



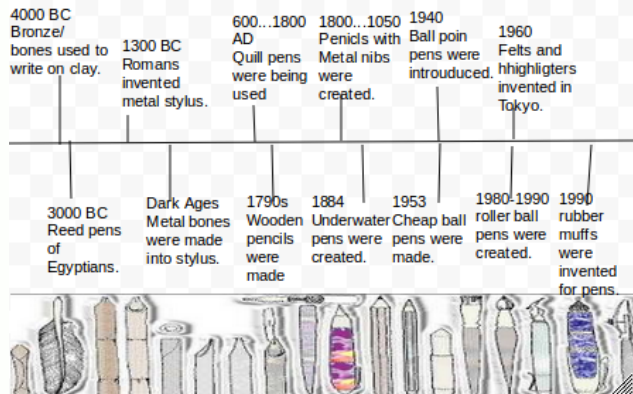
# Johnny and Jenny *Can* Write: Strategies for Deepening Writing Skills

Robin Pappas and Jessica White  
Oregon State University

# Overview

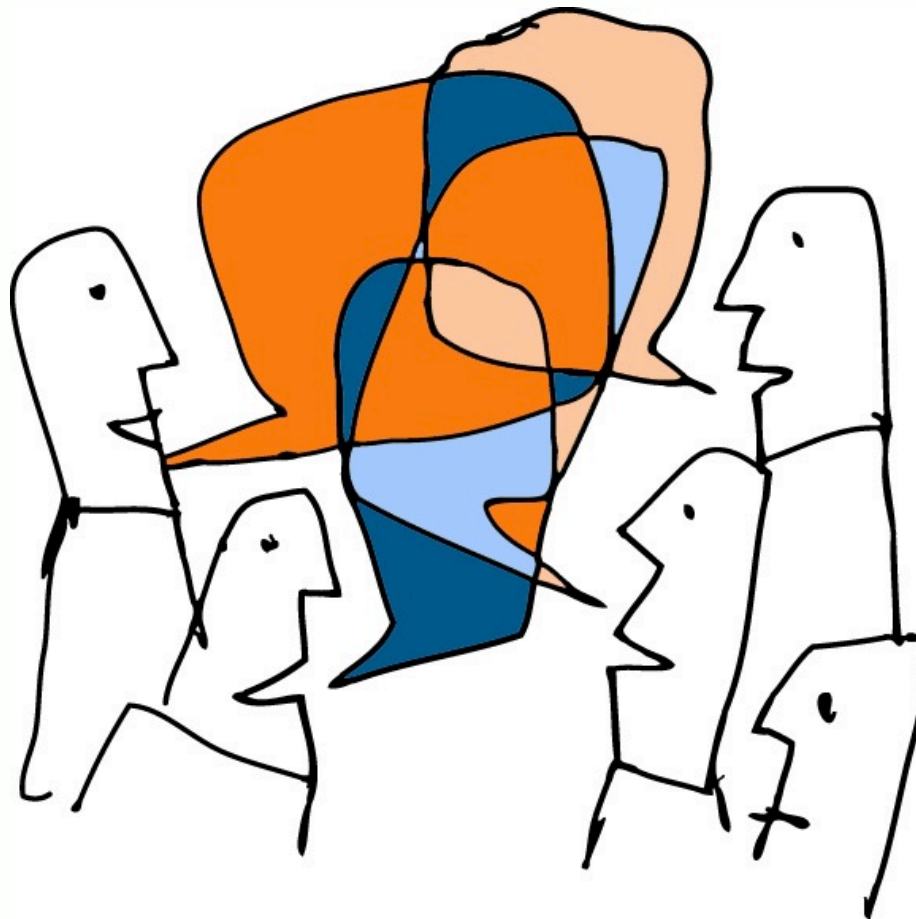
- Expectations about student writing
- High-stakes/Low-stakes writing
- Writing to learn
- Writing for formative assessment

# Timeline Of Pens



## Thoughts on student writing...

The schools are today paying more attention to composition than they did twenty or thirty years ago; and yet, notwithstanding this increased study and practice, the writing of [students] has been growing steadily worse; [...] most of the schools require frequent written exercises of some kind. These are corrected and commented on by the teacher and rewritten by the [student]. With all this practice in writing and time devoted to English, why do we not obtain better results?



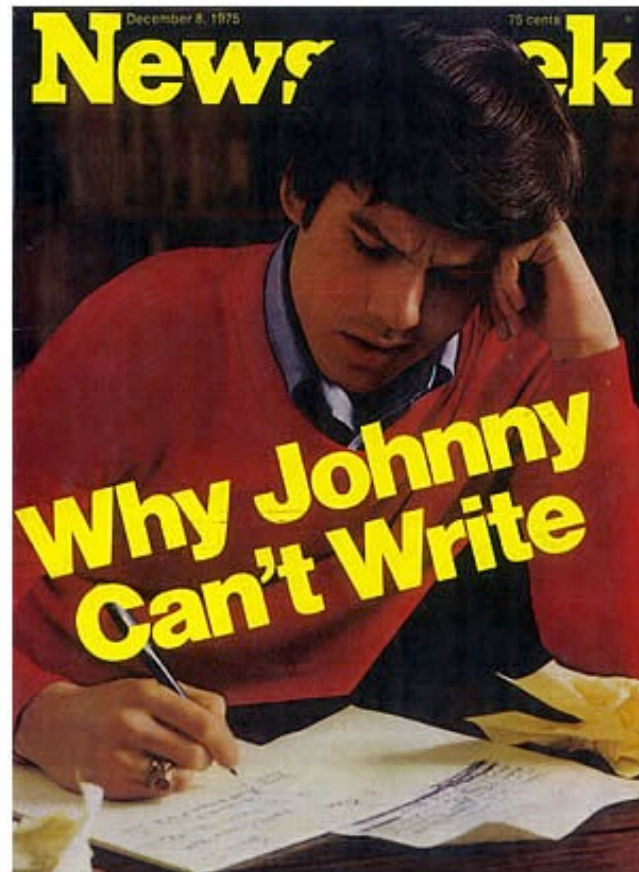
Greenough, James Jay. “The English Question,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 70 (May 1893).

While it's a rare person who sits down with pen and paper in hand and writes a letter to a friend or loved one, we pour emails into the ether at an astounding rate. We text message, tweet, instant message, blog, comment, and otherwise shoot words at each other in a near-constant flow of communication. We annotate group portraits, LOL-ify cat pictures, and tag... well, everything. At work, we write letters, proposals, PowerPoint presentations, business requirement documents, memos, speeches, mission statements, position papers, operating procedures, manuals, brochures, package copy, press releases, and dozens of more specialized types of documents.

We are, it seems, writing creatures. Homo scribus, if you will.

It's no wonder that businesses repeatedly cite "communication skills" as the single most desirable trait in new employees. The kicker, though, is that we are as a society incredibly bad at writing.

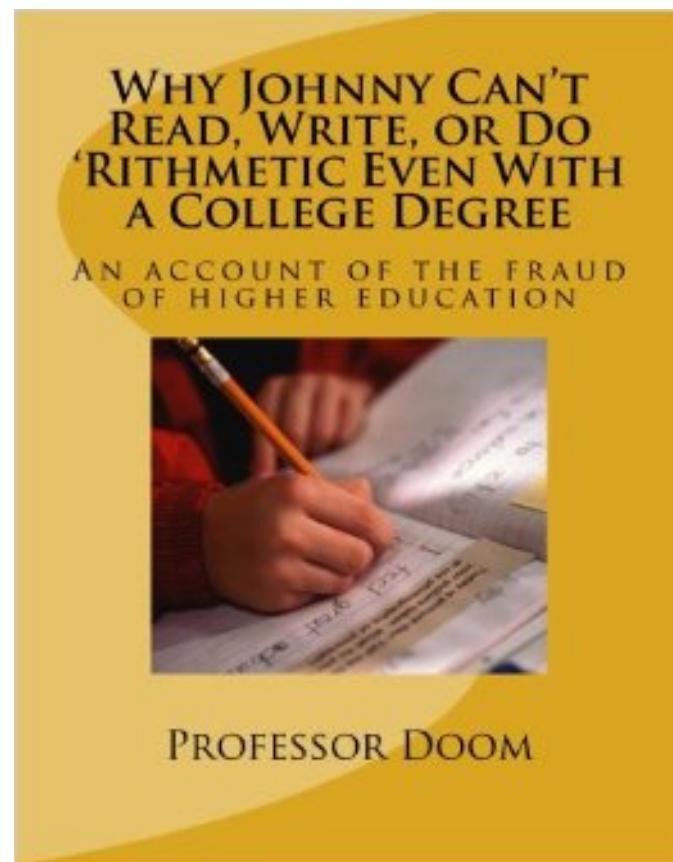
Dustin Wax. (2014) "The Value of Writing Well."  
[www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/the-value-of-writing-well.html](http://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/the-value-of-writing-well.html)





I didn't  
say it  
was your  
fault

I said I  
was going  
to Blame  
you







Andrea A. Lunsford

# **10 Most Common Formal Errors in Freshman Writing (Top 10) (Lunsford and Lunsford, 2006)**

1. Wrong word
2. Missing comma after an introductory element
3. Incomplete or missing documentation
4. Vague pronoun reference
5. Spelling error (including homonyms)
6. Mechanical error with a quotation
7. Unnecessary comma
8. Unnecessary or missing capitalization
9. Missing word
10. Faulty sentence structure

**Describe a recent, challenging writing project that had much riding on its success.  
How did you learn to successfully produce such writing?**



**What did you need to know to complete the writing task?**  
**What did you need to be able to do?**



# Task Analysis

1. Consider a writing assignment that students frequently perform poorly on.
2. Consider how you grade the assignment. What is most significant? Where do they lose points?
3. Break down that assignment into a list of kinds of knowledge and skills students need to complete the assignment successfully.



# High-Stakes and Low-Stakes Writing



Mary Deane Sorcinelli



Peter Elbow

There is nothing  
to writing.

All you do is sit down  
at a typewriter &  
bleed.

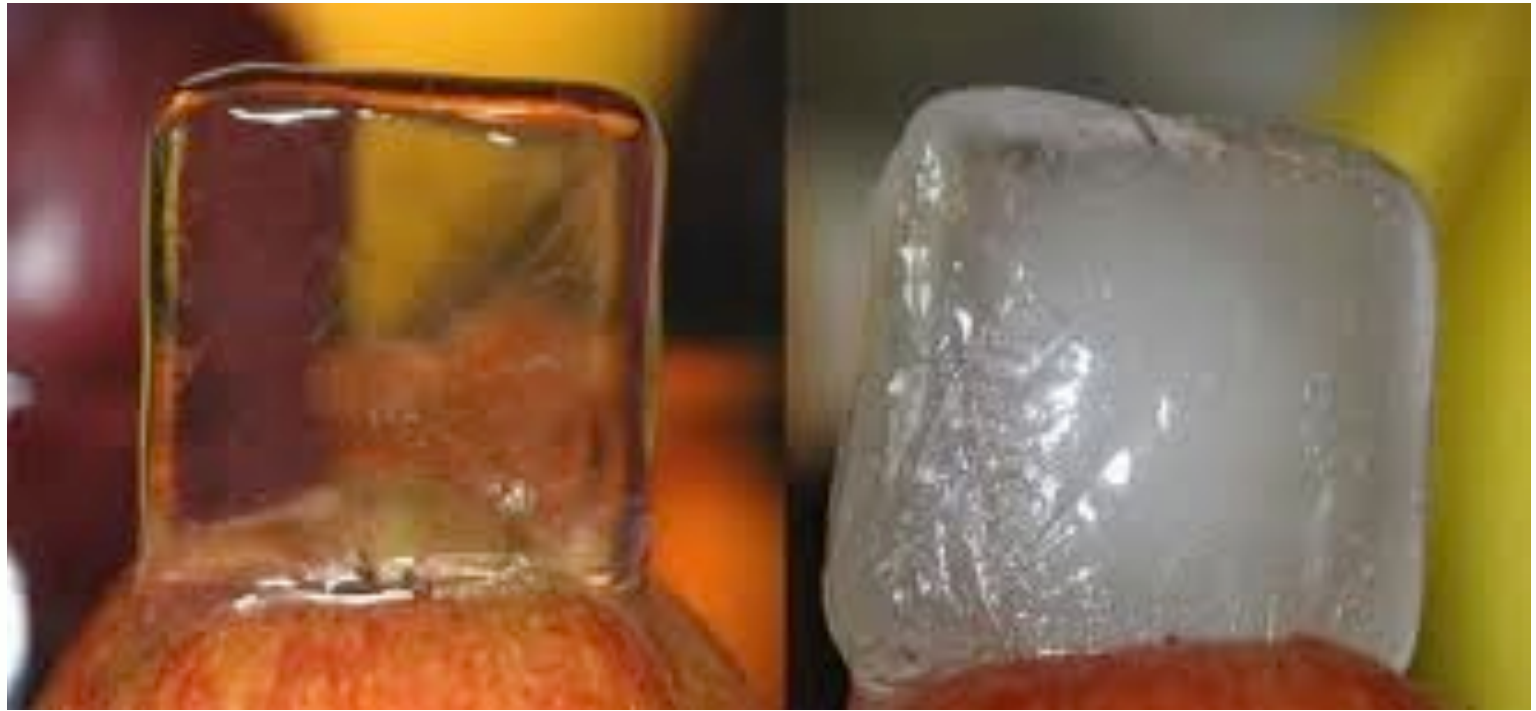
- Ernest Hemingway

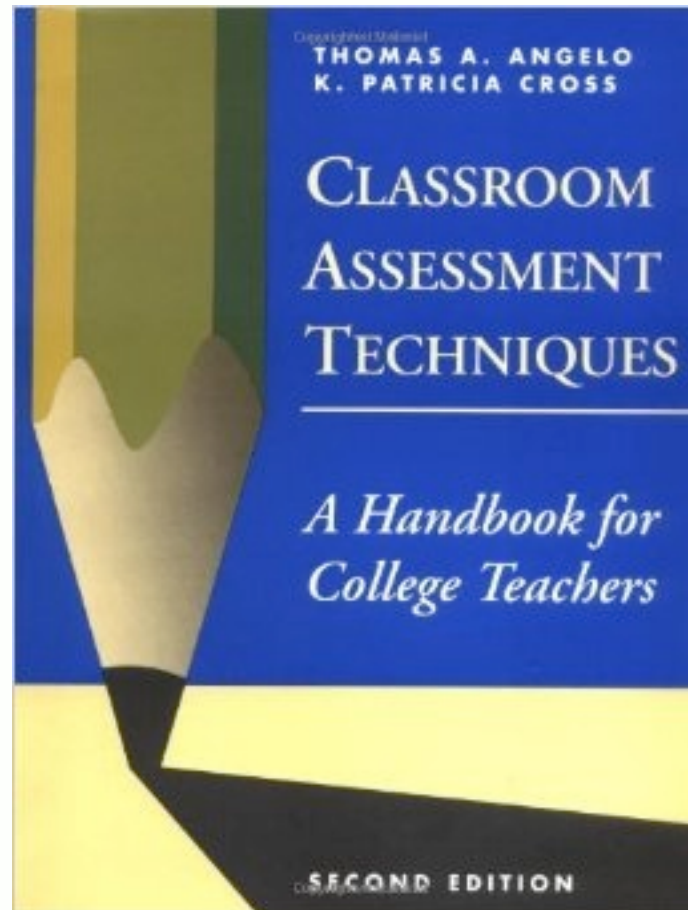
High-Stakes Writing	Low-Stakes Writing
Needs to be good	Is used for exploration/ doesn't always make sense
Impacts course grade	Often not graded or is graded for completion
Is used to "measure" learning and understanding	Is used to increase time spent learning and making sense of ideas / content
Represents broad range of skills and knowledge in one assignment	Enables practice in both/ either broadly- and narrowly-focused ranges of skills and knowledge

*I'll write more when I actually  
know enough to write about it.*

# Writing to Learn

- May or may not be graded
- May or may not be collected
- Timely, meaningful instructor feedback
- Scaffold: in sequence of skill-building activities
- Student self-assessment





## Resources

- Angelo, T. and Cross, P. (1993) *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Elbow, P. and Sorcinelli, M.D. (2005) “How to enhance learning by using high-stakes and low-stakes writing.” *McKeachie’s Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers*. 12<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Houghton Mifflin. 192-212.
- Lunsford, A. and Lunsford, K. (2008) “Mistakes are a fact of life: a national comparative study.” *College Composition and Communication*, 59.4 (June): 781-806.



