



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## COLLEGE WRITING FOR NON-WRITERS

In the technical fields, being able to *do* something demonstrates a certain level of skill development. Being able to *write* about what one has done demonstrates a deeper understanding of the material. Helping our technology students improve their writing skills is a worthwhile, yet challenging, goal. I offer here a method of introducing technical writing that my students have found valuable.

Students usually know what they want to say; the problem lies in knowing how to organize and present the information. I suggest the instructor provide a basic framework for the writing; then let the students fill in the framework with details. This method results in consistently well-formatted essays with good content and students who report that they are anxious to use the same format when writing for other classes.

There are two ways this idea can be implemented. One way is to write a series of questions for the student to answer. The answers to the questions result in a well-formed essay. The second way is to make a fill-in-the-blank template. For example, the topic sentence of a paragraph might be provided, along with specific instructions about what to write in the paragraph. Both methods can specify where external citations should be inserted. Of course, this means that the instructor must write the essay first in order to prepare the questions, or framework, but it is well worth the effort.

**Sample #1.** Question-and-answer method. Notice that the student *rewrites* the question into sentence form to begin the answer. This essay is the follow-up assignment to reading an essay in the book.

1. <p>\* Define a "renaissance man." (Then include information on how to do a Google search for the information.)
  - A renaissance man is defined by The Free Dictionary as "[a] man who has broad intellectual interests and is accomplished in areas of both the arts and the sciences." (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com>)

2. What/Have you heard of a "renaissance man" before?
  - I had not heard of this term before reading this article.
3. <p> Describe a person you know who is as close as possible to being a renaissance person. (What makes that person a renaissance person? Be specific.)
  - The person I know who is as close as possible to being a renaissance person would be my cousin, Jane. She has a degree in computer programming, but she is also a gifted musician and loves mountain climbing. She has three degrees, each one in a different subject area. No matter what I ask her, she always seems to know the answer. She would qualify as a renaissance person.

\* I use the HTML <p> tag to indicate where to start each paragraph.

**Sample #2.** Fill-in-the-blank template for the students to complete.

*Paragraph 1:* Start with a sentence that summarizes the case study you read. (INLINE CITATION to the case study in the book)

Continue and finish the paragraph by answering question #3 in the book. (Yes, out of order.) Use information from the textbook to help you answer the question about security safeguards. It will take several sentences to answer the questions completely.

*Paragraph 2:* Copy this starter sentence: These companies are not the only ones who have had data security breaches. There have been incidents in other companies.

Continue: An example is ... (Google: type "data security breach" and find a news article about a recent breach. Put an INLINE CITATION in the article and a full reference on the Works Cited page.)

*Continue:* Some of the reasons for these breaches include... (this is question #1 in the case study, and you can think of several reasons).

The payoff to pre-writing the essay yourself is significant. You will get a set of admittedly similar, but very well written, essays that will be easy to grade with



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a grading rubric. Students report that writing about their studies makes them think more deeply and understand more clearly, that they will use the model for future writing, and that the method results in improved self-confidence in future writing assignments.

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## **HANDSHAKES, DIALOGUE, AND TABLE GRACES: A BUSINESS ETIQUETTE WORKSHOP**

Students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and are provided learning experiences in different settings. Shelton State Community College's Career Services Center teamed up with other areas of the college and a local restaurant to provide an interactive workshop, which provided business etiquette training in a real-life setting. *Handshakes, Dialogue, and Table Graces: A Business Etiquette Workshop for Future Professionals* provided an opportunity for currently enrolled students to have a restaurant experience, learn business etiquette, and interact with faculty and staff.

Fourteen students from diverse programs of study—Office Administration, Nursing, Culinary Arts, Business, and Engineering—participated in the event. Prior to the actual workshop, the students participated in an orientation session where they received a brief introduction to etiquette and learned about appropriate dress and conversation. In addition to the orientation session, students had access to handouts and information via the Career Services Center link on the college website.

On the evening of the event, students were greeted as they arrived and divided into five groups; each group was seated at a table with a staff member who served as host. Staff members, representing five different areas of the college, volunteered their time.

As the participants enjoyed a delicious four-course meal, additional instruction about business dining expectations was coupled with hosts' sharing personal experiences. At the conclusion of the two-hour dinner / workshop, the participants were awarded a Continuing Education Certificate of completion.

Students provided enthusiastic endorsement of the event and expressed their appreciation for the

opportunity to practice etiquette skills. The workshop coordinator said, "Experiences like this link educational experiences and expectations in the workforce. The realistic simulation aids retention as it connects education and employment." Based on the success of this experience, the college plans to schedule other business etiquette workshops in the future.

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