A MAJOR PAPER METHOD THAT WORKS

As a general rule, do not allow students to choose their own topics, particularly very general or generic topics, like "global warming." These are incredibly easy to find online and the temptation can be just too great. Students also usually choose topics that are way too ambitious and wide-ranging, setting themselves up for failure. However, you can let students pick their own topics if you set up a system for helping them develop their ideas while you watch: this is done in stages, <u>with marks attached to each stage:</u>

A. Students choose their topics and submit them to you to assess. They also start a physical file folder, which will contain all the drafts, notes, and printouts of on-line material. You can ask the students to hand in their folders at random points during the process. Some instructors ask for a photocopy of the first page of each article the students have used. This has the advantage of making their Works Cited or Bibliography easier to do as well.

B. Students revise their topics based on your suggestions.

C. students have to submit a bibliography, preferably an annotated one.

D. Next, an outline, a detailed one, with a thesis statement and paragraph topic sentences.

E. Spend a few minutes with each student looking over what they have done at this stage, and provide them with feedback and suggestions.

F. Students submit a full draft of their paper. (In some English classes, this first draft is done as a mid-term exam, a great way to see the students' own unaided work.) This is also the stage at which uploading the draft to WriteAway, the on-line tutorial service that Langara subscribes to, can be helpful, as can a visit to the Writing Centre. Some instructors insist that the students go to the Writing Centre, talk to a tutor, and have the tutor sign and date the paper.

G. Give a final round of feedback on the draft and send them away to make changes.

H. Students hand in final drafts.

And before you say anything, yes, this looks like a lot of work, but you are really only glancing over their work, not giving an extended response. In an introductory course, it is an invaluable method for helping students to understand how to write a successful paper. It is particularly useful in teaching the research paper: what is the difference between an appropriate academic source and an inappropriate one, for example. And in subjects like Aboriginal Studies, which have a very short timeline for acceptable academic sources (less than ten years, I believe), you can stop students using outdated or faulty sources before they base their papers on them. The higher quality, non-plagiarized papers that are handed in on the due date more than make up for the time you have expended, if only because it takes far longer to mark a bad paper than a good one. Subsequent instructors will thank you for training the students as well. These are skills students need and they usually enter post-secondary courses without them.

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