First-Year Writing Assessment Report

Jonathan Goodwin

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PROCEDURES

1. A list of all enrolled students in first-year writing courses is generated by the registrar.

2. One hundred students are selected randomly from this list via a computer program.[1]

3. Notification is sent to the instructors to duplicate the portfolios for these students.

4. 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.

5. For each cycle, two outcomes from the list of the FYW Program Outcomes are selected.

6. Assessors are selected from available labor pool of first-year writing instructors.

7. A norming session aligns evaluation criteria according to the rubric.

8. Each paper is scored by two readers.

9. The assessment data is keyed in and analyzed by FYW staff.

10. A report is generated that indicates any action necessary to address assessment findings.

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[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.

2016 ASSESSMENT

In 2016, we conducted our assessment on a per-section basis. The outcomes that we chose to assess were consistency of voice and tone, adherence to citation norms, and effectiveness of interacting with sources. Approximately one hundred papers were collected from the six sections that had been selected randomly from five ENGL 102 and one ENGL 115 classes. Each paper was scored by five separate raters drawn from the First-Year Writing Committee. The results were tabulated and analyzed. A visualization of the results across all five outcomes shows that the distribution of results varied from section-to-section quite a bit, but that the general pattern was consistent:
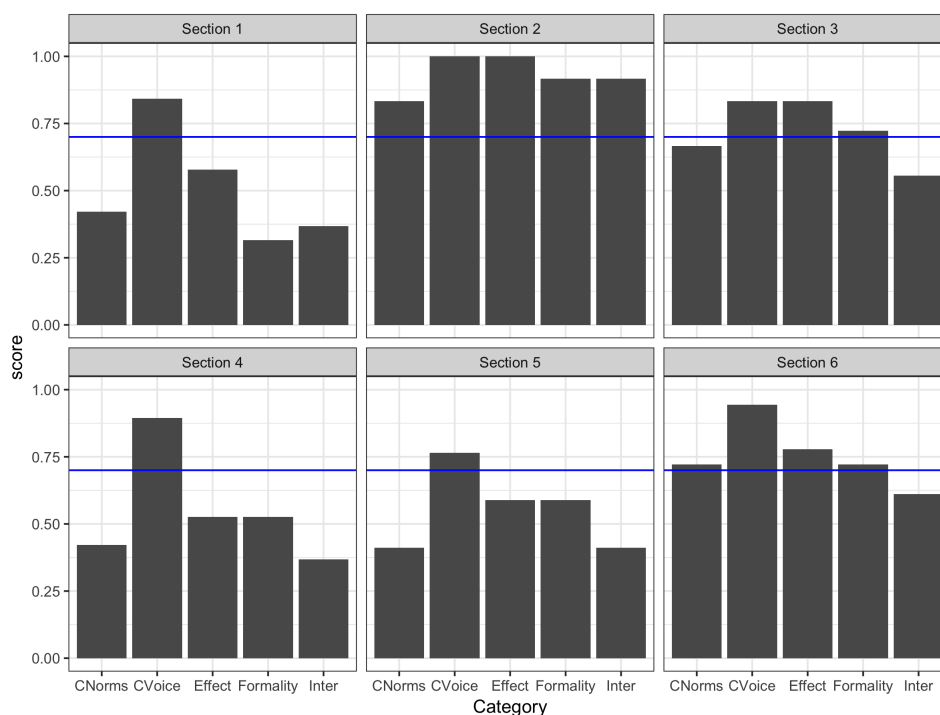
The horizontal line shows our target. A full accounting of this round of assessment was written and submitted to the Office of Assessment last year (and appears in full at the end of this document), but I will summarize some of the relevant results and conclusions. There were two broad categories that we assessed: suitable voice and tone for academic writing and integrating and citing sources. The first category showed that the assessment met the target, though the margin was slight in some cases. In the second, we were just short of the target.

    I included the per-section graphic above to show what I think accounted for much of this effect. The papers from the 115 class were rated much more highly than the rest.

Part of that has to do with the student population, but I think more could be attributed to the raters' pre-existing perceptions about citation effectiveness in literary analysis versus other types of writing. These skewed results were one of the main factors that led to us changing our assessment procedures for this cycle.

2017 ASSESSMENT

This cycle of assessment is ongoing, though we hope to be finished in July. As outlined above, we have switched our procedures in certain key ways. We are sampling on a per-student basis, selecting both ENGL 101 and 102 writing for assessment, evaluating portfolios instead of sample papers, digitizing portfolios, removing identifying information of both teacher and student, and also will likely use a slightly different set of reviewers.

Our action plan, which was detailed in the assessment report, included implementing teaching circles and redesigning the *Freshmen Guide*, a required text for FYW classes. We frankly feel that an overemphasis on the minutiae of academic citation formats can cause both teachers and raters in the assessment to judge student work more harshly than it perhaps deserves, so this point will continue to be emphasized in teacher-training for the program.

2016 ASSESSMENT REPORT

The First-Year Writing Program recently updated its program outcomes. For the past ten years, the outcomes had been these, taken from the Council of Writing Program Administrators' Outcomes for First-Year Composition:

Students in the UL Lafayette First-Year Writing sequence will:

- Engage in writing as a complex and iterative process

- Recognize the structures of argument

- Use writing and reading for learning, thinking, and communicating

- Learn to respond to the needs of various audiences

- Discuss appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality

- Integrate their ideas with those of others

For assessment, our rubric had been focused primarily on qualities of single writing projects with the categories of "Content," "Organization," and "Language Issues," and indicators like "paragraphs generally treat one idea at a time," only implicitly tied to

the outcomes. There was only coincidental alignment between the outcomes and the assessment, so we refined our approach.

For this assessment cycle, and as part of ongoing curriculum development, we decided to revise our outcomes. These are more action-oriented, and we have created rubrics aligned specifically to each of these.

- 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), 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, and critique—to compose texts that integrate the writer's ideas with those from appropriate sources

- Practice applying citation conventions systematically in their own work

We have also started a schedule of assessing the outcomes, two per year. For this cycle, we assessed these from the earlier set of outcomes: "Discuss appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality" and "Integrate their ideas with those of others." They are close to these from the revised outcomes – so technically we assessed these three outcomes:

- 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

- Use strategies—such as interpretation, synthesis, and critique—to compose texts that integrate the writer's ideas with those from appropriate sources

- Practice applying citation conventions systematically in their own work

The Assessment

During the Spring 2016 semester, we used a random number generator in the computer language R to identify sections of English 102 and English 115 at random. We contacted those teachers and asked them to contribute a set of student papers, and we ended up with a total of 103 papers from five sections of 102 and one section of 115.

Given that 1.) the 102 and 115 classes represent exit points from the First-Year Writing sequence; and 2.) the student population in English 101 sections in spring semesters is somewhat skewed (consisting heavily of students who are at-risk, who failed 101 the previous fall), we opted to go with student writing samples from 102 and 115 only. In the future, we will collect samples of student work from 101 in fall semesters and include them in the assessments we'll do at the ends of spring semesters.

The papers assessed were all research-based argument-focused essays. After a norming and training period, each paper was scored by two readers out of a group of seven total readers, all of whom were teachers or tutors in the English department. They assigned each paper a score of 1-6 in the five specific skills from the rubric, with a score of 1-2 as Poor, a score of 3-4 as Satisfactory, and a score of 5-6 as Outstanding.

Results   Outcome: 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

Outcome	Specific Skill	Score	Target
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	3.26	Met
"	Consistency of tone/voice	3.65	"
"	Formality in document formatting/presentation and style conventions	3.01	"

Outcome	Specific Skill	Score	Target
Use strategies—such as interpretation, synthesis, and critique,—to compose texts that integrate the writer's ideas with those from appropriate sources	Interaction with ideas from sources	2.94	Not Met

Outcome	Specific Skill	Score	Target
Practice applying citation conventions systematically in their own work	Understanding of citation norms; what does and does not need to be cited	2.97	Not Met

Action Plan   We will be addressing and supporting these outcomes in our curriculum and in our faculty development over the next academic year:

- We have written a new edition of the *Freshman Guide*, a required text for English 101 and 102, with new outcomes and rubrics. Again, these rubrics are much more aligned with the outcomes. We will ask teachers to call students' attention to the rubrics often in class and to use them in grading student work.

- We've planned a new approach to faculty development for First-Year Writing teachers, particularly those on graduate assistantships: a mandatory meeting once a month. I will divide the total number of graduate assistants teaching English 101 and 102 into groups of eight to ten by schedule availability. We will have meetings once a month to address pedagogical strategies for the outcomes assessed, as well as for the other outcomes that will be assessed in later cycles. Our previous attempts to hold teaching workshops have been poorly attended or not attended at all. Making these meetings mandatory has not been feasible without any actual consequences attached to missing meetings. This year we hope to change that.

- Instead of assessing individual student papers, starting in the next assessment cycle we will be assessing portfolios of student work. These will give us a more complete view of what students are actually able to do in their writing; sometimes, we don't see a particular indicator of satisfactory or outstanding performance

in one piece of writing, but in a portfolio, we may see it in another one, so we'd know the student was able to demonstrate competence in that area. Portfolio assessment has been the gold standard in Rhetoric and Composition Studies for many years. Instructors will be given support and guidance as they make the transition from a timed proficiency exam to a portfolio for assessment.

Additional Action   Also, we will improve our sampling method. Instead of assessing the program based on the instruction of only a few teachers (as in this cycle, six), we will gather portfolios from a random sample of the students, which we hope to be able to do through a simple database query. This should yield a set of portfolios from students in many different instructors' sections. Making this change to the sampling technique may improve the results, or it could worsen them; that's why we're not making it part of the action plan intended to improve the program. In any case, we believe this action will increase the validity of the results in future cycles.

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); ource material is presented passively	Mostly even balance of student's ideas with outside sources; Some knowledge of moves in *They Say/I Say*—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