Ten Best Practices for Teaching (Upper-Level) College Writing

1. Consider whether or not and how your assignments invite students to wrestle with the "big ideas" in your field(s).

2. Be intentional and transparent in creating writing assignments: determine clear objectives (learning outcomes) for each assignment (for example: sophisticated engagement with secondary literature; synthesis of ideas; following disciplinary conventions; taking risks).

3. Contextualize writing objectives within the liberal arts environment: are the objectives discipline-specific, typical of an academic division, and/or interdisciplinary in nature? How do they adhere to, combine or depart from standard writing forms/genres? What other norms might influence the objectives?

4. Identify for/with students the audience(s) for each writing assignment.

5. Describe/break down features of the expected writing and/or provide students with models of high and low end work. Isolate/excerpt one or two features to discuss at a given time (introduction, thesis, overall structure, voice/point of view, use of evidence, visual components, etc).

6. Know your "end" goal for their writing in particular assignments as well as for the course; sequence assignments accordingly.

7. Identify and discuss, where appropriate, relationships between writing process and product; require and discuss revision in writing-intensive classes.

8. Involve students at some point in the assessment process through self-evaluation and/or peer review. Consider giving them a rubric for self or peer evaluation. Perhaps assign an informal reflection/self-evaluation, due along with the paper.

9. Have pre and post-assignment conversations with students about their writing. Establish individual goals for the next paper/project.

10. Assign an informal essay that asks students to reflect upon their relationship to your discipline and its relationship to local and global challenges. How do students understand (or not) the potential significance of their discipline-informed (interdisciplinary) voices?