Help Students Learn How to Write

• Assign and discuss *The Science of Scientific Writing*
  – Emphasize what readers need:
    • Context
    • To be reminded at the beginning of a sentence or paragraph about what has come before
    • To be led into new, exciting material

• Present a mini-lecture on writing
  – Point out aspects of geoscience writing that may be less familiar
    • When to use past, present, future with regards to geologic time, published articles, collected data, rock formations, ...
    • How to cite references in the text
    • How to label and caption figures and tables
    • What goes into the various sections of a research article
  – Be prepared to address student questions on use of first person and third person
  – Be prepared to address student questions on use of active and passive writing

• Provide students opportunities to **practice** geoscience writing
  – Consider short (<250 word) writing that students might do before, during, or after a lecture
    • Present the main point of an article/reading assignment with supporting evidence
    • Explain a concept to a hypothetical audience
    • Write a caption for a figure, or one paragraph that explains the significance of a figure or table
    • Summarize observations/interpret geologic history/pose questions based on an image
  – Consider breaking a larger paper into components (outline, intro, figure captions...)

• Provide students opportunities to **reflect** on their writing
  – Beginning of course: *What are your strengths as a writer? What would you like to improve in your writing?*
  – After one or more assignments: *If you had one more day, how would you improve your writing?*
  – End of course: *How has your writing improved? What do you want to continue to work on?*

Carefully Craft Writing Assignments

• Write well-defined assignments that tie to course learning goals
• Consider assignments that relate to writing done in the geosciences
  – Reports, web pages, blog entries, proposals, poster presentations, articles ...
• Provide students with the evaluation criteria

Provide Relevant and Timely Feedback

• Consider peer review for early drafts
• Short individual conferences (< 15’) may take less effort & time than writing extensive comments
• A rubric with a few key comments may help towards providing a timely and fair evaluation.

References