

Writing in the Core Curriculum September 2013

(Revision of May 2008 Document)

Overview

This document provides an overview of strong writing as a Core learning goal. It seeks to specify different levels of writing skill, to describe stages of writing-intensive instruction within the Core Curriculum, and to define some next steps for the development of classroom practices that foster writing skill in our students. This document includes five sections and an Appendix:

- I. Defining Writing in the Core Curriculum
- II. Basic Writing-Intensive Courses in the Core Curriculum (Part of the Foundations sequence required for all students)
- III. Additional Writing-Intensive Requirement (Part of the Cross-Disciplinary Knowledge and Skill Requirements required for all students)
- IV. Writing in the Capstone
- V. Faculty Preparation for Infusing Writing-Intensive Elements into Courses

Appendix A. Writing Assignments at the Basic and Advanced Levels

The CCC conceives of this document as a living one which will be revised as the collective thinking of the faculty concerning writing and writing instruction evolves.

I. Defining Writing in the Core Curriculum¹

Writing is a hallmark of academic course work, and the faculty of Canisius College expects students to learn to write well. The faculty shares a common assumption that strong writing demonstrates a student's awareness of and control over the rhetorical situation of assignments. Generally, that is, the faculty expects skilled writers to demonstrate through their writing that they:

1. understand the audience and purpose to which their writing must be directed
2. develop logical arguments integrating appropriate ideas and evidence
3. can produce readable and correct prose
4. work with integrity

Most courses at Canisius include some writing assignments, and these assignments contribute to students' learning in particular academic fields as well as enhance their writing skills. Students are required to write many different kinds of papers so as to demonstrate their understanding of course content and to develop as critical thinkers able to strongly represent their ideas in writing.

While students should expect to write in all courses, the College ensures as well that all students receive specific instruction for developing strong writing skills. Thus as part of the Core Curriculum, students are required to take writing-intensive courses at both the basic and the advanced level. When courses are designated writing-intensive, this means that faculty will:

1. Use writing not simply to demonstrate knowledge at the end of a unit or a semester but also to help students learn course content, working through the knowledge and methods specific to their disciplines. Courses designed as “writing to learn” generally include numerous short and informal writing assignments that help students to think through key concepts or ideas and that contribute to the production of more formal writing. Writing will be a majority of the course grade.
2. Create assignments that make clear the rhetorical situations to which students must respond.
3. Employ various opportunities for seeking, evaluating, and using appropriate information as strategies of the writing and learning processes.²
4. Emphasize revision as a process that includes a range of practices through which students formulate and reconsider ideas, theses, and arguments. The concept of revision includes short informal writing, full drafts, as well as re-writes of formal writing.
5. Provide sustained and timely commentary about students’ writing.
6. Emphasize that Standard English is important in all assignments, especially in formal writing, and will direct students to appropriate support resources (e.g., handbooks, websites, and the Tutoring Center).
7. Emphasize the importance of academic integrity, encouraging students to practice integrity consistently and directing students to appropriate support resources (including the Canisius College Code of Academic Integrity at <http://www.canisius.edu/academics/integrity/code/>).

By making the commitment to specific writing instruction at both basic and advanced levels, the College ensures that the faculty at-large can reasonably expect that students who have completed these courses are familiar with the concepts and practices of strong writing as defined in this document.

II. Basic Writing-Intensive Courses in the Core Curriculum: First-Year Seminar 101 and English 101 (Part of the Foundations sequence required for all students)³

Two Foundations courses are designated as writing-intensive at the basic level, Explorations of Academic Writing: Special Topics (FYS 101) and Writing about Literature (ENG 101). Because FYS 101 is a more general course than ENG101, students are required to take the former before taking the latter.⁴ In each of these courses, students will write at least 15 pages of formal polished prose, as well as additional pages that might lead to the polished prose.

Originally, FYS 101 and ENG 101 were conceived of as embedding the following learning goals:

1. Students will demonstrate understanding of course content through written assignments.
2. Students will demonstrate understanding of audience and purpose, as well as develop logical arguments integrating appropriate ideas and evidence.
3. Students will demonstrate a writing process.
4. Students will demonstrate grammatical correctness.

5. Students will achieve a basic level of information literacy and demonstrate academic integrity.

The learning goals above have evolved into the following course-specific learning goals for FYS 101 and ENG 101:

FYS 101:

At the conclusion of this course, successful students will be able to:

1. Read and critically analyze college-level texts
2. Construct a coherent, thesis-driven project
This project could be a paper, an essay, an oral presentation, or a Web page or other multimedia work. Presumably, whatever specific form the project takes, writing is at the heart of it.
3. Present ideas clearly in writing
4. Revise ("re-see") their own written work to improve it in ways that go beyond the mere correction of surface errors
5. Demonstrate information literacy
6. Demonstrate knowledge of course content: This goal, and the ways in which its achievement is demonstrated, will vary from section to section.

ENG 101:

At the conclusion of the course, successful students will be able to:

1. Read and critically analyze college-level literary texts
2. Construct a coherent, thesis-driven researched project on a literary topic
3. Write clearly
4. Revise ("re-see") their own written work to improve it in ways that go beyond the mere correction of surface errors
5. Demonstrate information literacy
6. Demonstrate knowledge of course content

While the most concentrated teaching of writing in the Foundation courses is expected to be done in FYS 101 and ENG 101, it is highly recommended that faculty members teaching PHI 101 and RST 101 make at least one writing assignment in their course, so that students may have regular practice in developing their writing abilities not only in FYS 101 and ENG 101 but throughout their Core Foundation courses.

III. Additional Writing-Intensive Requirement (Part of the Cross-Disciplinary Knowledge and Skill Requirements required for all students)⁵

In addition to the two courses required at the basic level, the Core Curriculum requires students to take one additional course at an upper-level (200-level or above) that is designated as Writing-intensive.⁶ The Writing-intensive course may be taken as part of major requirements or from offerings used to fulfill other requirements of the Core Curriculum.

Upper-level writing-intensive courses presume that students share the common foundation in strong writing: that writing must be an appropriate response to a specific rhetorical situation and that they have engaged in those practices for at least a year. Writing instruction will continue to be an integral part of the courses designated as writing-intensive. Students should expect to complete at least 20 pages of formal polished writing.

In upper-level writing-intensive courses, students will continue to practice the requirements of strong writing, with an expectation that they will do so with growing facility and sophistication. Further, students will be asked to write according to the styles and methods specific to the disciplines through which the writing-intensive courses are offered.⁷ This includes defining for students the expectations for clarity, concision, development, and citation specific to the discipline in which the course is offered.

IV. Writing in the Capstone

The core capstone is a place to demonstrate and further develop the learning that students have done through the Core Curriculum.⁸ A developed writing skill is one kind of learning that students should expect to demonstrate in the core capstone. It is expected that by the time students take a core capstone they are thoroughly familiar with and have practiced continuously the following:

1. that writing is a way to learn course content, disciplinary styles and formats, and discipline-specific methodologies;
2. that strong writing requires an understanding of the rhetorical situation of assignments;
3. that formal writing requires a process for writing that includes revision;
4. that formal writing emerges through a process that includes seeking and appropriately using information;
5. that strong writing is characterized by reasonably correct grammar and punctuation; and
6. that strong writing is accomplished with integrity.

Instructors of core capstones will expect that students have learned the above and can demonstrate those skills with fluency and consistency. Writing as such is not taught in the Core Capstone courses. Formal writing is expected; writing to learn is not expected, though it is also not prohibited.

V. Faculty Preparation for Infusing Writing-Intensive Elements into Courses

This document seeks to provide an overarching sense of the place of writing within Core learning goals. It serves as well to provide faculty with information regarding writing instruction. To that end, the CCC will be organizing a series of events to facilitate understanding about and development of writing-intensive instruction. These events include:

- Campus-wide information sessions on improving students' writing abilities at the College
- Faculty sessions on developing writing in the Foundations courses, Advanced Writing-intensive courses, and Capstones
- "Assignments and Practices" exchange website
- Sessions for enhancing discipline-specific writing

As with any academic endeavor, opinions differ about the nature and function of practices fostering strong writing. The above listed efforts are meant to enhance discussion and development of the writing goal in an open and collegial manner.

¹ In addition to discussion with the Foundations working group (Capezzi, Kasbohm, Krawiec, Meyer) and the Writing in the Core working group (Capezzi, D'Amico, Desiderio, Gibert, Hodin, Kasbohm, Krawiec, Morris, Reber, Schroeder, Wolf), curriculum documents from the following colleges and universities were consulted in the writing of this overview: Monmouth University, The University of Wisconsin-Madison, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and The College of New Jersey. Also consulted was the WAC Clearinghouse at Colorado State University.

² Please consult the document "Information Literacy at Canisius College: Goals and Expected Outcomes across Four Years of the Undergraduate Curriculum--2013" for the full relevance of this issue and the range of ways to employ strategies for developing students' abilities in locating, selecting, and using information.

³ Because FYS 101 and ENG 101 are both writing-intensive, it is recommended that they be taken in two consecutive semesters as early as possible. Students may exempt ENG 101 with appropriate credit for prior college experience or specific standardized test scores; there is no external substitute for FYS 101. Students in All-College Honors take a set of core requirements determined by that program.

⁴ The following is the exact language from the "Structure of the Core Curriculum, March 23, 2007": FYS 101 Explorations of Academic Writing: Special Topics: A course emphasizing the production of academic writing through critical analysis of challenging texts. Topics will be drawn from a wide range of academic disciplines. Stress on writing to enhance learning, finding and evaluating information, practicing academic integrity, negotiating the process of revision, and using correct grammar and syntax. ENG 101 Writing about Literature: Strategies for reading and writing about literature (poetry, drama, fiction, literary essays). Emphasis on understanding and interpreting primary texts, rather than reading criticism. Intensive attention to writing, including the development and organization of interpretive essays, as well as the use and evaluation of sources.

⁵ Students in All-College Honors take a set of core requirements determined by that program.

⁶ The following is the exact language from the "Structure of the Core Curriculum, March 23, 2007": Writing intensive: One course with significant emphasis on using writing as a way to learn course material. Development of students' writing abilities will be a main focus of courses so designated.

Students will engage in the process of drafting, re-writing, and editing with extensive commentary and assistance of instructors, producing compositions that are better developed, better organized, and more stylistically sophisticated than in FYS 101 and ENG 101.

⁷ Some examples are as follows: Example 1: Writing-intensive courses offered in the English Department: a. Students will learn to find, analyze and explain a secondary source. b. Students will learn to integrate the information from a secondary source into their understanding of a primary text. c. Students will prepare writing for differing audiences and purposes. d. Students will write at least 20 pages of formal writing. Example 2: Writing-intensive courses offered in X department: This ought to become an appendix of ideas to assist people developing courses, not a slavish list to exclude some ways of instructing writing.

⁸ The following is the exact language from the "Structure of the Core Curriculum, March 23, 2007": One course that enables students to reflect upon the goals of the core curriculum and to develop leadership and a sense of the value of public service.