

**Building Writing  
Confidence and  
Reducing Anxiety in  
Adult Learners:  
Overcoming  
Dispositional Roadblocks  
in the Online  
Composition Classroom**



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Descriptions, Outcomes, and Something to Think About

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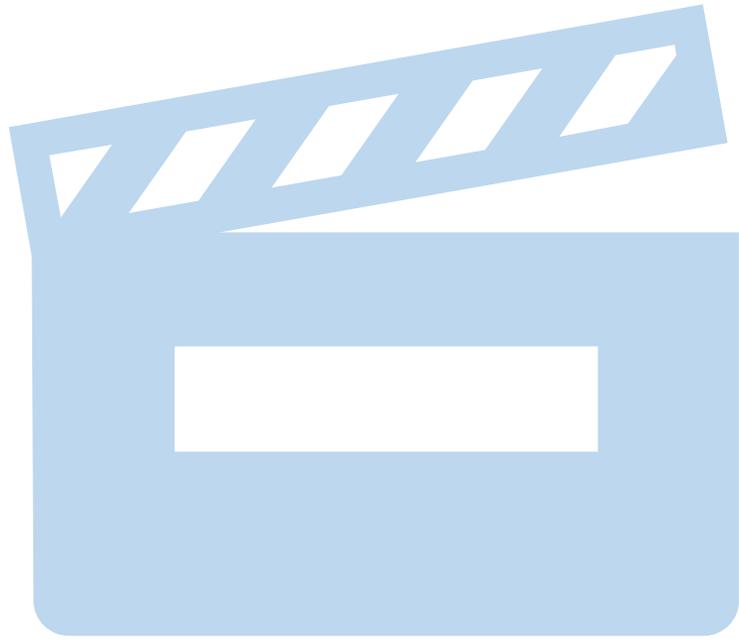
Curriculum, Content, and Instruction

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Changing the Relationship with Anxiety

Discussion and Application

# Session Agenda



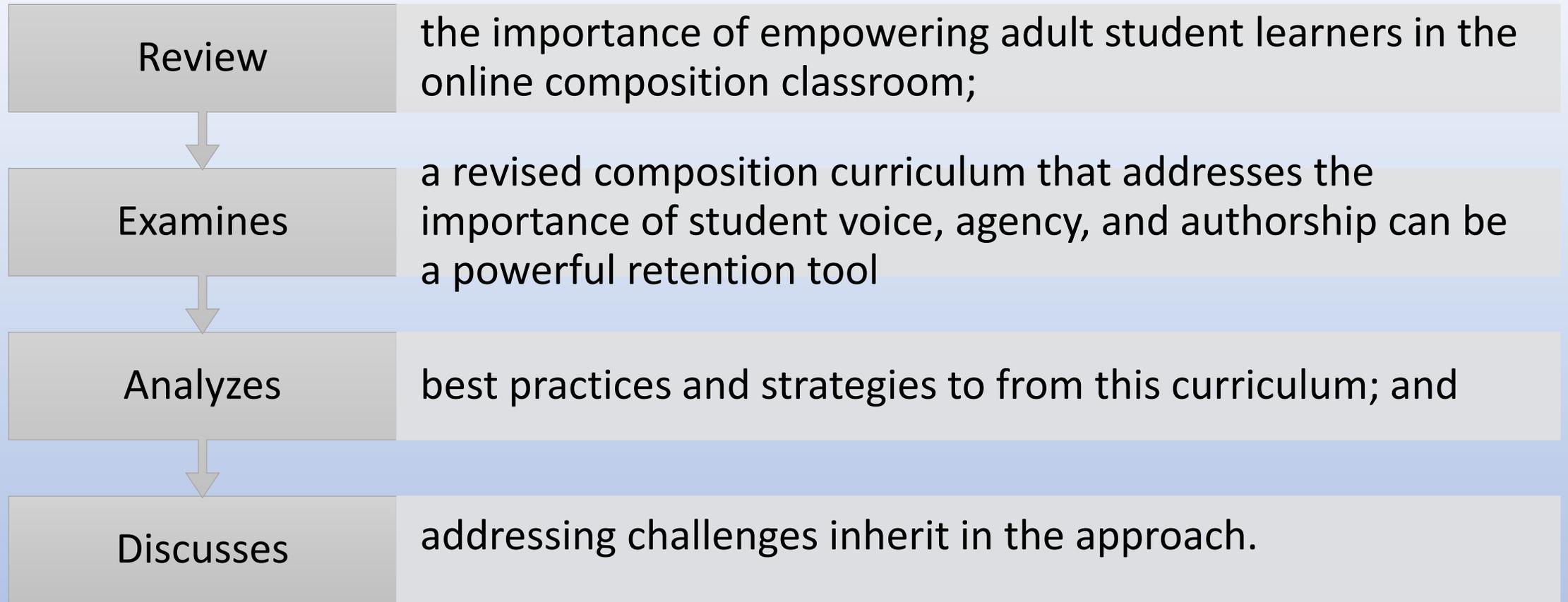
# Descriptions, Outcomes, and Something to Think About

Sheryl Bone, MAT

# Session Description

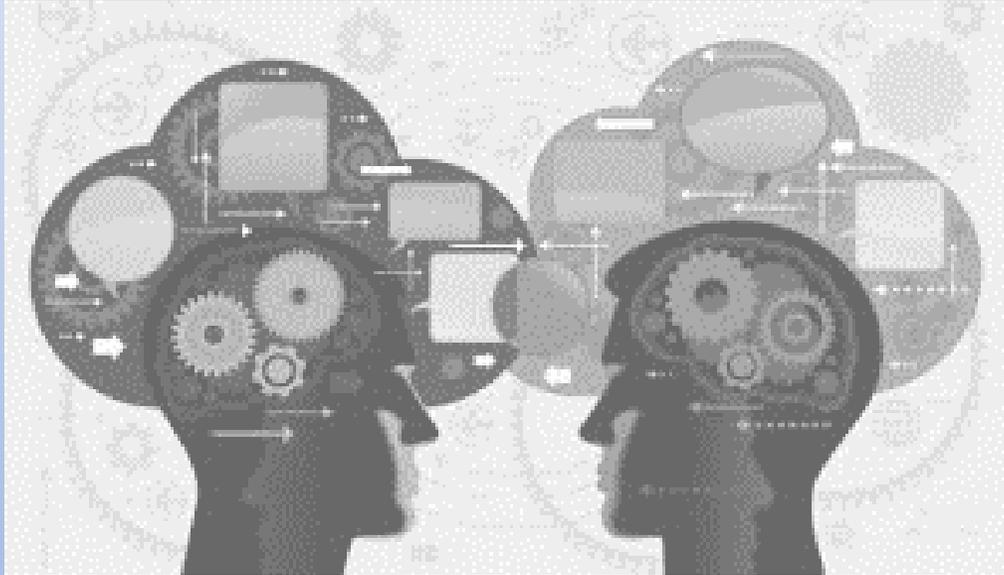
This session identifies teaching and curriculum solutions that address confidence and anxiety levels for the adult learners in writing courses.





## Session Outcomes

# Participant Takeaways



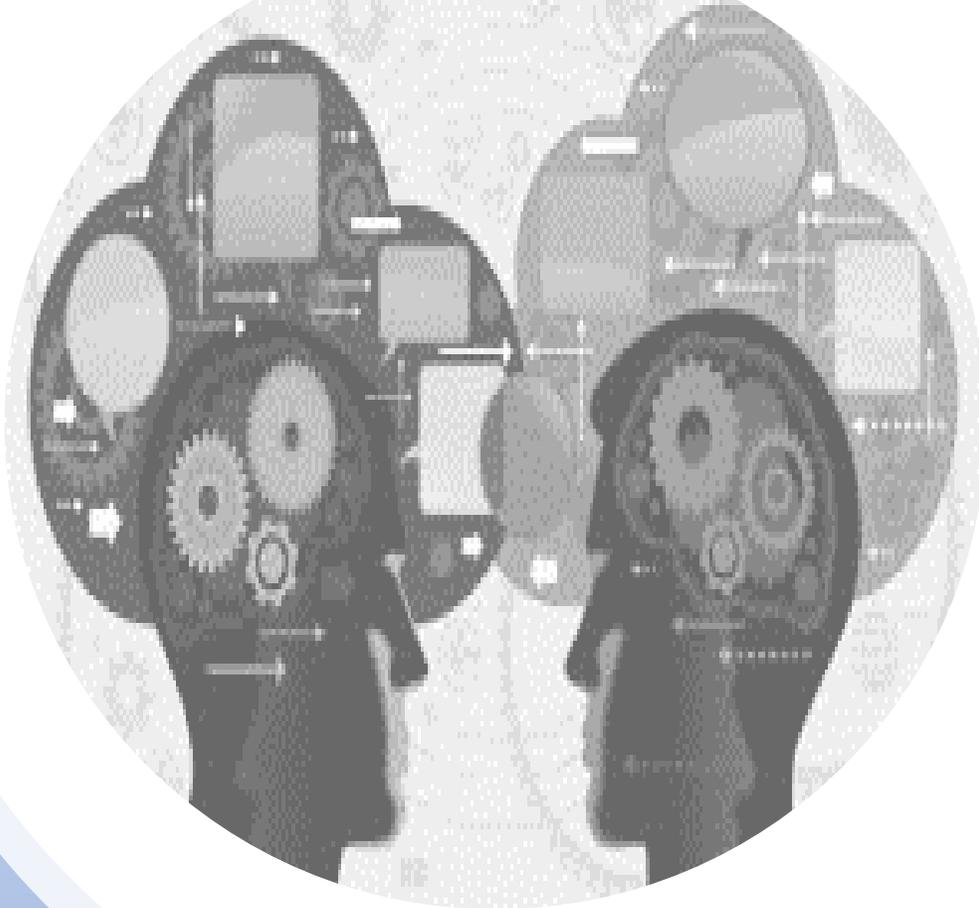
Participants will learn:

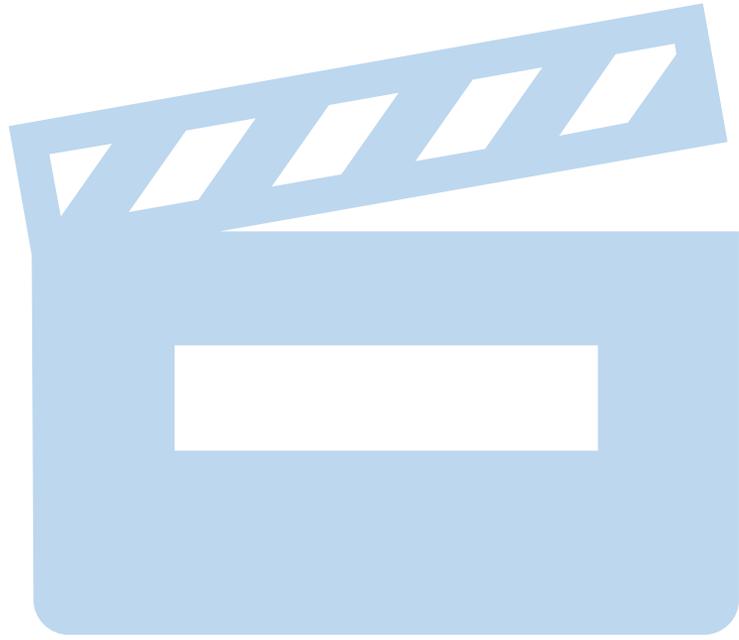
- Communication ideas
- Strategies including reversing the traditional writing and research process;
- Methods of engagement; and
- Tools that make the learning process more experiential and meaningful for students.

# Something to Think About During the Session

**How might you use these strategies in your courses through:**

- Course Redesign
- Teaching Methods
- Creating Resources
- Communicating with students
- Other ways





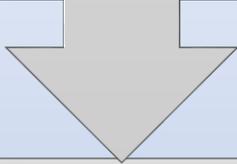
# Research Review and Rationale

Josef Vice, MA

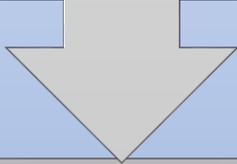
Contributor: Katie O'Neil PhD

# The Problem of Student Confidence

Despite years of success in the workplace, adult learners may have the least confidence as writers.



Low student confidence combined with high anxiety creates performance roadblocks and limits students' willingness to apply and learn from writing feedback in order to make adjustments to writing behavior and practice necessary for growth and improvement.



According to Plakhotnik and Rocco (2016), helping adult learners grow as writers means changing how higher education thinks about writing. Nielsen (2015) advocates using interim goals, precise feedback, and evidence of progress.

# ORIGINS OF THE PROBLEM: Cognitive Psychology, Self-Perception, and the novice writer



What we perceive is our reality; this may be completely counter to actual performance

Self-perception affects our responses to our environment and situations we find ourselves in

If students perceive themselves as poor writers, they will “act” like poor writers, believing themselves unable to improve, develop and succeed

This will increase problems with writers block and the writing process itself, as well as manifest itself in an unwillingness to seek out or learn from resources and ironically a lower willingness to try out new writing strategies that could otherwise replace poor writing behaviors and practice.

# Background

The online adult learner in the composition classroom may ironically be, despite their years of success in the workplace, the least confident of writers, the least likely to enter a composition course with the knowledge that the written word outside of the workplace can create agency for change.



According to Norman and Hyland, perhaps the biggest challenge educators face in building student confidence and thus success, particularly in the online composition classroom is “Dispositional: problems of attitude, negative perceptions of learning, expectations and motivations” (2003).



These challenges require a course that enables students to overcome negative perceptions not only of their ability to write but also of the value of the writing class itself. At the same time, the course prepares them for the more traditional research based academic writing they are expected to produce.

# 01

Major factors - 1<sup>st</sup> Term Course, High Enrollment, Impact U-Rate, Respect for Student Time, Prepared for Future Courses, and Career Readiness

# 02

University research studies indicate that our students' self-perception (whether they are realistic or not) is a solid indicator of course success or drop out levels

# 03

Identifying which students have low writing self confidence can, then, help instructors intervene and reverse student perception

# 04

A study involving a simple survey was conducted and a change in the Unit 1 DB instructions was made to affirm the importance of self-perception and confidence levels and their correlation to course success levels

## Research Pipeline/Study

Confidence levels can be challenging to overcome. Self-perception is deeply ingrained and may be decades in the making

Asking students to honestly identify their level of confidence in Unit 1 can help instructors to intervene before the first major writing assignment

DB: How confident are you that you will achieve your writing goals and improve your skills in this course

Self-reporting, though, can be misleading. Not all students who say they lack confidence do, and not all students who express confidence are actually confident in their writing skills.

## Early Identification

# Early Intervention

## Recommend

- Recommend identifying all students who express low self confidence levels

## Create

- Create positivity and encouragement early – pre-class in the NSO

## Contact

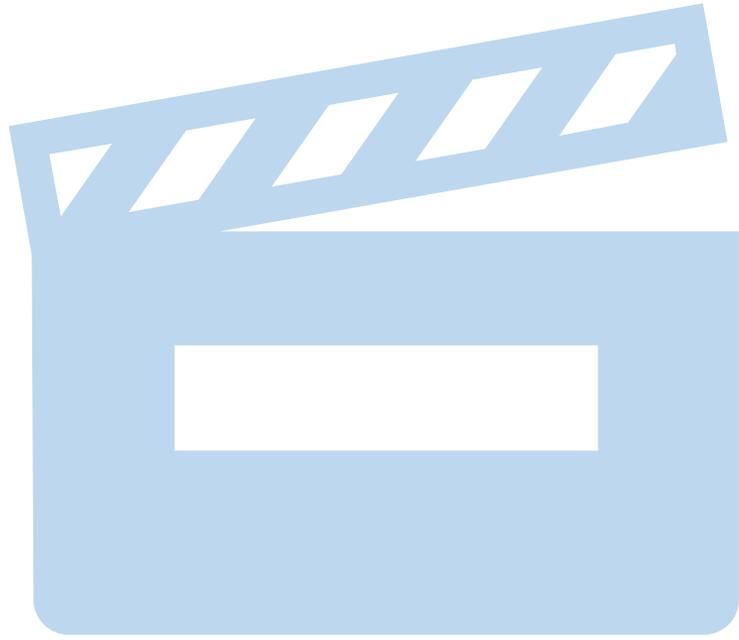
- Contact these students in the first unit

## Remind

- Remind students the course is organized to help build skills and with improved skills and success comes higher self-confidence levels

## Encourage

- Encourage students to take advantage of Writing Center resources



# Curriculum, Content, and Instruction

Teresa Marie Kelly, MAT

Contributor: Katie O'Neil PhD

01

Capitalize on  
what students  
bring

02

Prior  
Experience

03

Reframe  
“writing”  
• It’s not just  
academic

04

Value  
Communication

05

Share your own  
relevant career  
experiences

**Building Confidence**



CM107  
College  
Composition I

CM107

**What Will You Learn?**  
Imagine being able to... reading comprehension... you can more easily understand the content of documents you work and in your college courses. Imagine being able to apply strategies that allow you to write documents that are clear, concise, complete, and correct, whether for personal, academic, or professional purposes. Further, imagine learning how to do all of this in a systematic way that reduces, not increases, your stress.

**How Will You Use Your New Skills?**  
You will emerge from this course with powerful skills that will help you to succeed in all your other college courses and throughout your career. Remember, managers seek out employees with strong communication skills. Employees with strong writing and speaking

... effort... material and... successful CM107... past terms offer the... suggestions to help you manage your time and achieve course success.

... skills in so... focused, manage your time, and remain motivated. This will no doubt be challenging, but if you use this information to stay focused and on task and keep your eyes on the goals you want to achieve, you are more likely to succeed. Remember that challenges allow you to discover your strengths and weaknesses and to learn what you are truly capable of achieving!

**How to Manage Your Time**  
In this section, you will review information on what the average investment of time, and effort, is for each assignment. With this information, you can plan your time and begin to determine how to adjust for your learning.



Student Testimonials

**FIVE TIPS FOR COURSE SUCCESS**

PLAN YOUR WEEK	CREATE A CALENDAR	CREATE REMINDERS	REDUCE YOUR STRESS	GET ASSISTANCE
				
Knowing what is due and starting work early in the unit is a key to your success. This will give you more time to plan, draft, revise and edit your assignments.	A homework chart kept next to your desk helps you stay on track with your assignments.	Stay on track by using a homework app.	Take a break in your room in between assignments to work on your stress. Consider the benefits of meditation.	Consult your instructor, family and friends, and try the Writing Center!

Strategies

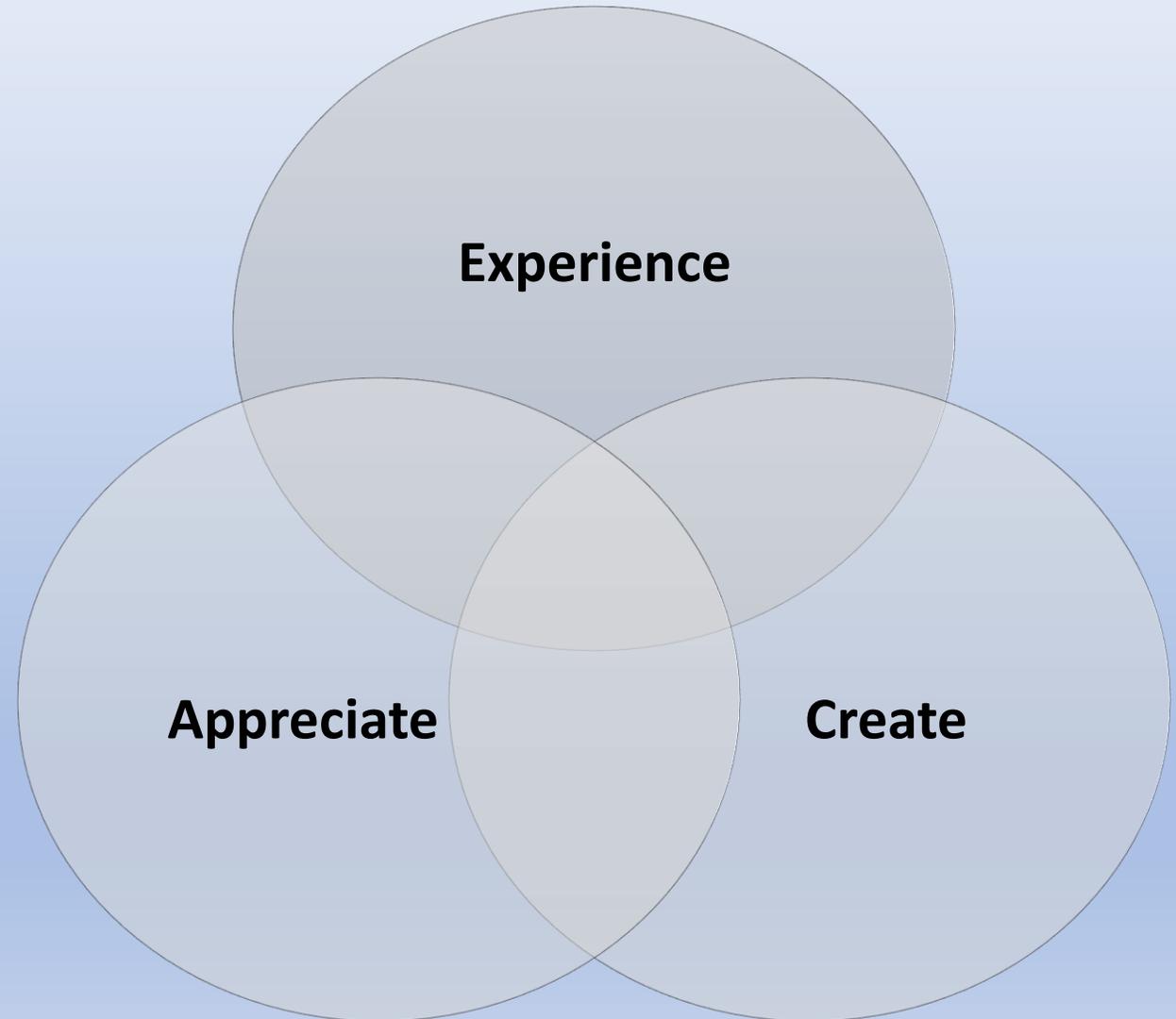
**HOW TO REVIEW THE INVESTMENT OF TIME AND EFFORT, IS FOR EACH ASSIGNMENT.**

	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6	Unit 7	Unit 8	Unit 9	Unit 10
Reading	3 hours									
Learning Activity	2 hours	1 hour								
Discussion	4 hours	3 hours								
Seminar	1 hour									
Assignment		4 hours		6 hours		6 hours		7 hours	8 hours	
Journal	1 hour									
Study	2 hours									

Course Level: A Built In Takeaway Reduces Anxiety

# Writing to Learn Using Authentic Writing

Authentic writings like journals, blogs, memos, and other formats applied in CM 107 contribute to the understanding of topics. These documents also inspire students to compose reflections and other unique writings that display higher-order thinking skills.





# Impact of These Examples

**Acknowledge**

Acknowledge the fear

**Reference**

Reference professional writers

**Share**

Share your own fear

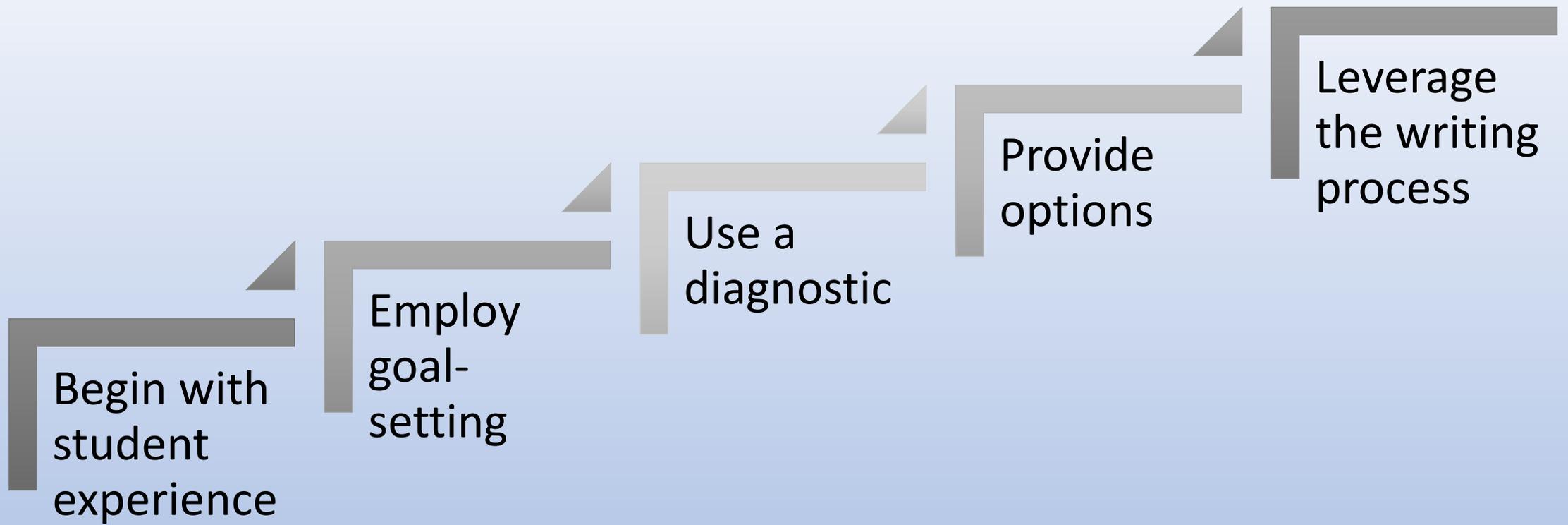
**Have**

Have students vocalize goals, fears, etc.

**Urge**

Urge students to reflect on their progress

**Begin With Attitude**



# Differentiate Instruction

# Personalize the Writing Process

## Define

- A process that allows you to move from mess to masterpiece; a logical strategy recommended by writing experts and used by effective writers

## Individualize

- Be willing to alter the process depending on the situation and what works best;

## Share and Model

- Write with students

## Experiment

- Try new strategies that may work better and may make writing less stressful, more productive

## Play to Strengths

- Share audio tools, verbal tools, kinesthetic tools, etc

# Expand Time For The Writing Process

## Create

Simply thinking about writing is part of the process; Create multiple opportunities to think about a writing assignment

## Foster

Foster planning through assignments

## Build in

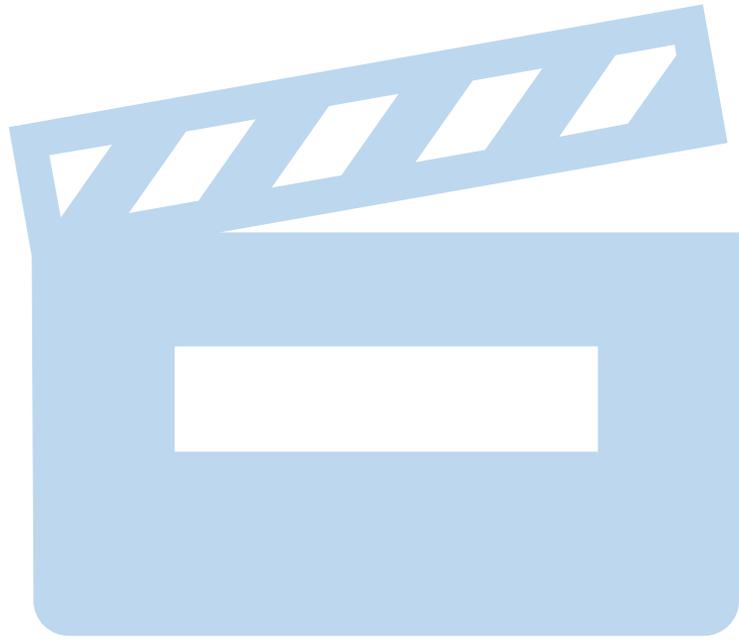
Build in time to get and apply feedback for each step; Encourage recursion

## Emphasize

Emphasize “as many drafts as it takes”

## Provide

Provide time for revision, editing, and polishing



# Cultivating a New Relationship with Anxiety

Emily Thompson, PhD.

# Mental Well-Being

## Stress

- Students are prone to chronic stress (Towbes & Cohen, 1996)
- 31.8% of students, report stress limits their success (ACHA, 2009)

## Anxiety

- After stress, students report anxiety as their biggest impediment to learning (ACHA, 2009)

## Writing Anxiety

- Writing can be particularly debilitating to college students because so many graded assignments depend on writing exercises.
- Writing anxiety can result in lower grades on writing assignments (Daly, 1985; Lee & Krashen, 1997) and can be exacerbated by unrealistic expectations about writing abilities (Larson, 1985).

# Reframing - Is Writing Anxiety “Bad”?

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## Daly's Writing Apprehension Scale Interpretation (Smith, 1984)

High: 26-59

Associated with nerves, fear of evaluation, to the point of avoiding courses or jobs that require writing.

Normal: 60-96

78 is the mean score for Writing Apprehension.

Low: 97-130

Lack of motivation, inattention to instruction details, due dates, evaluation criteria, and not revising based on feedback.

**Explore  
with  
Students:**

What changes when we focus on healthy levels rather than avoid anxiety altogether?

What can our anxiety teach us about ourselves?

What is our anxiety trying to do for us?

Is it normal and ok to feel anxiety when venturing into the unknown as learners?

Are anxiety and risk-taking correlated?



**Encourage  
Reflection**

**When**

**Seminar  
Discussion  
Journals  
Assignments**

**What**

**What worked  
What didn't  
Next Step  
Adjusted Goals**

# Share and Celebrate Vulnerable Learning Moments

**Share experiences with anxiety.**

**Example: I share my grad school story of being praised publicly for an abstract and then realizing the ideas fell apart when I wrote the paper.**

**Celebrate moments that appear to be failures with students.**

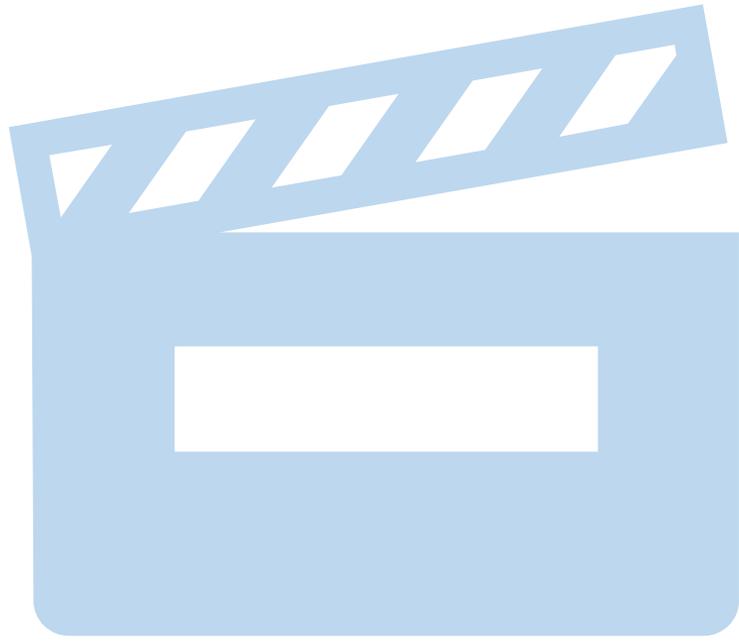
**What can we celebrate in this email?**

Hello, again Professor Thompson

As I have dived further into to the research and begun outlining, I think my thesis and community argument has fallen through. The main reason is, I can not find any credible research that backs up my argument. In fact, I found factual statistical information directly from the hospitals that indicates the exact opposite of my claim. I found that there is enough scholarly information to support my claim on a national level but not the community level. I finally realized I am at a point where I need help. I requested "Coffee with the Professor" to discuss my best options and strategies for proceeding. I do have a few thoughts for a change to my thesis I would like to run past you. Thanks for all of your help.



## Student Voices



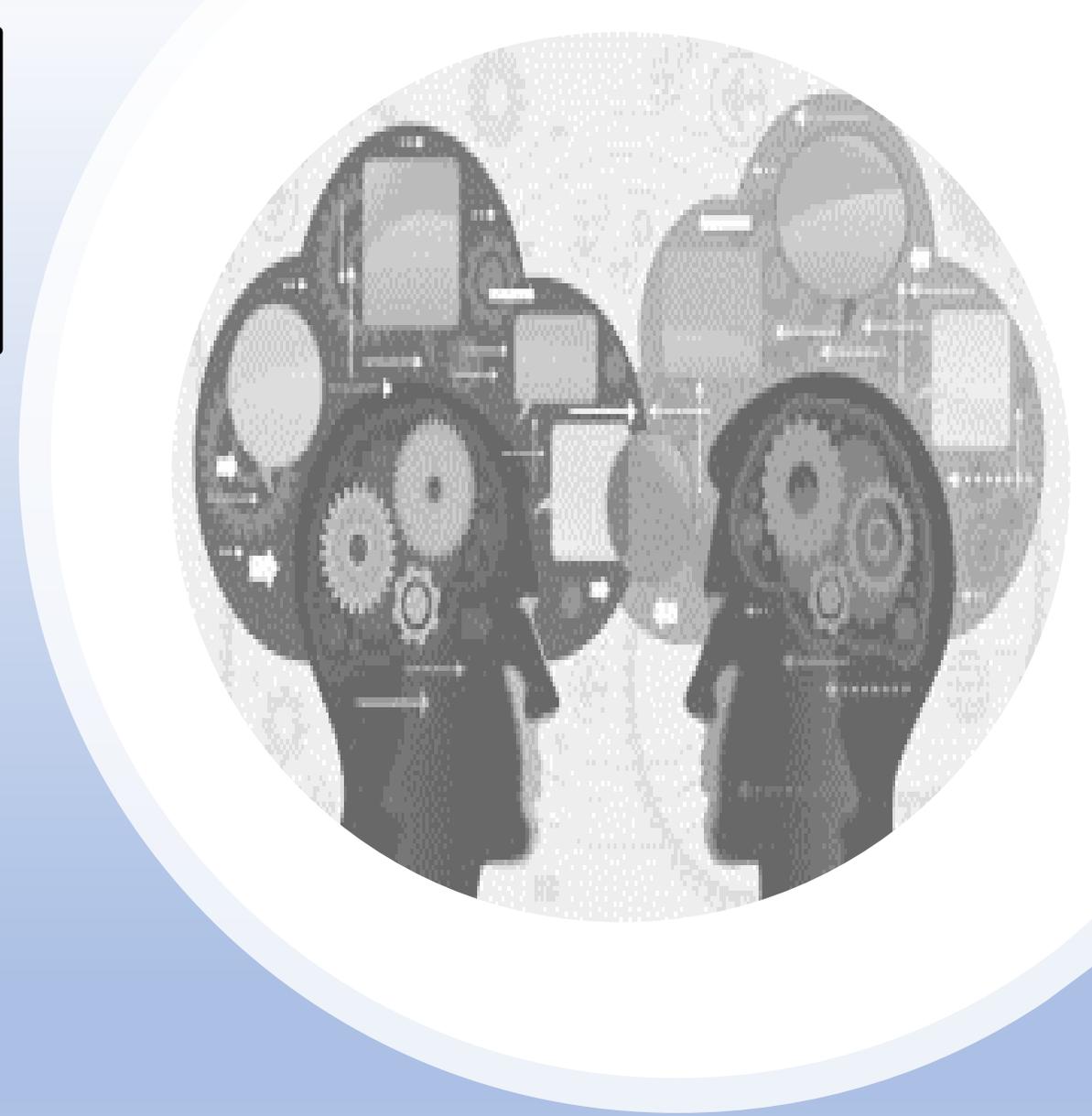
# Discussion, Questions, Contacts, and References

David Healey

# Remember: Something to Think About During the Session

How might you use these strategies in your courses through:

- Course Redesign
- Teaching Methods
- Creating Resources
- Communicating with students
- Other ways



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graph TD; A((How can you adjust assignments to foster confidence in students?)) --> B((How can you get them writing?)); B --> C((How can you show them the value of their ideas?)); C --> D((How can you address fear and anxiety?)); D --> A;
```

How can you adjust assignments to foster confidence in students?

How can you address fear and anxiety?

How can you get them writing?

How can you show them the value of their ideas?

**Focus on  
the Student**

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**Session Questions? Ideas? Future  
Projects? Contact Us!**