“I'm not a writing instructor”: helping students develop as writers

When you have a writing task or a deadline, what do you need to get that writing done?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WRITING TO LEARN = using writing as a way to engage with course material.</th>
<th>LEARNING TO WRITE = practice with the genres and conventions of particular discourse communities.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Focused free-writing; one-minute papers; ungraded pieces to cement understanding or review concepts.</td>
<td>Reports, proposals, grant applications, query letters, blog posts, profiles, reviews, FAQs, summaries, memos.</td>
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What We Know about incorporating writing . . .

1. Writing requires critical thinking. Full stop.
2. Writers need time, ownership, and response.¹
3. Good writing comes from re-writing; revision is the key.
4. Authentic audiences and purposes are more meaningful.
5. “The kind of writing students do is more important than the amount.”²
6. “Clearly explained assignments in which freshmen and seniors had to construct meaning through their writing—summarize something they had read, explain in writing the meaning of numerical or statistical data, argue a position using evidence and reasoning—had a noticeable effect on deep and sustained learning.”³

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¹ Nanci Atwell, 1987
² Charles Paine, Partnership for the Study of Writing in Learning, 2012
³ Partnership for the Study of Writing in Learning, 2012
What We Know about responding to writing . . .

a. Over-commentary leads to contradictory advice—and the writer’s paralysis.  
   Sommers, 1982
b. A balance of directive and facilitative feedback is best.  
   Sommers, 1982
c. “Correcting” a text without giving a chance to revise is wasted time.
d. If you must “correct it,” limit your marks to one paragraph or half a page.

Hierarchy of Concerns:
• Purpose: focus, main idea, thesis or claim
• Development: support, evidence, reasons, examples
• Organization: (logical) order of ideas
• Coherence: transitions, “flow,” glue
• Sentences: style, syntax, variety, verbs! [i.e., editing]
• Conventions of correctness: from formatting to punctuation [i.e., proofreading]

Suggestions for both incorporating and responding

1) Include a passage in your syllabus about the importance of writing.
2) Consider if Writing to Learn or Learning to Write is the best fit for your goals.
3) Assign writing, even if you don’t grade it!
5) Share your own writing, process or product.
6) Involve students in giving feedback.

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4 Nancy Sommers, 1982
5 Sommers, 1982