

FIRST-YEAR WRITING

June 1, 2015

I. Short Description

First-Year Writing equips students to grow as writers in the Wheaton College classroom and beyond. The course is designed to prepare students to write effectively in a variety of social contexts and to improve student learning and performance in many other facets of their undergraduate education.

II. Core Competency Learning Outcomes¹

A. Students will be able to....

1. write persuasive texts for different purposes, audiences, and situations
2. employ discourse community and genre conventions to govern such things as content, style, tone, organization, document design, mechanics, usage, spelling, and citation practices
3. develop recursive composing strategies to complete their written texts, including reading, drafting, reviewing, collaborating, revising, rewriting, rereading, and editing
4. demonstrate critical thinking and reading practices
5. locate and evaluate (for relevance, credibility, sufficiency, accuracy, timeliness, and bias) primary and secondary research materials, such as journal articles and essays, books, scholarly and professionally established and maintained databases or archives, and informal electronic networks and internet sources

B. Expansion and interpretation of the outcome statements

1. Preferred pedagogies for first-year writing

The First-Year Writing classroom at Wheaton College should be a student-centered community of practice that encourages active learning, collaboration, reflection, and metacognition. Preferred pedagogies for First-Year Writing include process-based and rhetorical approaches, along with an explicit emphasis on teaching students how to write in different contexts.

2. Definitions and explanations of disciplinary terms

Faculty members preparing to teach First-Year Writing should familiarize themselves with (a) the Writing Program

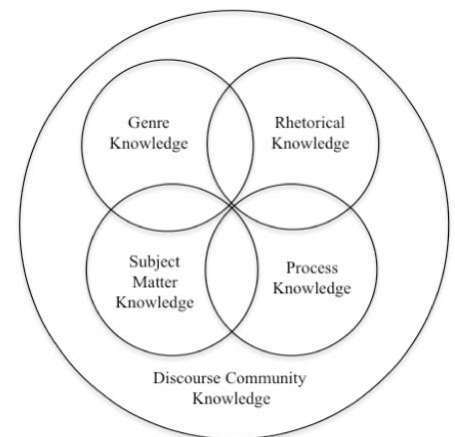


Figure 1. Expert Writers Draw on Five Knowledge Domains (Beaufort 19)

¹ Much of the language of the outcomes is taken from the Council of Writing Program Administrators' "WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition." *CWPA*. 17 July 2014. Web. 13 Feb. 2015.
<<http://wpacouncil.org/positions/outcomes.html>>

Administrators' Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition,² (b) the discipline-specific terms compiled by the Conference on College Composition and Communication,³ (c) the conceptual model of writing expertise described by Anne Beaufort in *College Writing and Beyond* (Figure 1),⁴ and (d) the following definitions, which, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the glossary of *Writing about Writing: A College Reader*.⁵

Argument. *Argument* can describe any of the many ways by means of which people try to convince others of something....In an *intellectual* or *academic* context, argument is *inquiry-based* or *conversational*, and it describes an attempt to *build knowledge* by questioning existing knowledge and proposing alternatives. Rather than aiming simply to show who is right or wrong, inquiry-based argument aims to *cooperatively find the best explanation* for whatever is in question.

Arrangement. The art of organizing what one has to say to present it most effectively.

Audience. An *audience* is anyone who hears or reads a text—but it is also anyone a writer *imagines* encountering his or her text. This means that there is a difference between *intended* or “invoked” audience and *actual* or “addressed” audience.

Conventions In Writing Studies, writing is understood to be governed by *conventions*—that is, agreements among people about the best ways to accomplish particular tasks (such as starting new paragraphs, or citing sources, or deciding how to punctuate sentences). That people have to come to agreements about such questions means that there is no “natural” or pre-existing way to accomplish the tasks; rather, people simply agreed to do *A* rather than *B*.

Critical thinking. *Critical thinking* is the ability to analyze, synthesize, interpret, and evaluate ideas, information, situations, and texts. When writers think critically about the materials they use—whether print texts, photographs, data sets, videos, or other materials—they separate assertion from evidence, evaluate sources and evidence, recognize and evaluate underlying assumptions, read across texts for connections and patterns, identify and evaluate chains of reasoning, and compose appropriately qualified and developed claims and generalizations.⁶

Discourse Community. Scholars continue to debate the meaning of this term....For the sake of simplicity, we will use John Swales' definition from his 1990 book, *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. According to Swales, a *discourse community* is made up of

² Writing Program Administrators. “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition.” CWWA. 17 July 2014. Web. 13 Feb. 2015. <<http://wpacouncil.org/positions/outcomes.html>>

³ Conference on College Composition and Communication. “CCC Poster Pages.” NCTE. 2015. Web. 16 Feb. 2015. <<http://www.ncte.org/cccc/ccp/posterpages>>

⁴ Beaufort, Anne. *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2007. Print. See chapter one, especially pp. 17-22.

⁵ Wardle, Elizabeth, and Doug Downs. *Writing about Writing: A College Reader*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011. Print. pp. 719-734.

⁶ Council of Writing Program Administrators. “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition.” CWWA. 17 July 2014. Web. 13 Feb. 2015. <<http://wpacouncil.org/positions/outcomes.html>>

individuals who share a “broadly agreed upon set of common public goals”; further, it has “mechanisms of intercommunication among its members,” “uses its participator mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback,” has and uses “one or more genres” that help the group achieve its share goals, “has acquired some specific lexis,” and has “a reasonable ratio” of “novices and experts.”

Drafting. Drafting is the writing-process activity that involves writing down what you’re thinking. While a basic description of the writing process differentiates drafting and revision, any moment in which a writer is creating text can be seen as drafting, even if it’s also revising.

Editing Editing is the correction of minor errors in a written text. Editing usually comes at the end of the writing process. It should not be confused with revision, which involves major rethinking, rewriting, and restructuring of texts.

Genre. Genre comes from the French word for “kind” or “type” and is related to the Latin word *genus*, which you might remember from the scientific classification system for animals and plants. In the field of rhetoric, *genres* are broadly understood as *categories of texts*. For example, poetry, the short story, the novel, and the memoir are genres of literature; memos, proposals, reports, and executive summaries are genres of business writing; hip-hop, bluegrass, trance, pop, new age, and electronica are genres of music; and the romantic comedy, drama, and documentary are genres of film.

*Genres are types of texts that are recognizable to readers and writers and that meet the needs of rhetorical situations in which they function. So, for example, we recognize wedding invitations and understand them to be different from horoscopes.....

*Genres develop over time in response to recurring rhetorical needs. We have wedding invitations because people keep getting married, and we need an efficient way to let people know and to ask them to attend. Rather than making up a new rhetorical solution every time the same situation occurs, we generally turn to the genre that has developed—in this case, the genre of the wedding invitation.

Information literacy. Information literacy is the set of skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze, and use information.⁷

Invention. Invention comprises the processes, strategies, and techniques writers use to come up with what to say in their writing. While the term suggests the notion of “making things up,” a significant part of invention is not saying brand-new things but rather combing one’s memory and written resources for things that have already been said that will work.

Lexis. *Lexis* is a term used for the specific vocabulary used by a group or field of study.

Literacy, literate. Literacy denotes fluency in a given practice. In its original use, *literacy* referred to *alphabetic* literacy—that is, to fluency in reading and writing “letters,” or alphabetic text. This kind of literacy was contrasted with orality, which was characterized as a *lack* of literacy. Over time, however, in academic circles, the meaning of *literacy* and *literate* has broadened to

⁷ “Introduction to Information Literacy.” Association of College & Research Libraries. *American Library Association*. 2015. Web. 10 Feb. 2015. <<http://www.ala.org/acrl/issues/infolit/overview/intro>>

encompass fluency in other areas; most academics therefore now use the term *literacies* (plural) and discuss *digital, electronic, musical, visual, oral, mathematical, and gaming* literacies, among many other kinds.

Metaknowledge. Metaknowledge is knowledge about knowledge – that is, what we can determine about our learning, its processes, and its products.

Plagiarism. *Plagiarism* literally means *kidnapping* in Latin; in contemporary English, the word refers to the *theft* of a text or idea...Definitions of plagiarism tend to come down to *taking another's ideas without giving them credit and thus pretending that you invented the ideas yourself*. In cultures that highly value *intellectual property*—the idea that one's ideas are one's *own* and that use of those ideas by others deserves either credit or payment—plagiarism is an ethical violation punishable by community sanction (such as failing a class or losing one's job). Plagiarism's cousin *copyright infringement* is an actual crime punishable by fine or imprisonment.

A significant difficulty with the idea of plagiarism is that originality and authorship are technically quite difficult to trace in ways that new digital technologies are making impossible to miss or deny. In *sampling, re-mixing, and mash-up* cultures where ideas are freely reused and reincorporated to make new texts, authorship becomes very difficult to trace, and it becomes difficult to tell what counts as original work.

Planning. While invention focuses on coming up with what to say in one's writing, *planning* focuses more broadly on *how to get a piece written*. Therefore, it includes not only invention but *arrangement*, which is the art of organizing what one has to say to present it most effectively. Planning also includes process considerations, such as considering what work needs to be done to complete a piece, what order to do it in, and when to do it in order to meet a deadline.

Process. *Process* refers to the variety of activities that go into writing/composing, including, at minimum, planning, drafting, revising, and editing.

Recursive. *Recursive* processes are characterized by repeated performances or the recurring application of a strategy or procedure. This term captures the notion that composing is rarely a linear process.⁸

Revision. *Revision* is the act of developing a piece of writing *by writing*—that is, by adding additional material, shifting the order of its parts, or deleting significant portions of what has already been written. The purpose of revision (“re-vision”) is to “see again,” which is necessary because what one could see in originally drafting a piece has been changed *by the drafting*.

Rhetoric. Rhetoric is the study of human interaction and communication, or the product(s) of that interaction and communication. Because most human interactions are *persuasive* by nature...one way to think of rhetoric is as the study of persuasion.

Rhetorical situation. *Rhetorical situation* is the particular circumstance of a given instance of communication or discourse. The rhetorical situation includes exigence (the *need* or *reason* for the communication), context (the *circumstances* that give rise to the *exigence*, including location

⁸ This definition is not taken from *Writing about Writing*.

in time/history and space/place/position), rhetor (the originator of the communication—its speaker or writer) and audience (the auditor, listener, or reader of the rhetor’s discourse).

Transfer. Transfer refers to the act of applying existing knowledge, learned in one kind of situation, to new situations. For example, a writer who learns how to write a summary in her College Writing I class in English is expected to *transfer* that summary-writing knowledge to her “history of the telescope” project in Astronomy. Transfer, we are learning, is not automatic—people learn many things that they forget and/or don’t or can’t use in different circumstances.

III. Guidelines

A. Expanded area description

First-Year Writing is designed to help students develop skills for academic success, enhance their engagement with the liberal arts, and provide them with a conceptual framework for learning how to write and research effectively in a variety of social contexts—including their other courses, their major areas of study, and their future vocations. To accomplish these aims, the course builds on the Writing Program Administrators’ Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition and introduces students to the knowledge domains that accomplished writers employ when they write: rhetorical knowledge, genre knowledge, subject matter knowledge, writing process knowledge, and discourse community knowledge (Beaufort 17-22).⁹ Through exploration and application of these knowledge domains, students learn “*how to learn* to become better and better writers in a variety of social contexts” (Beaufort 7).

B. Connection between area outcomes (Part II above) and the 12 overall program goals of Christ at the Core (see p. 8-9 of the Proposal).

It is our hope that students will use the knowledge and strategies they learn in First-Year Writing to create and respond to culture-shaping texts, practice love for God and neighbor through writing, and establish shalom in their communities and in the world. While First-Year Writing introduces students to knowledge domains and strategies that may help them achieve all of the Christ at the Core goals, the course directly advances the following program outcomes:

1. Christ at the Core Holistic Learning Goal 1.
2. Christ at the Core Wisdom Learning Goal 4.
3. Christ at the Core Christian Character Learning Goal 2.

⁹ Beaufort, Anne. *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2007. Print. Beaufort’s framework aligns well with the Writing Program Administrators’ “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition.” *CWPA*. 17 July 2014. Web. 13 Feb. 2015. <<http://wpacouncil.org/positions/outcomes.html>>

C. Evidence for achievement of the outcomes

FIRST-YEAR WRITING LEARNING OUTCOMES Students will be able to...	MEASUREMENT As evidenced by...
Compose persuasive texts for different purposes, audiences, and situations	Successful completion of at least two texts written for different rhetorical situations (as demonstrated by a score of a C or better on the rubric)
Employ discourse community and genre conventions to govern such things as content, style, tone, organization, document design, mechanics, usage, spelling, and citation practices	Effective use of genre and discourse community conventions in two or more writing assignments (as demonstrated by a score of a C or better on the rubric)
Develop recursive composing strategies to complete their written texts, including reading, drafting, reviewing, collaborating, revising, rewriting, rereading, and editing	Selection and portfolio presentation of different drafts of a writing project, accompanied by a reflection on the processes used to conceptualize, develop, and finalize the project (as demonstrated by a score of a C or better on the rubric)
Demonstrate critical thinking and reading practices	Effective use of a variety of strategies—such as analysis, synthesis, interpretation, evaluation, and critique—to compose texts that integrate the writer’s ideas with those from appropriate sources (as demonstrated by a score of a C or better on the rubric)
Locate and evaluate (for relevance, credibility, sufficiency, accuracy, timeliness, and bias) primary and secondary research materials, such as journal articles and essays, books, scholarly and professionally established and maintained databases or archives, and informal electronic networks and internet sources	Successful completion of an annotated bibliography, literature review, and/or research paper—which incorporates primary sources, secondary sources, and credible internet sources (as demonstrated by a score of a C or better on the rubric)

D. General Advice

Additional course information—including details about writing assignments and the portfolio assessment—may be found in the First-Year Writing Course Guidelines, which is regularly updated by members of the English Department. The Coordinator of First-Year Writing holds a

professional development session every August as well as several brownbag sessions throughout the academic year for the faculty members who teach the course.