, race, and gender. How does a diverse culture such as ours approach these topics? What are the major issues of each topic, what are the larger social implications, and what possible solutions exist for correcting problems? The topics presented in the readings are highly controversial and can create lively classroom debate in which students learn the critical skills of citing evidence, analyzing situations, and presenting judgments. The writing classroom is where students can hone their skills in preparing arguments as they read, respond, and conduct their own investigations into questions of public policy.

**Apportionment of Class Time and Assignments:**

**Sixteen-Week Semester**

- **Week 1**: Chapter 1 (any writing assignment from Chapter 1). Planning paper 1.
- **Week 2**: Chapters 2 and 3. Drafting and revising paper 1.
- **Week 3**: Chapters 4 and 5 (any writing assignment from Chapter 5). Planning and drafting paper 2.
- **Week 4**: Chapter 6. Revising paper 2.
- **Week 5**: Chapters 7 and 8 (any writing assignment from Chapter 4 or 7). Planning and drafting paper 3.
- **Week 6**: Part Four. Revising paper 3; begin paper 4 (any writing assignment from Part Four).
- **Week 7**: Continue Part Four. Complete paper 4.
- **Week 8**: Chapter 10 (any writing assignment from this chapter).
Teaching with a Purpose

Week 9  Review chapters on strategies and argument.
        Plan paper 5.

Week 10  Revise paper 5.

Weeks 11–16  Chapters 13 and 14 (any writing assignment from these chapters).
             Planning, drafting, revising, documenting paper 6.

Apportionment of Class Time and Assignments: Ten-Week Quarter

Week 1  Chapters 1, 2, and 3 (any writing assignment from these chapters).

Week 2  Chapters 4 and 5.
        Complete paper 1.

Week 3  Chapter 6 (any writing assignment from Chapters 1–6).

Week 4  Assign Chapters 7, 8, 9, 10 as necessary to individual students.
        Chapter 11: strategies.
        Complete paper 2.

Week 5  Continue Part Four: strategies.
        Paper 3 (any assignment from Part Four).

Week 6  Complete paper 3.
        Begin research. Read Chapter 13.

Week 7  Read Chapter 14. Plan and draft research paper.

Weeks 8–10  Concentrate on research paper (paper 4). Short in-class assignments
            on paraphrasing, summarizing, documenting sources.

MODES-CENTERED SYLLABUS

It is important for students to understand that real writing is not exclusively
descriptive, informative, or persuasive but is a combination of all of these methods
of development. One method generally emerges as dominant, depending on the
aims of the writing. The danger in promoting a modes approach to teaching writing
is that the methods are artificially imposed as molds into which students merely
pour content. To guard against this, point out the overlapping methods in the essays.
Understanding the various rhetorical arrangements can strengthen student writing,
but only if students understand how the various arrangements, or strategies, work.

Unit 1: Description
To get students warmed up, you might begin the course with a focus on description. Ask students to describe themselves as writers or to describe a room or computer lab where they write. Several in-class assignments rely on description.

**Unit 2: The Informative Essay**

Paper 1: Select a personal experience that you remember in vivid detail (writing assignment 1, 2, or 5 from any chapter will serve as a prompt for this paper). Write about this experience, using one of the patterns of development suggested in Chapter 5 and one of the strategies outlined in Part Four.

Paper 2: Write about the same experience, using a different pattern of development to explore the topic.

Paper 3: Revise again, using yet another pattern of development or strategy.

Paper 4: Write an informative paper about the experience, combining several patterns of development. Use any combination of patterns or strategies, but try for the ones that best serve the purposes of the essay and the needs of your reader.

**Unit 3: The Persuasive Essay**

Concentrate on Chapters 6, 13, and 14 (argument and research) and on Part Four (strategies and readings). Assignments 9 and 10 from any of these chapters can serve as prompts, although other assignments, such as investigative assignments and directives to write editorials, can also be used successfully.

Begin the unit with shorter, in-class assignments based on the readings, exercises, and writing assignments. Ask for a short, two-page paper to begin with, requiring that students bring drafts for peer review. These papers can be revised and turned in for a grade. Students can practice quoting and documenting sources by citing a passage from one of the readings for the short paper.

For the long paper, spend the first week discussing how to assess and present evidence for both sides. Break down each portion of the process, and set deadlines for each stage (for example, require a set of note cards and a draft of “Their Side”). Eventually, the paper will be constructed with a developed thesis and supporting sources carefully documented. Provide time for the class to go to the library, and arrange for groups to work together to read and respond to drafts in progress. Provide a sign-up sheet for conferences.

**Unit 4: Academic Writing:**

The Critical Paper and Essay Examinations (two papers)
Paper 1: Any writing assignment from Chapter 12.

Paper 2: Any writing assignment from Chapter 11. Give practice (timed exams for no grade) in order to provide an opportunity for students to practice the strategies for exam writing offered in Writing with a Purpose.

READING-CENTERED SYLLABUS

Students learn to write by writing. They also learn to write by reading. Writing with a Purpose, 13th edition, includes a section devoted to providing intensive reading, further reinforcing writing strategies introduced in earlier chapters. Part Four, “Readings with a Purpose,” offers reading selections with exercises and assignments designed to engage students with the making of meaning in the interrelated processes of reading and writing. Ongoing reader-response journal assignments should be required for the reading-centered syllabus; you might begin each class period with a short question related to the reading assignment. Class time should be divided evenly among reading and discussion; writing and responding; group work, including class presentations; and individual conferences. In addition to ongoing journal assignments and frequent in-class writing assignments, students should prepare at least three longer papers. Provide clear deadlines for each assignment. A final portfolio of all writing assignments should be presented at the end of the course.

Apportionment of Class Time and Assignments: Ten-Week Quarter (Concentrate on Part Four: Readings with a Purpose)

| Week 1 | Chapters 1, 2, and 3.  
|        | All readings.  
|        | Journal: reader-response to readings; selected assignments.  
| Week 2 | Part Four: Strategy One: Narration and Description.  
|        | Student and professional writing.  
|        | All or selected essays from sampler; selected assignments.  
| Week 3 | Chapter 4 and Part Four.  
|        | Student and professional writing.  
|        | All or selected essays from sampler; selected assignments.  
|        | First paper due.  

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