

Best Practices for Using the Writer's Personal Profile

Oregon State University Writing Intensive Curriculum (WIC) Program

What is the Writer's Personal Profile (WPP)?

The WPP is a survey tool available on Blackboard or in hard copy through which students in Writing Intensive (WI) courses can set writing goals for the course and identify their strengths and weaknesses as writers. The WPP is research-based and was developed at OSU by Tracy Ann Robinson as a thesis project, working with Vicki Tolar Burton.

Where can I learn more about the development and use of the WPP?

An article by Tracy Ann Robinson and Vicki Tolar Burton appears in the Fall 2009 issue of *Across the Disciplines*.

How is the WPP administered?

The course instructor assigns the WPP to all students during the first or second week of the term. It can be given on hard copy or taken online via the Blackboard Test function.

What does the instructor need to know ahead of time?

Instructor should understand:

- Tool's potential
- Fulfilling tool's potential depends on full class participation
- Fulfilling tool's potential depends on instructor follow-up on WPP exercise and results

What are the student benefits of completing the WPP?

Completing the WPP:

- Familiarizes students with required elements of a Writing Intensive course
- Gives them an opportunity to think about themselves as workplace writers and what that requires
- Gives them an opportunity to identify their strengths and weaknesses as writers
- Introduces certain WIC strategies – writing to learn, peer review, revising
- Invites students to set personal writing goals for the course

What are the instructor benefits of using the WPP?

- Familiarizes instructor with the writing background of individuals and class as a whole and provides insights on:
 - career goals and workplace writing notions of individuals and class as a whole
 - strengths and weaknesses students see in their own writing
 - degree to which students understand, value, and use WIC strategies
 - writing goals students set for themselves in the course – and how these compare to the instructor's goals for the course
- Allows instructor to integrate this knowledge into the course design
- Serves as a vehicle for holding students responsible for and helping them achieve the goals they set
- Helps students assess their progress as writers in the course

Best Practices for Using the WPP

Before assigning the WPP, the teacher should take the survey himself or herself.

In assigning the Writer's Personal Profile:

- Make sure you understand the tool and its potential.
- Require completion of WPP by all students either as an in-class activity or as homework. Ideally, the instrument is administered during the first class or as homework before the second class.
- When assigning the WPP, discuss its multiple purposes, with emphasis on teaching and learning benefits. Let students know you are familiar with the survey and will be reviewing their responses.
- Emphasize that the exercise is intended to support students' own development as writers. For students whose learning style preferences tend toward the hands-on and may therefore see the exercise as "busy work," reinforce the value of metacognitive processing in learning and skills development.
- If done in class on hard copy, require students to include their names for crediting purposes and so the profile can be redistributed to students for review during the term.
- Require that students save their online responses as they go and that they print out a copy of their completed survey for themselves and a copy for you.
- Explain that as part of completing the WPP, students will set personal writing goals for the course. Emphasize the importance of setting goals that are *specific and achievable in the course time frame*. Remind them that goals such as "work hard in this course," "get an A," or "improve my writing overall" are not appropriate for this exercise. If you want, you might offer some sample goals, but emphasize that students are encouraged to identify goals that matter to them personally.
- Instruct students to make a separate copy of their personal writing goals that they keep with their course materials for reference during the term and explain that they will be coming back to them for future reference. Then of course you need to come back to them!
- Announce to students that they will be coming back to their WPP responses at the end of the term as part of evaluating their writing progress during the course.

After students have completed the WPP, things to do during the term:

- Compile the results in an Excel spreadsheet, analyze them, and integrate results into the course, for example by referring to students' responses in lectures or discussions of writing and in writing conferences or as part of writing assignment feedback.
- Instructors who have completed the WPP can share their own responses with students. For some students, the revelation that their teacher also experiences writing difficulties constitutes a powerful form of affirmation and encouragement.
- Allow time in the course for discussion/follow-up of the students' responses. Especially recommended: "goals check-in" activities that students do either on their own, in conference with the instructor, or as a group activity.

For example, check in with students on the progress they are making on their personal writing goals—perhaps a three-minute update at the end of class, small-group conversations with peers, a mid-term progress report, or any other informal reporting strategy. Checking in with students not only makes it clear that their instructor really is holding them accountable for accomplishing their goals but also gives students an opportunity to bring up any difficulties they are encountering as they work toward those goals. Instructors may be able to suggest strategies and point to resources for resolving difficulties.

- Make students' writing goals part of peer review. You might ask students to attach their personal writing goals to their draft so that the peer reviewer can check for those issues. One teacher categorized the class's writing goals into one sheet that was displayed or distributed at the time of each peer review.
- Build time into the course syllabus for an in-class, end-of-term review by each student of his/her WPP, preferably in conjunction with some kind of end-of-term writing evaluation activity. Several models are available: End of Term Questionnaire, process memo.

Following use of the WPP – post term:

- Make notes to yourself on changes, improvements for either the use of the WPP or the course as a whole.
- Share successful strategies with other faculty through the WIC director.
- Ask the WIC director for help with questions on writing that come up for you as a result of using the WPP. The WIC program is eager to know what aspects of writing instruction faculty need help with in order to develop learning modules to support students' problem writing areas. This might be done in conjunction with the OSU Writing Center.