Strategies for Helping Graduate Students Overcome Writing Challenges

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| Challenge | Strategies |
| Students don’t know how to start writing. | * Help students verbally articulate their ideas through informal discussion. Consider having them record the discussion so no ideas are lost. * Use “blind writing” (having students type up ideas with their computer monitor turned off) if students are too focused on grammar. * If students are overwhelmed by the size of the task, help them develop and outline to divide writing into pieces. |
| Students don’t understand what technical writing is. | * Have students examine poorly written work and discuss it. * Share examples of a paragraph that is concise vs. one that includes superfluous information |
| Students don’t recognize writing for publication as iterative in nature. | * Ask students to review drafts of a paper you or other faculty have have published and identify the substantial changes that occur between iterations. This will help students appreciate the slow but necessary process of improving writing. * Have students put their paper down and list three major writing improvements they want to make to their manuscript or you can list these for them. Have them consider how they can modify each section of their paper to improve their writing in the way identified. |
| Students struggle to position their work in the context of prior research. | * Ask students to visualize how their research connects to other disciplinary work by creating a concept map (a diagram that shows how various concepts are interconnected; a web with the links that connect ideas labeled)of relevant literature. Using the concept map, ask them to clearly specify how their own work both aligns with and extends what is already known in their area. * Have them identify/bullet some of the critical issues in the primary literature they read. These might serve as the questions the literature review addresses. Develop the literature review around the critical issues. * After their study is complete, have students bullet each finding in their study and ask them to identify, in writing, how each finding connects to the primary literature. Review this work with them and provide guidance. Have them narrow down this discussion to the connections they perceive will be most informative for their readers. |
| Students are unfamiliar with the expectations for revision for publication. | * Show students feedback you’ve received on a manuscript from reviewers and then explain how you responded to it. * Ask student peers to provide feedback to each other on their writing and detail how they would address that feedback. |

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