

The Upper-Division Writing Exam (UDWE)

Information Sheet

To determine whether you should take the exam and to prepare for it, carefully review the following information regarding the Upper-Division Writing Exam (UDWE).

1. What is the UDWE?

Passing the Upper-Division Writing Exam is one of two ways that students can pass California State University, Fresno's Upper Division Writing Skills (UDWS) requirement. The UDWS requirement is a system-wide mandate; it is impossible to waive or modify this requirement. The UDWS cannot be fulfilled by a class or test taken outside the CSU system, nor can it be satisfied by taking a course at a CSU campus at which the student has not matriculated. The UDWE requires students to answer two questions through essay responses. Students have one hour to complete each essay. Consult the two sample questions at the end of this document to learn how students are asked to respond to these questions.

2. When should I take the UDWE?

It is imperative that students satisfy the UDWS within two semesters after completing 60 units. It is the responsibility of each student to satisfy this requirement in a timely fashion. Students who wait until their final semesters of study often find that they are unable to graduate when they had planned to, because they have failed to satisfy the requirement. *If you have waited until your senior year to satisfy this requirement, your graduation may be delayed.*

3. What if I don't pass the UDWE?

Students who do not pass the UDWE are able to take the exam a second time. Students who fail the UDWE a second time *must* enroll in an approved "W" course to fulfill the requirement.

4. If I have received good grades on my college essays and/or done well on previous times writing exams, will I pass the UDWE?

Past performance on writing assignments and essay exams is no guarantee that a student will perform well on the UDWE. The criteria for passing the UDWE are designed specifically to measure upper-division writing competence by means of this exam.

5. How will my essay be scored?

Each of the two essays students write for the UDWE is read by different faculty readers who assess the essay in what is called a “blind” reading. That is, after extensive on-site discussion of sample essays and the application of the scoring guide to these essays, two different faculty readers review and assess each response. Faculty readers assess each essay according to specific criteria and without access to the other readers’ scores. Readers consider each essay holistically (that is, in such a manner that no single aspect of the essay unduly outweighs other aspects of the writing) in light of how well the student demonstrates the following writing skills:

- The writer understands the prompt and thoughtfully and thoroughly responds to it.
- The writer demonstrates a clear sense of purpose and maintains a strong focus.
- The writer organizes his or her ideas effectively, providing a useful introduction and a conclusion, as well as effective paragraphs and transitions.
- The writer supports his or her claims with specific details and appropriate examples.
- The writer composes a persuasive, logical, and fully developed essay response.
- The writing is generally free of mechanical errors and reveals a clear grasp of proper sentence structure and a mature writing style.

Each faculty reader will score the essay as demonstrating the features of upper-division writing competence. In light of the above-mentioned criteria, each essay is determined to be *Competent*, demonstrating *Developing Competence*, or *Incompetent*. For students to pass the UDWE, at least two faculty readers must assess the writing as *Competent*, and not faculty reader should assess any one of the essays as *Incompetent*.

6. Is my score final?

Yes. Students either pass or fail the UDWE. All assessments are final and are not subject to appeal. A question leader assigned to supervise the reading will consider and resolve any scoring discrepancies before the scores are calculated and submitted to the Testing Office.

7. How can I prepare to take the UDWE?

You can prepare for the exam by studying the following sample questions and allowing yourself the opportunity to answer the questions in writing within the given time constraints. Any advice you receive from a counselor may prove helpful in determining whether you should take the UDWE; however, such advice is no guarantee that you will perform well on the UDWE.