

Writing Across the Curriculum Fellowship Signature Project: Annotated Bibliography on

Writing in Teaching of Psychology

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**Connor-Greene, P. A. (2000). Making connections: Evaluating the effectiveness of journal writing in enhancing student learning. *Teaching of Psychology*, 27(1), 44-46**

This paper gives the topic of journal writing in college courses a hitherto little-looked-at analysis of it on empirical grounds. Performance measures are utilized for this purpose. Methods of utilizing journal writing for teaching about personality theories specifically are described. The analysis of student test grades indicated that being assigned journal writing increased student learning, and student evaluations demonstrated perceptions of usefulness of this exercise in fostering understanding. The paper includes examples from students' journals as well illustrating ways in which students connected course material to their own observations.

A couple of specific aspects of the paper particularly caught my attention. First, it was noteworthy as described on the top-right of page 44 how the journal assigned by the professor explicitly did not ask students to share personal experiences, though the students could if they wished, and instead emphasized cognitive content, thus both avoiding ethical dilemmas regarding students' privacy and keeping students' focus on the content being learned. It was also interesting to see, on the left of page 45, the wide array of creative examples students brought to the journal writings, from song lyrics to television to literature. Finally, the results' lack of empirical support for writing 15 journal entries over only 5 entries begs the question of whether there is a limit to how much more journal entries improve outcomes more, though the author notes that other un-assessed qualities might be better fostered by the inclusion of more journal entries.

The one question brought to mind for me from this focus on journal assignments is, what does journal writing offer specifically to psychology teaching over other intensive writing types?

**Fallahi, C. R., Wood, R. M., Austad, C. S., & Fallahi, H. (2006). A program for improving undergraduate psychology students' basic writing skills. *Teaching of Psychology, 33*(3), 171-175.**

Fallahi, Wood, Austad & Fallahi (2006) examined the effects of in-class writing instruction, practice, peer review, and feedback on writing skills of undergraduates enrolled in a general psychology course. The categories of basic writing skills they focused on were grammar, writing style, mechanics, and American Psychological Association (APA) referencing style. The four writing domains were significantly improved, with the improvement occurring immediately for referencing, and not until the fourth paper for the other three domains. The results support teaching writing in content courses such as general psychology.

One key point particularly came to my attention. The quicker learning of APA style referencing than the other skills was striking. Perhaps the learning of APA style referencing is more simply undergone, with the skill only having a few main elements and being applicable formulaically to most citing situations the student will return into, whereas the other skills are more deeply complex and thus only improved through substantial practice and instruction, upon which point the target techniques will have been both witnessed and corrected in many of their myriad possible forms.

I have a few impressions that come to mind from this paper. For one, I wonder if the writing center wouldn't be more uniquely useful for fostering some of these basic skills (with the exception of APA style). Also, I will from now on keep in mind that practicing writing over the long term of a semester can have benefits that just 1 or 2 assignments might not have. Finally, the question of whether or not this paper's suggestion aligns with Bean (2011) is pertinent.

**Goddard, P. (2002). Promoting writing among psychology students and faculty: An interview with Dana S. Dunn. *Teaching of Psychology*, 29(4), 331-336.**

Goddard interviews Dunn here, with the discussion addressing a number of topics regarding writing in psychology. Goddard takes a greater role than simply asking questions — she is also a direct contributor to the ideas that are both expressed and take form across the interview. Topics addressed include Dunn’s own prolific writing output, Dunn’s own writing mentors, inspiring students to see the value in writing, linking of reading and writing, why Dunn became so interested in focusing on teaching writing, the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement, fallacies of a psychology instructor taking the view that he or she doesn’t know enough about writing to teach it and that the English faculty should do it, effects on the instructor’s workload of assigning more in-depth writing, debating on Willingham’s (1990; cited in Goddard [2002]) recommendation that the college instructor should demand technical competence in writing and that students can achieve that on their own given clear expectations thereof, peer editing, anxiety over a blank page or empty computer screen (i.e. writer’s block), and sharing writing pitfalls with students.

Dunn’s summary of WAC’s influence on him as teaching him about writing as a process was notable. So was the answer to the psychology instructor question ‘How can I grade my students on writing if I’m not fully confident in my own writing ability?’ involving the fact that writing is a big part of your requisite skills that you bring into the research work you do. Certain differences from Bean caught my eye – e.g. doing line editing on papers of particularly poor writers. The debate about Willingham’s paper was interesting, given for example Goddard’s note that ‘his approach may work at his university’, but that she doubts it would work at hers, which I

took as a possible noting of the differences between teaching at a university of students who tend to have a rich background in both academic English exposure and practice, and one where students may be from minority or English language learning backgrounds which affect their technical writing skills.

**Hammond, M. (2005). A review of recent papers on online discussion in teaching and learning in higher education. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 9(3), 9-23.**

Hammond (2005) provides a review of a sample of then-recent case studies on the use of asynchronous (e.g. message board instead of chatroom format) online discussion in higher education. The studies are analyzed in terms of curriculum design, assumptions about teaching and learning, and claims and reported conditions for using online discussion. The claims made for asynchronous online discussion are frequently found to be based on social constructivist principles. Asynchronous online discussion is seen as offering additional value by providing learners with experience of computer communication tools (though as of now in 2018 that may not be necessary any longer) and opportunities for taking part in group work. The authors discuss several constraints on participation within online forums as well, in relation to the nature of curriculum design, software design, tutor support, and learners' attitudes and previous experience. The conditions under which asynchronous online discussion may best support learning are set out, and avenues for future research are suggested.

This paper's highlighting of near-consensus best practices in asynchronous online discussion use in higher education is certainly a key feature of it. One notable best practice here involves making higher order thinking an explicit and appropriate learning outcome, which I could see lifting a message board for discussion up from boring conversational fodder into true interactive construction of knowledge.

In attempting to come up with my own example of an approach to incorporate the aforementioned best practice in a message board for psychology learning, I have thought of a

‘virtual experiment’ space, where students are asked to critique classic experiments, come up with their own experiments, and comment on others’ critiques/original experiments.

**Madigan, R., Johnson, S., & Linton, P. (1995). The language of psychology: APA style as epistemology. *American Psychologist*, 50(6), 428.**

This paper proposes that the Publication Manual of the APA, a guide for many aspects of professional writing for psychologists (and utilized by many other fields as well) known collectively as “APA style”, involves more than a set of explicit guidelines for presenting information. The paper proposes that APA style also incorporates a variety of unarticulated practices that reflect fundamental attitudes and values of psychologists. Some of the less obvious characteristics of APA style are examined here, to show how they support the discipline’s commitment to the empirical methods and the discipline’s view of itself as a cumulative, collaborative enterprise. The paper suggests that students who enter the field of psychology acquire psychology’s language conventions, and in doing so they also come to implicitly endorse important values of their discipline.

The discussion of hedge words in this paper is very interesting – this is a topic I’d thought about before, but had never heard anyone talk about, let alone in as much drawn-out detail as is included here. Hedge words (such as *tend*, *suggest*, and *may*) “implicitly recognize the uncertain flow of the ongoing stream of empirical studies investigating complex phenomena”. Story schema was also interestingly highlighted (that is, the typical ‘story-like’ organization of a scholarly psychological paper into an introduction, method, results, and discussion). Distortions this relatively inflexible mode of presentation can create are noted, but the current paper explicitly does not criticize said distortions.

My own take on this paper is that it brings to my attention the value and influence of APA style not only as a set of rules academics follow for consistently, but as epistemology.



Additional References

Bean, J. C. (2011). *Engaging ideas: The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom*. John Wiley & Sons.