



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1981 Volume IV: Writing Across the Curriculum

Failure-Proof Writing: Assignments for the Student Who Can't/Won't Write

Guide for Curriculum Unit 81.04.11
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This unit will not change anybody's life or their teaching style; instead, it was developed as a way of sharing some things I have learned about helping reluctant writers with their writing. All too often conventional introductory writing assignments intimidate and frustrate the budding writer. This is especially unfortunate when the student also has a history of academic difficulties; the Developmentally Disabled student is a prime example of such a student. My unit discusses ways in which writing assignments can be formulated especially for the student who, for whatever reason, is reluctant to write. My unit was developed primarily for the teacher of Developmentally Disabled students, and I refer to and quote my own D.D. students throughout because they usually represent an extreme end of the writing spectrum; however, there are reluctant writers in every class and at every level. The assignments in this paper are by no means limited to D.D. students.

I've divided the unit into several parts so that the non-D.D. teacher can skip over the parts that are not relevant to him/her. I begin with a brief overview of the kinds of learning problems a teacher is likely to encounter in a D.D. classroom. I then talk about some beginning strategies that have worked for me in developing a good working atmosphere in the classroom. This section is followed by one containing several "warm-up exercises"—exercises that can be used to familiarize the student with the writing process. Finally, I conclude with a section on "selling" writing to the student; that is, trying to get him/her to initiate writing on his/her own, whether for practical reasons or personal ones.

(Recommended for 8th—12th grade Developmentally Disabled English and any student who needs help with writing.)

Key Words

Basic Skills Writing Instruction

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