Resources for teaching writing

There are innumerable resources out there about how to write, how to teach writing, and the particulars of science writing. Here are a few that I’ve found most useful, with some explanation of why.

Most inspiring
   When I first decided to teach a senior seminar focused on writing, this is the first book I read. Zinsser’s more famous book is On Writing Well, which is also excellent, but Writing to Learn was exactly the point I wanted to make in my teaching. Being able to write about something means that you have learned it, and my goal in the course was to demonstrate that being able to communicate well to others is the only way that science gets done.

   This is a very useful book for getting started actually teaching about writing. It covers a variety of ways of grading, making assignments, and avoiding common pitfalls.

Things I have my students read
   This is the main text I use in my senior seminar writing class. Fortuitously, Montgomery has a background in geology, so many of the examples are from the geosciences. I find this book the most tolerable of the “how to write” types of books, and his tone is engaging. I supplement this with real examples from the literature.

   http://www.visionlearning.com/library/module_viewer.php?mid=158


   http://www.visionlearning.com/library/module_viewer.php?mid=159

   http://www.visionlearning.com/library/module_viewer.php?mid=156

These short modules available for free online cover some basic concepts – you might think your students already know them, but they probably don’t. I use these at all levels, from intro courses to more advanced.

This article from American Scientist has become a classic. The authors include an exercise you can do with your students: they take a nearly incomprehensible paragraph of a scientific journal article and thoroughly *why* it is so difficult, then reconstruct something that is easier to read.


This book is geared towards science journalists, but there is one chapter on writing about technology that applies to everyone, especially beginning scientists who are learning to make analogies and uncover how labs and equipment work.


These three pieces are short, sweet, and immensely helpful in writing abstracts and introductions.

**Additional books/resources I use occasionally and find useful**


I love this book. It makes me laugh, and Truss explains in a very engaging and entertaining way why it is worth paying attention to grammar and punctuation.


This is as close as I come to using a real “manual of style”, and it is by the authors of the Chicago Manual of Style.