



General Education Program: Writing Intensive and Oral Communication Requirements Minimum and Best Practice Statements

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The following document outlines the minimum and best practices for courses that are designated as meeting the writing intensive (W) or oral communication (O) requirements in the General Education program. The “minimum expectations” describe what curricular elements need to be incorporated into the syllabus to meet the requirements for an “O” or “W” course; the “best practices” describe elements that would make an ideal “O” or “W” course.

These statements of practice are intended as guidelines, and it is expected that faculty will use their professional judgment to develop a syllabus appropriate to the writing and speaking expectations in their discipline. However, these statements are based on the evidence faculty need to provide in order to have a course designated as a W or O, and therefore faculty teaching courses that have been designated in the past should refer to these statements for information on the university expectations for those classes.

Where ever possible, departments should engage, periodically, in a discussion of these expectations for W and O courses so that the faculty who teach the courses in which students learn the writing and speaking conventions of the discipline can share the approaches they use to develop these key communication skills.

Writing Intensive (“W”) Courses

Minimum Expectations

Writing in the Discipline: The focus of the course should be on developing the writing skills appropriate to the discipline. Instructors should be able to articulate these disciplinary expectations to students, and they should ensure that the syllabus and the writing assignments make these expectations manifest.

Writing as an integral part of the course: Writing must be integrated as an on-going feature of the course rather than being isolated in one long paper at the end of the semester. Students should clearly perceive, from the syllabus and the work of the course, that the course is designed to specifically address the development of written communication skills in addition to any other curricular objectives.

Number of words: Students should produce a minimum of 2,500 words (approximately 9-10 pages) of polished writing. This total can be broken down into several shorter papers; this total does not include drafts or informal, low stakes, writing such as journals—though both are encouraged. The syllabus should clearly identify these writing assignments and the expectations they must meet.

NOTE: This total is appropriate for a 3-credit W course; in a 1-credit W course students should be producing 4-5 pages of polished work.

Percent of final grade based on writing: At least 30%* of the grade should be derived from writing projects, i.e. formal prose. Other written work, for example essay exams, should not count towards that 30% unless the essay is later turned into a polished piece of writing. In addition, students must pass the writing assignments in order to pass the class. That is, a student must turn in all the written assignments and get at least a D on those assignments to get a D for the class.

Revision: Students should receive substantive feedback from the instructor on all of the writing assignments in the course, and they should have the opportunity to revise and resubmit at least one piece of formal writing. The revision and resubmission should happen early enough in the semester for the student to benefit from the feedback. The feedback given to students on their writing should be based on a process that does more than identify surface errors (for example, in-text comments or a detailed rubric).

Assessment: Some class time should be dedicated to a discussion of evaluation criteria for writing assignments.

Class size and instruction: Course enrollment should be limited to 25 students. In an exigency – ie making space to allow a student to enroll so he/she can graduate – enrollments will occasionally go above that mark but this should be the exception and not the rule. The instructor must be responsible for grading students' work, and this responsibility should not be delegated.

Best Practices for “W” courses:

In addition to meeting the minimum requirements a ‘best practices’ course should have the following characteristics...

Number of words: Students will produce 3,500 to 5,000 words (approximately 15-20 pages) of polished writing. (2000-2500 words for a 1-credit course).

Percent of final grade based on writing: Perhaps 50%* or more of the final course grade will be derived from formal written work. (By definition a student must have satisfactory performance on the written work in order to pass). Emphasizing writing to this degree does not mean that course content is ignored. Rather both formal and informal writing is used as an integral part of the process by which students master course content.

Writing assignments featured and goals for each: Assignments should be sequenced, with scaffolds provided to practice writing and research skills required for more complex assignments. How assignments are sequenced and scaffolded will depend on the writing conventions in the discipline. In some cases the problem addressed in a given piece of writing will get progressively more complex and sophisticated. In other cases the assignments will develop skills that are then used for a final project/term paper. In still other cases faculty will design a critical inquiry process that requires students to move toward more sophisticated academic writing.

Assignment-related instruction: A process-approach to writing should be stressed, with opportunities for prewriting and peer group activities. Two or more assignments should be worked through a structured revision process including group or individual conferences with the instructor.

Low-stakes writing integration: A variety of informal, ungraded writing activities—journals, reading or project logs, blogs, forum questions, mid-lecture feedback, short response papers—that encourage

students to reflect on and synthesize course content, as well as generate ideas for formal writing assignments should be integrated into the course.

Revision and reflection: Students should compile portfolios of their polished writing, accompanied by drafts, and students should be required to reflect on their own development as a writer in reference to this portfolio. An integral part of students' ability to reflect on their writing should come by means of their development as peer reviewers of other students' work; this skill should be assessed as part of the students' final grade.

Support services: Instructors should consult with staff from the Writing Resource Center, the Center for Teaching and Learning, and the Communication Across the Curriculum program about the design of the writing component of the course.

Oral Communication ("O") Courses

Minimum Expectations

Oral Communication in the Discipline: The focus of the course should be on developing the oral communication skills appropriate to the discipline. Instructors should be able to articulate these disciplinary expectations to students, and they should ensure that the syllabus and the speaking and presentations assignments make these expectations manifest.

Speaking as an integral part of the course: Speaking must be integrated as an on-going feature of the course rather than being isolated in one long presentation at the end of the semester. Students should clearly perceive, from the syllabus and the work of the course, that the course is designed to specifically address the development of oral communication skills in addition to any other curricular objectives. "O" courses use communication exercises for supporting course content, for thinking critically in a discipline, and for teaching disciplinary conventions. Ideally, assignments are of the type students will encounter in their academic careers or in the workplace.

Presentations: Each course, regardless of credit hours, should have assignments which require a minimum of two formal oral presentations that will be evaluated by the instructor; presentations made in private and recorded can be included in this count, but students should make at least one presentation in public. In total this should amount to perhaps 15 minutes of actual presentation time.

Percent of final grade based on speaking: At least 30%* of the grade should be derived from presentations. Other opportunities for oral communication—for example class discussion-- should not count towards that 30% unless student contributions are formalized in some fashion. Students must pass the oral communication assignments to pass the course. That is a student must do the required oral presentations and get at least a D on those assignments to get a D for the course.

Revision: Students should have opportunities to practice and receive substantive feedback on at least one formal presentation to foster skill development. The feedback should happen early enough in the semester so students can incorporate the lessons learned in subsequent assignments. The feedback given to students on their presentations should be based on a process that does more than identify surface errors (for example a detailed rubric).

Assessment: Some class time should be dedicated to a discussion of evaluation criteria. Students should be provided, in advance, with the criteria to be used.

Class size and instruction: Course enrollment should be limited to 25 students. In an exigency – ie making space to allow a student to enroll so he/she can graduate – enrollments will occasionally go

above that mark but this should be the exception and not the rule. The instructor must be responsible for grading students' work, and this responsibility should not be delegated.

Best Practices for "O" courses:

In addition to meeting the minimum requirements a 'best practices' course should have the following characteristics...

Presentations: The course should provide 4-5 opportunities for formal oral presentations (2-3 presentations may be appropriate in a 1-credit course). Of necessity this total is likely to require that some of these presentations be made to small groups or submitted electronically. The total time devoted to formal presentations will vary by discipline, however, the increase in the number of presentations does not necessarily require a corresponding increase in the presentation time—5 shorter presentations for a total of ~30 minutes can be structured in a fashion that maximizes learning potential.

Percent of final grade based on speaking: Perhaps 50%* or more of the final course grade will be derived from formal oral presentations. (By definition a student must have satisfactory performance for speaking in order to pass). Emphasizing speaking to this degree does not mean that course content is ignored. Rather both formal and informal speaking is used as an integral part of the process by which students master course content.

Speaking assignments featured and goals for each: Assignments should be sequenced, with scaffolds provided to practice presentation and research skills required for more complex assignments. How assignments are sequenced and scaffolded will depend on the presentation conventions in the discipline. In some cases instructors will provide multiple opportunities for students to master a particularly central kind of oral presentation appropriate for the discipline—the presentation of a 'case' or a design review—raising the expectations in each instance. In other cases instructors will assign presentations that present a variety of rhetorical situations a student might encounter and arrange these in a fashion that helps develop the students' skills. In still other cases, instructors might include both individual and group presentations, again in a fashion that stresses similar and different skills required for each format.

Assignment-related instruction: A process-approach to speaking should be stressed, with opportunities for rehearsal and peer evaluation. Two or more assignments should be worked through a structured revision process including group or individual conferences with the instructor that are use recorded versions of the presentation for reference.

Low-stakes writing integration: A variety of informal, ungraded speaking activities—impromptu minute speeches, formalized roles in class discussion, small group work—that encourage students to reflect on and synthesize course content, as well as generate ideas for formal writing assignments should be integrated into the course.

Revision and reflection: Students should be required to reflect on the development of their speaking skills, preferably in conjunction with some kind of portfolio of their presentations. An integral part of students' ability to reflect on their speaking skills should come by means of their development as peer reviewers of other students' work; this skill should be assessed as part of the students' final grade.

Support services: Instructors should consult with staff from the Center for Teaching and Learning and the Communication Across the Curriculum program about the design of the speaking component of the course.

* In cases where courses are meeting both W and O requirements some flexibility in the percentage of the grade assigned to each may be appropriate.