



English Composition | 2016-2017 Assessment Plan

1. Please review last year's assessment results (2015-2016) as well as the Academic Program Assessment Report with the faculty in your program. How does your program plan to take these results into consideration in future programmatic planning?

For 2015-16, English Composition assessed Program Outcome #4: "Inquiry—Students will formulate research questions appropriate for the assignment, locate and evaluate appropriate sources, and synthesize material from those sources, while adequately paraphrasing, carefully quoting when appropriate, and correctly citing." More specifically, we assessed the latter portions of Outcome #4: students' skills in summarizing, paraphrasing, quoting, and citing. We used 36 randomly selected papers from UWGB English Composition classes as our sample. We found that nearly all sample papers demonstrated that the students who wrote them had mastered most of the basics of research-based writing: selecting appropriate sources for academic writing, introducing source material with clear signal phrases, summarizing or paraphrasing clearly, quoting relatively sparingly and for good rhetorical reasons, citing in such a way that readers could look up the source material if they wished to, etc. We did, however, see room for improvement, often in areas such as providing context for source material via the sentences just before or after the source material. Our full report is available at the English Composition portion of the Assessment web site.

We took these results into consideration via two English Comp teachers' meetings in which we discussed the results and their implications for us as individual teachers. Much of the emphasis at these meetings was on the need to teach our students to think rhetorically about ways they use source-based material, since expectations for use of source-based material vary according to academic discipline, genre of writing assigned, and even preferences of individual teachers. Because our discussion thus far has focused exclusively on what we might do in our individual classrooms, we're planning one more meeting in which we compare guidelines and handouts we use to deal with such subjects as quotation versus paraphrase or summary, reliance on source material to speak for itself versus framing the source material within one's own discussion, integration of multiple sources within a paragraph versus use of only a single source in a paragraph, etc. We don't intend to standardize our teaching on these subjects, but we do hope to minimize the cases in which one English Comp teacher's advice to students contradicts the advice given by another teacher, and we hope to learn more about the expectations of other teachers and how we might help our students prepare for those diverse expectations.

2. Please review your program's Learning Outcomes. Do any of them need to be updated or clarified?
 - a. Please provide brief indications of the kinds of assessment that might be used to assess each outcome.

Thus far, we have assessed our Learning Outcomes in the same way each year: by getting a random sample of papers from English Comp classes (typically one paper per class, using sampling techniques described in our final assessment reports) and assessing those papers for particular outcomes or traits, using a rubric or checklist to guide our assessment. We plan on using the same technique in the coming year, and we see no reason the technique cannot be applied to each of our Learning Outcomes. Since English Composition is all about the writing students produce, it seems obvious that the best way to assess the program is through focused examination of a random sample of student writings.

- b. Please compare your Learning Outcomes to the University's main learning objectives. Which programmatic outcomes match university mission outcomes?

I would argue that all the English Composition program outcomes match University mission outcomes, particularly the University's "critical thinking" and "problem focused" outcomes. A slew of research supports the following:

- writing is a mode of learning, promoting "deep learning" as opposed to memorizing details and then forgetting them the day after the exam;
- writing about a topic is one of the best ways of sharpening one's thinking about that topic;
- proposed solutions to problems are usually best expressed in writing, and the writing process itself can lead to discovery of better solutions to a problem.

After reviewing our Learning Outcomes, we in English Composition are considering adding two more Learning Outcomes. We plan to tweak the wordings for these outcomes at a meeting early next semester before officially adding them, but tentative wordings for the additional outcomes are as follows:

- Students will display control of style, expressing their ideas in sentences which display appropriate variety in sentence structure as well as precision in word choice.
- Students will use digital technologies appropriately to enhance visual elements in their texts, as well as to navigate databases and other resources appropriate for research.

3. Which outcome will you assess this year (2016-2017)?

- "Standard English – Students' essays will adhere to the conventions of Standard Edited American English."

4. Which technique will you use to assess this outcome?

Embedded assessment using student papers.

5. Which course or group of students will you assess on the outcome chosen above and when?

For each 2016-17 section of English Composition, the instructor will be asked to provide one student paper from the last essay assigned in the course. (See assessment reports from 2015-16 or 2014-15 for the techniques we use to assure that the essays are randomly selected rather than being up to the whim of the individual teacher.) The Director of Composition will create a form for tabulating lapses from Standard English according to category (comma errors, subject-verb agreement errors, sentence fragments, etc.). Members of the assessment committee will all read a few papers in common, filling out the form, and then meet for a “norming session” in which they compare results, to assure that they are all using the same criteria to tabulate lapses from Standard English and to tweak as necessary the form for tabulating errors. Once the assessment committee members are all on the same page regarding tabulation, the remaining essays in the sample will be divided among the committee members for tabulation. After reading the essays and tabulating the lapses from Standard English, the committee members will meet to go over the results and compare impressions. The Director of Composition will use the forms and the responses at the second meeting as the basis for writing up a draft of the assessment report. The other committee members will read the draft and suggest revisions, after which the Director of Composition will create the final report.

The Fall-semester papers may be read, and errors tabulated, in January 2017, but the Spring-semester papers cannot be read, and errors tabulated, until late May 2017. The report will probably be completed around June 1, 2017.