



## SUCCESS STORY

### Karen Hackley, M.A.

Instructor of Integrated Reading and Writing — Houston Community College

## Students “Connect the Dots” Between Reading and Writing with Aplia™

Karen Hackley has taught Developmental English at Houston Community College (HCC) since 2001. An experienced writing instructor, Karen recently began teaching an integrated reading and writing course that’s being offered at HCC for the first time. She uses the Aplia™ online learning solution, which includes an eBook version of *Fusion: Integrated Reading and Writing, Book 2*, for its grammar and reading exercises.

### COURSES AND PARTICIPANTS

The integrated reading and writing course is taught face to face, and is required for any freshman who doesn’t pass a placement exam. Students attend three hours of lecture, a one-hour technology lab with Aplia, and a one-hour writing lab each week. Students in the course are “close to the bubble,” as Karen puts it — almost prepared for freshman composition.

### THE CHALLENGES

There’s always a period of adjustment when change occurs, and for Karen, that means covering more material in the integrated course than she would typically include in a writing course. “I am in an unprecedented situation because it is a brand new course,” says Karen. “I’ve always included reading in my writing courses — because in order to teach writing you have to teach reading — but now the approach is different because I have to give equal time to each.”

Karen says that many of her students don’t see the important connection between reading and writing, and she works to help them “connect the dots” in a way that will benefit their skills in both areas. Some complain about assignment deadlines, not realizing that it’s difficult to catch up once they fall behind. And, like everyone in a reading and writing course, students need to practice outside of class to build, improve, and retain fundamental skills.

### THE RESULTS

Aplia’s reading exercises help to reduce Karen’s workload in her integrated course while leaving more time in class for discussions and group work. Grades are automatically recorded in the Aplia gradebook, keeping students accountable while minimizing time spent grading. “Reading instructors tend to assign many reading exercises,” says Karen. “In my writing classes, I’ve always included readings but don’t have much experience with exercises. In class we discuss readings as well as how to apply them to writing, but I have relied on Aplia to cover the reading exercise component of the course. I like the reading examples in Aplia, and the exercises are thorough.”

Karen also uses Aplia to give students practice with grammar. “It is really helpful that students have a place to practice and that they receive direct feedback with respect to

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### CHALLENGES

- **Combined reading and writing courses cover virtually the same material as two separate courses**, increasing instructors’ workload and leaving less class time to cover each topic.
- **Students can be resistant** to investing the time necessary to reinforce concepts and hone fundamental skills.
- **Some students don’t see the connection** between reading and writing.

### SOLUTIONS

- Aplia for Integrated Reading and Writing
- Kemper, Dave, Verne Meyer, John Van Rys, & Patrick Sebranek, *Fusion: Integrated Reading and Writing, Book 2*

### RESULTS

- **Diagnostic tests** allow instructors to easily assess class and individual skill levels, and tailor lectures accordingly. Auto-graded exercises reduce the time needed to cover certain concepts in class.
- **Reading and grammar exercises, with feedback, promote proficiency by engaging students** in course content. Weekly assignments keep students involved and on track.
- **Aplia complements and reinforces** classroom discussions and activities, aiding students in understanding how the elements of good writing can help them read critically, and vice versa.

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Houston Community College

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how well they are doing,” she says. Aplia provides constructive comments on every question, reinforcing key concepts and motivating students to improve their skills, especially when they make a mistake. When students repeat a question, they see a different version that includes the same learning points.

In the second week of the course, Karen’s students took the Aplia reading and writing diagnostic quiz to help her assess their various proficiency levels and needs. She notes that it was helpful for identifying students’ areas of strengths and weakness in each area of reading and writing; she used this to shape the course in order to address those areas that needed the most attention. Use of the diagnostics also helped students target the areas in which they needed and wanted to improve.

Karen finds Aplia easy to use, and appreciates the flexibility it allows her in selecting assignment topics. “I like that I can organize the Aplia assignments by week so that they coincide with the topics and skills that I am working on in class. For instance, if I am covering the narrative essay and we are going to discuss certain aspects of narration through reading, then I can select relevant reading exercises to correlate with that skill.”

She also cites the ease of setting assignments and due dates, noting that Aplia is less complex than other online programs that she has used. As for the students, Karen says, “There’s always some grumbling because they don’t want to have to do any work outside of class, but I think students like using Aplia. I’ve had more students stay with Aplia consistently as compared to courses using other online programs, when some students just gave up. I think part of it is that Aplia is so easy to access and use.”

Weekly assignments hold students accountable for learning the material, and Karen says that their performance and engagement have improved. “Aplia assignment deadlines keep students on task,” says Karen. “Certainly there is greater retention, and students seem to be fully engaged in the course. In fact, Aplia promotes their engagement. They know exactly what their assignment is and when it is due. If they have questions about anything in Aplia, and sometimes they do, we can discuss them in class. As a result, students get better reinforcement of the subject matter.”

A final benefit of Aplia is that it helps students see the relationship between reading and writing. “Many students begin the course thinking of reading and writing as separate entities,” says Karen. “Aplia helps them ‘connect the dots’ and understand that reading and writing are synchronous — that you can’t do one without the other. The same elements that we look for when we read critically — such as main ideas and supporting details — are also elements that we focus on when we write. Aplia helps me show them that very important connection.”

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Source Code: 13L-AG0684



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