



SCHOOL OF  
**PUBLIC HEALTH**  
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

## Writing for Success: “Not everything has to be mathematics”

A workshop and presentation for  
Public Health Sciences Graduate  
Students

Dr. Roger Graves  
Professor and  
Director, Writing Across the  
Curriculum  
University of Alberta

# Who am I?

**Roger Graves**  
Director, Writing Across the Curriculum  
Professor, EFS

April 17, 2009


wac  
c4w  
writing initiatives  
webmail  
efs

I'm new to the University of Alberta, having come from the University of Western Ontario where I was Director of the Program in Writing, Rhetoric, and Professional Communication in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. In my new position here I'll be working with faculty and students across the university as part of the Writing Across the Curriculum initiative. I will also be working with students and faculty in the Department of English and Film Studies.

I am the author, co-author, or editor of five books and 29 articles, including Writing Instruction in Canadian Universities. My current research interests include the development of doctoral student writing, writing assignments across disciplinary fields, and rhetorical approaches to text encoding. Currently I serve as co-Vice-President of the Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing (CASDW) and a member of the Executive Board of the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Literacy (CASLL/Inkshed).

**Recent presentations**  
This page contains links to pdfs of slides displayed at presentations I've given.

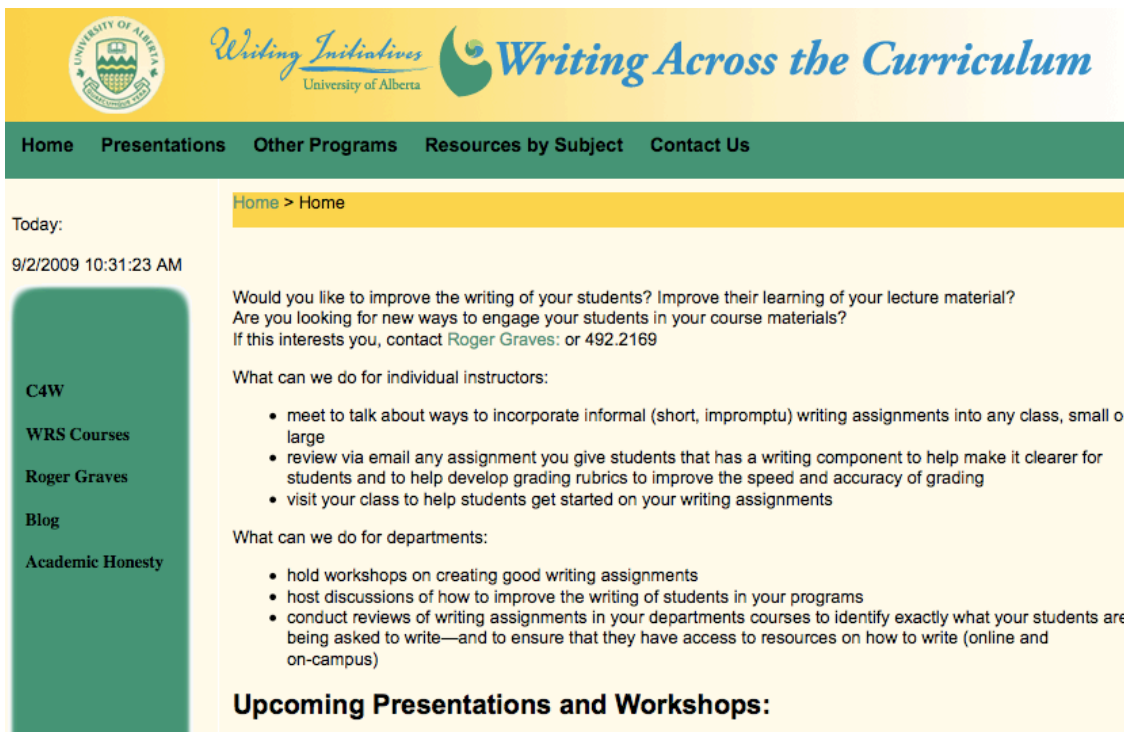
**Books**  
This page displays the covers and descriptions of books I've authored, co-authored, or co-edited



**Blog: Thinking About Writing**  
A new blog on writing-related issues at the U of A and beyond.

<http://www.ualberta.ca/~graves1/index.html>

# Writing Across the Curriculum



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Writing Across the Curriculum website at the University of Alberta. The header features the University of Alberta logo, the text "Writing Initiatives University of Alberta", and the "Writing Across the Curriculum" logo. A navigation bar includes links for Home, Presentations, Other Programs, Resources by Subject, and Contact Us. The main content area has a breadcrumb trail "Home > Home" and a welcome message from Roger Graves. It lists resources for individual instructors and departments, and mentions upcoming presentations and workshops. A sidebar on the left contains links for C4W, WRS Courses, Roger Graves, Blog, and Academic Honesty. The page is timestamped "9/2/2009 10:31:23 AM".

Today:  
9/2/2009 10:31:23 AM

**C4W**  
**WRS Courses**  
**Roger Graves**  
**Blog**  
**Academic Honesty**

Home > Home

Would you like to improve the writing of your students? Improve their learning of your lecture material? Are you looking for new ways to engage your students in your course materials? If this interests you, contact [Roger Graves](#): or 492.2169

What can we do for individual instructors:

- meet to talk about ways to incorporate informal (short, impromptu) writing assignments into any class, small or large
- review via email any assignment you give students that has a writing component to help make it clearer for students and to help develop grading rubrics to improve the speed and accuracy of grading
- visit your class to help students get started on your writing assignments

What can we do for departments:

- hold workshops on creating good writing assignments
- host discussions of how to improve the writing of students in your programs
- conduct reviews of writing assignments in your departments courses to identify exactly what your students are being asked to write—and to ensure that they have access to resources on how to write (online and on-campus)

**Upcoming Presentations and Workshops:**

<http://www.humanities.ualberta.ca/WAC/>

# Centre for Writers



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Centre for Writers at the University of Alberta. The header features the University of Alberta logo, the text "Writing Initiatives University of Alberta", and the "Centre for Writers" logo. A navigation menu includes Home, Appointments, Contact Us, Location, Coaches, Resources, FAQ, and WAC. The main content area has a breadcrumb "Home > Home" and a "Welcome to the Centre for Writers" section. This section states that free one-on-one writing coaching is available to all students, instructors, and staff. It lists services such as thesis formation, organization, idea development, grammar, and documentation style. A link to "Request a class room visit by a tutor" is provided. A notice for the Fall 2009 term states that tutoring hours begin on Monday, September 14. On the right sidebar, there is a timestamp "9/2/2009 10:34:15 AM", an "Express News" section, a "Twitter Updates" section with a tweet about the fall term opening on September 14, and a "GramWOW" section with a video player.

**UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA**  
Writing Initiatives  
University of Alberta  
Centre for Writers

Home Appointments Contact Us Location Coaches Resources FAQ WAC

Home > Home

### Welcome to the Centre for Writers

We offer **free** one-on-one writing coaching and support to all students, instructors and staff at the University of Alberta - in any faculty or at any level of study.

Our writing coaches are available to assist clients with higher order concerns in their writing, such as thesis formation, organization and idea development, as well as more specific details, like grammar and documentation style. Clients can bring in any writing project at any stage of development: essays, lab reports, creative pieces, scholarly articles, thesis drafts, application letters - and more. Our coaches will also help students read instructor comments on already-graded papers. ESL and EAL students are welcome!

[Request a class room visit by a tutor.](#)

**Welcome back for the Fall 2009 term! Tutoring hours will begin on Monday, September 14. The online appointment-booking schedule will be available to clients as soon as possible prior to this date. We look forward to working with you!**

9/2/2009 10:34:15 AM

**Express News**

**Twitter Updates**

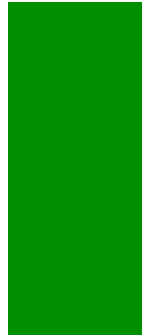
The Centre for Writers will open for the fall term on Monday, September 14! 5 days ago  
[follow me on Twitter](#)

**GramWOW**



<http://www.c4w.arts.ualberta.ca/>

**GRAM WOW!**



# C4W



Over 1300 students last year

Work with graduate students as well as undergraduates

Free to students

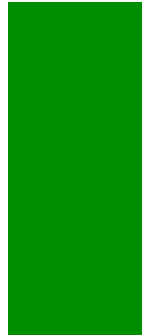
# You need both

## Quantitative

- Statistics
- Numbers
- Tables
- Objectivity
- Science

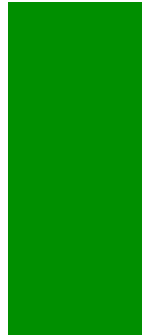
## Qualitative

- Sophistry
- Words
- Paragraphs
- Subjectivity
- Social science/humanities



# Writing: What doesn't work

- Grammar lessons
- Failing to understand the assignment
- A one-shot, linear writing process
- Relying on written comments from profs as the only way to improve





# Grammar

- Focus on grammar and “lower-order” concerns (punctuation, format of citations, margins) takes time away from strategies that do work
- Grammar has a **negative** effect size of .32 (Graham, *Handbook of Writing Research*)
- **Any strategy** is better than teaching grammar

# Assignments

## Author profile essay

(20% of your final grade)

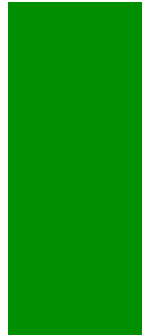
### Purpose

Write a reflective essay in which you ex:

1. Select several (or perhaps only one) readings upon to write a document, and do so by the end of the semester.
2. In your reflections and analysis of the readings support what you connect at all with your writing process.

- Too much direction can make a written assignment daunting because the answer can only be of a specific type
- Too much choice can result in students forming thesis statements that are too broad; they also jump from one topic to the next
- Too little direction leaves them wondering about what they have been asked to do

# Writing Process



- Students who developed a writing process in high school that is inadequate to the rhetorical and intellectual challenges at university flounder
- Processes: students need more than one process to respond to the variety of texts they must produce

# Audience



- A key component of writing is audience
- Students sometimes don't know the professor as audience
- Students can't judge if a topic is of interest to the professor without guidance
- Eg: A graduate student proposes a topic in a writing course that is not related to the topic of the course

# Written comments

- “notoriously unreliable”
- In one study, 17 untrained readers marked the same paper as anything from a B to an F
- Many errors are unmarked
- Teacher response varies with gender, personal background of student, instructor’s politics and employment status, and other factors (Haswell 333)
- Students’ evaluative sets contrast with instructors’

# How to succeed as a graduate student writer

Recognize and act on the idea that **writing is social**:

- Form writing groups (on your own or through the Centre for Writers)
- Seek out feedback from trusted readers
- Talk/email profs to seek clarification re. assignments
- Talk with senior students
- Attend job talks, research presentations

# Adopt a process approach

Adopt a **process approach** to writing:

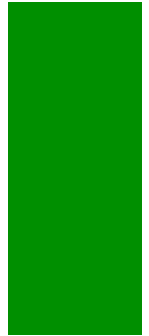
- Gather information
- Draft the document
- Seek feedback; revise for structure and content; gather more information (if necessary)
- Edit for cohesion, style, register



# Learn new genres

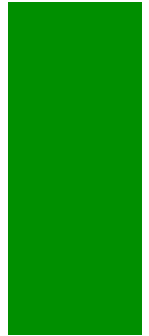
Identify and learn the nuances of the genres you are asked to write:

- Research posters
- Short papers
- Thesis proposals
- Grant applications
- Scholarship applications
- Opinion/editorial articles





# Genres in Public Health Sciences



In groups, come up with answers to these questions:

- What do students write in Public Health Sciences courses?
- Why do they write them? To explore ideas? To be evaluated? To describe? To argue? To reflect?
- Who do they write for?

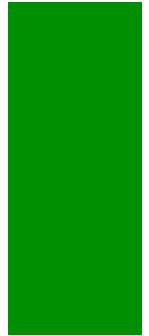
# Keys to Good Writing in PHS

- Transitions/coherence (BPH Ch. 4, 5)
- Logical sequencing/organization/outlines (BPH Ch. 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 21)
- Audience—non-technical (BPH 1, 3, 5, 8, 9, 14, 31)
- Trusted readers
- Plain language/jargon (clarity/credibility) i.e. KTE
- Structure: headings

BPH = *Brief Penguin Handbook*

# Non-technical writing

- Working in groups at your tables, re-write the abstract you've been given for a non-technical audience.



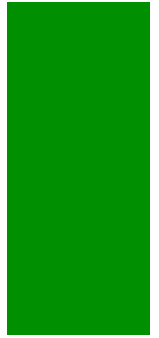
# Proven instructional strategies: Writing Centres



- Both tutors and tutees improve their literacy skills (Haswell 339)
- Both groups improve their self-concept and attitude toward writing
- Tutors reduce power differentials with tutees and soften the directives from professors via assignments

# Writing Studies

## New Course: WRS 500



### WRS 500 Academic Writing in Science

(Winter, 2010)

This class will focus on teaching graduate students about academic writing with the goal of helping them to improve their ability to construct clear, concise, and well-supported arguments in the documents that they write as part of or associated with their degree programs.

# Resources

- **People:** other students and faculty members
- **Books:** Handbooks, writing in the sciences books, web pages
- **Services:** Center for Writers
- **Courses:** Writing Studies, new PHS 600-level course