

Guidelines & Best Practices for Teaching First-Year Seminars

First-year seminars have an epistemological focus that engages students in seeing the questions implicit in texts, acquiring metacognitive awareness, and using writing as a form of thinking and invention (i.e. how to have ideas).

- focus on analytical writing—an understanding of what things may plausibly mean (as a necessary precursor to argument)
- assign at least 15 pages of written work, which must be broken up into at least three assignments, including some form of revision
- discussion format as primary pedagogy
- focus on discussion and analysis of shared readings rather than emphasis on individual research projects
- develop students' capacity to engage the voices of experts beyond agreeing and disagreeing
- objectify developmental goals for students: reinforce how college writing differs from high school—that it is more nuanced, that it qualifies its claims, that it seeks to blend clarity with complexity, etc.
- a mix of informal and formal writing assignments
- regular meetings between the professor and the writing assistant
- at least three meetings between the writing assistant and each student
- written and oral feedback on student writing