

What do ISAW teachers say?

Teaching analytic writing and critical reading

As I assess my students' academic writing capabilities mid-year, I am excited about their progress. I feel they are far more familiar with the processes to use when writing in an academic context than they were at the beginning of the year. I attribute this progress to several factors:

- Being part of ISAW gives me the extra “push” I need to consistently stay on track in teaching academic writing. Because I know I am accountable, I am driven to create assignments that will bring me the results I'm striving for.
- The ISAW coordinators have worked overtime to provide multiple resources and teacher-to-teacher support so that I have plenty of lessons, prompts, and strategies to use when trying to design academic writing assignments. I have learned to more naturally integrate academic writing practices into my existing curriculum.
- One of the ISAW resource books, *They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*, has been invaluable in helping my students find the appropriate language for making important rhetorical moves in their writing.

In the past, I've often felt like I haven't known where to start in helping my students become more capable and confident in their ability to write analytically, to synthesize sources, and to choose the most effective transition words to move them through these processes. This year, though, I've been able to put together assignments specifically designed to help students practice these moves. I've noticed them becoming more comfortable in their ability to integrate sources and to take their own stand on an issue.

Shawni McBride, English teacher, Corning Union High School

ISAW has been and continues to be a great vehicle to explore effective teaching strategies and expand learning opportunities for all students in our never-ending pursuit of effective academic writing.

Carla Truttman, Social Studies teacher, Yreka High School

The ISAW collaborative allows me, as a literacy coach and teacher, to choreograph an approach to academic writing. Instead of placing students on a “painted-steps” dance floor with constraint at its center, ISAW instruction emphasizes writing and thinking “moves.” Students learn writing moves, that when used in combination, equip them to see and make choices in their writing as well as in their oral expression. Students practice choosing moves to determine the course, tempo, and lyrics of their writing. Ultimately, students learn to write in a variety of genres, in situations of freedom as well as restriction, and in greater control of their voices.

Heidi Bowton, Literacy Coach, Dorsey High School

Teaching for improvement

Focusing on improving academic writing over time was a new idea for me, rather than just teaching and assessing one genre and moving on to the next. It really helped me change the culture and climate of my classroom. Students actually started to like writing once they saw they were not “failures,” that they had strengths and areas for improvement. It also helped build our class into a community of writers as we all worked on improving together.

Becky Gemmel, English teacher, Escondido High School

The ISAW experience has been enlightening for me as a teacher because it has provided clarity regarding the writing expectations of our University of California system. The ISAW writing improvement model rubric is excellent because it recognizes a student's growth in critical areas of writing. I am glad that I said yes to this experience!

Jeanette Providence, English teacher, Grant Union High School, Sacramento County Teacher of the Year, 2007-2008

Collaborating with other ISAW teachers

My horizons expanded outside of the San Francisco Bay Area when I had the chance to work with teachers from all over California in CWP's ISAW program, which focuses on preparing students to face the challenge of college level writing. Seeing the work of students who represented demographics other than those of my English learners and understanding the expectations of all students entering a UC, CSU, or community college helped me to expand my perspective on how and what to teach my so-called "at-risk urban youth."

*Bissa Zamboldi, ESL and English teacher, Lowell High School;
Carlston Family Foundation, Outstanding Teacher of America, 2006*

ISAW has changed the way I teach writing and the way I evaluate student writing. I love getting together with teachers from different schools to share ideas, discuss student writing, and support each other through the daunting task of teaching students to be competent writers.

Carrie Weldon, English teacher, Folsom High School

I always look forward to ISAW meetings because I know I'll get fresh ideas and insightful feedback from a diverse group of teachers. After the meetings, I return to my classroom remembering the reason I wanted to teach in the first place—to help students express themselves effectively through writing—rather than focusing on how to prepare them for the next multiple-choice test. It's great to be part of an intellectual group focused on sharing and analyzing their own teaching practices and their students' work.

Janelle Weiner, Special Education teacher, Grant Union High School

Empowering all students

ISAW is the most powerful and illuminating professional development I have experienced. It has provided me with something like a lens, allowing me to see in the sharpest focus what my mission as a teacher of writing actually is. ISAW helps the teacher create effective practice from sound principles informed by the reality of college-level analytical writing. These principles and practices can benefit all your students, from the college-bound to the most reluctant student-writer. Make no mistake: after ISAW, you will see everything you do in the classroom in a whole new way.

Martin Brandt, English and ELD teacher, Independence High School; Carlston Family Foundation, Outstanding Teacher of America, 2003; CATE Award for Classroom Excellence, 2008

It's one thing to tell students to write; it's an entirely different thing to show them how to write. ISAW does just that. It is grounded in sound theory and classroom practice and has tremendously informed my own teaching. What may be more important, though, is that my students are now learning academically-focused writing skills that are applicable to life beyond the often compartmentalized essay writing of high school."

Matt Brown, English Teacher; Academic Dean, Santa Clarita Christian School

What do ISAW evaluators say?

About 70% of the 10th grade non-traditionally college-bound students whose papers I read during an ISAW improvement scoring would be ready to take a first-year composition course at my university. That was not the case at the beginning of the school year. Remarkable improvement and impressive teaching!

Douglas Tedards, Associate Professor, University of the Pacific; Evaluator, CWP Improving Students' Academic Writing