



Teaching Matters and Assessment Center

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Director's Note



In my time at Rutgers-Camden I have seen both excellent teaching and poor teaching. I have surely done a bit of both myself. Like others, I have struggled with the teaching of writing in various courses. While few of us simply assign writing to be collected on the due date with no further instruction, just how much scaffolding and support (including dedicated class time) to provide for those assignments is a challenging question. I am especially mindful of this from my perch as director of the Writing Program. In our courses for first year students, writing itself is the subject matter. Instructors strive to model best practices in teaching writing and we hope that students leave ready for college-level writing across the disciplines. Yet I fear that a transfer of the baton is not as smooth or as secure as it might be. On our end, are we setting up students to succeed? In other courses, are students missing out on opportunities to build on their skills? The scholarly literature on transfer tells us that the transition into disciplinary modes of writing is far from automatic and that there are indeed best (or better) ways to teach writing in content courses. For instance, there are better assignments than the generic term paper and better approaches to structuring assignments to support learning. (If interested, we can send relevant chapters from *Engaging Ideas* by John Bean on formal and informal writing assignments.)

One area of support for instructors that is ever useful is making the most of written (or oral) responses to writing. For that, see below. Also below see resources for teaching with technology and news of upcoming TMAC workshops to which you are warmly invited. Happy Fall!

Let's Talk Teaching

In honor of World Mental Health day this past Monday, October 10th, the *The Guardian* released [a series of articles](#) on the mental health of both students and academics in the university setting. If you'd like to learn more about the resources offered on our campus, visit the [Student Health Services website](#).

The role of internet usage in the college classroom has been the center of much debate. In this [interview](#) with the *New York Times*, Kenneth Goldsmith from the University of Pennsylvania discusses his new book, *Wasting Time on the Internet*, describing his experiences exploring the net with his students as a means of discovering, creating, and generating discussion.

What do you think? Let us know at teaching.matters@camden.rutgers.edu





Assessing and Responding to Student Writing

At this point in the semester, as students submit their first major course assignments, many teachers wonder how they can most effectively respond to their students' work.

For assessment basics, strategies, examples, and tools, visit these resources from the [Carnegie Mellon Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence](#) and [Penn State University](#).

Published scholarship on the subject includes Dana R. Ferris' [survey](#) of various instructors' approaches to response, and Richard Haswell's [study](#) of the "shortcuts" that teachers use to assess student work. In addition, Sheri Rysdam and Lisa Johnson-Shull prompt teachers to [reframe "feedback" as "feedforward,"](#) questioning long-held response techniques and suggesting a new set of best practices.

Looking for alternative ways to respond to student writing? Check out Shannon Mrkich and Jeff Sommers' [article](#) exploring the use of audio recording software to comment on papers. This [article](#) by Chris Anson includes excerpts from students' writing and teachers' taped commentary. Interested in learning more? Attend the TMAC workshop on using VoiceThread to respond to student writing (see "Conferences and Events" below).

Tools and Technology

Whether you're using a whiteboard and expo markers, powerpoint slides, or high-tech 3d visualization in your classroom, this [resource](#) includes a wide range of information visualization tools for you to consider the most effective way to present data to your students.

Many teachers question just how much technology should be used in the classroom, and how they might craft an appropriate technology policy. This [article](#) explores various studies on encouraging vs. discouraging technology policies, as well as their effect on student empowerment.



Grant Opportunity

As part of the Open and Affordable Textbooks Project, the Rutgers University Libraries will be awarding twelve \$1,000 grants to full and part-time faculty from across the Rutgers system who agree to design (or redesign) a course to rely on open access education resources, library subscription resources, and/or course reserves. More information about the program can be found [here](#). Grant applications are due by December 9th and can be found [here](#).

Conferences and Events

TMAC, in collaboration with the Writing & Design Lab (WDL) and the Office of Instructional Design & Technology, is hosting a workshop on **“Using Voicethread to Respond to Student Writing.”** Join us in the *Writer’s House room 202 on Thursday, November 3rd from 3:00-4:30pm* to see a demonstration of new tools and strategies for leaving audio-feedback on student work, as well as try out the technology for yourself! Light refreshments provided. Please click [here](#) to RSVP.

Julie Rocinske, Mary Flaherty, and Bill FitzGerald will host an **Academic Integrity Workshop** on *Wednesday, October 26th during free period in the South BC Conference Room (Campus Center).*

Are you concerned about your students’ writing? TMAC invites you to join us for a presentation titled **“Help! My Students Can’t Write: Here are 7 Things You Can Do.”** This event will take place on *Monday, November 14th during free period in the Faculty Lounge.* Please RSVP [here](#).

Visit us at tmac.camden.rutgers.edu. Send us your questions, links, and comments at teaching.matters@camden.rutgers.edu

