

Writing Across Communities St. John's University

Dear SJU Community,

We at Writing Across Communities seek to bring awareness to the different standards and expectations for communication in different communities, show appreciation for the linguistic diversity of our communities, and invite conversations about language practices.

Language standards in higher education can oppress voices and ideas in academia and can limit participation from ethnolinguistically diverse communicators. A WACommunities approach to writing instruction invites writers to consider how an understanding of the dimensions of cultural diversity enhances their ability to write and communicate appropriately (i.e., with an awareness of different conventions), productively (i.e., so as to achieve their desired aims), ethically (i.e., to remain attuned to the communities they serve), critically (i.e., to learn to engage in inquiry and discovery), and responsively (i.e., to negotiate the tensions caused by the exercise of authority in their spheres of belonging).

Below are principles from Michelle Hall Kells (2019) that WACommunities relies on, and some ways to think about and apply these to teaching, learning, and communicating. Engagement with these principles is an opportunity for ongoing learning.

Students arrive already embedded in complex discourse communities.

How can I use these principles when I'm teaching/mentoring using writing?

- Develop a syllabus that reflects the complex discourse communities represented in the classroom.
- Create a learning environment that values students' discursive backgrounds and makes them feel included, regardless of what language(s) they speak or write in.

How can I use these principles when I'm communicating?

- Think about how your varied discourse communities impact your academic work and attempt to bring them into your writing.
- View your participation in complex discourse communities as assets on and off-campus.
- Be mindful of varied discourse communities by listening carefully and engaging inquisitively with discourses you're unfamiliar with.

Membership in different discourse communities is a dynamic (ever expanding and receding) process, as students shift to and from the communities to which they already belong and those to which they seek to belong.

How can I use these principles when I'm teaching/mentoring using writing?

- Develop assignments that bridge the gap between academic and professional communities to invite students to imagine future communities they would like to join and participate in.
- Assign a variety of collaborative writing projects so students can learn from one another's discourse communities and communicate across borders.

How can I use these principles when I'm communicating?

- Attempt to reflect your dynamic literacies in your work across all St. John's departments, not just in language-focused classes, as well as in daily writing engagements (i.e. social media, texts, blog posts, etc.)
- Make use of memberships in various communities to promote interaction and enrich yourself and others in the use of translanguaging, an inclusive use of diverse linguistic resources.

Students bring discursive resources and literacy practices that are variably conditioned by the cultural and intellectual communities of the academy.

How can I use these principles when I'm **teaching/mentoring** using writing?

- Assign reading materials that encourage students to question standardized literacy practices.
- Implement varied learning modalities (i.e auditory, visual, kinesthetic, etc.)
- Consider the impact of institutional restrictions on students when grading and giving feedback on their writing assignments.

How can I use these principles when I'm **communicating**?

- Actively consider when and why standardized academic English is the norm and whose voices are suppressed by these restrictions.
- Embrace and engage with styles of writing not acknowledged in academic communities.
- Academic learning should expand writing skills without asking writers to abandon the rhetorical skills they have already developed.

Agency in language does not begin and should not end in the college classroom.

How can I use these principles when I'm **teaching/mentoring** using writing?

- Develop assignments and teaching methods that extend beyond the classroom into communities.
- Ask students how and when they use their language(s) and rhetorical agency beyond the classroom.
- Have open dialogue with fellow faculty across disciplines/professions and stay updated on the ever-evolving field of writing -- even if it is not emphasized in your discipline.
- Consider, with students, how disciplinary/professional language is used beyond higher education.

How can I use these principles when I'm **communicating**?

- If you are a member of a student organization, consider the role that language and writing has in the work you do. How do you and your fellow members communicate? How do you communicate with a larger student body using social media?
- Recognize your writing experiences outside of the classroom as being just as valuable as a graded paper.
- Own the writing process by discussing your ideas and progress with friends, classmates, family and other communities you are engaged in.

Faculty and staff across the university, along with on-campus writing programs (WACommunities, the University Writing Center, First-Year Writing) serve an important role as cultural mediators between the academy, students, students' homes, and their target academic and professional discourse communities.

How can I use these principles when I'm **teaching/mentoring** using writing?

- Make time and space in every course to reflect on and question the dominant discourse of the discipline or profession.
- Allow students to incorporate aspects of their histories, cultures, and language(s) in their writing.
- Encourage/implement student feedback in ways beyond the end-of-semester course evaluation.
- Ask students about their target academic and professional discourse communities -- who do they hope to write to and for, both now and in the future?

How can I use these principles when I'm **communicating**?

- Reach out to student partners as a stepping stone to developing better relationships with your professors and cultivate an open writing dynamic.
- Make appointments at the University Writing Center, develop relationships with the Writing Consultants, and be an advocate for St. John's University's writing programs.
- Promote the support you've received from faculty, on campus writing programs, and varied other student organizations that helps you strengthen your rhetorical agency.

Faculty and staff across the university, along with on-campus writing programs (WACommunities, the University Writing Center, First-Year Writing) should serve as advocates of literacy and language awareness for native and non-native speakers of English as well as for members of other ethnolinguistic communities present on and around campus.

How can I use these principles when I'm **teaching/mentoring** using writing?

- Incorporate various writing styles and languages in course materials and invite students to read and discuss this material.
- Advocate for and support students who wish to use terms and phrases from their languages and experiences.
- Attend a general body meeting held by any of St. John's University's cultural organizations for insight into how students use/think about language and their communities.

How can I use these principles when I'm **communicating**?

- Connect with on-campus writing programs to learn about their work with ethnolinguistically diverse student communities.
- Work to build awareness of campus departments and programs that advocate for students from diverse language backgrounds.
- Engage in conversations with students who speak a different language than you.
- Become and remain aware of the ethnolinguistic diversity represented across campus.
- Create opportunities within student organizations for non-native speakers of English to share their linguistic diversity.

Literacy education can, and should, do more than satisfy learning outcomes limited to the production of standard written American English.

How can I use these principles when I'm **teaching/mentoring** using writing?

- Recognize the racism inherent in standardized written American English, question language standards, and acknowledge the limitations of maintaining them.
- Ask students about the various languages they speak, assign work that speaks to their varying literacies, and revise learning outcomes accordingly.
- Give students the freedom to explore various communicative modes and literacies in their writing and communicating.
- Develop writing assignments that invite students to write for communities beyond the university.

How can I use these principles when I'm **communicating**?

- Recognize the racism inherent in standardized written American English, question language standards, and acknowledge the limitations of maintaining them.
- Initiate conversation about the relevance of your different literacies and modes of learning with classmates and faculty to exemplify the shortcomings of standardized written English.
- Ask faculty about choices you might have for your writing and propose how you might meet learning outcomes without limiting yourself to standardized written American English.

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