

Editor's Note

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We welcome our new editor, Sileshi Shewaneh, to this issue of Writing Works.

Grappling with the challenges of teaching developmental writing courses in colleges is both a daunting task and a rewarding experience.

Nowadays, almost every two-year college and many four-year colleges in the U.S. offer developmental writing courses for mostly first time college students and returning college students—students who somehow interrupted their college education for a protracted period of time to take care of family, civil, or profes-

sional responsibilities. These developmental writing courses often serve as refresher courses and prerequisites for freshman college composition, and they usually emphasize reading comprehension, vocabulary building, grammar and usage, and sentence and paragraph construction skills.



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Students in developmental writing classes, therefore, need rigorous training, motivation, and support from the “teacher” in order to master basic grammar and writing skills. They need to be given every detail of how to write a sentence and how to write a paragraph, with each step spelled out in a very easy-to-understand manner.

Moreover, as Parker Palmer clearly stated in his book *The Courage to Teach*, “Many students have no direction and lack motivation. These students have little knowledge of the social skills necessary for teamwork and negotiation. They’re bored and passive in situations calling for action, and belligerent and destructive in contexts requiring reflection” (p. 40).

Therefore, the developmental writing teacher can neither be a lecturer nor a facilitator, but a teacher. He or she must act more like a nurturing grade school teacher who mixes anecdotal evidence, facts and figures with occasional jingles and comical jokes to garner the attention and active participation of the class than as a college professor who lectures on key subject matter concepts and hands out weekly assignments for students to pursue independent work. And it is this balancing act between mixing of grade school and college teaching principles and strategies that makes teaching developmental writing a challenging

Admittedly, developmental writing instruction is a great challenge. It usually takes a lot of care and patience to teach someone, let alone to teach a group of students who are normally eager to learn, but who generally lack the motivation, study habits and preparatory skills to cope easily with the demands of college education. And this is one reason why the developmental writing teacher must use care and tact in dealing with developmental writing students. He or she must listen to, provide timely feedback, and grant developmental writing students the extra time they will need to complete their assigned homework and other writing tasks without discounting the reasons for late work as mere excuses of academic laziness.

Many believe developmental writing students are slow but serious learners, and this observation is commonsensical given the time they will need to adjust from the workforce or GED classroom to a college classroom to learn anew the basic reading, writing and grammar skills. Though challenging, working with developmental writing students in college makes teaching developmental writing a rewarding experience when the developmental educator clearly understands that he or she is bridging the gap—serving, not only as educator, but also as motivator, mentor