

# ***Improving Reading and Writing in the Content Areas***

## **Course Syllabus**

### **Catalog Description**

In order to be successful in content area classes such as social studies, science, and mathematics, students must be able to read a variety of informational texts and produce written documents. This workshop will give teachers the tools they need to integrate literacy strategies into content learning to help raise student achievement. Participants will use the Literacy Matters web site as an anchor throughout this workshop for exploring instructional strategies. By the end of the workshop, participants will be able to locate web-based tools, strategies, and lessons that foster literacy skills in all content areas. They will also have developed a preliminary lesson plan incorporating these tools and strategies.

### **Prerequisites**

This is an introductory course for teachers, technology specialists, curriculum specialists, professional development specialists, or other school personnel. Participants are expected to have regular access to computers. In addition, participants should be proficient with using email, browsing the Internet, and navigating to computer files.

### **Goals**

This workshop will enable participants to:

- Understand the benefits and challenges of teaching literacy skills in the content areas
- Learn and apply specific strategies for teaching reading and writing in the content areas
- Develop an understanding of different types of text structures and how to teach students to recognize them
- Gain experience in developing literacy activities to support curricular goals in different content areas

### **Assessment and Course Requirements**

Each session includes readings, an activity, and a discussion assignment, which participants are required to complete.

### **Course Products**

Participants will use the *Content Area Lesson Plan Template* to create a lesson plan based on the strategies and concepts they have explored throughout the workshop. The template is a Microsoft Word document. The template is also available in a PDF version.

Workshop participants are expected to complete weekly assignments, including active participation in the online discussion board. In addition, participants will develop and share their ideas to incorporate tools and strategies presented in the workshop into their own curricula.

### **Discussion Participation**

Participants will be evaluated on the frequency and quality of their discussion board participation. Participants are required to post a minimum of two substantial postings each session, including one that begins a new thread and one that responds to an existing thread. Postings that begin new threads will be reviewed based on their relevance, demonstrated understanding of course concepts, examples cited, and overall quality. Postings that respond to other participants will be evaluated on relevance, degree to which they extend the discussion, and tone.

### **Required Readings, Activities and Assignments**

#### **Session One: Content Literacy**

In this session, participants will define content literacy and think together about how reading and writing instruction can be integrated into content area curricula.

Participants will read three brief sections from the Literacy Matters website:

- Definition: What is Content Literacy? (<http://www.literacymatters.org/content/overview/definition.htm>)
- What are our Core Principles? (<http://www.literacymatters.org/content/overview/principles.htm>)
- Why is Content Literacy Important? (<http://www.literacymatters.org/content/overview/why.htm>)

As an activity, each participant will read the article Integrating Literacy with Content ([http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed\\_lead/200211/holloway.html](http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/200211/holloway.html)), as they think about their current or past classrooms, and consider to what extent they have focused on content literacy in their instruction with students.

### **Session Two: Reading in the Content Areas**

In this session, participants will consider challenges some students may face in reading content area materials. Participants will also explore strategies for improving reading skills and how to differentiate reading assignments for students of diverse abilities in content area classes.

Participants will read, Reading Expository Text: The Choice for Some. A Challenge for Others, which provides an introduction to why reading expository text is difficult for some students. It discusses factors that affect students' success with reading expository text, including reader and instructional factors.

As an activity, students will read the brief article, Learning to Learn: Getting down to Grass Roots: Student Difficulties (<http://english.unitecology.ac.nz/resources/resources/learntolearn/grassroots.html>), which describes ways to address specific problems in content reading. Then they will think of a student who struggles with reading or processing difficulties. Lastly, they will complete exercise B at the end of the article using the note-taking template for nonfiction text (<http://english.unitecology.ac.nz/resources/resources/learntolearn/non-fiction.html>). They will choose one of the three supplied text excerpts: History, Geography or Science and identify any difficulties that could arise for readers engaged in the text, as well as possible ways to address those difficulties, and write them on the note-taking template for nonfiction.

### **Session Three: Writing in the Content Areas**

In this session, participants will explore and discuss the different types of writing students need to do in content area classes, as well as strategies for improving writing skills.

Participants will read:

- The section devoted to Writing on the Literacy Matters website for an overview of content area writing.
- An Overview of the Expository Mode (<http://www.bham.wednet.edu/departments/currdept/asmtoff/MSExpWrite/ExposModeDescription.html>) which includes purposes, organizational structures, and modes of expository writing, as well as samples of students' writing in different forms

As an activity, students will read about three write-to-learn assignments: Free write/quick write, Double entry journal or summary/response notebook, and Quick Questions. If possible, they will try one of these activities out in their classroom with students.

### **Session Four: Text Structures**

In this session, participants will explore text structures, or the organizational arrangements a writer chooses to present written information. Participants will also be trying out some online activities they may wish to use in the classroom.

Participants will read:

- The brief section on *Text Structure* from the Literacy Matters website.
- Reading Instructional Handbook (<http://www.smasd.org/pssa/html/Reading/pdf/rihand15.pdf>), which provides an introduction to the research on text structure. It lists the signal words for each structure and graphically illustrates each structure.

As an activity, participants will choose from a choice of online activities on *Literacy Matters* and they will try out the activity with a struggling reader or a small group. If participants are not currently teaching, they will reflect on how it might benefit a struggling reader they have known.

#### **Session Five: Specific Strategies for Different Content Areas**

In this session, participants will investigate the reading and writing requirements for specific content areas, and explore together how to support students in developing their literacy skills in content area learning.

Participants will read one of four selections within the website, Adolescent Literacy in the Content Areas - Knowledge Loom (<http://knowledgeloom.org/practices3.jsp?t=1&location=1&bpinterid=1197&spotlightid=1174&testflag=yes>).

As an activity, participants will write their own “stories” about a literacy skill they teach (or have taught) in a content area based on the readings.

#### **Session Six: Creating a Content Area Lesson Plan**

In this session, participants will create and share content area lesson plans, and review the essential concepts of the workshop. They will explore several lesson plan models and assessment resources.

As a final activity, participants will use the *Content Area Literacy Lesson Plan Template* (<http://www.edtechleaders.org/documents/ContentAreaLiteracy/lessonplan.doc> ) to design a lesson that uses a strategy for helping students with content area reading and/or writing. Finished templates will be shared in the discussion board.