

Observation Report 1 Meghan Riley - Introduction to Academic Writing

Event Observed: English 109: Introduction to Academic Writing (Lecture)

Date Observed: November 18, 2015

Location: RCH 109

Time: 8:30 - 9:30 AM

Number of Students Present: 17

Observer: Charis Enns, Graduate Instructional Developer, University of Waterloo
Centre for Teaching Excellence

Plan for Teaching Event:

This teaching event occurred in a first-year English class, ENGL 109: Introduction to Academic Writing. This is an introductory composition course that first-year students may use towards fulfilling a required writing or public speaking course credit. All students in this course are arts and business students. While this is your first year acting as an instructor for this course, you are familiar with the material as you were previously a TA for this same course. You also have a significant amount of experience teaching English in a variety of settings, including secondary schools, adult education programs, and summer school programs.

As the instructor of this course, you had the freedom to design and deliver the material as you saw appropriate. You employed ‘popcorn’ reading, discussion and other interactive learning activities as your primary teaching methods during this lesson. You choose to use the blackboard as your primary visual aid. This particular lesson focused on providing students the opportunity to practice peer-review. Students were also given time to practice writing in response to prompts. The learning objective for this lesson was for students to be able to:

- Incorporate strategies from the course textbook, *Writing Tools*, into their writing and peer review

This learning objective was identified as important as students will need to demonstrate their ability to incorporate comments from peer review into their final research paper. Their peer review skills will also be assessed through the activities in their end-of-term portfolio.

During our pre-observation meeting, you specifically asked for feedback regarding the transitions between teaching strategies, time breakdown of the lesson, alignment between learning objectives and assessments, and facilitation of activities.

Aspects to Maintain:

1. Gaining and maintaining students’ attention

- You began this lesson with a couple of writing prompts, which got students thinking and involved in the lesson early on. I appreciate that you gave students the choice to free write if they preferred. I believe that including a degree of choice in this activity encouraged students to participate. Starting class with an activity also helped in gaining students’ attention, which can be difficult to achieve so early in the day.

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- The many subsequent questions that you asked and activities that you planned helped to maintain that same level of attention throughout the lesson. Getting students involved in the lesson, especially early on, helps to cut down on any classroom management issues. It also helps students to learn and retain new material better. In addition to activities, you maintained students' attention by using good voice intonation, moving around the classroom and by making students get up and move around the classroom as well. Good work!

2. Activity planning and variation of activities

- You planned engaging and relevant learning activities. Your lesson included class discussion and popcorn reading, which provided students the opportunity to discuss new material as a class/in a larger group. Your lesson also included a peer review activity where students worked in pairs to review each other's work. Finally, your lesson began with a writing activity where students wrote individually in response to prompts. These activities were varied, providing students opportunities to interact with you, to work with one another and to work alone. Including a variety of activities is a great idea as students have different preferences when it comes to interactivity.

3. Activity management

- Overall, I felt that the activities that you planned were extremely well executed. You gave the students lots of information about what they were to do when working individually or in pairs. You also made the goals of the activity clear and let the students know how much time they would have to complete the activity. It was good that you made yourself available to your students while they were working by walking around the classroom (despite the physical constraints of the classroom): This kept the lines of communication open so that students could ask you questions as needed. While the students were doing the activities, you checked in on their progress and stated how much time they would have to finish up. Doing this made sure that students could plan their time and they were not caught off guard when the activities concluded.

4. Delivery and confidence

- Many elements of your delivery were strong. You appeared comfortable and natural in front of the classroom. You made eye contact with the students and eagerly engaged them throughout the lesson. The fluency and pace of your speech were also suitable.
- Your lecture delivery style made you appear knowledgeable, well prepared and organized. Your knowledge of the material and teaching confidence were also made evident by your concise and clear responses to student questions. Overall, you seemed incredibly comfortable in your role and relaxed, which helped to foster a comfortable classroom environment.

Targets for Change and Methods for Improvement:

1. Transitions

- It would be useful to plan transition sentences between activities. For example, following the popcorn reading, I found the transition to be a bit quick. When you finish a section of your lesson, provide a quick summary. Let students know how and when they should try to apply this new information (in this case, it was about paragraph length). Also, let

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students know how this information relates to past or future course content or fits into the ‘big picture’ of the course. The absence of strong transitions can make a lesson feel choppy while providing transition statements can improve the flow of a lesson, as well as facilitate student learning.

2. Responding to students’ questions and comments

- When students asked questions or responded to your questions, you generally responded helpfully and thoroughly. However, on two occasions, you only provide one-word responses. This was only noticeable because it contrasted with your other more thorough responses. Try to expand on and acknowledge all comments and suggestions that students offer in the same way and with the same level of enthusiasm. This will help ensure that students (especially the shyer ones) know that their contribution is valued.

Additional Comments:

You specifically asked for feedback regarding the transitions between teaching strategies, time breakdown of the lesson, alignment between learning objectives and assessments, and facilitation of activities. These elements of your teaching have all been commented on above above.

Overall, this was a very strong teaching event Meghan! I thoroughly enjoyed watching you teach and it was wonderful to see you deliver such an interactive lesson. In addition to appearing confident, credible and organized in front of the classroom, it was a pleasure to watch your students participate and enjoy this interactivity: They were clearly engaged throughout the entirety of the lesson. Well done!

Decision: Accepted

Response Paper

Due date: December 2015 (email to cenns@uwaterloo.ca)

Prompt:

For your response paper (2-3 pages single-spaced), I’d like you to discuss how you would change this lesson if you were teaching this same course but with a larger class size (e.g., 100+ students). Here are some points you might want to consider:

- Would you structure the content differently? If so, how?
- How would you keep the lesson interactive despite being in a large class?
- Describe some examples of activities you would use.
- Describe some of the challenges that you would expect to encounter in a larger class.