

# Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

## Science Course Places Importance on Academic Writing Development

### Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

To emphasize the importance of writing as a part of everyday life, this biology instructor engages students early on in a series of activities designed to help students improve their academic writing skills. At the beginning of the semester, students practice adhering to guidelines, develop techniques for summarizing scholarly articles, and gain strategies for avoiding plagiarism. Since the course entails frequent lab reports, students apply the skills learned in these early activities throughout the semester.

For their first assignment, students write a 100-word essay on why they chose to pursue their specific field of study. The essays must follow a set of formatting guidelines and include at least six different sentence openers. For example, one sentence must start with a preposition, one must begin with a word ending in “ly” or “ing,” another must start with a subject, and so on. The instructor provides a document that outlines the formatting guidelines and lists a variety of sentence openers, including example sentences. The entire assignment is worth 10 points, with sentence openers and formatting comprising the majority of possible points. After the students submit their essays, the instructor provides detailed feedback, noting formatting errors and offering additional sentence examples. If the instructor notices a student struggling with the assignment, the instructor meets with the student and provides a referral to the writing center.

The second assignment, which immediately follows the first, is a one- to two-page summary of a scientific article. The instructor selects a topic previously covered in class so that students are familiar with the material. This assignment helps students learn how to rewrite information using their own words and apply the skills they learned through the first assignment to produce a succinct, plagiarism-free paper. As with the first assignment, the instructor provides detailed feedback to each student.