

## **Writing that Works interview with Professor Connie Wanberg:**

### **1. Tell us about the writing assignments you've developed for your courses.**

I teach a writing intensive course at Carlson. It is a Capstone Course for undergrads getting a bachelor's in business with an HR emphasis. The course is focused on leadership. There are several writing assignments in this class, but I will describe one of the assignments. In this assignment, I have students write about an organizational/business leader.

*First, students are told the paper must provide a rich description of the leader they've chosen to write about. Who is this person and how have they been a leader? Students are asked to incorporate information about the leader such as:*

- What challenges has this leader faced and how have they handled them?
- What has been said about this leader by others (how has this leader been evaluated)?
- How did this leader make it to the place they are today? What important developmental events or mentors did this individual have?
- Is there anything unique about this leader?
- It may be useful to acknowledge areas in which this person has limitations and if information is available, how serious these limitations are or how the leader counters these limitations.

*Next, students must include an analysis of this person's leadership. The analysis can pull from course readings and can include candid opinions, such as whether they admire the person (if so, why and how) or if they are disappointed in the person (if so, why and how). They can reflect upon if this is the type of leadership they want to exemplify in their life.*

In this assignment, students must draw upon multiple sources of information about the person. Students have chosen a variety of leaders to write about, ranging from Donald Trump, Sheryl Sandberg, Andrew Carnegie, Sam Walton, Jack Welch, J.P. Morgan, Oprah Winfrey, and many others.

Students discuss what they've learned about their leader with the other students through paper exchanges and short conversations in class. They learn many things from this assignment. For example, they often learn about how hard many leaders have worked to get to the places they are. They often learn about major challenges the individuals have faced and overcome. They learn about the many different leadership styles people have. They learn about the paths that these leaders have taken to get to where they are. In some cases, they learn about ethical

shortcomings among these leaders. These are valuable reflections for business students.

**2. What are you hoping to see students demonstrate in the writing they do for your course?**

I grade my papers with a rubric to allow me to provide comments and to be consistent in my grading. When I grade the paper, I watch for:

- Does the content of the paper match the assignment provided?
- Is there an effective introduction and conclusion?
- Is the paper engaging to the reader? For example, does the leader “come alive” for the reader?
- Has the student used examples and evidence?
- Does the analysis section reflect critical thinking and show that they really thought about this leader?
- Are the ideas in the paper presented clearly? Is the structure of the paper clear? Does it flow nicely?
- Is the grammar, punctuation, and spelling appropriate?
- Has the student drawn upon a variety of credible citations?

**3. Any pet peeves/writing missteps that drive you crazy? (Follow up: what types of errors/flaws do you see most often?)**

I find that most students in my class are fairly good writers, or else they have effectively learned strategies to make their papers good before turning them in (such as having someone else read the paper and provide comments). I find that students for whom English is their second language struggle a bit. I often find myself in awe of these students. I can't imagine having to write this essay in Chinese, for example.

Perhaps the error I see most often is students not putting enough time and effort into their work, or not thinking deeply enough about the subject matter they are writing about.

The University of Minnesota has excellent writing resources to assist both instructors and students, see <http://writing.umn.edu/>

**4. What types of writing do you do most often? How did you develop your own writing skills?**

About half of my job is research. I write up the research results and submit them for publication. Examples of this type of work can be found on my Research Gate site at [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Connie\\_Wanberg](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Connie_Wanberg). Any one journal article involves hours and hours of work. I have always communicated well in writing. One reason might be because I was an avid reader as a child.

**5. Do you have any suggestions for listeners who want to improve their writing? Are there resources that you have found particularly useful?**

There are so many forms of writing. For simplicity purposes, why don't we just focus on e-mail.

Consider: is email the best way to discuss this topic or is a face to face or phone call better? It is so easy to avoid talking to each other but resist the temptation to use email for everything.

The title of the email does matter. At work, I often collaborate with the same people on multiple things. When I search my email for information from one of our communications, I often hunt for the right email for up to 15 minutes. This is inefficient and titling your email by project and subject helps.

Consider numbering your main points. This will help you ensure you are not repetitive and scattered, and that you get your main ideas across quickly.

Often, emails do not provide all of the details necessary. Review your email for completeness and clarity. On the other hand, other people provide extraneous details in emails. Focus on what is really important to communicate.