Kelly Peinado, Ventura College

kpeinado@vcccd.edu

**A good unit for starting any community college composition course that contains a wide range of writing skills and confidence:**

**Goal:  Offer support for students’ affective needs with a relevant, thinking-oriented**

**The course:** Any composition course—students at all levels can benefit.

**The Unit**: A two-week unit (designed for two 2 hour classes a week) which includes the following elements:

* Readings and videos addressing students’ fears in college and tools to address them:
  + “You Can Grow Your Intelligence” (introductory reading in the *BrainologyTM Curriculum Guide for Teachers* at mindsetworks.com)
  + *“*Brainology: Transforming Students’ Motivation to Learn” by Carol S. Dweck
  + *“*The Student Fear Factor” a chapter from Rebecca Cox’s book *The College Fear Factor*
  + *“*Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance,” a TED talk by Angela Lee Duckworth
  + “Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are,” a TED talk by Amy Cuddy—one of the top-rated TED talks of all time. Extremely inspirational.
* Pre-reading and post-reading discussion activities.
* A low-stakes writing assignment in response to “The College Fear Factor”
* The semester’s first essay assignment.

**Day 1**:

* Pre-reading activities:
  + Using white board or projector, teacher leads student brainstorming session on the questions “What helps people learn?” and “What gets in the way of people learning?”
  + Give students copies of “You Can Grow Your Intelligence” and “Brainology.” Lead them through some reading strategies designed to improve comprehension and retention (and be explicit as to those purposes). I show them how to scan titles and subtitles and turn them into questions to guide their reading. Using the document camera, I read a few paragraphs out loud and model how I underline and annotate as I read.
* Homework: Students are asked to read and annotate both articles for the next class meeting and write answers to the questions I provide.

BTW: Take time to do whatever non-unit related activities you desire, too, like ice-breakers, etc.

**Day 2:**

* Begin with speed dating exercise with questions on “Brainology”
* Next, a whole class discussion on both articles. Collect the written work.
* Show the TED talk “Grit” and assign a 5 minute written response.
* Do pre-reading activity for the article “The Student Fear Factor”; perhaps a brainstorming or pair-discussion on the question “What are students afraid of when they start college?”
* Introduce the article, pointing out it is organized into easy-to-read case studies of real individual students. Ask for volunteers to read the first few paragraphs out loud. Show on the overhead the points *you* would annotate and underline.
* Students read the article for the next class and complete the following writing assignment:
  + Write one paragraph summarizing the harmful fear management strategies that the author identifies. (Instructor Caution: some of those strategies can be seen as helpful, so be ready to discuss that.) Then, write a paragraph describing a time in school when fear got in the way of your learning or accomplishing something. Instructor Note: be ready to explain what a paragraph is.

**Day 3:**

* Arrange students in groups of 4. Urge students to read their paragraphs out loud—remind them how this helps improve writing awareness and skills. Tell them if that bothers them, they can explain what they wrote about, instead.
* Bring the discussion back to the whole class. Ask for volunteers to read their personal narrative paragraph. If none, ask each group to verbally share what they learned about student fears in their groups.
* Collect the paragraphs, and return them to students the next day with short, RELENTLESSLY POSITIVE feedback. (“This was a great example of a student fear” and/or “I am sorry this happened to you!” and “You handled that really well.”
* Play the Amy Cuddy TED talk—running time approx. 20 minutes. Students can write or discuss afterwards, and why not lead them in a power pose or two?
* Give an introductory lesson on what an essay is, its basic form, etc. Nothing too complex or dire. Cover the importance of proofreading. Explain tomorrow they will be writing an essay in class on some ideas they’ve been reading about and viewing in the last few days.

**Day 4:**

* I take my class to the computer lab to write the essay. If some students have little or no experience typing, let them handwrite the essay but at the end of class show them an online typing tutorial program and tell them to start learning.
* Give them the essay assignment sheet and tell them the first step to writing an essay is to read and re-read the writing prompt carefully.
* I recommend that the writing prompt be very specific, with directions on what to focus on in each paragraph.
* 50 minutes to plan, write, and proofread should be enough.
* Collect and return with a few suggestions for revision. I suggest continuing this for three drafts.