

REDUCED CLASS SIZE IN *COLLEGE WRITING*: SOME TIPS FOR TEACHERS

Reduced class size in *College Writing* doesn't require any radical changes in our curriculum, pedagogy, or teacher training; if anything, the course we've been teaching the past few years probably presumes a smaller class size than we've actually had! We have instituted one significant change – replacing individual Final Conferences with a single Final Exam meeting. Most other adjustments we think will be relatively minor and will come naturally to you. Still, we thought it might be useful to lay out a few specific ideas about how to take advantage of smaller class size in *College Writing*.

1. With a class of 15, it will be easier for you to create a quieter, more relaxed, more *intimate* learning environment, less formal and less intimidating for everyone. But you'll need to make that happen. → **TIP**: if you're teaching in a room with a capacity larger than 15, don't let your students spread out! From day one, bring everyone together and *keep* them together. Arrange the desks or chairs in a tight circle or rectangle. Imagine you're a seminar, committee, or jury – not a traditional "class."
2. Research shows that small classes make it easier to foster close interpersonal relations among students and between teacher and students. In such an environment, you can get to know your students better, and they can get to know you and one another better. → **TIP**: spend more time on introductions than you usually do, spreading them out over several days. Keep doing such community-building activities throughout the semester: e.g., take the first few minutes every day to talk about movies, music, sports, politics, etc., and connect those discussions to the coursework at hand.
3. In a small class, it's harder for any one student to get lost or isolated. Of course, not everyone is going to get along in your class, and not everyone is going to excel; but it will be more difficult for students to hide. In fact, in small classes, there's more pressure on students to attend, participate, and get their work done. And it's easier for you to keep track of each student's progress and identify problems before they escalate. → **TIP**: bring every student into the group! Don't let anyone disengage. (But remember: different students engage differently, and you need to be sensitive to those differences. The bottom line: if you feel someone slipping away, talk to him or her!)
4. A smaller class means more time for each student. In a class of 15, *everyone* has more chances to participate, share his or her ideas, and have the floor. On final due dates, you can have each student read aloud his or her favorite sentence or paragraph. You can have one unit culminate in student presentations – at 10 minutes each, including Q & A, you can do a whole class in a week. You can regularly "check in" with students during class about their progress, either one-on-one or in small groups, thus ensuring better drafts when those are due. But here's a → **TIP**: even with more time for each student, it's still possible for 2-3 students to dominate. Try to keep that from happening!
5. You can be more flexible with a small class than a larger one. You can more easily meet in other places (e.g., the library); you can more feasibly plan "field trips"; and you can more readily manipulate classroom space and time. → **TIP**: reserve a computer lab for your class at least once every unit. Use the lab for supervised drafting workshops, follow-up research sessions, tutorials on PowerPoint or iMovie, design and production days for your class magazine, etc.

If you have other ideas about teaching small classes, please share them with us! And, as always, let us know if you have questions or need advice about a particular situation.