

Case Study #1
What I Did When I Realized my Students were About to Fail my Composition Course

The Problem: I was teaching a composition course at a local university. The final exam was just a few weeks away and many of my students still didn't understand how to write an argumentative essay. Most of them had taken this class before and failed. I couldn't let that happen again, so I had to act fast.

The Solution: There was a small note at the end of my syllabus, which read, "Syllabus subject to change." I knew that was my answer. I stood in front of the class the next day and I said, "We were supposed to have an essay due soon, but is that what we need? Do we need another essay? I don't think so." I handed out the newly revised syllabus.

We started completing mini essay writing assignments in class. I broke the essay writing process down into manageable parts. For example, I'd give all of my students an essay prompt on the spot. I'd tell them what to write (an entire essay outline, a thesis statement, an introductory paragraph, a supporting paragraph or a conclusion). I timed them on every assignment. I continued to time them on every assignment until they could think quickly on the spot and write well under pressure.

Furthermore, I assigned collaborative essays in class. I paired weak students with strong students and they peer taught one another.

In addition, I held weekly student conferences to give them feedback on their work. They met my expectations every time. I was impressed.

The Result: There were about 25 students in my class and all of them but one passed the final exam and moved on to Composition 2. The student who did not pass, failed because of absences.