

## **A “How To” Guide to Writing Interdisciplinary Units**

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Conditions that are vital for good quality units and quality teaching

1. Communication
  - a. Principal needs to know the plan and why it will broaden the learning experience
  - b. Coordinating teachers
2. Preparation
  - a. Procedural notes
  - b. Instructional materials
  - c. Students
3. Structure
  - a. See inter-relationships clearly
4. Role
  - a. New learning and teaching roles emerge
  - b. Shifts from lecturer to facilitator...make things happen
5. Groups
  - a. Learning dynamics within groups
  - b. Enhance group's mastery level
  - c. Individual success is dependent on success of coworkers
6. Environment
  - a. Slowly and honestly relinquish control to working groups
  - b. Need to train students to prepare them for this
7. Questioning
  - a. Conclusions
  - b. Logical mental structures
  - c. Inquiry, investigation, discovery
  - d. Questions alternating with further investigation
8. Commitment
  - a. Must be made by teacher to pursue this form well beyond one teaching unit

Selecting a topic

1. Is the topic broad enough to ensure individual choices about some aspect?
2. Will topic appeal to both genders and all cultures represented in the class?
3. Will the topic lend itself to a theme of reasonable length— not too short and not too long? (no more than 4 weeks for academy)
4. Does the teacher have a background of experience upon which to draw from for this unit of study?
5. Are materials and resources necessary readily available?

Need to get beyond the surface

Answer questions to get beyond the surface and get to a deeper level

Pull them together into a single paragraph to form the deeper meaning of the unit...

1. **What is the nature of the problem?** To make this study of the past meaningful to the teenagers in my class. Some of them have a more direct connection to this particular unit than others, but they all can gain something from it. My job is to point them in the direction and encourage them to find what it is for themselves as individuals.
2. **What different perspectives do people (i.e. students!) have about it?** Some say it is boring, some say it is irrelevant. I say it is only boring if they don't know how they can use the information and the experience of immersing themselves in the material. I believe that studying the past informs our relationships and choices of today.
3. **What inferences and generalizations can be drawn from this problem?** If one didn't know better, one might assume that kids don't care about anyone but themselves. The truth is that they just don't think often enough about using what they learn in school right then and there. Most of the time they think that high school is "just" a stepping stone to college and that that's all they have to gain, an entrance into college. My goal is to make the information and experience useful at the moment, but also for the future.
4. **What are its causes and its effects?** On the students' part, there is their general ennui and lack of interest, their overall resistance to the need to focus...and think...and their sometimes lack of concern about anything but their current self. The effect of all this, of course, is that they don't gain what they could, that their vision remains narrow and their critical thinking skills remain undeveloped.
5. **Is it changing, and if so, how and why is it changing?** This attitude changes as they get older, and the junior year is often when the change is most obvious. This is actually my favorite level to teach because of that. They are aware that college is around the corner and that they will need more skills than they have now... And if I preface what I ask them to do with "this will help you in college and this is how you will be able to use this then..." then they see more value...
6. **What are your choices with respect to it?** Just keep bringing their attention to the past and offering them opportunities to apply what we're learning to their present situation. Use a variety of approaches and learning experiences to capture their attention and learning styles.

7. **What can be done by the students to help fix the problem?** Keep an open mind, enter into the discussion and the experience with a “possibility” mind set...Do the work!!! All of it!!!

The problem with teaching teenagers, especially juniors, is that if they are going to apply themselves fully to the lesson, they need to understand how it will work for them as individuals now and later...for college. The challenge, then, for me as the teacher is to make this unit of Slave Narratives and Spirituals meaningful enough for them to put themselves whole-heartedly into it so they can gain something from it on all levels, but especially personally. My whole goal in teaching is for my students to come away from their study as better individuals, not just good students. Engaging the students every step of the way should accomplish this.

### **Graphic Organizer**

Make a graphic outline of the total unit

- To keep track of various elements of unit
- To keep track of materials needed, etc.

### **Introduction to Unit**

- Statement of problem, purpose
- Information not to be taken for granted
- Scope and sequence
- Grade level, length of unit

### **Unit Schedule**

- Table of Contents
- Suggested Schedule
- Lesson Outlines

### **Creating Activities**

- Are activities related?
- Are critical thinking embedded
- Does this help reach curriculum goals?
- Does this build community, involvement and extends understanding
- How should the teacher tie this new learning to past experiences?
- Direct teaching, discussion, lecturing that ties learning experience together so that students have a more coherent overview...what the teacher needs to do to hold it all together
- How should the teacher assess student learning
- Can this activity meet several goals in one lesson?

- Introductory activities
  - Should engage the students and can include textbooks along with outside materials
- Developing activities
  - The heart of the unit – projects, writing, creating, that move students towards final goal
- Culminating
  - Publishing, sharing, and celebrating awareness
  - Enrichment activities
  - Vocabulary
  - Research projects