Texas A&M International University
“Write On, TAMIU!” Committee

Writing Intensive Courses (WIN),
Creating Effective Writing Assignments,
and
Assessing Student Progress
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Information Regarding Writing Intensive Courses

General Description
To be designated as a “Writing Intensive” (WIN) course, a course must give writing a critical role in the course. Writing should play a central role in the learning process, and grades earned on written work should constitute a significant portion of the grade for the course. The course grade, in fact, should reflect to a great extent a student’s competence in mastering the expectations for competent written work in the discipline.

Specific Criteria
- The writing assignments in a WIN course must be significantly more “intense” than are the writing assignments in equivalent courses in the same discipline. Thus, a 3000-level English literature class may have a significant number of writing assignments, but it would not be a WIN course unless it required “significantly more ‘intense’” writing assignments (see #2 below) than do other 3000-level English literature courses.

- To have “significantly more ‘intense’” writing assignments generally means that the course requires more writing than do equivalent courses, but the quantity may not be significantly greater. The “intensity” could also come from having more demanding criteria for a successful paper. It could also come from requiring that students write multiple drafts of assignments. The “intensity” could also come from having evaluation criteria that is significantly more demanding. In general, the writing assignments for a WIN course should require higher orders of thinking and higher expectations for written expression than equivalent courses in the discipline, and they are clearly different from remedial and foundational skills.

- Sixty-percent (60%) or more of the course grade must be devoted to the evaluation of written work. This 60% may include stand-alone writing assignments, but it may also include essay questions on unit and final exams.

- Students in WIN courses receive appropriate feedback and response to their writing that is based on explicit criteria and is directed at improving the quality of their writing.

- Revision is built into the process of writing for ‘formal’ assignments, usually in terms of revisions of the same papers, or alternatively, in revisions accomplished through successive similar assignments.

- The writing assignments for a course should be appropriate to the discipline. Evaluation criteria should parallel the expectations for effective written expression for graduates working in fields in that discipline or a related discipline. Thus, a WIN course in the A. R. Sanchez, Jr. School of Business (ARSSB) might expect and reward brevity and simplicity, while a WIN course in English might expect and reward greater elaboration and development of an individual style.

- WIN courses will be designated on the course schedule and on student transcripts.

- WIN courses may be counted as “honors courses” for students admitted to the University Honors Program.
- Entering freshmen for the fall of 2010 must complete 3 WIN courses in order to graduate. One of these 3 courses must be in the discipline in which the student is getting a degree. One may be at the 2000-level, but the other 2 must be at the 3000-4000-level. This requirement is a minimum requirement only.

- Freshmen students enrolled prior to fall 2010 may take WIN courses after completing 12 semester credit hours or with permission of the WIN course instructor.

- WIN course proposals must be approved by the department chair and the dean prior to being placed on the schedule.

- WIN courses have a cap of 30.
Although it sometimes appears that grading essays is a “subjective” exercise, there are standards for evaluating written work. Students’ grades reflect how effectively these standards are met. The following clarifies the criteria that make written English exceptional (4), good (3), average (2), poor failing (1), or unacceptable failing (0).

The “2” Score:
The “2” paper provides a baseline for minimum standards. It is competent work that shows control of the basics; that is, the paper has a clear focus, an orderly development of ideas, a minimum number of distracting errors, and adequate style and sentence structure. A “2” paper addresses the topic and demonstrates that the writer has some command of the subject/genre. If offers a logical argument that may be thin in development and proof. The thesis is clear and accurate although not profound or original. There is a structural plan, but it may be imperfectly realized. The paragraphs are unified and coherent but not substantially developed. Sentences are orderly and complete but lacking in force and variety. Words are appropriately chosen but without freshness, originality, and vigor. A “2” paper may contain errors in grammar, usage, punctuation, and mechanics, but these can not be so numerous that they render the writing unintelligible.

The “4” Score:
The “4” paper possesses a predominance of positive qualities. It addresses the topic and meets the genre expectations. It presents an inventive perspective on the topic through a thesis that is unique or daring or an argument that is particularly well-developed with specific and relevant detail. The argument in an “4” paper is lucid, the organization is thorough and logical, and the ideas are fresh and developed on several levels. Sentences are forceful and varied as well as coherent and correct. Words are fresh, precise, economical, and idiomatic. Technical errors are infrequent, if at all. The prose is characterized by a stylistic sophistication that shows an awareness of the power of artful syntax and evocative metaphor.

The “3” Score:
The “3” paper, of course, stands between the “4” and “2.” It meets the assignment parameters/genre expectations, and the thesis is a step up from the commonplace. It is, however, lacking the significance, the originality, and the imagination that distinguishes the “4” paper. The paper demonstrates command of thesis, structure, syntax, and diction. It is generally more thorough in development than the “2” paper, but it lacks the stylistic sophistication of the “4” paper. Such a paper generally has few errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. There is another type of “3” paper, however, that ultimately suggests a greater promise. This type shows the special imaginative flair associated with the “4” paper, but it may have a disconcerting number of errors, which undercut the writer’s achievement.

The “1” Score:
The “1” paper is poor and failing. It may have a central ideas, but that idea may be garbled in expression or may reflect an inadequate understanding of the topic/genre. Evidence to develop the writer’s argument is either non-existent or so poorly presented that it carries little weight. While there should be a sense of paragraph structure, paragraphs are repeated rather than developed. Sentences are generally short with little variety. When the student attempts complexity, the syntax becomes tangled. Word choice is often simplistic and trite. Problems in syntax—agreement errors, mis-modification, and faulty parallel structure, for example—interfere with the writer’s ability to present and develop assertions. The “1” paper tends toward dullness or monotony; it offers neither a new idea nor a fortuitous expression. The “1” paper, unlike the “0,” shows that the writer has at least some understanding of the topic/genre and has succeeded to some degree in communicating a central idea to the reader.

The “0”:
A “0” paper may be unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. A paper should earn an “0” if it has no discernible thesis or if it fails to address the topic/genre. If the paper has a single key idea it may still earn an “0” if it lacks a structural plan or offers no real evidence to support its assertions. A paper may also fail if it is filled with misinformation. A paper that is difficult to read—that must be read and reread in a struggle to ferret out the meaning—is also a failure. Such a problem may arise for a number of different reasons such as inadequate command of the sentence, misleading punctuation, poor word choice, or faulty logic. When a reader is constantly distracted by the faults in the paper, failure is justified. Without question or hesitation, any evidence of plagiarism warrants a “0”.
Part I
Defining Writing for YOUR Discipline

1. If you were to characterize the kind of writing you do in your field/discipline to someone off the street, how would you describe it? Please be detailed and specific.

2. Why is that kind of writing expected in your field/discipline? Or, to put it another way, how does your discipline expect a writer to think/see/know, and why?

Part II

Referring to what you wrote above, think for a moment about an assignment you are currently using in your WIN course that asks students to write in a specific way; that is, disciplinarily. This could be the “final project” for the course.

The WHAT

1. TOPIC: What kind of assignment is it? Are you asking students to demonstrate basic knowledge? Apply a theory or idea to a new situation? Compare and contrast two ideas/theories/texts? Argue a position? Define a problem? Execute a solution? Interpret results or a story? Analyze an idea? Tell a story?

2. CONTENT: Is there a specific topic you want your students to focus on, or do students have a choice of topics? In other words, what would the content be for this assignment? How broadly or narrowly would you like your students to think?

The WHY

3. PURPOSE: What would you say is/are the purpose(s) of doing this assignment in terms of learning to write in your discipline? What would you like for your students to be able to do? Why this assignment?

**This is a crucial step. Once you clearly identify the reason behind doing the assignment, then students understand its important. They think, “Oh! So, I have to be able to do this kind of thinking and writing when I become a/an _________(fill in the blank).” It also will help you to articulate what you really want and then to hold students accountable for it.**
4. GOALS: Use this section to layout student-centered outcomes or goals. These are the measurable elements in the assignment, something that you can actually assess to see if students are being successful or not. For “Write On, TAMIU!” purposes, we want to measure the success of a student’s writing in the discipline.

The HOW

5. FEATURES of the FORM: What are you looking for, specifically? What would a member of your field/discipline expect to see in the writing? What style of documentation do you want students to use (APA, MLA, CMA, etc.) and what style of document design do you want students to use? Are there subheadings, sections headings, specific sections that need to be included? Are there model essays students can examine?

   (For example, Social Science research projects are usually characterized by labeled subheadings that include Introduction, Data, Method, Variables, Findings, Discussion and Conclusion. However, the features of an English research paper include introductory paragraphs that frame the context of the topic addressed, often including, but not necessarily requiring, a thesis statement, primary textual analysis and secondary source citations, acknowledgement of counterarguments, rebuttal of them, and finally several concluding paragraphs).

6. PARAMETERS: Will students submit their work via hardcopy or electronically? Where? How long should the paper be? Do you count pages or words? How many sources should be cited? How many drafts and revisions should there be? Is there a Writing Center visit required? What is the due date for the final product?

7. ASSESSMENT: How are you going to measure the success of the students? What are the means by which you will determine whether or not they have succeeded in achieving the goals?

Now that we have articulated what we want our students to do, why we want them to do it, and how we want them to do it, we can turn our attention to creating the assessment instrument to see how successful they are in meeting the goals.
Mini-Memoir

**Topic:** You are writing a narrative that both reflects your experiences with literacy and analyzes it for significance and meaning.

**Content:** You will be composing a mini-Memoir that focuses on a writing experience in your early education, sometime between K-12, although it does not mean you have to focus on formal education; there are informal ones, too. While there are no set parameters about the kind of experience—perhaps you will want to recount a positive experience where you were inspired to write or recount a time when you wrote begrudgingly—there are parameters about the time frame. William Zinsser, who wrote *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, explains:

Unlike autobiography, which moves in a dutiful line from birth to fame, memoir narrows the lens, focusing on a time in the writer’s life that was unusually vivid, such as childhood or adolescence, or that was framed by war or travel or public service or some other special circumstance….a good memoir is….a work of history, catching a distinctive moment in the life of both a person and a society. (15)

Your mini-Memoir, then, is a genre of writing that focuses attention on a specific moment in time and in a specific place. You will want to capture the setting, the circumstances, and the people who were involved and explain how these contributed to the overall experience.

**Purpose:** This kind of writing is often used as part of reflective practice: thinking about what you know, how you know it, and why you know it. It makes us consider the implicit and explicit forces at play in shaping how we use language, and the positive and negative results they have on our literacy development.

**Goals:** Students will be able to:
--Compose an engaging introduction, develop a narrative, and discover significance in an experience
--Compose an essay using features of the form, the writing process, and peer review
--Analyze personal experience for meaning beyond the obvious
--Exhibit dialectical thinking

**Features of the Form:** This genre of writing includes a personal, first-hand experience. While topics vary in this genre, the use of "I" is embraced as a necessary element in the writing, for it is, after all, your experience. You are not offering a “thesis” in this genre, for the purpose of this kind of writing is revelation and reflection, not persuasion. Writers of memoirs also will include other people’s ideas, particularly when the topic is appropriate (e.g., Richard Rodriguez examines his educational identity in terms of Richard Hoggart’s notion of the “the scholarship boy.”) In your introduction, you might capture the experience of that time and place using an anecdote, dialogue, or vivid setting that grabs the reader’s attention and interests him/her in reading further. Memoirs also rely on memory, which can sometimes be elusive, but writers of memoirs rely on their creative abilities to fill in the gaps as honestly as possible. This genre also requires that you reflect back on your previous experience from the position you are in today. In other words, in looking back on this experience you are able to gain insight and revelation for moving forward, highlighting the importance of the experience, articulating the “so what?” answer. Finally, you will need to incorporate one of the memoirs we have been studying in your own writing as a point of comparison/contrast.
Parameters: You will use MLA documentation style and document design.

Due Dates:
- Draft 1 for Self-Review: Wednesday, February 3 (Hardcopy in class) 2.5%
- Draft 2 for Peer Review: Monday, February 8 (meet in PH 211 for lab peer review) 2.5%
- Final Draft: Friday, February 12 (submit to TurnItIn.com by 6 pm) 10%

Length: 1000 words

Assessment: Your writing will be assessed on the following:
--Engaging introduction, developed narrative, exhibition of dialectal thinking, meaningful conclusion
--Use of vivid details, anecdotes, recollections of experience
--Articulating the significance or meaning of that experience
--Meaningful incorporation of another text
--Overall readability, grammar, mechanics, and MLA format
In Informative Report

**Topic:** You are writing to our class about an issue you deem important in understanding Contemporary Rhetorical Theory. The Informative Report merely informs the reader of the topic/issue without taking a side or evaluating the approaches. You should imagine yourself to be a journalist: you are providing your readers with an account of what the current research is the topic and who the major theorists are.

**Purpose:** One reason for this kind of writing is to give you the opportunity to do deep research: you identify an issue, learn about the different approaches to it, and identify the competing paradigms. Another reason for this kind of writing is to engage you in critical reading, writing, and thinking. That is, you will use research to inform your understanding about the complex nature of Rhetoric and situate yourself in the debate.

**Goals:** Students will be able to:
--Explain the complexities of some aspect of Rhetoric with an unbiased tone
--Explain leading theorists’ perspectives and alternative approaches
--Compose an essay using features of the form, the writing process, and peer review

**Features of the Form:** Informative Reports have a standard format. You will have an **introduction** where you contextualize the issues, explain why your reader has a stake in the topic, and then lead off with one of the “surprise values.” You will have **two “subsections.”** Finally, you will have a **conclusion** that briefly summarizes the report. You need to answer the “so what?” question: why should we pay attention to this topic, these issues? What is our stake in the issue? You also need to include these features:

“Surprise Value”: An Informative Report shares new, unknown knowledge or insights into the topic with the reader. What is “surprising” to you is likely to be surprising to us.

“Comprehensiveness”: The Informative Report is “comprehensive,” which means that you have to present the broad spectrum of issues. What are the “camps” of thinking on your issue?

“Support”: Use of examples, anecdotes, and illustrations to help explain the issues in concrete and, perhaps, practical ways.

**Parameters:** You will use MLA documentation style and document design. Use “visual rhetoric,” such as topic headings, to partition your essay into sections.

Due (in-class): Draft 1, Thursday, April 8 for peer review (HARDCOPY)
Final Draft, Tuesday, April 15 (due to TurnItIn.com by 6pm)
Length: 1200 words, including a Works Cited page, using at least 10 sources

**Assessment:** Your report will be assessed on the following qualities:
--Incorporation of 10 sources that are selective, yet comprehensive
--Clear structure that follows the genre and includes “features of the form”
--Overall readability, editing, grammar, and mechanics
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Organization &amp; Development</th>
<th>Style &amp; Sentence Structure</th>
<th>Grammar &amp; Mechanics</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Holistic Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Uploading Student Essays (Diagnostic & Terminal) to the QEP COLLECTION SITE

NOTE: Students must upload both their Diagnostic and Terminal Essays upon completion. They must follow these instructions very carefully.

1. Students must save their Word Document file on a pin-drive, using the following information:

   - Semester
   - Year
   - Course
   - Section
   - Instructor’s last name
   - D (for Diagnostic) OR T (for Terminal)
   - Student’s last name
   - Student’s Banner ID number

   *(EXAMPLE: Spring08ENGL4395222ScaggsDGarciaA000000000)

2. To upload their essays, the students must do the following:

   - Go to ANGEL and log on and enter the course
   - Go to Lessons (one of the top icons)
   - Click on QEP Drop Boxes
   - Click on Diagnostic Essays
   - Type in naming convention in TITLE box (*see example above).
   - Click on Attachments
   - Click on Browse. Find file.
   - Click on Attach.
   - Click on Submit. Click on Finished.
Uploading Diagnostic/Terminal Essay Scores to the QEP COLLECTION SITE

1. Go to ANGEL and log on.

2. Under the listing of courses, locate “All Year.”

3. Click on the following, sequentially:
   - QEP Collection Site
   - then, QEP Collection Folders
   - then, Semester
   - then, WIN
   - then, Your Course

4. Click on DIAGNOSTIC ESSAY SCORING SHEET DROP BOX. Click on the link that is labeled with your course. (this is a pre-filled Excel Sheet)

4. SAVE the Excel sheet to your desktop or pin-drive for easy retrieval.

5. OPEN the Excel sheet, and INSERT the six scores for each of your students’ papers:
   - Focus
   - Organization & Development
   - Style & Sentence Structure
   - Grammar & Mechanics
   - Research
   - Holistic Score

6. SAVE changes to the Excel sheet to your desktop or pin-drive.

7. Go back to DIAGNOSTIC ESSAY SCORE SHEET DROP BOX and FILL-IN the “Title,” following the naming convention below, omitting the brackets:
   [Semester][Year][Course][section #][Instructor's last name]D

8. Click on ATTACHMENTS, and then BROWSE for the saved file on your desktop or pin-drive and click on it.

9. Click on UPLOAD FILE, then click on FINISHED, and then click on SUBMIT.

You have completed the process!
“Write on, TAMIU!: University Writing Field Day”

When: Wednesday, October 20, 2010 from 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

What: On Wednesday, October 20, 2010, NCTE is honoring writers and their writing with its second annual “National Day on Writing.” To coincide with NCTE’s writing initiative, we propose a full day of writing inspired events for faculty, staff, and university students on campus from 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m..

Who: The entire university community can participate: All Departments, Faculty, Staff, and Students.

Why: Because the University focuses highly on fulfilling the QEP writing requirements, it is imperative to ensure that all involved parties do their part to help TAMIU fulfill this purpose. The Field Day would consist of a series of consecutive workshops, presentations, and games out on the Green each devoted in some way to writing. Each event would be fun, yet meaningful, as well as meet the writing needs of our students.

The purpose of this event is to inspire and encourage a positive perception of writing. This second annual event will support the goals of the QEP and encourage writing within and across the Texas A&M International curriculum. The following are ways this day will reinforce the university’s QEP goals:

QEP Tier I. Participation: Writing Fundamentals

The entire event will be inspired by writing and will teach the importance of writing and writing skills in a creative, fun, and non-threatening environment. Instructors are encouraged to substitute classroom lectures in favor of an outdoor “Writing Field Day” interactive workshop. Students and faculty can choose which workshop to attend, request content-specific sessions, or facilitate workshops themselves. Students can volunteer to participate in fun hands-on games that teach writing, as well as create writing that matters to them, thus encouraging the desire to improve writing.

QEP Tier II. Excellence: Creating a Culture of Writing

Everyone will be writing and/or presenting their writing, thereby creating a piece of writing for their portfolios. This event will create a culture of writers outside of the traditional classroom/lecture environment. Students will also be exposed to the diversity, creativity, and importance of writing. TAMIU promotes excellence, so this would be an opportunity to not only tell, but also show students how to excel academically and excel professionally via writing.

Participants will also benefit by having their writing submitted for publication for the TAMIU Writing Center literary journal: Reflections.
QEP Tier III. Success: Writing in the Community

This event will get the TAMIU community inspired about writing. This event will reiterate that writing is everywhere, in all disciplines, and that all people can write, and write well, over time. Thus, some of the activities will include technical writing instruction (résumés; business letters; scholarship/appeal/recommendation letters), as well as more traditional writing (lab reports; critical essays), and, finally, creative writing (poetry, fiction, drama). Furthermore, we envision workshops on what critical reading and thinking are and their connection to writing across the curriculum. Such workshops will inspire all students to think carefully about their writing.

How: To make the day not only fun but educational, we propose to include interactive writing workshops and presentations for those willing to share their work.

What we need from you: The most important aspect of this day’s success will come from outspoken support from administration and faculty across the curriculum for what this event is aiming to achieve: to change the perception of writing on campus, to make writing a priority of all members of this university community. Working together to encourage students to attend the activities, we can make writing a meaningful, important, and indispensable aspect of higher education.