

THE SUMMER BEFORE: IMPROVING COLLEGE WRITING BEFORE FRESHMAN YEAR *FINDINGS FROM 10 YEARS OF A COLLEGE PREPARATION PROGRAM*

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For the last decade the Pullias Center has offered a writing program for college-bound youth.

Goals

- to increase writing competence, and
- to improve students' college knowledge (CK) and better prepare them for freshman year.

Objectives

- to increase students' expository writing abilities,
- to improve students' grammar and language capabilities,
- to increase students' ability to serve as a self-editor and evaluator of their work,
- to have written a competent 15-page paper on a social science theme,
- to have mastered two CK skills (financial literacy and time management), and
- to provide students with resources and tools for transitioning from high school to college.

Program rationale A college-level argumentative paper gives students the opportunity: (a) to think seriously about a question of interest; (b) to build on the research of others by contributing their insights to the topic; (c) to practice important academic skills such as conducting library searches, managing time, organizing information into coherent ideas, substantiating arguments using research, presenting insights about the research; and (d) to be challenged intellectually to write a college-level essay.

Theory of action First, we assume that students need to develop learning strategies for college success that are framed by self-regulated learning. The assumption here is that learners need to have a sense of self-efficacy and control over their work. We have coupled the idea of self-regulated learning with the idea of group learning. Group learning assumes that individuals learn within a group rather than as autonomous individuals. The purpose of SummerTIME has been to enable and sustain self-regulated learning within the activities and actions built by a group.

Outcomes Based on pre and post-tests student learning has been high with regard to the improvement of writing. Although students have demonstrated knowledge of the College Knowledge curricula, we are less certain that the demonstration of issues relating to time management, for example, gets translated into practice once a student arrives on campus. Some of the findings from the most recent study were:

- 60% of SummerTIME students who were classified as remedial at the start of the program according to a writing pretest were classified as college-ready on the writing posttest.
- 80% of SummerTIME students improved by one score or more on a writing test from pretest to posttest.
- Participation in SummerTIME was associated with an approximately 50% greater chance of receiving a college-ready score on the writing posttest than being in the comparison group.

Findings: What Works

Over the last 10 years we have been able to distill our ideas about writing into four principles that have correlates not only in our work, but also in the research literature.

Principles

- Set specific and understandable goals.
- Teach students how to revise.
- Teach summarizing, not analyzing.
- Require more and longer writing.

Correlates

- Teach students strategies for planning, drafting, and revising their compositions.
- Teach students strategies and procedures for summarizing reading material.
- Develop learning strategies where students work together to edit their compositions.
- Set clear and specific goals for what students are to accomplish with their writing.
- Teach students how to write complex sentences that convey simple, clear ideas.