

College Writing Program: What Students Should Learn

The following are the core skills and ideas students should gain from the College Writing course sequence:

Concepts of Writing

- Students should understand that writing is a process, a series of choices, and not simply a product.
- Based on the idea that writing is a series of choices, students should learn how to make effective choices in their own writing.
- Since writing is a social act, students should learn how to give critical feedback to their peers' writing and to receive critical feedback on their writing.
- In learning these concepts, students should begin to develop an awareness of themselves as writers.

Writing Process Skills

- Students should understand and attend to the role of the audience in writing.
- Students should learn how to formulate an original thesis in their writing projects and to develop that thesis into a well-supported argument.
- Students should learn a range of research methods and how to incorporate source material into their writing so that it develops and supports their ideas.
- Students should learn effective organizational strategies for their writing.
- Students should learn to write in multiple genres (e.g., personal narrative, researched essay, textual critique, proposal, profile, timed-writing essay).
- Students should develop the ability to sustain an analytical essay for at least eight pages.
- Students should learn how to recognize and repair sentence-level errors.

Reading/Thinking Skills

- Students should be challenged to develop critical thinking and reading skills, so that they can devise original ideas, rather than simply echo the ideas of others.
- Based on class discussion, class reading, writing assignments, and conferences, students should learn how to arrive at informed questions and opinions.
- Students should learn how to express themselves clearly as participants of the class, whether in discussion or more formal presentations.
- Students should learn how to analyze assignments from all disciplines.
- Through experience with the instructor's commentary and workshops/peer review, students should learn how to interpret feedback on their writing.

Research Skills

- Students should acquire research skills, including making full and meaningful use of the library's resources, such as databases, catalog, stacks, periodicals, and media holdings, as well as non-textual sources (e.g., the larger DC community).
- Students should learn how to support ideas with persuasive research.
- Students should learn how to evaluate the credibility of a source (especially Internet sites), to use academic/scholarly resources, and to incorporate sources effectively.
- Students should learn the correct formatting for MLA citation, including the construction of an MLA-style Works Cited page.

- Students should learn the definitions of and consequences for plagiarism and other Academic Integrity Code violations, as well as techniques for avoiding unintentional violations.

College Writing Program: What Teachers Should Do

The following are the ways teachers should address the skills and ideas students should gain from the College Writing course sequence:

Concepts of Teaching Writing

- Incorporate writing—through lessons, discussions, activities— into every class session.
- Create your course around a unifying theme to give the course an intellectual arena in which to focus writing.
- Reinforce the idea of writing as process through the sequencing of assignments and multiple drafts of assignments.
- In order to maximize the students' resources and experience, hold writing workshops or peer reviews.
- Offer meaningful, appropriate, and thorough feedback, including attention to the College Writing Program Grading Criteria, on all major writing assignments.
- As some students are better served by one-on-one instruction, hold regular office hours and mandatory student conferences throughout the semester.
- The class must meet during the scheduled final exam time. LIT-100 must include a final exam.

Develop Writing Skills

- Assign 3-4 major essays in a range of academic genres: narrative, critical analysis, researched essay, oral history, profile, proposal, textual critique, etc. An essay that sustains an argument for eight or more pages should be included.
- Assign 20 pages of polished writing for LIT-100 and 25 pages for LIT-101; both page requirements could include a revision of a major writing project.
- Require, as a matter of course, multiple drafts of major papers and provide students with strategies and opportunities for revision.
- Teach students that a thesis and its development are key to the success of every essay, including narrative essays, non-traditional essays, and essay exams.
- Emphasize the importance of correctness in grammar and punctuation in establishing credibility and authority with an audience.

Develop Reading Skills

- Early in the fall semester, make meaningful use of the *Writer as Witness* text.
- Choose a range of texts (non-fiction and fiction) to serve as models and sources of discussion/analysis; students should examine a variety of genres.
- Promote and model original and critical reading/thinking through class discussion, activities, or one-on-one instruction.
- Ensure that students understand your individual commenting style so that they can interpret your feedback.

Develop Research Skills

- Emphasize how “research” informs almost all writing by crafting assignments that require students to draw on traditional and non-traditional research methods.
- Encourage students to use the DC community and local resources in their research and writing projects.
- Arrange a class visit with your assigned reference librarian partner sometime in the fall semester, preferably to coincide with the first major research project.
- Teach students how to incorporate research, in particular scholarly research, to effectively support their argument.
- Teach students how to accurately document their sources, correctly format MLA citations, and construct an MLA-style Works Cited page.
- Emphasize the importance of the Academic Integrity Code and the consequences of violating it; offer students strategies for avoiding unintentional violations.

Gen Ed Orientation—Writing and College Writing

- ❖ College Writing and Honors English courses:
 - Two-semester sequence
 - Required for all incoming freshmen, except those with certain AP scores (4 or 5) or IB scores
 - Most transfer students must also take a semester
 - Almost all students take it in freshman year
 - Must receive C or higher to get CW credit
- ❖ What College Writing is NOT:
 - Creative writing
 - Literary analysis/literature
 - ◆ Do read texts, including books, but mainly non-fiction, and used as
 - models for student writing
 - objects of rhetorical analysis for writing strategies
 - “content” for course theme
- ❖ Emphasis of College Writing:
 - Academic writing and college writing
 - Research literacy
 - Writing skills
 - Process
- ❖ What might be reinforced in General Education:
 - Value of writing
 - ◆ Students comment that CW instructors are the only ones who care about “that stuff”
 - ◆ Students think other profs just care about content
- ❖ How to reinforce writing in General Education classes:
 - Have high expectations for their writing—but make those expectations explicit
 - ◆ See CWP Grading Criteria for expectations/standards in CW
 - ◆ Can expect at least some facility with skills
 - See pages from CWP handbook for faculty
 - Make writing part of your evaluation criteria
 - Mention writing in the assignment
 - Respond to particulars about writing
 - ◆ Write 2-3 different brief, substantive comments, even in margins
 - ◆ Respond as reader (e.g., “I don’t see where this is going”)
 - ◆ Choose a paragraph to mark sentence-level errors
 - Send students to the Writing Center (in Battelle 228 , phone: X2991)
 - Refer to students’ writing handbook (Rosen)
 - Refer to other writing texts
 - ◆ See annotated list of frequently used texts
 - Design assignments that incorporate writing in meaningful ways

Contacts and resources:

Lacey Wootton, Writing Instructor

lwoott@american.edu

202-885-2982

Writing Center (they have handouts and resources for faculty & students)

202-885-2991

Bonnie Auslander (writing resource person for Kogod)

ausland@american.edu

www.american.edu/kogod/bizcomm

COLLEGE WRITING PROGRAM GRADING CRITERIA

	A Outstanding	B Good	C Satisfactory	D/F Unsatisfactory
Audience	The writing reflects superior audience awareness. It actively engages its reader and makes a clear point that is supported with excellent reasoning, evidence, and detail emerging from appropriate research. It also provokes the reader to reflect on the topic's subtleties and complexities.	The writing reflects solid audience awareness. It engages the reader and supports its central point with sufficient evidence. The writing demonstrates a working understanding of the topic's complexities and reasons through an original insight without flaws in logic.	The paper shows minimal audience awareness. It establishes basic credibility, giving some evidence and detail to support a point. The writing offers some elements of insight and thoughtfulness about the subject matter.	The writing ignores the needs of the audience. It offers insufficient evidence, irrelevant evidence or details, or illogical, flawed reasoning to support its assertion. The writing offers little or no insight or thought about the subject matter.
Thesis & Support	The writing has a critically reasoned, original thesis that is strategically placed and substantiated through reliable, relevant, and sufficient evidence.	The writing has a clear, good thesis with sufficient, reliable evidence and sound reasoning.	The writing has a thesis and some relevant support.	The thesis is tangential, disordered, or not discernible, and the writing has weak or non-existent support.
Response to Assignment	The writing takes an original and thought-provoking approach to the assignment.	The writing has a clear purpose beyond the minimum requirements of the assignment.	The writing has some sense of purpose and meets the minimum requirements of the assignment.	The writing does not fulfill the minimum requirements of the assignment.
Organization	The writing is organized seamlessly to elucidate the thesis. The organization reflects the logic and analysis necessary to support the thesis. The introduction, conclusion, transitions, and other organizational strategies are clear and strong; paragraphs are fully developed.	The writing is organized so that ideas are connected fluidly and sensibly. The introduction and conclusion are good; transitions are clear but could be stronger. Some minor gaps in logic and argument appear. Paragraphs are well developed, focused, and positioned effectively.	The writing has a basic structure, organization, and transitions, and the ideas are ordered and linked. The introduction and conclusion are solid. Paragraphs are focused but might require more development.	The paper's organization is difficult to discern. The parts of the paper—including the introduction and conclusion—do not work together towards a unified whole. Paragraphs are underdeveloped or lack focus or cohesion. Transitions are awkward or missing.
Style	The writer's voice engages the reader through a sophisticated control of prose. The language reflects and develops the thesis. Quotations are effectively integrated into the text. The language is concise and precise.	The writing keeps the reader's attention through deliberate but not contrived choices in prose. Sentences are clear; quotations are usually well integrated into the prose. The language is concise and precise.	The writing is consistent in tone, language, and integration of support. The prose is adequate and, despite some awkwardness and clutter, communicates clearly. There may be some wordiness.	The writing has weak or confusing diction and syntax. Quotations are not integrated or are integrated inappropriately. There is substantial wordiness.
Grammar & Form	The writing has virtually no grammatical or mechanical errors. Sources are appropriately documented and cited.	The writing has few grammatical and/or mechanical errors, and they do not distract the reader from the content. Sources are appropriately documented and cited with very few errors.	The writing has grammatical and mechanical awareness, but the writer has not proofread carefully. Some errors distract the reader from the content. Sources are documented and cited.	The writing has substantial grammatical and/or mechanical errors that distract the reader from the content. Sources are inappropriately documented and cited.