

FIRST-YEAR WRITING

Foundation Document

Criteria for General Education Certification

Approved by FGEC April 19, 2007

Requirement Purpose

The BYU Mission Statement and the *Aims of a BYU Education* identify the ability to communicate effectively among the primary skills that students should acquire as part of a broad university education. This requirement is founded on the belief that effective writing is essential to any area of inquiry. It is both a method of learning as well as a means of expressing that learning. Effective writing helps students develop skills in verbal expression and sound thinking, “the ability to engage successfully in logical reasoning, critical analysis, moral discrimination, creative imagination, and independent thought” (*Aims*). In particular, the first-year writing requirement prepares students to write effectively in other academic environments, particularly other courses in the University Core.

Learning Outcomes

1. **Rhetorical Knowledge.** Students should demonstrate that they can focus on a well-defined purpose in writing, write clearly for a specified audience, use conventions of format and structure appropriate to the rhetorical situation, and adopt a voice, tone, and level of formality suited to the purpose and audience. They may also learn about and practice the following: responding to the needs of different audiences; responding appropriately to different kinds of rhetorical situations; writing in several genres; and exploring the ways different genres shape writing and reading.
2. **Processes of Writing.** Students should develop productive and flexible individual and collaborative writing processes, including prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and proofreading. These processes could include the following: collecting data, finding supporting evidence, and creating good arguments; organizing the material for a paper; writing successive drafts of the same paper; group writing; seeking and using peer responses; revising; editing grammar, usage, and punctuation; and using conventional formats.
3. **Critical Reading.** Students should be able to read and evaluate written materials from a variety of genres. They should demonstrate their ability to read critically, which would include some of the following: analyzing and evaluating arguments; identifying authors’ claims and main ideas; identifying supporting evidence; identifying premises and unstated assumptions; evaluating logic and logical fallacies; drawing inferences; synthesizing ideas; identifying and evaluating analogies and figurative language; and distinguishing among emotional, ethical, and rational appeals.

4. **Processes of Library Research.** Students should demonstrate that they can locate and evaluate print and electronic sources and use these sources to write a documented research paper.
5. **Knowledge of Conventions.** Students should demonstrate their knowledge of the following: common formats for different kinds of texts; genre conventions ranging from purpose and structure to tone and mechanics; methods of documenting borrowed information; and conventions of edited syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Course Characteristics

1. **Writing as a Primary Emphasis.** This primary emphasis manifests itself in several ways:
 - a. direct instruction in writing concepts and processes
 - b. substantial polished writing (typically several assignments with 25 or more total pages)
 - c. feedback from the instructor using clearly articulated criteria on work in progress and on final drafts
 - d. a substantial portion of the grade based on final drafts (usually 70% or more).

A writing course is different from a writing-intensive course, which may require substantial writing but doesn't have writing as a primary emphasis.

2. **Course Size.** According to the National Council for Teachers of English, the optimal size for a first-year writing class is 20 students per section. Second-language writing courses are typically smaller, optimally 15 students per section.
3. **Frequency.** To enhance pedagogy, departments should schedule writing classes to meet at least twice a week.
4. **Teacher Qualifications.** Teachers of first-year writing should themselves be effective writers. In addition, because writing pedagogy is not typically part of the academic training of most college faculty, first-year writing teachers must be qualified to teach writing through one of the following:
 - a. recent experience teaching first-year writing
 - b. an approved internship with an experienced teacher
 - c. an approved seminar on methods of teaching writing

Graduate instructors teaching first-year writing should be part of a closely supervised development program that includes pre-service and in-service training, and course work in writing pedagogy.