(Some) Best Practices for Teaching Writing
Rebecca Disrud, Associate Director, TLC

Assignment Design

- **Genre-based**: use models (or templates) and make features explicit
- **Rhetorically-based**
  - TIP: task as an interesting problem
  - RAFT: role, audience, format, task
- **Writing-to-learn** or **writing to demonstrate mastery**: set expectations and rubrics appropriately

Active Learning Strategies

- Use models and templates, both student and professional
- Teach content rhetorically
- Text prediction
- Explain “assignment words” and have students practice on the day’s material
- “Goal-oriented small group” and consensus-driven writing prompts (John Bean)
  - Thesis-proposing: disciplinary problem phrased as an open-ended question
  - Thesis defense: Give students a thesis to defend or attack
  - Question-proposing: After looking at research questions from published research, contextualize a topic and have groups generate 2-3 questions and explain why they are appropriate
  - Evidence finding: give students a premise and have them search for supporting evidence—and explain why it’s appropriate for the discipline
  - Case studies
  - Norming session: pass out 3-4 essays from previous classes and have students rank elements of the essays using your grading rubric

Commenting Strategies

- Is this a learning assignment or a mastery assignment? Does your commenting match?
- Invest your time at the draft stage and incentivize holistic revision that responds to that feedback.
- Final draft feedback should focus on skills students can transfer to future assignments.
- Ruthlessly prioritize: Teach one clear lesson (Nancy Sommers).
- Or, focus on no more than three patterns.
- Have realistic expectations.
- Start with a positive comment that starts the conversation (Sommers) or continues an existing conversation.