

School Name St. Johns River State College, Orange Park, FL

Course Name Humanities I and II

Course Format Hybrid/Traditional

Key Results Writing Space allows me to integrate college-level writing and critical thinking into my course, as required by Florida's "Gordon Rule," while providing timely and consistent feedback to students.

Submitted by

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Course Materials

The Humanities: Culture, Continuity, and Change by Sayre plus MyArtsLab

The Humanities I course focuses on the ancient through the medieval periods of culture and history. Humanities II covers the Renaissance to the Modern periods of culture and history. Both courses emphasize developing an understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage. In both Humanities I and II, however, my greatest instructional challenge is assigning and grading the necessary amount of writing. Not only is college-level writing a required part of these courses per the state of Florida's "Gordon Rule," but I also believe writing helps students better understand course concepts than simply reading the textbook.

I adopted Writing Space in MyArtsLab as a way to provide timely, consistent feedback to my students while also taking precautions to avoid plagiarism. In addition, creating prompts specific enough to keep student responses succinct and, at the same time, worded in ways to make students think critically—a skill needed for success in college, career, and life—can be challenging. I found the Writing Space prompts to be especially well conceived in this regard, and I have happily inserted them into my syllabus.

Implementation

All students in both courses must complete the "Museum Exploration" Writing Space assignment within MyArtsLab. Since different art exhibits in our local museum, the Thasher-Horne Center for the Arts, are relevant to a range of historical periods, the same essay prompt works well for both courses.

This assignment asks students to assess the value of acquiring a broader cultural understanding from museum collections rather than just knowing the simple historical context of the works displayed. This type of assignment requires students to think more critically and judiciously about content covered in the course, something that simple multiple-choice questions often do not do.

I use "Museum Exploration" Writing Space assignment in conjunction with our museum field trip with great success. Writing Space streamlines the entire process of assigning writing by including pre-loaded writing assignments along with pre-loaded grading rubrics. Plus, the built-in originality check is a huge benefit for both me and my students. Before Writing Space my students had to draft and revise to their essays in Microsoft Word, run them through Turnitin to check for plagiarism, and then post them to Blackboard. Now, this is all done in one place.

Within MyArtsLab I also require students to complete selected "Closer Look" media assignments before coming to class. My goal with these assignments is to expose students to the material early so they arrive in class prepared to participate actively. Making these assignments worth 25 percent of students' overall course grade gives students an incentive to take the time to complete all of them, even when there may not be time to cover some of this material in class.

Assessments (for both Humanities I & II)

50 percent	MyArtsLab (Writing Space; Closer Look media assignments)
25 percent	Midterm exam
25 percent	Final exam

“I like Writing Space because it is easy to use, quick, and everything can be done at your own pace. I like that you can go back and edit your drafts while still being able to see the questions. It definitely made things easier for me!”

—Hannah Guthrie (student)

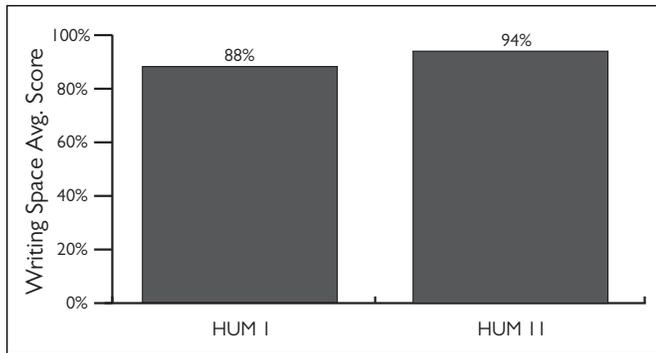


Figure 1. Average Writing Space assignment scores Spring 2014 (HUM I $n=15$; HUM II $n=25$).

Results and data

Writing Space allows students to practice and then demonstrate their college-level writing skills, like forming logical arguments and showing valid evidence. It also allows me to easily review, grade, and report on student performance. My students' high average scores on their Writing Space assignments in both Humanities I and II clearly demonstrate they are producing competent college-level writing (figure 1). I have not yet included revisions as part of the Writing Space assignment, but I am considering requiring one or two revisions going forward. This will give them practice not only in drafting their ideas about a topic but also in the valuable polishing, sharpening, and focusing of their writing that happens when writers revise.

The student experience

“Writing Space is more convenient than Blackboard. It requires fewer steps for submitting a paper than are needed in my other classes. I also loved the link to Turnitin.” —Naomi Pangborn (student)

“Some of my favorite things about Writing Space are how it tracks everything—due date, the progress of your work, and even the similarity report at the end.” —Christopher Cruz (student)

Conclusion

Writing Space has made the process of assigning, receiving, and evaluating writing assignments easier. It's simple to create new assignments, upload relevant materials, see student progress, and receive alerts when students submit work. Moreover, students overwhelmingly prefer working in Writing Space to other kinds of assigned writing. Going forward, I may include additional Writing Space assignments such as the “Roman Architecture” essay for Humanities I. This should help me toward my ultimate instructional goal, to provide students with as much writing practice as possible so they can become better writers and critical thinkers.