

## Provisions: Research Stages for AOE Summer Launch Students

The following example is specific to English classes that were attended by students in Saint Rose's Academic Opportunity Experience (AOE) program, which met for one week prior to the start of the Fall 2014 semester, but the process is applicable to semester-length classes, across the campus. AOE students wrote a research paper in one week. In our class meetings of one hour and ten minutes, for a mere five days, we walked through the stages of the process. It is important to note that students were also provided with daily small-group tutoring and structured study to support them in understanding concepts and completing assignments. I also incorporated collaborative learning experiences into the class. My main goals were:

- to walk students through the stages of writing a research paper, giving them an overview of the process and using a brief assignment to minimize the sense of overwhelm that often accompanies writing research papers
- to make it virtually impossible to plagiarize, so students would complete the assignment without resorting to shortcuts, enabling them to finish with a sense of confidence about facing the next writing task with academic integrity
- to give students experience collaborating academically, since connecting with one another is one of the strongest factors in positively impacting student retention.

Day 1: I designated a topic, a controversial one, to encourage a lively discussion. (In this case, we talked about the First Amendment and Freedom of Speech, specifically on college campuses). We had a class discussion about some of the pros and cons (of freedom of speech without limits and of campus speech codes, which limit certain words and impose penalties to anyone who uses those words). Since the topic is relevant to the students, they were engaged and participated enthusiastically in the discussion.

I asked students to write their opinions about the issue, limiting them to 400 words (allowing 350 to 450). This limit is contrary to what we usually ask of students, and it requires that they choose their words with care, so that they can say something of substance without exceeding the maximum. I often get complaints about how hard it was to really say something with so few words, a complaint that is music to my ears, in comparison with complaints about how students couldn't possibly fill whatever the designated number of pages. After they wrote their opinions, they were given three sources (covering some of the pros and cons of the issue) to read for the next day.

Day 2: We talked about thesis statements, and I asked students to add all three sources to the opinion they had already written, including at least one quotation, one paraphrase, and one summary (after going over each and practicing in class), to be handed-in the next day. What I also asked, enabling me to see how well they understood in-text citations, was for them to underline—in their papers and on the articles—their quotations, summaries, and paraphrases, identifying each in the margins. I provided them with citation information for the three articles I gave them, an example of a completed entry, and guidelines for creating a Works Cited page.

Day 3: We talked about why we cite and why the styles are so particular. I asked them to go back to the articles I gave them and to acknowledge the opposing argument and

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to state why their own position was stronger. The students then met in small groups to read each other's papers and decide on examples of effective quotations, summaries, and paraphrases, and wrote them on the board, which served as the basis for discussion.

That afternoon, the students then went to the library, and Steve Black presented an information session about how to use our library's databases. The students then found two additional sources to add to the paper (they were required to use each source at least once, both paraphrasing and summarizing at least once). They, then, added those sources to their papers and their Works Cited pages.

Day 4: We looked at structure, introductions, and conclusions, and further discussed thesis statements and in-text citations. Students worked on computers, while the teaching assistant and I circulated and answered questions. This gave students a chance to practice, while we were in the room, and to get questions answered right away.

In the afternoon, I met students in the library's reading room, and facilitated peer review workshops, where students worked in groups of four, reading and responding to each other's papers, in accordance with provided guidelines. Most groups were serious and engaged, and a number of students said that they found the feedback of their peers to be useful and would consider it as they wrote their final drafts.

Day 5: Students handed in all drafts, along with their final papers, enabling me to track their growth and also the consistency of their writing, to rule out plagiarism. In class, students read each other's papers, in groups of four, and chose a paper to read aloud to the class. They handed in a paragraph specifying how they evaluated the papers and why they chose the paper they did. I also asked them to respond in writing to some wrap-up questions, and in the overwhelming majority of responses, students said they understood a lot more about college writing and felt they would be able to apply the process to future research papers.

Throughout the process, AOE tutors worked with small groups of students to reinforce the lessons and to tutor writing. The Writing Center can offer this same kind of follow-up to students in classes across the campus.

What I am thinking about doing differently next time is to give students at least one article to read, that speaks of both pros and cons, before they write. It seemed that once they had already written, they were resistant to changing their minds on paper, or to doing the work of that kind of rewriting, even when it was clear in class discussion that several of them had changed their minds from their original positions. I hesitated to give them reading up front, because I wanted students to formulate an initial argument on their own. That may not have been the most effective approach because many of them had not previously given any thought to the matter. Reading ahead of time could help them to formulate more considered initial arguments.