



"Assessment is a means for focusing our collective attention, examining our assumptions, and creating a shared academic culture..."  
Tom Angelo

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## College Coordinator

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## Writing Program Mission, Role, Scope

### Overview:

The Writing Program offers first-year and advanced writing courses to help students become more capable writers for personal, civic, academic, and professional purposes. Our courses aim to develop students' critical thinking, their writing, their audience awareness, and their ability to represent themselves and their ideas in language. Students practice strategies to generate ideas from experience and research and to engage effectively in a recursive process of writing and revision. The Writing Program cultivates the skills necessary for multiple literacies, and we teach students to examine the ways in which writers compose to achieve social, political, economic, professional, and personal goals.

In service of this mission, students who complete the composition sequence should be able to

- Assess the rhetorical strategies writers use to achieve their purposes with varied audiences and in a range of contexts.
- Use evidence and persuasive appeals that are effective with various audiences, situations, and purposes.
- Develop critical analyses of public, scholarly, and personal issues based on research, observations, and reflections from their own experiences.
- Revise in response to feedback from readers to improve drafts and offer useful feedback to other writers on how to revise their writing.
- Use the appropriate conventions of research and analysis, including the stylistic conventions of clear and convincing academic writing.

We pursue these learning goals in Writing Program courses through 1) individual, small-group, and large-group activities and student and team writing conferences, 2) visits to campus sites as part of course assignments, 3) service-learning projects, 4) oral presentations and public performance of written works, 4) integration of online and digital technologies to produce multimodal texts, and 5) writing workshops. Students write and revise multiple drafts of their work, and they receive feedback from instructors, classroom peers, and other audiences in the case of public projects and service-learning opportunities. Students are also encouraged to visit the Writing Center and Writing Skills Improvement Program for tutoring.

### Expected Learning Outcomes:

#### Writing Program Goals and SLOs for First-Year Writing Courses<sup>[1]</sup>

The Writing Program defines five learning goals with specific SLOs for its first-year writing courses.

**Goal 1:** Assess the rhetorical strategies writers use to achieve their purposes with varied audiences and in a range of contexts.

**Student Learning Outcomes:** At the end of the First-Year Composition (FYC) sequence, students will be able to

- a. identify the purposes of, intended audiences for, and arguments in a text.
- b. analyze the ways in which a text's purposes, audiences, and contexts influence an author's rhetorical choices.
- c. identify the particular cultural, economic, political contexts of a text.
- d. analyze print, multi-modal, and electronic texts composed in various styles to create their own complex, well-supported argument.
- e. analyze how genres shape reading and writing.
- f. read in ways that improve writing, especially by demonstrating an ability to analyze the rhetorical strategies at work in texts.

**Goal 2:** Use evidence and persuasive appeals that are effective with various audiences, situations, and purposes.

**Student Learning Outcomes:** At the end of the FYC sequence, students will be able to

- a. develop evidence by employing a variety of research methods including primary and secondary research.
- b. make informed judgments about the quality and veracity of sources.
- c. synthesize research findings in support of an original argument.
- d. incorporate other writers' interpretations into the analyses they write.
- e. draft, revise, and present original researched arguments about an issue.
- f. compose well-structured print and multimodal texts for various audiences and purposes.
- g. correctly incorporate quotations, summaries, paraphrases, and citations into their own writing.

**Goal 3:** Develop critical analyses of public, scholarly, and personal issues based on research, observations, and reflections from their own experiences.

**Student Learning Outcomes:** At the end of the FYC sequence, students will be able to

- a. analyze texts from multiple points of view.
- b. use writing for purposes of reflection, action, and participation in conversations within and across different communities.
- c. compose a contextual analysis in which they combine information and perspectives from at least two secondary sources to support their interpretation of a primary source.
- d. demonstrate the ability to conduct research that is purposeful, ethical, and balanced.
- e. evaluate sources for credibility, appropriateness, and quality.
- f. support ideas or positions with well-structured discussion of evidence from multiple sources.
- g. develop ideas with observations and reflections on students' own experiences.

**Goal 4:** Revise in response to feedback from readers to improve drafts, and offer useful feedback to other writers on how to revise their writing.

**Student Learning Outcomes:** At the end of the FYC sequence, students will be able to

- a. create multiple, meaningful revisions on global and local levels to improve their own texts.
- b. suggest useful revisions to other writers on global and local levels.
- c. work with peers in a variety of configurations (large group, small group, pairs) and mediums (in person, electronically, and on paper) in all stages of the writing process.
- d. evaluate and incorporate peer and instructor feedback to revise their texts.
- e. reflect on their progress as academic writers.

**Goal 5:** Use the appropriate conventions of research and analysis, including the stylistic conventions of clear and convincing academic writing.

**Student Learning Outcomes:** At the end of the FYC sequence, students will be able to

- a. use the conventions of scholarly research and documentation.
- b. consistently introduce borrowed information with appropriate signal phrases that establish authority by including the source's credentials.
- c. understand diction, usage, voice, and style, including standard edited English, as conventional and rhetorical features of writing.
- d. edit/proofread their own writing for clarity and style.
- e. demonstrate the ability to write well-organized prose with varied sentence structure.
- f. demonstrate the ability to write with few mechanical errors (grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization).
- g. write in a tone appropriate to a specific subject, purpose, and audience.

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[1] For English 101A, 101, 102, 107A, 107, 108, 109H

## Assessment Activities:

### 2012-2013 AY Writing Program Activities--Direct and Indirect Measures

#### Direct Measures--Student Writing Samples

The University of Arizona Writing Program collected 281 essay responses from first-year students enrolled in English 101 during the first week of the Fall 2012 semester. These students were selected by stratified random sampling of 13 sections of English 101 offered in the fall (i.e., sections of English 101 were selected randomly with adjustment made for years of teaching experience, rank in program--GAT and lecturer, and graduate program emphasis--rhetoric and composition, literature, creative writing, and English language and linguistics).

The students were asked to participate in an ungraded writing assignment that included:

1. reading a short essay (either essay A or essay B is randomly assigned to each student),

2. writing a response following a prompt,
3. writing a short reflection on their response, and
4. completing a survey about their writing experiences.

These materials were collected through a Drupal interface where students logged in with their netids and passwords and where their response data are stored on a secured server. This homework assignment was given as an ungraded diagnostic by the students' instructors, both giving students an authentic writing task (instructors often ask for an early writing sample) and allowing teachers to use the responses to determine students' writing needs early in the semester.

In spring 2013, the team collected 210 responses from the same students who were enrolled in English 102. Student drafted these responses in weeks 13-14 of the semester as an ungraded final exam preparation exercise that included all the same activities. The only two differences were that students, upon login, received the other essay that they had not read the previous semester, and they responded to a different survey. The prompt, instructions, and reflections are consistent in both semesters.

To prepare raters to review all 420 responses, the Writing Program hosted three training sessions--an overview of essay rating and two specific trainings to use the multitrait rubric on each prompt A and B. The former session allowed us to identify members of our teaching community who are interested in evaluation. After the overview session, we recruited 12 raters to use the multitrait rubric to evaluate all 420 total essay responses from fall and spring. The rating team included evaluators from all ranks of the Writing Program, including GATs and adjuncts. The raters were invited to two sessions on two different days that focused on Prompt A responses one day and Prompt B responses the next. The raters were given specific training packets for each day, and they were asked to evaluate the materials in their packets in preparation for a norming session that occurred each morning on the day of the evaluation. After reviewing the evaluation packets, raters were separated into two teams in order to ensure that any response that needed a third reading would be given to the other evaluation team. The rubric results were read by two raters for agreement on all four traits, and any trait that did not agree was given a third reading. The team's overall inter-rater reliability for both scoring sessions was 72%, but when adjusted for one rater who needed further calibration during both scoring sessions, the reliability was 78%.

The program used a multi-trait scoring rubric to evaluate all essay responses. The rubric (See Rubric Attachment) was developed to assess the following SLOs: Summary, Thesis, Evidence, and Style/Conventions (See Specific SLO Director Measures Attachment).

#### ***Indirect Measures--Student Self-Assessments***

These scoring data are our direct measure to assess our program, and we are continuing to work with our indirect data from the student surveys, especially the students' own ratings on a scale of 1 to 5 of their self-confidence in their writing ability and their development as writers after having taken the sequence of English 101 and 102 at University of Arizona.

In addition to the assessment of student performances on a standardized prompt, students were asked to respond to a Writing Experience Survey with 27 items distributed across six subsections: section A "Writing Process," section B "The Transition to College Writing," section C "When I Revise," section D "Public Forms of Writing," section E "Journal" or "Science" Writing, and section F "Demographic Information." Students completed the survey as part of the submission process for the standardized prompt described previously.

In order to understand students' own perceptions, we collected and analyzed responses to section B of the survey "The Transition to College Writing" (TWC), which asked students to assess their writing ability after completing first-year writing at The University of Arizona. Students ranked their confidence in writing, using a standard agree/disagree Likert Scale (5 - Strongly Agree, 4 - Agree, 3 - Undecided, 2 - Disagree, 1 - Strongly Disagree):

- BQ1: After taking first-year writing, I am more confident in my academic writing abilities.
- BQ2: After taking first-year writing, I am more confident in writing for out of school purposes.
- BQ3: I believe that what I have learned in my college writing courses will help me write in my general education courses.
- BQ4: I believe that what I have learned in my college writing courses will help me write in my major.
- BQ5: I believe that what I have learned in my college writing courses will help me write in my future career.

## **Assessment Findings:**

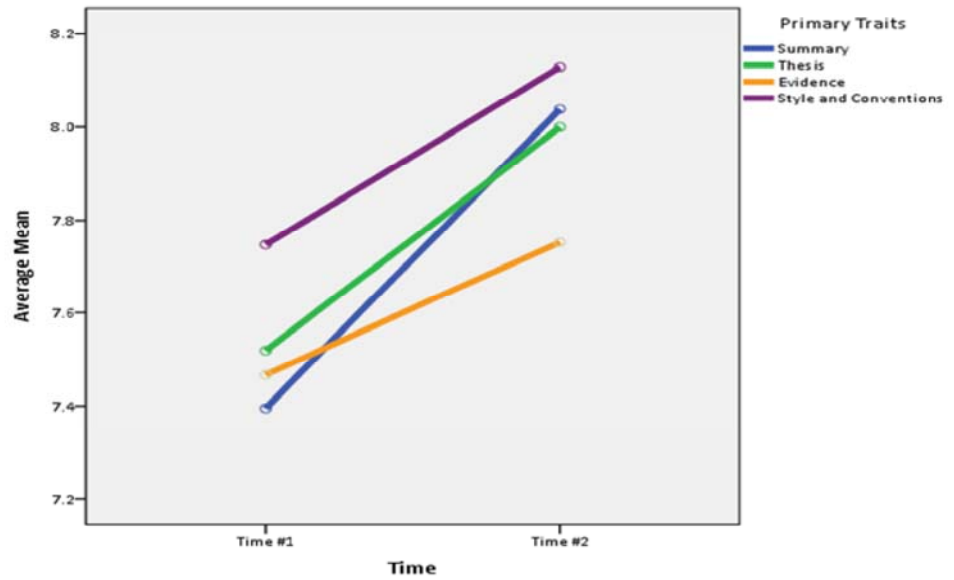
### **Findings**

#### ***Direct Measure Findings***

In the assessment of 210 students who remained in our participant pool, we rated **student performance on four primary traits: Summary, Thesis, Evidence, and Style/Conventions.**

The method of data analysis was factorial repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA)[\[1\]](#). In terms of main effects, there was a significant effect of time,  $F(1, 209) = 14.37$ , with a partial eta of .06, which represents a medium effect size. Contrasts revealed a small but statistically significant increase in scores across primary traits over time (See Figure 1: Primary Traits over Time). **On average, 210 students demonstrated higher scores across traits with statistically significant gains in summary, thesis, and style and conventions.**

[Figure 1: Average Change in Scores on Primary Traits over Time](#)



To translate Figure 1 into a narrative, dependent t-tests revealed the most statistically significant improvement was in summary, followed by thesis, and then style/conventions (See Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Primary Traits over Time). Also, when we look at the four traits, summary showed the most improvement while evidence showed the least (See Figure 2: Average for Each Trait). We want to emphasize that students who scored lower on all traits in their Fall English 101 responses made the most gains in their Spring English 102 scores, but despite their fall ratings, **all students in the study demonstrated improvement in these writing traits**. In other words, all students demonstrated real learning for these traits over time with statistically significant gains in three of the four traits measured.<sup>[ii]</sup>

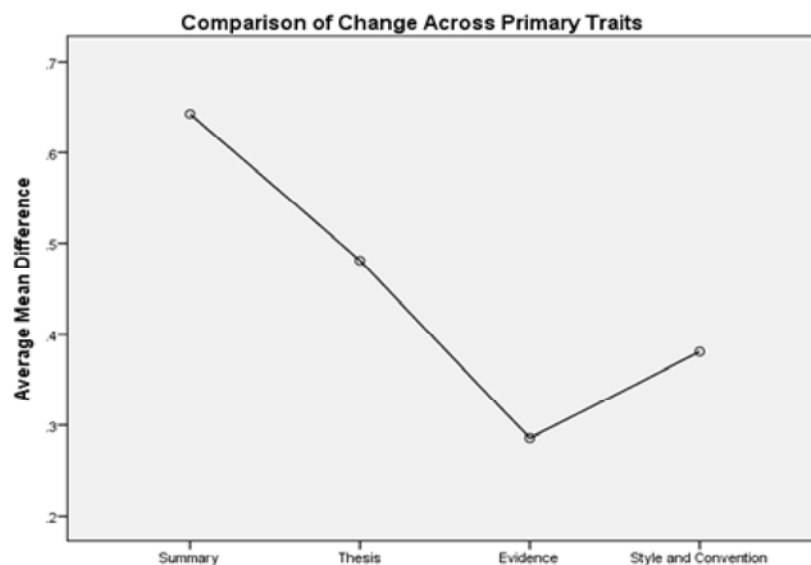
Table 1: (n = 210) Descriptive Statistics of Primary Traits over Time

	Time #1		Time #2		Paired t-Test Comparison		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	r	p
Total Score	30.13	5.94	31.92	5.10	3.79	.06	<.01**
Summary	7.40	1.86	8.04	1.72	4.26	.08	<.01**
Thesis	7.52	1.75	8.00	1.55	3.26	.05	<.01**
Evidence	7.47	1.75	7.75	1.64	1.81	.02	.07
Style/Convention	7.75	1.65	8.13	1.35	2.90	.04	<.01**

\*\* p ≤ .01

Figure 2: Average for Each Trait<sup>[i]</sup> Factorial repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) is an appropriate method for multiple paired dependent variables at two points in time.<sup>[ii]</sup>

Figure 2: Comparison of Change Over Time



### Primary Traits

The limitations of our assessment are that the improvement cannot be ascribed only to the students' participation in the writing sequence, and we acknowledge that we have a sample student population that was rated, not the entire student population.

### Indirect Measure Findings

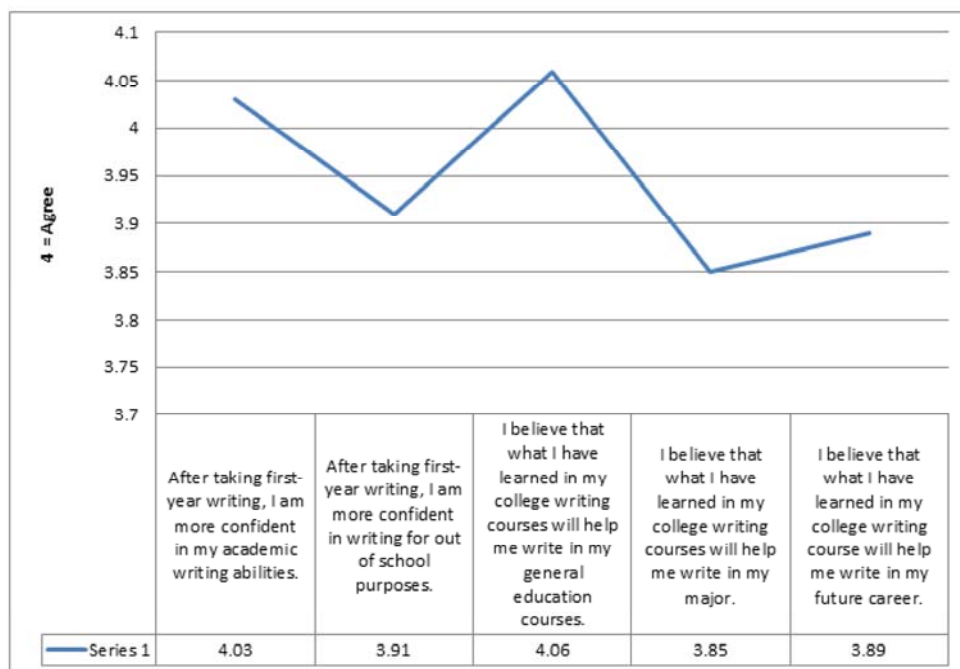
Of the 210 student participants scored on the Direct Measure Assessment, 204[1] responded to five questions in "The Transition to College" survey. SPSS v. 20.0 was used to conduct descriptive analyses, which were useful in demonstrating students' perceptions of their writing after completing first-year writing. For all five questions, the average mean hovered near "Agree" (See Table 2: Average Scores on Transition to College Writing Survey).

Table 2: (n = 204) Average Scores on Transition to College Writing Survey

	Mean	Std. Deviation
After taking first-year writing, I am more confident in my academic writing abilities.	4.03	.882
After taking first-year writing, I am more confident in writing for out of school purposes	3.91	.932
I believe that what I have learned in my college writing courses will help me write in my general education courses.	4.06	.945
I believe that what I have learned in my college writing courses will help me write in my major.	3.85	1.032
I believe that what I have learned in my college writing course will help me write in my future career.	3.89	1.013

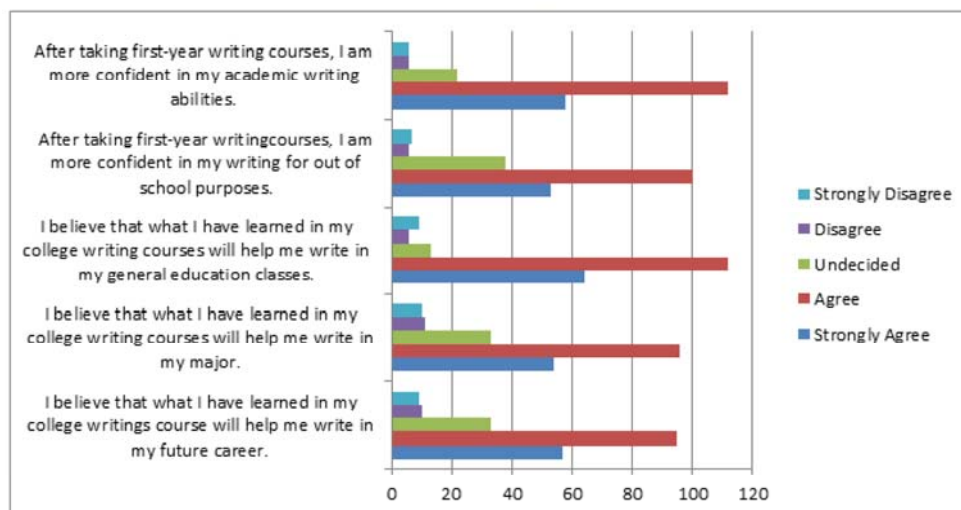
On average, students ranked their confidence as slightly higher in two categories: academic writing abilities and writing for general education courses (See Figure 3: Transition to College Writing). In other words, students indicated feeling confident in their writing after completing the first-year writing curriculum.

Figure 3: Transition to College Writing (n=204)



While an average mean indicates students agree that they have gained confidence in academic writing, analysis of frequency distribution reveals that most students feel confident about their writing. That is, over half of the students indicated agreement with statements about having more confidence in writing abilities that will help them write in other contexts, which is displayed in the following histogram (See Table 3: Frequency of Student Agreement about Statements on Writing).

Table 3: Frequency of Student Agreement with Statements about Writing (n=204)



The “Transition to College Writing” survey questions focused on students’ perceptions of confidence in writing after completing first-year writing courses, and results illustrate that on the whole 204 students felt what they learned would help them write for general education courses and courses in their majors.

Importantly, the survey on the “Transition to College Writing” provides a glimpse into students’ perceptions of their learning in first-year writing. Responses to the survey suggest that students perceive what they learned in first-year writing will transfer to future writing contexts since students agreed that what they learned will help them write in general education. In terms of the Writing Program Curricular Goals, Goal 1 in the first-year writing curriculum focuses on the ability “to assess the rhetorical strategies writers use to achieve their purposes with varied audiences, situations, and purposes.” Being able to analyze and interpret rhetorical context is fundamental for analyzing how audience and purpose influence rhetorical choices and understanding how genre shapes reading and writing (See SLOs 1a, 1b, 1e), all of which contribute to rhetorical dexterity across disciplinary communities and situations.

### Change in Response to Findings:

Based upon our direct and indirect measures, The Writing Program is redesigning the English 101 curriculum, and these findings encourage us to work more closely with evidence in both the English 101 and 102 courses. The pilot curriculum of 101 also will include further instructor training to teach uses of evidence.

Because the Writing Program annually revises its core text--*A Student's Guide to First-year Writing*--we also will be developing more targeted lessons and support for student writers to develop stronger evidence for their claims.

Attachment	Size
<a href="#">goal_slo_mapping.pdf</a>	88.17 KB
<a href="#">multi_trait_rubric.pdf</a>	215.43 KB
<a href="#">Specific SLOs for Director Measure</a>	26.5 KB
<a href="#">Transition to College Writing</a>	101.85 KB
<a href="#">Student Agreement</a>	97.24 KB
<a href="#">Average Scores on Transition to College Writing</a>	80.79 KB
<a href="#">Comparison of Change over Time</a>	95.78 KB
<a href="#">Descriptive Statistics of Primary Traits over Time</a>	70.33 KB
<a href="#">Average Change in Scores on Primary Traits over Time</a>	125.42 KB

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