

John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM (WAC) COURSE GUIDELINES

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The Need for Course Guidelines about Writing

Colleges create Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) guidelines as a tool to help individual faculty, chairs, and major coordinators design courses or develop course curriculum that includes writing instruction as part of the curriculum. At John Jay, UCASC also uses the WAC guidelines to evaluate courses for their focus on student writing. John Jay's existing course guidelines for writing consist of a single page, written by an unknown author in 1998, and they make just a couple recommendations: all courses should assign writing and the amount of writing should meet certain page lengths by course level.

The new WAC Guidelines in this document provide more substantial guidance as well as national best practices for how to include the teaching of writing in courses throughout the college within the 100, 200, 300, and 400 levels. The guidelines have been developed from research-based best practices from national Writing Across the Curriculum scholars and practitioners, as well as research in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (see attached references). These guidelines will be used to support current and new faculty as they design curriculum for their courses, and/or as they complete course revisions or write new courses. As virtually every major/minor/program at the college includes a learning outcome related to writing/communication, these guidelines can also be used by chairs and major/minor/program coordinators to incorporate writing instruction in a scaffolded way throughout a major, minor or program.

The guidelines can also be used by Department Curriculum Committees and UCASC to evaluate course revisions and new courses for the amount and quality of writing instruction within a course. The guidelines provided are not requirements, as curriculum design and requirements remains where it should be: in the hands of the faculty from the discipline, as the teaching of writing content and the amount and types of assigned writing varies by discipline, course level, the course learning goals, structure, and course modality.

Notes

All WAC terms used in this document are defined in Addendum A: Key Terms Glossary.

The Document concludes with a reference page of scholarly sources, from which the claims and ideas about the teaching of writing are derived.

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WAC Principles

The John Jay WAC Guidelines are based on seven principles about the teaching of writing (see reference page for scholarly foundations of these principles):

1. Students come to John Jay with existing literacy and writing knowledge and capabilities, in multiple languages, which can be used to build literacy expertise in new contexts (translingualism).
2. All faculty should support and facilitate student writing improvement in all courses, but no particular faculty member or group of faculty or single course is responsible for teaching all that there is to learn about how to write.
3. Writing for different audiences, in different genres/modalities, and for different purposes is a complex act of literacy that is best learned over time, through multiple opportunities, throughout levels of the curriculum, and in a variety of course settings and contexts.
4. For students to learn how to write, writing should be taught as a research-and writing process, not merely assigned as writing products; writing should be taught explicitly as a process-based skill and a content-based craft.
5. When writing is taught in any course, students not only improve their writing (learning to write), they also improve their knowledge and application of course content (writing to learn).
6. Writing should be taught in the context of meaningful inquiry, not as a separate set of skills, unconnected to the work of a course. Writing should be embedded in all stages of the inquiry-driven research and analysis process to enable students to engage in actively contested questions, empirical observation and evidence-based analysis.
7. While all research-based academic writing has common attributes, use of language, grammar, and style (WAC), individual disciplines and genres often have specific attributes, use of language, grammar, and style that students need to understand and master—referred to as Writing in the Disciplines (WID).

Learning Outcomes for Writing:

When developing new or revising existing majors, minors, programs or individual courses, faculty and curriculum committees are strongly encouraged to develop at least one learning outcome explicitly related to writing/communication. Note that different learning outcomes may be appropriate for different disciplines and/or levels of courses. There is no one-size-fits-all learning outcome for research-based academic writing.

Sample Writing-Focused Learning Outcomes

The sample learning outcomes below provide for different disciplinary emphasis points. These are only examples and would need to be adjusted to context (major/minor/program/course sequence/individual course) and discipline. Note that these learning outcomes feature the main verbs from Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (See Addendum E.) For additional possible learning outcomes for writing, see Addendums B, C, and D.

- Create writing to generate, explore and evaluate ideas and concepts in a meaningful, thorough, and complex way.
- Create texts that engage the audience and use appropriate genre and audience conventions.
- Analyze and produce writing that demonstrates awareness of the argument, style, voice, and structure appropriate for the (name of discipline).
- Demonstrate an awareness of the disciplinary conventions, style, and language in (name of discipline).
- Explain, analyze, develop arguments about course content through writing in multiple disciplinary specific genres.
- Understand and apply the writing process steps and rhetorical knowledge of writing to create texts with appropriate structure, style, and voice for this discipline.
- Evaluate and integrate appropriate qualitative and/or quantitative data and/or external sources as evidence to make logical arguments.
- Describe quantitative relationships and concepts, and evaluate quantitative evidence, data, and models.
- Understand and apply rhetorical, stylistic, and language choices that are appropriate to a variety of genres, audiences and contexts.

General Writing Guidelines for Courses

1. The teaching of writing in the course should follow generally accepted WAC/WID practices, and should include some of the following: low stakes/high stakes assignments, writing process steps, scaffolding of larger assignments, reflective writing, peer review, varied response methods, and clear evaluation criteria.
2. When designing writing into a course, faculty should consider assigning the genres and styles of writing that are typical in the major/minor/program and the professional or career path of the discipline..
3. Faculty should assign low-stakes writing in all courses, but especially in courses at the 100 level. Low stakes writing assignments can be stand alone assignments (i.e. end of class response, reflective writing, pre and post assignment), ongoing semester long assignments (i.e. discussion board posts, key terms assignment), or scaffolded assignments building to a larger, high stakes assignment (i.e. outline, draft etc.).
4. High stakes assignments are more formal, substantial, and graded assignments. High stakes assignments should consist of scaffolded low-stakes steps before the final version of the project is submitted. For high-stakes assignments, faculty should create an assignment page for students and review the assignment page with students. At minimum, assignment pages should cover the purpose, genre, audience, and evaluation criteria of the assignment. Students should also be provided with models of high-stakes assignments and these models should be reviewed in class.
5. Students should receive written and/or verbal feedback on their written work. Feedback can include general or specific responses, line editing, peer review, self evaluation, use in class discussion, conferencing, and graded evaluation. For high-stakes assignments, evaluative criteria should be clear to the students and the use of a rubric with clearly defined evaluation criteria is recommended.
6. Evaluation criteria should be transparent about conventions, style, punctuation, grammar, and citation expectations. The weight given to these expectations should be in proportion to the amount of time spent teaching writing curriculum in class.
7. Students should be given guidance on how to best or most appropriately incorporate their various “Englishes” into their writing for the course, whenever beneficial and appropriate for the purpose, genre, and audience. (For example, low stakes assignments or writing a personal essay.) Students should be encouraged and

facilitated to use their translingual abilities during the writing process for larger assignments.

Syllabus Guidelines for Writing

Writing should be identified and explained on the course syllabus as a key component of the course.

Writing assignments should be clearly labeled (i.e. Case Study Project; Interview Project etc.) and described.

At least one learning objective on the course syllabus should address writing/communication.

The John Jay College Alan Siegal Writing Center should be identified and explained on the course syllabus as a place for writing support for all writers and for all writing tasks. The link to the writing center should be provided. Writing Center Link:

<https://www.jjay.cuny.edu/alan-siegel-writing-center>

The course syllabus should identify and explain student access to research and information sources, if required in the course, and provide a link to the main library page.

See: <https://www.lib.jjay.cuny.edu/>

The course syllabus should have a clear plagiarism/ethics policy that links to the college academic integrity policy.

See: <https://johnjay.jjay.cuny.edu/files/cunypolicies/JohnJayCollegePolicyofAcademicIntegrity.pdf>

The course syllabus should have a clear artificial intelligence/computer-aided writing policy that references the college policy.

See: https://new.jjay.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/2024-05/REF_AI%20Responsible%20Use%20Guidelines_May%201%202024.pdf

Writing Requirements by Course Level and Course Type

Different courses will teach writing in different ways and faculty will assign different genres and styles of writing for different purposes depending on the modality of the course, type and level of the course, the discipline of the course, the needs of the curriculum, and the position of the course within the program, minor, or major.

The guiding principles are recommendations, which faculty should consider, revise, and adopt to fit the needs of a particular level, discipline, course curriculum, modality, etc. The writing curriculum in a particular course should prepare the student writer for the next-level or type of course they may encounter.

100 Level Courses

1. Assign 1,000-2,000 words (approx. 4 to 8 double-spaced pages) of writing for the semester.
2. Assign frequent low stakes writing such as reading responses, discussion boards, summaries, reactions, key terms or concept explanations/applications, and reflective or metacognitive writing.
3. If a high stakes piece of writing is assigned, scaffold the assignment using the writing process and low-stakes assignments such as idea generation, outline, proposal, draft, peer review etc.
4. Focus writing assignments on the first three levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, asking students to remember, understand, and apply concepts, terms, theories, and strategies.
5. Introduce students to a common genre and style of writing in the discipline, perhaps by asking students to complete a rhetorical analysis of already assigned readings in the course. Emphasis can be placed here on a rhetorical vocabulary for analyzing how a piece of writing (i.e. a lab report, a scholarly study) works.
6. Use reflective writing practices to facilitate knowledge transfer and a growth mindset.

200 Level Courses

1. Assign 2,000-3,000 words (approx. 8 to 12 double-spaced pages) of writing for the semester.
2. Assign low stakes writing (see description above).
3. Assign high stakes pieces of writing, such as proposal, annotated bibliography, lab report, academic essay, case study, quantitative data analysis etc.
4. Focus writing assignments on the first five levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, asking students to remember, understand, apply, analyze and evaluate concepts, terms, theories, and strategies. Students should be asked to gather, synthesize, compare secondary sources and primary data, and find, use,

5. Rhetorically analyze models of the genre and style of writing in the discipline, and have students practice the style and craft moves of the genre and style of writing you are asking them to produce.
6. Assign reflective writing practices to facilitate knowledge transfer and a growth mindset.

300 Level Courses

1. Assign 3,000-4,000 words (approx. 12 to 16 double-spaced pages) of writing for the semester.
2. Assign low stakes writing (see description above).
3. Assign high stakes writing (see description above).
4. Focus writing assignments on all six levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, asking students to remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create writing that explores concepts, terms, theories, and strategies. The create term is added here in that students should be able to write in the genre and style of the discipline.
5. Rhetorically analyze models of the genre and style of writing in the discipline, and have students fully integrate the style and craft moves of the genre you are asking them to produce.
6. Use reflective writing practices to facilitate knowledge transfer and a growth mindset.

400 Level Courses (Capstone)

1. Assign 4,000-5,000 words (approx. 18 to 20 double-spaced pages) of writing for the semester.
2. Assign low stakes writing (see description above).
3. Assign high stakes writing (see description above). Note if the 400-level course is a capstone course, requiring a single lengthy research project, faculty should place an increased emphasis on scaffolding the smaller steps of the project (proposal, annotated bibliography, outline, draft, peer feedback etc.) throughout the semester.
4. Focus writing assignments on all six levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (see above).
5. Integrate a rhetorical understanding and practice of the professional or career- based writing genres and styles the students may encounter.
6. Use reflective writing practices to facilitate knowledge transfer and a growth mindset.

Assessment of Writing in Courses

Departments are encouraged to assess where, how, how often, and how well writing is being taught, assigned, and practiced in courses. Assessment can include syllabi review for the guideline items mentioned above, analysis of assignment pages, and conducting faculty and/or student focus groups. Departments can also include outcomes assessment in writing as part of annual outcomes assessment practices. Note that learning outcomes assessment is often conducted using student written work, so designing assessments should be careful to not over assess writing as they evaluate the other outcomes associated with the major/minor.

In any case, all writing assessments should be conducted as an evaluation of individual courses, course sequences, or entire programs and majors. Note: course/major/minor/program assessments are not to be used for student placement or as qualifying assessments for student advancement. Nor should these kinds of assessments be used to evaluate faculty performance. Once conducted, all writing assessments should be tied to faculty development and curricular design improvements (“closing the loop”).

Support for Enacting These Guidelines

The English Department’s Vertical Writing Program is committed to support any faculty member, department, or program interested in improving writing instruction and/or student writing outcomes. In the past, the Vertical Writing Program offers individual faculty consultation, Writing Intensive course design support, faculty development sessions, Writing Enriched Curriculum (WEC) Projects, and writing assessment design and facilitation support. You can reach out to the Vertical Writing Program through the English Department or by sending an email to VWP@jjay.cuny.edu.

The Vertical Writing Program also maintains a Writing Across the Curriculum portfolio of guidance, and curricular and assessment materials on Digication.

<https://johnjay.digication.com/wac-resources-for-faculty-john-jay-college-february-2-2023/home-1> Password: resources

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All of the articles above and many additional articles can be found for free, all in one place, at The WAC Clearinghouse. The *WAC Repository* offers both a collection of peer-reviewed articles pertaining to WAC administration and pedagogy and a set of resources for the wider writing studies community that have been assembled through curation and crowdsourcing. The *Repository* is a collaboration between the WAC Clearinghouse and the [Association for Writing Across the Curriculum](#). LINK TO WAC CLEARINGHOUSE: <https://wac.colostate.edu/>

Addendum A

Definition of Terms

Disciplinary Writing. Stated simply: writing in a Literature class looks, sounds, and behaves differently than writing in a Biology class. An essay asking for a close reading of a poem and a lab report on the behavior of cells under heat conditions requires writers to make many significant rhetorical choices to follow the genre requirements and deliver a document that reads like what the audience is expecting. Often what looks like terrible format, style, voice, and organization decisions in one discipline are the right choices in a different discipline.

Global and Local Responses to Student Writing. Global responses refer to major concerns such as structure, argument, use of evidence etc. Local responses refer to style, grammar, punctuation, formatting and correct citation. Good responses to student work handles the global issues early in the writing process and the local issues near the end of the writing process.

Growth Mindset. One key to learning is the belief by the learner that they have the ability to improve and they can see the pathway towards improvement. In relation to writing, writers who shut down and are no longer writing because they feel incapable or doomed to failure may have lost their Growth Mindset. Encouraging a growth mindset in relation to writing requires faculty to scaffold assignments, explain and demonstrate the methods for producing writing, offer multiple and varied opportunities for practicing writing, and provide clear, direct, and supportive feedback on writing.

Knowledge Transfer. The ability of students to take what they have learned from one learning situation and apply it to the next, sometimes different and more challenging, learning situation. Focusing on knowledge transfer with writing requires faculty to explicitly demonstrate and teach the research and writing process, provide writing instruction in different genres and for different audiences, and make explicit connections between assignments in their course and writing students will encounter in subsequent courses.

Low Stakes and High Stakes Writing: Low stakes writing assignments are small, generative, or scaffolded assignments that are usually ungraded or account for a small percent of the course grade. High stakes assignments are larger assignments requiring complex work over multiple stages and usually account for a significant portion of the course grade.

Reflective Writing: When students are asked to write about the processes and practices of writing (also called metacognitive writing). Reflecting on learning processes enables a deeper learning of concepts and practices that facilitates knowledge transfer to the next writing situation.

Research-Based Academic Writing: This term refers to the genres and purposes of written and visual texts common to writing in academic settings. Research here refers to both primary and secondary texts as well as data collection and analysis. Academic Writing refers to stylistic and structure decisions related to writing for a scholarly or professional audience in an academic and disciplinary-specific style.

Research and Writing Processes: The steps taken to move a project from non-existence to completion, which includes everything from generating ideas, formulating questions, gathering research, analysis, writing a draft, peer review, outlining, revision, and proofreading. It's important to point out that sophisticated writers do not conduct the research and writing process in linear steps, but rather as a set of recursive activities.

Rhetoric: The art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing, especially the use of figures of speech, arrangement of material, kinds of evidence, and authorial voice. A main feature of writing instructions is to enable student writers to understand and apply the rhetorical moves necessary when writing for different genres, audiences, purposes, mediums and from different stances.

Rhetorical Terms: The language used to describe texts and how they work. For example: organization, ethos, conciseness, cohesion, hypothesis, genre, voice, design, etc.

Scaffolding: A curriculum design concept where teachers break complex tasks into pieces that build into the final product. WAC research suggests that scaffolding assignments leads to increased students success on complex writing projects.

Translingualism: The idea that language is shaped by social interaction and serves functional purposes; meaning that language users adapt and evolve language to meet their communication needs, creating new forms to effectively convey their meaning. In a translingual approach to writing, students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds are encouraged to leverage the various languages and rhetorical styles they bring to their work. All linguistic abilities are seen as valuable resources, and variations in students' writing are considered strategic and creative choices, not mistakes or barriers. Proficiency in any language is viewed as an asset in learning how to use language in new contexts and for different audiences.

Writing Across the Curriculum: Writing principles and practices that are common to genres, audiences, purposes, from throughout the disciplines (i.e. use of evidence, writer's voice, drafting process).

Writing in the Disciplines: Writing principles and practices that are specific to a set of disciplines (i.e. Social Sciences), one discipline (Sociology) or sub discipline or genre (i.e. ethnography).

ADDENDUM B: John Jay College First Year Writing Learning Outcomes

Invention and Inquiry: Students learn to generate, explore and expand their ideas in a meaningful, thorough and complex way.

Awareness and Reflection: Students learn to reflect on their own writing and learning and increase their understanding of who they are as writers and learners.

Writing Process: Students learn methods of composing, drafting, revising, editing and proofreading.

Claims and Evidence: Students learn to develop substantial, plausible claims, provide valid and/or strong arguments, and show why and how their evidence supports their claims.

Research: Students learn to conduct research (primary and secondary), evaluate research sources, integrate research to support their ideas, and cite sources appropriately.

Rhetoric and Style: Students learn rhetorical and stylistic choices that are appropriate and advantageous to a variety of genres, audiences and contexts.

Sentence Fluency: Students learn to write clear, complete and correct sentences and use a variety of complex and compound sentence types.

Conventions: Students learn to control language, linguistic structures, and the punctuation necessary for diverse literary and academic writing contexts.

ADDENDUM C John Jay College General Education Writing Rubric Categories

Development of Complex Analysis:

Students evaluate arguments, ideas, and studies with original judgments. Through synthesis of complex ideas, students position themselves in a scholarly conversation.

Awareness of Audience and Genre Conventions:

Students write with an awareness of purpose, audience, and context. Students make deliberate rhetorical and stylistic choices appropriate to specific genres, disciplines, and modalities.

Use of Research:

Students gather, evaluate, and integrate appropriate qualitative and/or quantitative evidence and external sources, which are relevant to the genre and discipline.

Creation of Claims, Evidence, and Warrants:

Students develop substantial, plausible claims, provide valid arguments, and show why and how their evidence supports their claims.

Acknowledgment of Sources to Build Authorial Credibility:

Students acknowledge and cite external sources appropriately to develop authorial credibility. Citation formatting and style is correct and relevant to the disciplinary context.

Sentence Structure and Language Mechanics:

Students write correct, clear, and powerful sentences. Syntax, punctuation, and language use are appropriate for the audience and genre.

Addendum D: CUNY Pathways Writing Courses Learning Objectives

- Read and listen critically and analytically, including identifying an argument's major assumptions and assertions and evaluating its supporting evidence.
- Write clearly and coherently in varied, academic formats (such as formal essays, research papers, and reports) using Standard English and appropriate technology to critique and improve one's own and others' texts.
- Demonstrate research skills using appropriate technology, including gathering, evaluating, and synthesizing primary and secondary sources.
- Support a thesis with well-reasoned arguments, and communicate persuasively across a variety of contexts, purposes, audiences, and media.
- Formulate original ideas and relate them to the ideas of others by employing the conventions of ethical attribution and citation.

Addendum E: Bloom's Revised Taxonomy

