

# Planning for Instruction

Helping student writers capture their own meanings, thereby becoming successful writers, involves engaging them with the writing process, instilling confidence in them as writers, and encouraging them to take ownership of their writing. In this chapter, we discuss how to plan for such engaging instruction. As we get into the specifics of needs and rights analyses, lesson planning, and incorporating content, it is important to remember that, to meet these goals, you need to provide opportunities for students to make meaning and not focus solely on form.

## Needs and Rights Analyses

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- Have you ever designed a new writing course?
- If so, what was the process like? What steps did you take?
- If not, how would you start? What difficulties do you think you might encounter?

Educational institutions often require syllabi or unit plans to include a list of objectives and ways to measure them. To produce these objectives, you should conduct a needs analysis that considers both the students' needs and their strengths: Why are the students studying English? What do they already know about academic English writing? What genres and varieties of English will they need to know? In what topics and genres are they interested? Once you understand the answers to these questions, you can think about the requirements of the institution in which you work and the standards you are to attain, and combine them with student needs to create objectives.

We recommend listing the objectives and means of assessment together to make the correspondence between the two as transparent as possible. Table 1.1 shows an example from a syllabus for an advanced ESL academic writing course in a United States university.

**Table 1.1 Sample Objectives and Methods of Assessment**

<b>Objectives</b> <b>(Students will be able to . . . )</b>	<b>Assessment</b> <b>(The teacher will assess this objective by . . . )</b>
Identify the distinct features of academic writing	In-class analysis task
Paraphrase, summarize, synthesize, and critically analyze source materials	Research paper Graphic organizer Homework In-class assignments
Respond effectively to others' texts in peer-review activities	Peer-review task

In the United States, K–12 teachers must align the curriculum with the Common Core State Standards. See Appendix 1 for a description of a primary school unit and its accompanying Common Core standards and means of assessment.

In addition to needs analysis, Benesch (2001) has suggested that teachers engage in rights analysis. Rights analysis asks students to reflect on the objectives set out by their institutions and to explore any possible contradictions between the objectives on the one hand and institutional and

students' realities on the other. For example, a college writing program may promote the writing process, including opportunities for revision, whereas the larger university requires students to demonstrate proficiency on a timed essay test. Or, in ESL contexts, a middle school writing program may be devoted to developing bilingualism, while state-mandated testing focuses solely on English proficiency. Such contradictions can be examined and explored together with students, whose input can help you strengthen your writing programs and courses.

## REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- What issues are relevant to your teaching context? Have you ever discussed them with your students?
- How might you address these issues in your course?

## Lesson Planning

Despite the key role of needs analysis, most teachers must prepare their classes before they meet their students. In doing so, they rely on information from the placement test and their previous experiences working with students in the same context. However, once the class begins, you can conduct additional needs assessments. These can take the form of in-class writing tasks or surveys in which students provide information about their literacy backgrounds. (For more on needs assessment and syllabus design, see Ferris and Hedgcock, 2014). These assessments can provide additional insights into students' needs, wants, goals, and skills.

Following are two in-class writing samples by high school ESL students. The students completed an 8-minute journal-writing task that prompted them to reflect on something they were proud of. What needs can you identify?

### *Alena's response*

*I am very proud of my family. They were able to overcome many obstacles. They work hard. They never complain. They always tell me to work hard and not complain. They are so strong. I really admire them.*

## Jun's response

*My parents would probably feel embarrassed because they value humble, but I want to say that I'm kinda proud for myself because I only been in the United States for one year and I am able write in English and read and keep with my classmates at school. I just work really hard even when no one looking, like when I walk home after school, I am trying to tell myself important things we were studying that day and if I have a hard day I try to tell myself to think about some good day I had maybe last week or sometime I think of some goals for myself for next week. If I have goals next week, one day, they will all add together and my dream to become a ???? will become reality.*

### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- How are the responses different?
- What are students' strengths?
- Which areas could be improved?

Reading Alena's response, you may be struck by how accurate her writing is. However, her text is short and her sentences quite simple. This reveals that Alena may have spent much time editing. Jun, on the other hand, produced more than twice as many words. He made many grammatical and spelling errors, but he did not shy away from experimenting with complex structures and expressing complex thoughts.

What does this ongoing needs assessment mean for developing lessons that meet Alena's and Jun's needs? The Alenas in your classes may be overly preoccupied with accuracy and unwilling to take risks at expressing more complex ideas. Such students may benefit from working on fluency tasks and building complex sentences, both of which will help build their writing confidence.

Fluency instruction in writing lessons can take many forms. A common one is freewriting. The goal of freewriting is to get words down on paper without worrying about form or errors. Students should spell unknown words the best they can, substitute a word from another language, or leave a blank or a note to return to the word later. Cross-outs are acceptable, and you should encourage any strategy that keeps students' pens moving.

You can make the task less threatening and promote textual ownership by telling students that the writing will not be collected unless a student would like your response. Begin by freewriting for only five minutes. Afterward, facilitate a class discussion on the writing topic or on the experience of freewriting. This is a good time to talk about how students feel about writing, writer's block, and the discipline required to become a good writer.

Other slightly more structured informal writing tasks may also be introduced to help students develop fluency. You might assign journal prompts, diaries, blogs, emails, or personal letters. These tasks may revolve around relatively easy and engaging topics or student-chosen topics, or they may be used to initiate writers' thoughts about later essay or research paper topics.

In contrast to Alena, students like Jun need to focus on accuracy and may benefit from being taught to use a spell checker to self-correct. A short grammar-based unit with examples will help to provide practice with accuracy in writing lessons; this could be followed by exercises in which students work together to connect ideas in complex sentences. Another meaningful activity is reformulation, whereby you share the original example and an improved, reformulated version, asking students to identify and reflect on the differences between the two texts. You may also choose to provide sentence starters or frames to model unfamiliar structures, giving students a variety to choose from. Regardless of the type of accuracy practice, it is important not to overwhelm students with too many grammar points at a given time. Accuracy practice should focus on grammar points that several students are struggling with, those discussed in other classes (to reinforce students' learning), or those shown to be prevalent in L2 writers' texts.

Writing teachers develop many lessons on different aspects of writing, including cultural values in writing, effective writing strategies, academic vocabulary, coherence and cohesion, specific genres, summarizing, tone, voice, audience expectations, revision, moves, paraphrasing, word choice, truth claims and support, and introductions. Textbooks can be a good source for ideas on how to develop lessons. Most teachers strike a balance between preparing lessons on these topics and teaching them through response to student writing. When you teach with lectures and exercises, you reach all the students at once. When you teach through response, the lesson is directly related to the student's desire to communicate, which individualizes instruction.