

- Developing proficiency in language goes hand in hand with developing proficiency in critical thinking. The same processes that are at work in wrestling with discipline-specific content are also at work in the act of writing and speaking about this content.
- In other words, English grammar, syntax, style, format, and conventions do not exist in a separate universe all on their own. They are inherently woven into the fabric of how we talk about and understand the content we're learning.

How to bake language proficiency assessment into assignment design:

1) Set Clear Objectives

- Make clear from outset of assignment that students are responsible for proofreading, adhering to professional formatting and quality standards, etc.
- Set precise criteria on rubrics
- Align language proficiency goals in with critical thinking goals
 - For example: Students must adhere to the conventions of the professional engineering report...
- Assign a variety of writing tasks with varying goals
 - Informal, low-stakes writing where language and grammar and not assessed
 - More formal assignments where language and grammar is expected to be polished
- Allows writers to embed revision and editing into their process in a deliberate way.

2) Make Writing Meaningful

Present tasks as real-world disciplinary problems to inspire students to become emotionally invested in work. Examples:

- In our eagerness to discover life on Mars, are we about to doom life on Mars?
- Evolution slow or fast? Punctuated equilibrium and its discontents.
- To vaccinate or not? Facts, fears, myths and realities.
- Infinity is a beautiful problem – and it's ruining physics.
- Decaying cities, urban agriculture, and local food solutions: Can Montreal do a Detroit?
- To eat meat, or not? Considerations scientific and ethical
- Facebook and other social media platforms: When the masters of technological innovation become the masters of social and political manipulation – what are the options for democracies?
- Youth in contact sports: Building character, risking concussion and permanent side effects?

In addition to framing the task as a problem, have students consider audience, purpose, and genre. For example:

- **Problem:** Youth in violent sports: Building character, risking concussion
- **Audience, purpose, & genre:** Write an op-ed for the Concordia student newspaper calling for the elimination of varsity football, lacrosse and rugby teams.

- **Problem:** To vaccinate or not? Facts, fears, myths and realities.
 - **Audience, purpose, & genre:** Write a critical literature review of the MMR vaccination controversy of the late 1990s, and summarize your findings for inclusion in a PSA for young parents from under-privileged neighborhoods.
- Humans are problem-solving creatures. When confronted with an intriguing problem, we cannot help but try to solve it.
 - Writers are naturally inspired to do their best work to solve a problem (including expressing ideas coherently)
 - Present writing as a problem-solving exercise. Writing clearly and coherently is not a straightforward task! Engage problem-solving muscles in revision tasks.
 - When possible, make student writing visible and public (blogs, forums, etc.). Social pressure is a great motivator!

3) Emphasize writing as a process

- Allow for messy rough drafts with lots of mistakes.
- Embed revision and editing into the process.
- Scaffold more difficult assignments by assigning easier idea-development tasks early on
- Become more rigorous with language standards as the process moves forward.
- Allow for rewrites and resubmissions if the acceptable level of language proficiency is not met. Hold work to a high standard, and make students responsible for resubmitting work that doesn't meet standard.

4) Provide timely and actionable feedback

- Focus formative feedback on early parts of the process, drafts, etc.
- Focus feedback on a few things students can do to improve for next part of process.
- Highlight student's responsibility to act on comments and fix errors
- Decenter teacher's voice through peer reviews
- Bake metacognitive tasks into assignments: self-reflections, notes on revisions, etc.

5) Adopt a bigger picture view of grammar and correctness

- Be sensitive to "writing dialects" and the cultural conventions of different types of English speakers and writers
- Teach standard English as a tool in students' toolbelt, rather than binary of "correctness" and "incorrectness"
- Teaching grammar has proven to have negligible benefits
- Line-by-line grammar correction has proven to have negligible, and possibly harmful effects
- Focus on positives and what student is doing well. Our learning can only grow from what we already know.
- Process work, revision, drafting, etc. usually takes care of writing issues.