This presentation was made to ISLAS fellows as a workshop in infusing writing into a variety of classes on our campus. It focused on making writing strategies and expectations explicit for students.
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Faculty in the workshop identified a signature assignment so that their thinking could be focused on a specific task.

**SIGNATURE ASSIGNMENTS**

- Identify an assignment that you think of as a “signature assignment” -- one that’s important to you AND that you are wanting to revise.
- Tell us why you give this assignment. What purpose does it serve?
- What have the problems been with the assignment in terms of student writing and/or learning? How do you know?
Mary gave examples of how to make a common assignment, the literature review, more explicit for students.
This was the assignment students were given. Help is already provided in this class in the form of a library visit, specifications on paper length and due dates, and the requirement of a one-page proposal.

Workshop participants brainstormed a long list of other elements of a literature review that would be helpful for students to know, including:
--what is this genre? What purpose does it serve?
--how do I read scientific journals or books?
--what makes a topic narrow enough or broad enough?
--how do I know when I have enough sources?
--what do I do with my sources in order to get them into a format that will work for this paper?
--how much summary and how much analysis? And how much opinion?
This tutorial is a good way to help make the requirements of the genre of literature review specific and explicit for students. If you assign literature reviews, try watching it and discussing it with students (even if they watch it outside of class and post comments in an online discussion).

http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/tutorials/lit-review/
Another helpful way to make the genre more explicit to students is to analyze a good model with them. Here you see me analyzing an editorial on health care with students in a writing class, so that they could see the relationship between what a writer says, the main points (on the left side) and moves the writer makes, rhetorically speaking (on the right side).

The line across the middle is an analysis of structure—where the introduction stops and the body begins.

Having students mark up a sample literature review and bring it to class is a good way to open the conversation of what you expect. Then, project the sample onto the white board (without the screen) and using your white board markers, make whatever notes you would like to emphasize, as students tell you what they noticed.

For example, in a lit review, students might observe the use of transition words to connect research, the use of APA formatting, the identification of common themes or topics in the research (perhaps with the use of subheadings to mark those themes), and so on.
In this slide we can see that although the assignment already offered some support, students benefit from additional check points, especially when this is a new genre and when it incorporates other skills they may still be developing (like reading academic texts). The right side, in red, shows additional scaffolds that help students. The small group discussions during weeks 4-8 may only take 15 minutes each, but they required students to each have read at least one article and come to class ready to share its main points.
Providing students with additional resources on how to accomplish the task can be helpful for those who need more guidance. This handout is available on the Writing @ CI website.
Here we added questions under each item in the rubric, to support student understandings about the faculty members’ expectations.
After discussing this example, workshop participants returned to their “signature assignment” and discussed ways to identify explicit processes, knowledge, and skills that students must have in order to succeed. Then they considered ways to make those qualities more explicit for students.