

First-Year Writing Assessment Report

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INTRODUCTION

This report describes the assessment cycle for the First-Year Writing program in Fall 2016-Spring 2017 academic year. All of the goals were met, though two of the outcomes in ENGL 101 were at the borderline for acceptability. There are mitigating circumstances for this finding, some of which are described below. But we have taken the findings into account and are taking steps to remedy any problems, as described in the “Action Plan” section. We ran into the difficulties caused by the labor required to read and evaluate 20-25 page portfolios on multiple categories, with each portfolio being scored twice. We have decided to restrict the sample size for the next round of assessment. This will involve some marginal decrease in the accuracy of the estimation of the population mean, but it is more than balanced by the saved labor.

Speaking of labor, I wish to thank Assistant Director of First-Year Writing, Clancy Ratliff; graduate assistants Amanda Capelli and Nolan Meditz, and members of the First-Year Writing committee: Patti Pangborn, C. J. Craig, Jarrett Kaufmann, and Nick Merino for their hard work on this assessment. Over twenty-five hundred pages of student writing had to be read and evaluated by members of this committee. It took several months, and the work was done without any compensation.

PROCEDURES

1. A list of all enrolled students in first-year writing courses is generated by the registrar.
2. ENGL 101 is sampled for Fall 2016; ENGL 102 for Spring 2017.

3. Approx 2.5% of enrolled students are selected randomly via a computer program.¹
4. Notification is sent to the instructors to duplicate the portfolios for these students.
5. Portfolios are collected. Students who did not turn in a portfolio or who dropped the class are indicated on the spreadsheet. Identifying information is removed.
6. For each cycle, two outcomes from the list of the FYW Program Outcomes are selected.
7. Assessors are selected from available labor pool of first-year writing instructors and members of the First-Year Writing Committee.
8. A norming session aligns evaluation criteria according to the rubric.
9. Each paper is scored by two readers.
10. The assessment data is keyed in and analyzed by FYW staff.
11. A report is generated that indicates any action necessary to address assessment findings.

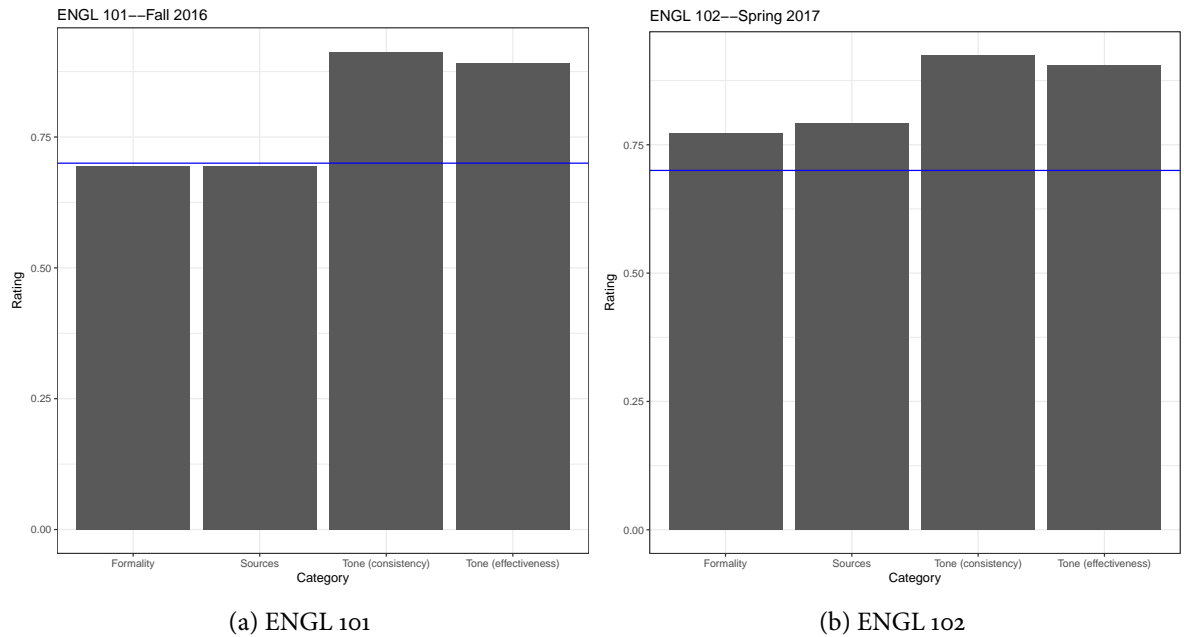
ACADEMIC YEAR 2016-2017 ASSESSMENT

The major change that we implemented for the assessment cycle for Academic Year 2016-2017 was selecting portfolios individually rather than by section. As documented in the last assessment report, we felt that choosing sections randomly had the potential to create distorting results. A per-student unit of assessment should give a better overall picture of conditions in the writing program as a whole. Moving to portfolio-based assessment, where each unit has 20–25 pages that need to be read and scored by two separate readers, has caused this process to take more time than I had hoped. I recognize that we do not have sufficient resources to assess this many papers efficiently, and I have decided to halve the sample size for the AY 2017-2018 assessment, which is ongoing.²

We assessed two outcomes during this cycle: the first was “Develop facility in responding to a variety of situations and contexts calling for purposeful shifts in voice, tone, level of formality, design, medium, and/or structure.” The second was “Use strategies—such as interpretation, synthesis, response, critique, and design/redesign—to compose texts that integrate the writer’s ideas with those from appropriate sources.”

¹*The program in question is the R package for statistical analysis. <https://www.r-project.org/> The command is `sample()`, which relies on the built-in random number generation function. Forty-six 101 papers were returned from the initial selection, and 53 102 portfolios were turned in.

²This reduction will come at some cost to the accuracy of the sample’s measurement, but it will be well within the range that we need in order to have confidence in the validity of the results.



(a) ENGL 101 (b) ENGL 102
Figure 1: AY F16-S17 First-Year Writing Assessment Results

To make scoring easier for the readers, we broke the first outcome into parts: “Effectiveness of tone/voice according to conventions of the genre,” “Consistency of tone/voice,” and “Formality in document formatting/presentation and style conventions.” The scores for each of these parts are included in this report, but it’s important to note that the outcome itself is the rhetorical skill of versatility and flexibility—are students able, to example, to write rhetorically effective personal-experience-based pieces as well as more formal analyses. The outcome should be interpreted holistically.

We are seeing more students arrive at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette with first-year writing credit, for one or both of the first-year writing classes. And we should take this into consideration when designing and interpreting curriculum and assessment. ENGL 102 students, for example, who did not take ENGL 101 here may not perform as well as they would have otherwise. We feel that this especially likely for students who test out of the courses completely.

I would have predicted the latter two categories would have higher scores in ENGL 102 than ENGL 101, as those outcomes are taught more directly in those classes. This prediction proved accurate. See Figure 1 for the results by category.

Our target is 70% of the students meeting the score of Satisfactory (3 or higher on a scale of 1-6) on each of the categories. For ENGL 101, the score was almost exactly 70% for both Formality and Research Strategies. While we predicted that these scores would be lower, we would still like for them to have a higher average than this. Steps to

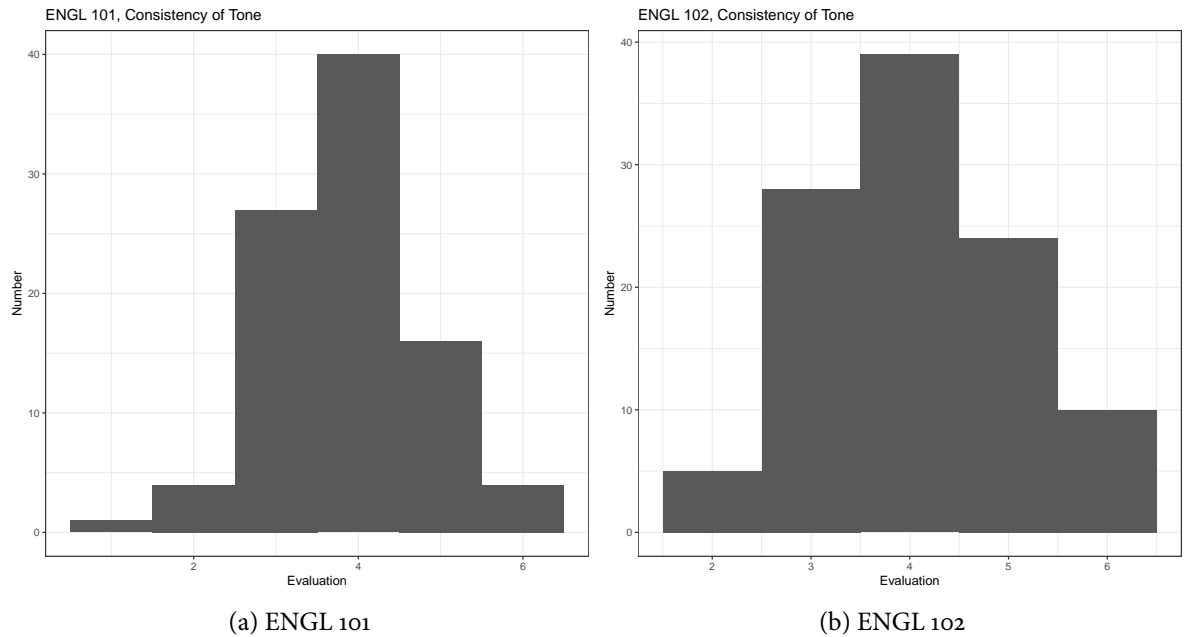


Figure 2: Consistency of Tone

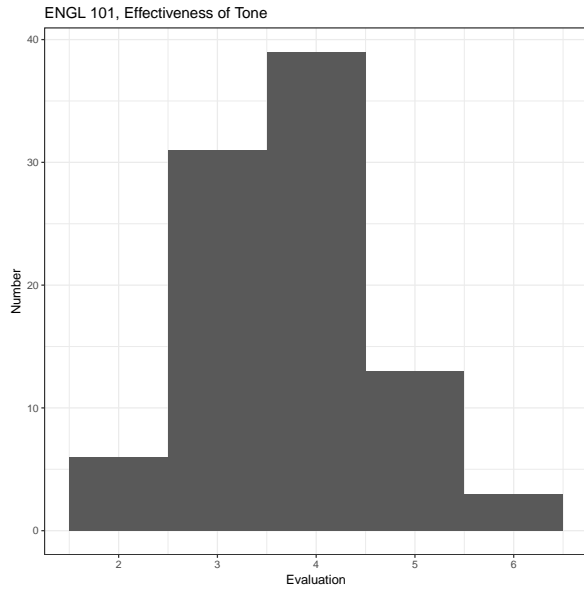
be taken to increase these outcomes will be described in the next section of the report.

The rater scores for each category are shown in histograms for each course. See Figures 2–5 for the distribution of scores for Consistency of Tone, Effectiveness of Tone, Formality, and Research Strategies.

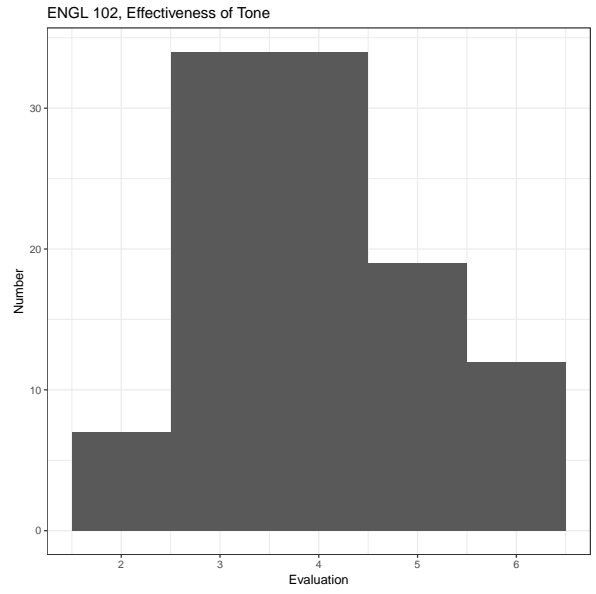
ACTION PLAN

Our plan for improving in the outcomes assessed this cycle is to design new assignments for the curriculum that are targeted toward these particular outcomes. We may also hold workshops, but we have found that these are ephemeral and not well attended. An updated common syllabus with ready assignment documents provides support to teachers and will have a more lasting influence. We will introduce these assignments in our standing workshops: the orientation for new teachers in August and the annual faculty development meeting for dual enrollment instructors, the latter of which accounts for about 20% of our sections of ENGL 101 and 102.

In our first-year writing curriculum, ENGL 102 is dedicated to research-based writing from sources. Therefore, we would expect that the outcomes that measure this attainment would be lower in ENGL 101. Any assessment of the research-based outcomes in the ENGL 101 sample we consider to be a baseline reading. The improvement

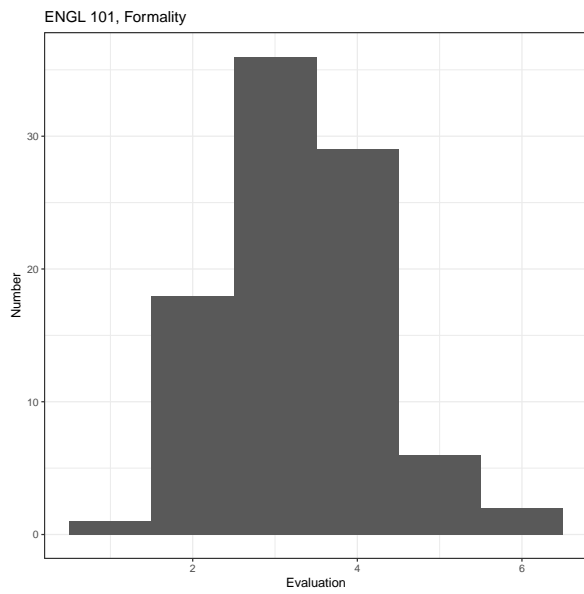


(a) ENGL 101

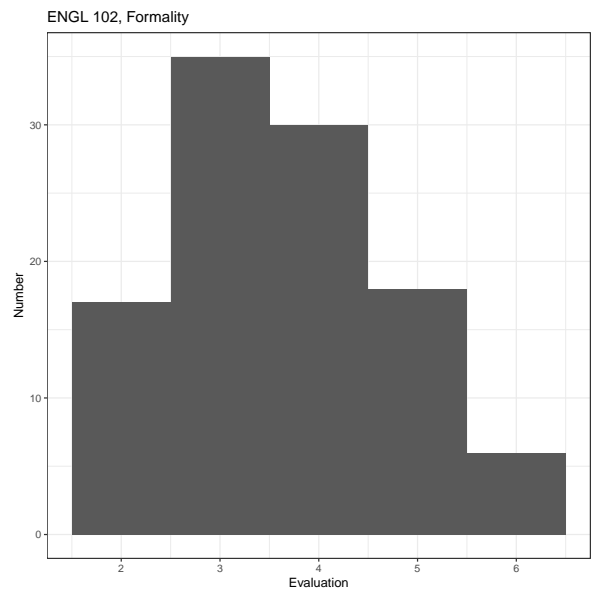


(b) ENGL 102

Figure 3: Effectiveness of Tone



(a) ENGL 101



(b) ENGL 102

Figure 4: Formality

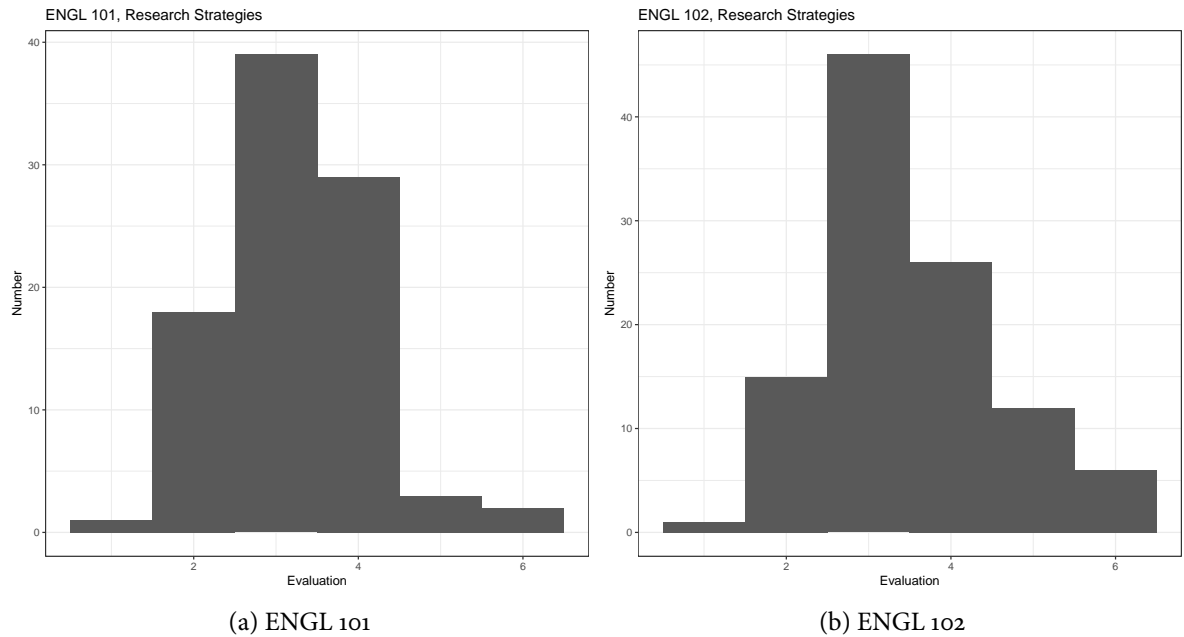


Figure 5: Research Strategies

shown in ENGL 102 demonstrates the value of experience and practice of writing, plus the effectiveness of curriculum devoted to these issues.

APPENDIX: FIRST-YEAR WRITING OUTCOMES

Students in the University of Louisiana at Lafayette's First-Year Writing Program will:

- Develop a writing project through multiple drafts
- Learn to give and to act on productive feedback to works in progress
- Develop facility in responding to a variety of situations and contexts calling for purposeful shifts in voice, tone, level of formality, design, medium, and/or structure
- Locate and evaluate (for credibility, sufficiency, accuracy, timeliness, bias and so on) primary and secondary research materials, including journal articles and essays, books, scholarly and professionally established and maintained databases or archives, and informal electronic networks and internet sources

- Use strategies—such as interpretation, synthesis, response, critique, and design/redesign—to compose texts that integrate the writer’s ideas with those from appropriate sources
- Practice applying citation conventions systematically in their own work

While instructors may have assignment-specific rubrics for the purposes of grading, the following rubrics will be useful in assessing overall performance in 101 and 102 courses.

Outcome	Poor	Satisfactory	Outstanding
Develop a writing project through multiple drafts	No evidence of engagement with writing process; Missing deadlines for rough drafts; submitting fewer than the required number of drafts for each writing project	Meeting deadlines for rough drafts; submitting the number of drafts required for each writing project	Excellent engagement with writing process: Meeting all deadlines for rough drafts or submitting them in advance of deadlines; submitting more drafts than are required
Outcome	Poor	Satisfactory	Outstanding
Learn to give and to act on productive feedback to works in progress	Not participating in peer response activities, or minimal feedback on peers’ drafts; missing scheduled office conferences, or attending unprepared; not acting on or reflecting on feedback received	Participating in peer response activities, providing mostly useful feedback for peers; participating in scheduled office conferences and being prepared in advance; reflecting on feedback received and acting on most feedback	Excellent participation in peer response activities, providing consistently productive feedback for peers; participating in scheduled office conferences, being prepared in advance, and seeking additional; insightfully reflecting on feedback received, substantially revising according to feedback

Outcome	Specific Skill	Poor	Satisfactory	Outstanding
Develop facility in responding to a variety of situations and contexts calling for purposeful shifts in voice, tone, level of formality, design, medium, and/or structure	Effectiveness of tone/voice according to conventions of the genre	Excessive insertion of (or suppression of) writerly presence in tone/voice according to conventions of the genre	Writerly presence in tone/voice that is mostly appropriate for the genre	Writerly presence in tone/voice that is appropriate for the genre
	Consistency of tone/voice	Jarring shifts in voice or tone in the same piece of writing	Voice and tone are mostly consistent throughout the piece of writing	Tone and voice are consistent throughout the piece of writing
	Formality in document formatting and presentation and style conventions	Document features (line spacing, font, margins, page numbering, etc.) fail to meet expectations of the genre; writing contains many sentence-level errors (several per paragraph)	Document features mostly meet expectations of the genre; writing is mostly free of sentence-level errors (1-2 per page)	Document features meet expectations of the genre in every respect; writing is almost completely free of sentence-level errors (1-2 per paper)

Outcome	Specific Skill	Poor	Satisfactory	Outstanding
Locate and evaluate (for credibility, sufficiency, accuracy, timeliness, bias and so on), including journal articles and essays, books, scholarly and professionally established and maintained databases or archives, and informal electronic networks and internet sources	Use of library resources	Inability to navigate stacks; inability to use library databases, overreliance on internet search engines	Basic knowledge of how to find books in stacks; knowledge of one or two library databases	Knowledge of LOC numbers in student's own areas of interest; knowledge of several library databases
”	Evaluating sources	Using sources that are outdated, not credible, inaccurate, or insufficient; not recognizing bias	Using sources that are mostly current, credible, accurate, and sufficient; some recognition of bias	Using sources that are current, credible, accurate, and sufficient; recognition of bias most of the time

Outcome	Poor	Satisfactory	Outstanding
Use strategies—such as interpretation, synthesis, and critique,—to compose texts that integrate the writer’s ideas with those from appropriate sources	Data dump from sources (very little or none of student’s own analysis); source material is presented passively	Mostly even balance of student’s ideas with outside sources; Some knowledge of moves in <i>They Say/I Say</i> —agreement, disagreement, etc.	Even balance of student’s ideas with those of outside sources; source use is purposeful: variety of strategies of engagement such as interpretation, synthesis, response, critique
Outcome	Poor	Satisfactory	Outstanding
Practice applying citation conventions systematically in their own work	Not understanding what information needs to be cited or why; source information not integrated well at the sentence level—patchwriting; Works Cited pages not present or not formatted according to a specific documentation style (MLA, etc.)	Basic understanding of citation norms and concept of common knowledge; basic understanding of attributive tags and in-text citation: conventions of quoting and paraphrasing; Works Cited pages present and formatted in a specific documentation style (MLA, etc.), though some errors may be present	Nuanced understanding of citation norms and sophisticated concept of common knowledge; strong understanding of attributive tags and in-text citation: conventions of quoting and paraphrasing; Works Cited pages present and formatted in a specific documentation style (MLA, etc.) with minimal formatting errors