

**General Education  
Writing Requirements  
Approved by Academic Senate on May 9, 2005**

**I. Goals of the General Education Writing Requirement**

- A. To improve our students' competence in writing clearly and communicating effectively.
- B. To enhance learning of the subject matters represented in the General Education areas by the addition of writing to the other typical methods of interaction with the subject content and other typical methods of evaluation.
- C. To encourage students, through appropriate writing assignments, to take increasingly greater responsibility for their own learning and to engage in disciplined, independent thinking about complex subject matters.
- D. To expose students to the written analytical and critical aspects of the methodologies of the General Education subject disciplines, and to give students an appropriate opportunity to participate in the writing aspect of the methodology of the discipline.
- E. To impress upon students the advantage and power they gain from developing a strong competence in writing, with respect not only to successful and satisfying completion of their university education but also to meeting their own career goals.

**II. Writing Guidelines**

- A. Every lower division General Education course requires a minimum of 1,000 words of writing in original student text (except for courses used to satisfy the quantitative reasoning requirement). One writing requirement must be a minimum of 3 pages in length on which faculty will provide meaningful, feedback so that students may improve their writing abilities during the course (see II.B. for examples of writing assignments that would meet this requirement). Faculty (not readers, teaching assistants, etc.) should provide ample suggestions for improvement, and in doing so, should consider using the General Education scoring guide for writing developed on campus in 2002. ([http://www.csufresno.edu/academics/documents/scoring\\_guide\\_writing\\_Rubric\\_060602.pdf](http://www.csufresno.edu/academics/documents/scoring_guide_writing_Rubric_060602.pdf))

Note: Class notes taken during the course of the semester cannot be used to satisfy this requirement.

- B. Every upper division General Education course requires a minimum of 2,000 words of writing in original student text. A substantial portion of the writing must be handled in one multipage assignment on which faculty will provide meaningful, feedback so that students may improve their writing abilities during the course (see II.B. for examples of writing assignments that would meet this requirement). Faculty (not readers, teaching assistants, etc.) should provide ample suggestions for improvement, and in doing so, should consider using the General Education scoring guide for writing developed on campus in 2002. ([http://www.csufresno.edu/academics/documents/scoring\\_guide\\_writing\\_Rubric\\_060602.pdf](http://www.csufresno.edu/academics/documents/scoring_guide_writing_Rubric_060602.pdf) )

Note: Class notes taken during the course of the semester cannot be used to satisfy this requirement.

- C. The intent of the requirement is to insure that a significant writing component to which faculty have responded in a meaningful fashion will be included in and integrated into the scheduled assignments.
1. At least half of the minimum writing requirement will consist of a sustained, multipage assignments (expository, critical, or both) of a particular subject matter. Such a sustained treatment of a subject matter can take on a wide variety of forms.
  2. The content of these assignments should be both rigorous in the use and application of the content and methodology of a subject matter, and relevant to the concerns of our students.
  3. Writing assignments and instructor response to student writing should stress the conventions and expectations of writing in the academic setting as well as in the business and professional world, including attention to audience and purpose, discipline-specific conventions of style and organization, and mastery of standard grammar and mechanics. Instructor response should reference the General Education scoring guide for writing developed on campus in 2002.

### **III. Clarifications**

#### **A. Definitions**

1. “1,000 words” translates into approximately 3½ to 4 double-spaced typed pages (250-300 words per page), varying with margins and size and style of font. “2,000 words” translates into approximately 7 to 8 double-spaced typed pages (250-300 words per page), varying with margins and size and style of font.

2. This word-count/page-count refers to total minimum words or pages over the course of a semester.

## B. Interpretation

1. The requirement could be satisfied by a single assignment provided there are multiple drafts with feedback from the instructor.
2. An instructor who judges that a student needs more help in the mechanics of writing than the instructor is able/willing to provide should take the following steps:
  - a. In notifying the students early of deficiencies in their writing skills, the instructor could stress that doing well in the course will require that the student get assistance.
  - b. Inform the student of the offices on campus that provide writing instruction. (See Section V.)
  - c. Some learning assistance labs or writing workshops require very early enrollment.
3. Some examples of writing assignments that would satisfy the writing requirement are:
  - a. An essay on an assigned or student-selected topic, where the goals, structure, and methods of the essay are clearly specified by the instructor
  - b. A complete write-up and analysis of a laboratory experiment
  - c. A report of a data-gathering session (observational or interview-based)
  - d. An ethnography
  - e. An analysis of works of literature in traditional literary genres
  - f. An analysis of the ethical, social, and economic implications of a local or global geologic, geographic, or meteorological trend
  - g. A critique of a current political movement, national or international
  - h. An analysis of a social problem such as racism or sexism in a particular context or locale from a scientifically-based methodology, e.g., sociology, political science, psychology
  - i. An ethical analysis of a contemporary moral problem
  - j. A report of interactions with works of art, music, theatre or dance and
  - k. A description and analysis of the effects of verbal or nonverbal communication upon specific kinds of human relationships; such as those between persons of different sexes, races, or nationalities.
  - l. Written answers to complex essay questions involving application of a subject matter on an in-class or take-home exam
  - m. A full-sentence preparation outline for a major oral presentation.

#### **IV. Strategies for Assisting Faculty in the Use of Writing Assignments in General Education Courses**

##### **A. Preliminary comment:**

1. It is the charge and the commitment of the General Education Committee to construct a General Education Program that has maximum possible benefit to our students inasmuch as it provides the foundation of their university experience as an education for life. In addition, the committee is fully aware of the present workload of faculty. Considering all factors, it remains the conviction of the committee that the writing requirement in General Education courses adds significantly to the value of the General Education courses which students are required to take.
2. In response to well-justified faculty concerns about quality of education and workload pressures, the committee is open to hearing suggestions from faculty and eager to provide assistance and suggestions to faculty toward the goal of successfully meeting the requirement in a way which is truly beneficial to our students and at the same time does not inappropriately burden faculty.

##### **B. Constructing writing assignments**

1. It is the belief of the committee that one of the best and most creative contributions faculty can make to enhance the value to our students of General Education courses, with respect to satisfying the writing requirement, is in the constructing of exciting and relevant writing assignments. Such an assignment is more interesting to grade as well as more interesting to complete. An assignment can be both exciting and intellectually rigorous. All faculty know that this is so, because we are all directly aware of the intellectual pleasures we experience in the practice of our disciplines. We remember the excitement we felt when we became captivated by our chosen fields and committed our professional lives to them. We surely can construct an assignment that gives our students a glimpse of how our subject discipline can engage the mind and life of a well-educated person and citizen, whether or not the student decides to enter into one's own discipline as a career.
2. Writing assignments should contain a complete description of the components, methodology, and goals of the assignment, as well as the criteria/standards against which they shall be evaluated.
3. Many faculty find journal assignments helpful to the students; and where this is so, such a journal assignment would constitute a partial satisfaction of the General Education writing requirement. Journals comprised primarily of class notes may not be used to meet this requirement. Instructor feedback must be provided throughout the semester.

4. Long before the end of the semester, faculty should comment on and return to students writing assignments or drafts of assignments to insure that students will have the opportunity to improve their writing abilities during the course. Such assignments may take the form of iterative assignments, a portfolio or revised work, or other forms that allow faculty to assess whether feedback has been effective. Faculty are encouraged to utilize resources available through Teaching, Learning & Technology (TLT) to develop appropriate and effective writing assignments for General Education courses.

### C. Evaluating writing assignments

1. Faculty will structure writing assignments so as to maximize the amount of meaningful feedback students will receive over the duration of the course.
2. Comments and feedback by faculty on writing assignments need not be lengthy, but should be given to students in a timely fashion, so that students have the possibility of improving their writing abilities during the course.
3. The focus of the feedback should be on content, accuracy, completeness, and clarity of expression. Feedback on organization, style, grammar, and mechanical aspects of composition is also necessary. Students should become familiar with the manual style of the course.
4. Instructor response should reference the General Education scoring guide for writing developed on campus in 2002. ([http://www.csufresno.edu/academics/documents/scoring\\_guide\\_writing\\_Rubric\\_060602.pdf](http://www.csufresno.edu/academics/documents/scoring_guide_writing_Rubric_060602.pdf)) The advantages of such an evaluation technique are as follows: it provides a standard against which all papers in a given assignment are evaluated, thus promoting fairness and uniformity in grading; it allows faculty to give comprehensive feedback on all aspects of the assignment quickly and clearly; it gives students an evaluation of the quality of their work on every aspect of the assignment, even if that evaluation is only a check mark in a box on the grid.
5. Positive reinforcement for work well done should always be included in evaluations of assignments, along with the criticism and suggestions for improvement. Consistent with the aims of the requirement, faculty should impress upon students the value of good writing skills. Positive feedback, as well as suggestions for improvement, are essential for providing this encouragement. Ideally, after receiving an evaluation of their writing, students should still want to write and want to write better.

## **V. Sources of Additional Help**

A. For students who need help in basic writing:

1. English Writing Center, c/o Department of English, Ext. 8-0334. Early enrollment typically is required.
2. Developmental Learning Resources Center, drop-in tutorial services (Lab School 137), Ext. 8-3052.
3. University Tutorial Services, Ext. 8-3052.

B. For faculty:

1. Annual writing workshops, available to a limited number of faculty by reservation, usually held mid-August. Faculty have rated these workshops as very helpful in several ways, including specific suggestions for the construction of challenging assignments which will meet the writing requirement and the development of evaluation techniques which do not require excessive faculty time.