

Requirements for Writing-Intensive Courses

Guidelines for Writing-Intensive Courses

Writing-Intensive (WI) courses in the College of Letters and Science incorporate frequent writing assignments in ways that help students learn both the subject matter of the courses *and* discipline-specific ways of thinking and writing. Generally, WI courses are at the intermediate or advanced level and are designed specifically for majors. Please note that writing-intensive courses are in L&S departments only, and that writing-intensive courses are different from the Bascom or Communication-B courses which will satisfy Part B of the University-wide general education communication requirements. For more information about Communication-B courses, please contact the chair of the implementation committee for those courses: Professor Sherry Reames, English Department, sreames@facstaff.wisc.edu.

In most semesters, there are between 70 and 100 courses in over 30 different L&S departments designated as writing-intensive. In October 1999, the L&S Faculty Senate passed legislation recommending that all L&S departments develop enough writing-intensive courses so that all of their majors take at least one as part of their undergraduate studies. Both the L&S curriculum committee and Faculty Senate felt strongly that the writing skills students learn in Communication-A and -B courses should be further developed, nurtured, and practiced in subsequent, more advanced writing-intensive courses.

The procedure for designating a course as writing-intensive is simple. As long as you feel that the course will meet the writing-intensive guidelines outlined below, please go ahead and list it as writing-intensive. All you need to do is—

Ask the person in your department responsible for preparing the Timetable to add a footnote to your course listing. Standard Note Number 0003 is for a "Writing-Intensive Course."

Send Brad Hughes, the director of the L&S Program in Writing Across the Curriculum, a note or email message (English Department, Helen C. White Hall, bthughes@facstaff.wisc.edu) letting him know which course you're designating as writing-intensive.

If you have questions about writing-intensive courses or would like advice about designing assignments and a syllabus for a WI course, please contact Brad Hughes, director of the L&S Program in Writing Across the Curriculum (3-3823, bthughes@facstaff.wisc.edu). Please also explore the sample syllabi and assignments available on this site, through the page on "Integrating Writing into Your Course."

WI courses take many different forms, but they all share the assumption that **writing facilitates learning**. They use a wide variety of frequent writing activities, closely integrated with the course material, to help students acquire the knowledge and the skills relevant to that course. Ideally, students in these courses will write in a variety of forms, including formal papers, which require polished prose, and informal, ungraded papers, which allow students to explore ideas and to experiment with writing strategies.

WI courses further assume that **writing is a process**, providing opportunities for students to prepare for, reflect on, and improve their writing. Revision of formal writing is an essential part of the process, since it helps students clarify their ideas, recognize their strengths, and learn from their experience. Feedback--from course instructors and sometimes from peers--is essential to guide and encourage revision and improvement.

Minimum Requirements

To be designated as writing-intensive, a course must fulfill the following minimum requirements. Exceptions to some of these requirements may be made for faculty who have compelling pedagogical reasons to adjust these requirements.

1. Writing assignments must be an integral, ongoing part of the course, and the writing assignments must constitute a substantial and clearly understood component of the final course grade. Assignments must be structured and sequenced in such a way as to help students improve their writing. Instructors in writing-intensive courses should not just assign writing; they should help students succeed with and learn from that writing.
2. There must be at least four discrete writing assignments spread throughout the semester, not including in-class essay exams.
3. At least one assignment must involve revision; the draft and revision may count as two discrete writing assignments. Exceptions will be allowed for instructors who instead choose to use a sequence of repeated assignments.
4. Students must produce a total of at least 14 double-spaced pages (c. 4000 words) of finished prose; this total does not include pages in drafts. When the writing is in a foreign language, a lower number of total pages may be appropriate.
5. Instructors must provide feedback on students' writing assignments.
6. Some class time must be devoted to preparing students to complete writing assignments. Some options include:
 - discussion of assignments and of evaluation criteria
 - analysis and discussion of sample student papers
 - discussion of writing in progress, using examples of successful work from students
 - peer group activities that prepare students to write a particular paper, such as sharing and discussion of plans, outlines, strategies, theses, drafts
 - discussion or presentations of students' research in progress
 - instruction about a how to write a particular type of paper or about solving a common writing problem

Strong Recommendations

1. Departments may wish to limit enrollment to 30 or fewer students per instructor.
2. The course syllabus should explain the writing-intensive nature of the course and should contain a schedule for writing assignments and revisions.
3. Assignments should follow a logical sequence and should match the learning goals for the course. Among the many options: assignments can move from more basic to more sophisticated kinds of thinking about course material; assignments can move from clearly defined problems toward more ill-defined problems for students to solve; assignments can move from familiar to new perspectives on course material; assignments can give students repeated practice that builds particular thinking and writing skills; complex assignments can be sequenced--students write proposals for research, write drafts, receive feedback on drafts, and then revise their papers.
4. Assignments should include time for students to prepare to write and time for them to reflect on their writing.
5. Courses should include some informal, ungraded writing (such as journals, freewriting, reading logs, questions, proposals, response papers . . .), in order to encourage regular practice with writing, to help students reflect on and synthesize course material, and to provide opportunities for students to discover promising ideas for formal papers.
6. Students should receive detailed written instructions for each writing assignment, including an explanation of the goals and specific evaluation criteria for that assignment.
7. Instructors should require students to keep all of their writing in portfolios and to submit their past writing with new papers, so that instructors can gauge and guide students' improvement as writers.
8. Instructors should hold at least one individual conference with each student.
9. Instructors should have students complete midterm and final evaluations of the writing component of the course.
10. Instructors should consult with the staff of the L&S Program in Writing Across the Curriculum about the design of the writing component of their courses.

Procedure for Designating a Course as Writing-Intensive

- If you feel that the course will meet the above guidelines, please go ahead and list it as Writing-Intensive.
- Ask the person in your department responsible for Timetable copy to add a footnote to your course listing. If possible, the footnote should be a “W,” explained in the note as a “Writing-Intensive Course.”
- Send Brad Hughes (6187 Helen C. White Hall, 263-3823, bthughes@facstaff.wisc.edu) a note or email message letting him know which course you’re designating as Writing-Intensive.

