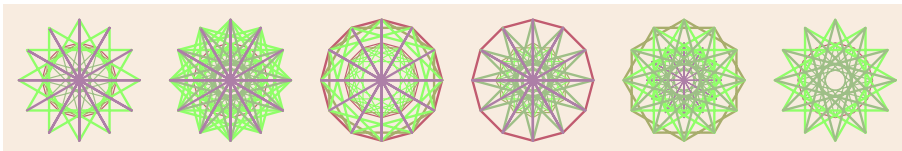


# Examples, guidance, and practice to improve our students' writing

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## The importance of stories

**Storytelling during the interview: Why jobseekers need to become storytellers** is a part of the Udacity Career Tips Series. In this 5 minute video recording, Martin McGovern demonstrates a skill that he believes can help our students achieve their goals.

## Ingenuity: Cornell College's curriculum

### Educational priorities

The faculty at Cornell College helps students develop skills, habits, understanding, and perspective in these areas:

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knowledge	◇	inquiry	◇	reasoning
communication	◇	intercultural literacy	◇	ethical behavior
citizenship	◇	vocation	◇	well-being

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### Essential abilities

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writing	◇	quantitative reasoning
intercultural literacy	◇	foreign language

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## Writing encounters at Cornell College

Here are the guidelines, taken from [Cornell College's website](#), for instructors who choose to make a course a “writing encounter.”

Faculty should:

- Assign formal and/or informal writing so that students are writing regularly throughout the course. Informal writing assignments (e.g., journals, blog posts, reading responses) are low-stakes, often non-graded assignments, that assist students in exploring and understanding course material. Formal writing assignments are high-stakes assignments that students use to develop their own arguments or ideas about course material.
- Assign one substantial, preferably staged, formal writing assignment, thus allowing for faculty feedback throughout the process.
- Devote class time to the writing process (which includes prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing). Writing instruction should focus on discussing assignments and rubrics, writing techniques and strategies, approaches to particular types of papers or writing problems, and students' work-in-progress.
- Provide timely feedback in writing and/or in-person through individual or small-group writing conferences.
- Require students to employ feedback in a subsequent draft, paper, or assignment and to reflect on their work, process, and goals.

## Writing exercises in my course

Here are two kinds of writing exercises that I included in my course last year:

1. Career explorations: write 6 essays (2 essays in each of the first 3 weeks of the block), each 256 words in length.
  - The instructor provides links to online articles and video recordings.
    - Example: [Babbel](#) produces software to help people learn languages. The company publishes profiles of its employees and articles about how it selects programming languages, the disciplines that its engineering teams have adopted, and descriptions of jobs it is trying to fill.
    - Example: [Atlassian](#) produces software to help teams coordinate and plan their work. In this [video post](#), one of its product managers describes a role open to students of computer science that is likely to be unfamiliar to most.

- Example: [Gayle Laakmann McDowell](#) worked as a software engineer for several leading technology companies. As she advanced within these organizations, she gained experience hiring. She saw that she could help those who were seeking a foothold in her industry. She developed a second career helping other people qualify themselves and make successful applications. She is a prolific writer with [a strong presence on the Web](#).
- Students learn how organizations produce software and the variety of ways in which people contribute to the work of software engineering organizations.
- Students summarize and respond to what they read, view, and hear.
- In their summaries, students will share lessons learned with their classmates.
- In their responses, students will comment on how engaging and persuasive the articles and video recordings are.
- The instructor will encourage students to reflect on their own developing career goals, to write in the first person, and to share how what they learn through these exercises might influence their plans.

2. A milestone in the development of computer science: write a 2048 word essay in stages (prospectus/abstract, annotated bibliography, notes/outline, initial draft, final draft).

- The instructor directs students to [the Association for Computing Machinery's website](#) where students find listings of the winners of the A. M. Turing Award. This award is the highest distinction in computer science. The website provides biographical profiles of each winner, a citation that describes the winner's contributions to computer science, and the winner's acceptance lecture.
- Students seek and find other resources from which they learn more about the life and work of a winner of the Turing Award.
- In their papers, students share what they have learned about the life and work of this outstanding computer scientist.
- Together, students in the class discover the breadth of our field. Students may comment on how their subject's special interest connects with our curriculum or how their reading has opened their eyes to opportunities that they did not previously know existed.
- Many winners choose to share some advice for young people in their acceptance lectures. The instructor will encourage students to share and respond to the advice that they encounter.
- Some of the winners are great teachers as well as great researchers. Some have very colorful personalities. Students may comment on what their reading has taught them about the kind of teammate

they hope to become and the kinds of teammates that they hope to find in their own careers.

## Advice to writers

- Begin early.
  - Return to your work frequently. Work steadily.
  - Have something to show every day.
  - Read your work aloud.
  - Show your work in progress.
- Prefer...
  - short sentences to long sentences.
  - short paragraphs to long paragraphs.
  - simple and familiar words to fancy words.
  - the active voice to the passive voice.
- Muster the courage needed to throw out the first page. You were only warming up.
- Alternate between...
  - the kind of work that adds and develops ideas and...
  - efforts to reorganize and rephrase statements without adding new content.
- Carry a printed copy of your essay with you wherever you go.
- Alternate between...
  - editing on the computer and...
  - marking up a printed copy of your essay with a pen.
- Separate...
  - the work of choosing and ordering the words your readers will see from...
  - decisions about format (such as margins, fonts, placement of page numbers, and so on).

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