



Offer examples of texts as models and/or objects of critique for students

## Tips for Modelling Good Writing

Students don't always understand new genres of writing quickly, and they can sometimes think they know what is expected in an assignment (when in reality, they are not quite right). Use example texts as models of good writing as well as good content. Here are some ways to do so.

### 1. Select strategically

Students benefit from seeing strong writing, so showing them examples of good writing is important. But consider showing them less-successful examples, too, and explain specifically how those examples fall short of your expectations. Do not use student work as examples unless you have obtained written consent, however.

### 2. Make the aim transparent

Make sure that students know what their goal is when looking at examples. Tell students if a text is an example that you want them to emulate, or if the text is one that you want them to evaluate and critique. Otherwise, students might misunderstand how they should use the text. For instance, in the absence of other instructions, some students will see example texts as templates, which could lead to formulaic writing.

### 3. Show them how it's done

When showing examples of good writing, make sure to draw a distinction between why content is strong and why the writing is strong (and let them know if you want them to analyze both aspects of the text, or just one). Perform an example analysis of a text for the class yourself, so that students have a basic understanding of what steps they should take in such an analysis. Next, have students analyze a different text and discuss their findings in small groups. The groups can then report back to the whole class to share insights (thus ensuring that any groups on the wrong track can hear about more sound analyses).

“Teaching Spotlights” are small but impactful ways for professors to keep consistent pedagogical improvement at the forefront of their teaching practice.

## Additional resources

Alston, Chandra & Katie A. Danielson. "[Enacting Thinking: Supporting Teacher Candidates in Modeling Writing Strategies](#)." *Literacy Research and Instruction*, vol. 60, no. 1 (2020): pp. 199-219. Doi: 10.1080/19388071.2020.1822475

Andrews, Roy. "[Modeling How We Think When We Write](#)" (1991, reprint). *Plymouth State College Journal on Writing Across the Curriculum*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1997): pp. 63-67.

Arnold, Will. "[A Guide to Starting Your Own Journal Club](#)." Addgene blog. 6 February 2020.

Swales, John, and Christine B. Feak. "Writing Critique." In *Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). University of Michigan Press, 2012, pp.228-276.

### 4. Keep it in their minds

When discussing students' writing assignment instructions after having discussed model texts, refer to the previous example analysis exercise as a method for breaking down and understanding new writing genres. Explicitly pointing out how activities in your course relate to each other will help students see how skills and knowledge build.

### 5. Start a "journal club"

Over the span of a course, module, or assignment, have students read and respond to important journal articles. You can assign a different discussion leader for each article, with that leader constructing a set of questions to elicit discussion from the group, or serve as a discussion leader yourself. But make an evaluation and analysis of the writing strengths of the text part of any article discussion to help students improve their writing skills.

Alternatively, an outside-of-class-time journal club can form part of the contributing or preparatory activities of a capstone project, thesis, or even be a regular activity in a student club. Another option is to include students in a journal club that faculty have already created.

Students can select articles to reinforce their information literacy and research skills, or you the professor (or faculty advisor) can select the articles.

### 6. Give insight on the process

Using an article of your own, show students the complex, even messy process of writing and revising that you undertook. Explaining your revision choices can not only help show students how you were thinking about what the article needed, but it can also remind students that focusing on good processes takes time and effort, but is likely to produce a strong writing product.

### 7. Tools are cool

Provide resources, as appropriate, to help students successfully complete the task. Suggest helpful journals or books on the content, provide links to videos of presentations in the mode that you have assigned, or give students sound advice about presentation planning and delivery from respectable sources. If you need help finding more tools, seek additional help from the Center for Teaching and Learning.