Advice from First-Year Writing Instructors

We asked a few current and former first-year writing instructors to tell us what they wish first-year students knew and did in order to achieve success in English 001, 002, and 11 (and usually in other classes, too!). Here are their thoughts:

**James Hamill:** “Sleep is essential. As a simultaneous teacher and student, the greatest gem I discovered for a healthy and successful academic career has been the ability to turn off my screens, bundle in my bed, and shut down my brain for the right amount of time each night. When I am successful in doing these things, I'm usually at my best the following day.”

**Wade Linebaugh:** “It’s simple advice but keep up with reading, read carefully, and reread. I remember how I was as a first year college student, and it’s simple advice I was lucky to learn early. I also like that it's attainable - I don't like to give advice that imagines their time is limitless or that FY English is the most important thing in their lives. It isn't. But simply reading carefully is a relatively minimal time investment that can really change things.”

**Nicole Batchelor:** “For me, I think that students coming unprepared to class hurts their performance. If they leave, forget, or just don't feel like bringing the text, article, handout, etc. then the conversations are vague and hazy because they cannot recall from memory what was said or argued. Or worse, there is no conversation so teachers *might* resort to a lecture which isn't as stimulating as conversation. So I think that making sure the night before that they’ve put the text, article, handout, etc. in their bag before going to bed. Failure to bring the required texts to class impacts both their participation grade and depending on each instructor's policy it also impacts their attendance record. Just as important, I feel like it hurts their ability to think critically and/or practice the skill of analysis because they don't have the specific words and claims in front of them; they are not really then engaging with the material on its terms.”

**Evan Reibsome:** “To add to Nicole's suggestion, the students with better organizational skills perform better in my class. Students who are able to keep track of various due dates, differentiate and prioritize between small and large assignments, and effectively break large assignments into a series of manageable steps (backwards planning) inevitably improve both the class atmosphere and their own experience.”

**Dashieille Horn:** “I would say to plan ahead and schedule ahead.”

**Jess Snyder:** “I agree with everything Nicole noted above. I also think it's really important for students to embrace revision. I often have students who feel like once they've produced a 4-5 page draft all they really have left is proofreading (and sometimes not even that). They are often unwilling to change substantial parts of the paper. I think it's important for students to take conferences, peer reviews, and any other feedback seriously, and sometimes that means making big changes to the argument or losing a supporting paragraph that isn't working.”

**Sarah Heidebrink-Bruno:** “I agree with both Nicole and Jess, and I would add that feeling nervous or fearful or even ashamed about asking for help (or even asking a question for clarification in class, asking for an extra conference, etc.) when they really need it is also detrimental to their performance, because we literally can't help them if we aren't aware of what the problem might be (and sometimes, it's as simple as re-phrasing something or using another example).”

**Laura Kremmel:** “I always try to stress to students the importance of communication with the instructor as big part of success. It sounds simple, but so many students run into trouble because they don't let the instructor know if they're sick, if there's a family emergency, if they need an extension, or
even if they're confused about the homework. If you're out for a week and don't email the instructor once during that time, he/she's going to think you're blowing off the class and will be less generous with extensions and extra help. There are ways to be present even when you have to miss class, and they're as easy as sending an email.”

Have more questions or have specific topic ideas for tips? Email the OFYE (fye@lehigh.edu) with your requests, and we’ll be sure to cover them in this semester’s email series. Also, take this advice to heart: communicate with your instructors, ask them what you can do to improve, and work on generating action plans that help you put their advice into practice!