

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING II OVERVIEW—

INTEGRATING WRITING WITH CONTENT COURSES

The Writing II Program aims to incorporate writing into courses across the curriculum to help advance student learning and course objectives. In this integrative approach, writing is a means of helping students deepen their understanding of the course content and, more broadly, to develop the ability to think using a given disciplinary perspective. Simultaneously, these courses help students develop their written communication skills.

Critical thinking and writing develop together, each supporting the other. Clarifying writing helps clarify thinking, as well as the reverse. The end result does not emerge fully formed, but evolves in stages. At a beginning stage, we write to learn. We discover what we think, giving shape to previously half-formulated or unformulated ideas. Writing is not external to thought, transcribing already clearly conceived ideas. Rather, it is integral to the thought process at each successive stage. Within an academic context, we finally write to communicate, drawing on the conventions of a given field. Writing, then, is at the core of our broadest mission: to teach students how to think critically so that they can master the modes of thought they learn in their class and eventually apply them to other contexts and contents.

Attention to writing is particularly important since a Writing II course may be a student's **only** writing-intensive experience at UCLA.

PROCESS – THE SEQUENTIAL STAGES OF WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Writing II courses focus not simply on the final product, but also on the process that leads towards clear thinking and clear writing. For most students, learning to write a lengthy paper is like learning to run a marathon. Just as coaches train runners with warm-up exercises of stretching and shorter runs, Writing II courses are most effective when students train by focusing on the various stages of both the thinking and the writing processes. The primary writing assignments should be sequenced to build both a knowledge base for course content as well as analytic writing skills. As part of writing these longer main assignments, students should engage in preparatory (formative) activities or writing tasks which build toward the longer writing assignments by helping them understand the rhetorical and intellectual demands of the assignment.

At the initial stage, Writing II courses focus on how we write to learn in a given discipline. Students begin with pre-writing exercises/activities that explore core concepts of the course, enabling students to practice the kind of thinking that will help them form a larger project. Writing II encourage instructors to be creative in devising exercises to help students connect more deeply with the course ideas. These preparatory assignments can take multiple forms such as blogs, personal stories, drawings or visual representations of thought, reading responses,

synthetic summaries of readings, journal entries, or other pre-writing exercises. (See [the Undergraduate Writing Center's Course Planner](#) for more details and other examples.) The goal of such formative writing exercises is to help students, as disciplinary novices, explore and respond to the course content, as well as practice using disciplinary specific methods. These formative exercises help students understand and apply the course's more abstract theories or concepts. These exercises help students learn to shift from the concrete to the abstract and vice versa.

At a second stage, the students work on transforming their ideas about the course material into drafts. The focus here is on macro-issues such as developing an organizational structure that presents a focused thesis, providing evidence in an effective way, and distinguishing observation from inference in the context of a given discipline. Students frame their thinking and writing more specifically to address the expectations and conventions of a given field. While the primary focus of Writing II instruction is not on local, mechanical issues of style or grammar, some attention to them may be necessary to ensure clear written communication.

The final stage is writing to communicate. Students rework drafts into a final form, refining the content and editing their prose for clear style, effective sentence structure and word choice, as well as citations appropriate to the discipline. Final stage writing often entails thinking not simply about how a sentence makes sense, but also how a series of sentences constitutes a fluid, clear line of communication. Moving from sentences to paragraphs, and then from paragraph construction to a logical line of reasoning across pages takes practice and self-study, a process that Writing II courses encourage. These final stages often entail directly working with writing tutors, teaching assistants, and often peer readers.

The writing process outlined above will lead to final papers that are substantive and polished, enabling students to demonstrate their ability to craft an academic argument informed by a disciplinary perspective. The total page count of the final project might be less important than the total pages written across the entire course. But the Writing II committee recommends that students write 15-20 pages, including drafts. Writing II assignments provide an excellent opportunity for instructors to discuss the rhetorical expectations and disciplinary perspectives in various disciplines, including writing style, citations, voice, and abstracts.

STRUCTURING THE COURSE:

While there is no set way to structure the course, we recommend that instructors begin by first identifying the learning outcomes. What are the fundamental analytic skills that students should learn through the course content? Some skills will be basic to all fields, such as differentiating opinion from evidence-based claims. Other skills are field-specific such as what counts as evidence and how to provide context to make the evidence resonate meaningfully with a particular audience. By highlighting skills, we help students engage with the course content, expose them to disciplinary rhetorical conventions, and work towards clear and effective writing.

We suggest instructors work backwards from the learning outcomes, designing sequenced assignments that lead towards these outcomes. This is a practice of reverse engineering, dividing

the end result into its constituent parts so students can work on them individually, in a logical manner, leading to increased difficulty or as components incrementally building toward the larger final written assignment. We recommend that instructors structure their course around the writing assignments, rather than around the readings and lectures. (See [Course Planner](#) for examples.)

LECTURES: Writing II courses need not necessarily offer lectures *per se* on how to think and write within a given discipline, although that is of course an option. However, instructors can consider offering a meta-teaching practice by sharing with their students the elements of their own thought process as they prepared their lectures. The skills that instructors use in their lectures on course content are the same as those we seek to develop in our students. When instructors are explicit their own thought process, they provide an excellent example of how experts in a given discipline think and write. For example: What were the key questions driving the lecture? What counts as a good question? What counts as evidence or data? What separates observations from inferences? How are inferences drawn from data or observations? What paradigms of thought are privileged in the discipline? How might this differ from the paradigms that students bring to class? How is material presented in relation to a particular audience? How is data contextualized within the conventions of a particular discipline and audience? How does the lecture connect various strands of the course material? How does the course material incorporate and respond to the on-going conversations and polemics in the field?

Most instructors have probably assimilated these analytic and rhetorical skills so fully that they may no longer be aware of them as skills. But they are teachable skills: we teach them by simply being more explicit about our own thought processes. Teaching writing through course content, then, requires instructors to reflect on the thought processes behind the preparation of a course. Students benefit from a “behind the scenes” peek at the instructor’s thought development in constructing the course. In short, Writing II recommends that instructors make explicit what they typically do implicitly.

Another example of this kind of meta-teaching practice involves using the course readings for more than content: instructors are encouraged to use readings as rhetorical models for structuring an argument, asking questions, analyzing evidence, citing sources and the like.

TA SECTIONS: If writing an essay is a marathon, the discussion sections are a work-out. They should be mainly activity-based. Student can engage in pre-writing exercises (listed above) to explore their ideas, provide and receive feedback from classmates.

ASSUMPTIONS OF BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE:

In planning a Writing II course, remember that few of the students will be majors in the given field and that most Writing II courses are lower-division and, thus, introductory. Readings, writing assignments and lectures should be designed for novice learners in the discipline without an assumption of specialized background knowledge or proficiency in writing/thinking in the field.

Writing II courses should assume that students have foundational academic writing and skills learned in Writing I through English Composition 3 courses. However, learning to write is a life-long endeavor as we are always faced with new writing contexts, audiences, and genres. Although the students may learn to write in one context, they may find it challenging to apply these skills in different contexts and disciplines. Instructors should thus assume that they will need to ground students in disciplinary genres and writing conventions, including ways of presenting information, stylistic expectations, etc..

EVALUATING WORK— The evaluation process focuses mainly on higher order concerns: do students respond to the prompt, grasp core concepts, develop and support a thesis, use a logical structure and organization. What issues impede understanding? While style, tone, and grammar are also important, they are not the primary focus. These issues should be attended to judiciously, either early in the drafting process, if there is a pattern of error that impedes clarity, or at the end of the process when students are polishing their work.

In Writing II courses and any accompanying TA sections, student performance, including performance on writing assignments, should be assessed on a criterion basis (not on a curve), using rubrics which measure the writing objectives outlined in the course. Evaluation methods and instruments, such as rubrics, should be shared with students to ensure transparency of the assessment process for instructors and students alike. In evaluating student writing, keep in mind that students come from varied educational backgrounds. Therefore, we need to teach inclusively and provide all students with the opportunity to succeed by scaffolding their learning and writing processes. We suggest instructors work with their TAs to design an evaluation process that brings both basic and accomplished writers respectively to more advanced levels of writing. Helping good writers become better writers at the same time as teaching more novice writers who may have difficulty with language and grammar can be challenging. However, consistent use of rubrics that attend to issues of clarity, fluidity, and understandable prose helps students improve no matter their writing skills. To ensure a level playing field, consider an evaluation system that rewards not only grammatical sentence construction (the product), but improvement from previous assignments (the process).

Evaluating work brings time management challenges to both professors and TAs. The Writing II program recommends student peer-editing activities, where students read and comment on their classmates' work based on guidelines. (See [Course Planner](#) for suggested guidelines). Instructors and TAs could limit the written evaluative commentary to only one part of any given assignment, such as use of evidence, or development of a thesis. Learning happens when students engage in these exercises, even if they do not receive extensive feedback. TAs can skim the submissions, giving a simple check plus, check or check minus. Alternatively, instructors could adopt the scoring of peer reviewed journals: Accept, Revise/Re-submit, or Reject.

OTHER SPECIFICS:

- **TA and Faculty TRAINING** – All TAs for the Writing II Program classes will take the appropriate writing pedagogy 495 courses to train them in writing pedagogy, including how to teach writing and give meaningful, constructive feedback. Teaching Fellows who teach independent seminars through the Cluster or History 96W are required to take a

495 course during which they develop their writing-centered syllabus and assignments in advance of the quarter in which they are slated to teach. In addition, workshops will be available for faculty of the Writing II Program to share insights about how best to integrate writing with course content. (See [Course Planner](#) for instructional resources.)

- **COURSE FORMATS:** Writing II courses should be offered in a variety of formats, from lecture classes with multiple sections to smaller stand-alone courses. Courses qualifying for Writing II credit include small writing courses, writing-intensive Honors Collegium seminars, Cluster courses, lecture courses that emphasize writing, and other lecture courses created or modified to emphasize the development of student writing.
- **WRITING GENRES:** The Writing II Program acknowledges that there is a wide variety of writing genres beyond a standard research paper, such as book review, literary analysis, op-ed letter to the editor, case study, field report, lab report, literature review, ethnography, scientific research paper, and policy brief. (See [Course Planner](#) for more options.) Instructors are free to select those genres most important for their given fields.
- **WRITING SECTION SIZES:** No more than twenty students should be in any given TA section. The only exception is in Cluster courses, where each GSI will normally be responsible for two sections of no more than twenty (20) students each.
- **COURSE STATUS:** Writing II courses must be offered for a letter grade and carry *impacted* course status. Students will be dropped from their sections if they miss the first two course meetings.
- **SUMMER SESSIONS:** Summer Session Writing II courses must be taught by instructors who have had previous experience teaching in the Writing II Program or by TAs who have taken the appropriate writing pedagogy 495 training courses and have had previous experience teaching in a Writing II course.
- **UNITS:** Writing II courses must be 5 unit