



English Composition | 2017-2018 Assessment Report

1. Please give a brief overview of the assessment data you collected this year.

The learning outcomes for the English Composition program at UWGB have been updated this year so that they are in closer alignment with the WPA (Council of Writing Program Administrators) Outcomes Statement for First Year Composition, Version 3.0, which was updated in 2014 to account for and address the ways in which technology has changed the discipline and pedagogical practices of first year composition.

For the 2017/2018 academic year, we have assessed the outcome of “Gain experience reading and composing in several genres.” Specifically, we assessed students’ ability to write “concise, vigorously worded texts” (2016/2017 UWGB English Composition Assessment Report). Last year’s report noted that professional / digital writing favors this style of prose; given both the importance and difficulty of teaching the style, the composition faculty elected to use the 2017/2018 assessment process to see how we as a program are doing in helping students to write “concise, vigorously worded texts.”

It should be stated that first year writing is a liminal space; not only does the collective entity of “freshman comp students” encompass an extremely wide array of writing skills and aptitudes, but each individual student within that collective body is, by definition, in a transitional phase of her development as a writer—crossing thresholds from high school to college, adolescence to adulthood, creative writing to academic writing, etc. Therefore, we recognize that the ability to produce “concise, vigorously worded texts” is an ideal to aim for rather than a realistic expectation for most first year college writers. We took this into account when tabulating and coding our data corpus, which is described in detail below.

The English Composition faculty performed an embedded assessment using a randomly selected corpus of student essays as the assessment artifacts. All identifying information was removed prior to distributing the essays to faculty members, and no faculty member assessed his own students’ work. Each faculty member submitted an essay from the 10th student on the roster from each section of English Composition offered during the 2017/2018 academic year, for a total of 50 student essays.

Each essay was assessed to determine the salient stylistic feature of the text, using these four options:

- **Intentional fluff/filler (IFF):** the student appears to be trying to fill up space
- **Abstract/vague (AV):** it appears the intention to articulate something is sincere, but the writer is not achieving concreteness or specificity
- **Concrete/specific (CS):** self-explanatory; this is the goal
- **Concise/vigorously worded (CVW):** achieves “concrete and specific” but also transcends those qualities into the realm of artfulness; evidences a professional diction/tone not generally expected or seen in first year composition

The faculty read and coded aspects of the text while reading; in many cases, one salient style emerged. Predictably, there were many essays that fell somewhere in between categories stylistically. This makes perfect sense for the work of first year college writers.

The overall coding results are as follows:

IFF	11
AV	6
CS	10
CVW	5
IFF/AV	2
IFF/CS	4
AV/CS	10
CS/CVW	2

Brief Explanations of “combo” codes:

- **IFF/AV:** very typical for developmental level writing or for students who are struggling to make the transition into academic writing; they are in some cases perhaps intentionally filling up space, in others legitimately trying but falling short in achieving academic prose.
- **IFF/CS:** if the student is able to write concretely and specifically but also shows evidence of intentionally filling up space, there is usually one of a few simple explanations: 1. The student is savvy and sophisticated enough to “game” the assignment, and for much of the student’s prior education this was an acceptable (if not rewarded) way to produce a text; 2. There is a flaw in the assignment/prompt that encourages filler or fluff; 3. The length requirement of the assignment is inappropriately long for the writing task.
- **AV/CS:** very typical transitional first year writer style; the student is experiencing some success in producing college level prose, but also still learning to do it consistently.
- **CS/CVW:** the student who can write clearly and specifically on a consistent basis with moments of achieving “concise” and “vigorously worded,” is solidly prepared to succeed in writing tasks at the college level.

Data interpretation:

The majority of our students fall somewhere along the spectrum of abstract/vague to concrete/specific. This is consistent with UWGB’s demographics.

We have too many students submitting too much intentional fluff/filler. This is typical of any group of first year writers, but it is still something we need to work harder to mitigate.

We have a few students who are actually achieving concise, vigorously worded texts; however, we would like to have more.

The rubric also included a category for “essay topic.” The purpose of this was to determine if certain topics yielded higher quality writing than other topics. In this assessment, no correlation was found. There are too many extraneous factors (efficacy of teaching, student interest, etc.) to draw any meaningful conclusions regarding essay topics, at least from what we assessed this year.

2. How will you use what you’ve learned from the data that was collected?

We will use the data to help us target the weaker aspects of first year writing. Specifically, we need to explicitly address the presence of intentional fluff/filler and explain to students why it’s both unnecessary and unacceptable in college level writing. Students should be shown the differences between “fluffy” writing and substantive writing.

Additionally, we need to nudge students toward producing texts that are more specific, concrete, concise, and vigorous. These terms mean nothing to students if introduced without context, so the most effective way to teach them is to offer students strong examples that evidence such writing and then engage in discussion/reflection that identifies and evaluates it.

There are various pedagogical practices that will be useful:

- Practice in reflective/active reading (highlighting, annotating, asking questions about a text, etc.)
- Group workshopping of texts—student-written or otherwise; students can learn a great deal about writing by critiquing the writing of others.
- Explicit teacher feedback using vocabulary that has been normalized and is recognizable within the course (e.g. “You need to delete this fluffy phrase and replace it with something concrete”).
- Teacher-guided revision practices in which students are given time in class to edit and improve early drafts that evidence less desirable stylistic choices.

The English Composition program holds a formal meeting prior to the start of each fall semester; during that meeting, we will return to the findings of this assessment report so that we may tailor our teaching toward helping students to make the kind of stylistic improvements that it discusses.