How Well Are Our Students Writing After One WI Course?

Teaching Arts Lunch
February 7, 2014
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Cate Rowen
Alice Hearst
Minh Ly
Why Do We Assess First-Year Writing?

• To discern how well a class writes
• To identify the specific strengths and weaknesses of a particular class
• To help us create a culture of writing, and to help us build consensus around the quality of the writing we see and our assessment standards
• To help the writing committee focus faculty development
• To help the writing committee develop protocols and curricula that support all writers, especially weak writers
Why Do We Assess First-Year Writing?

• To help us identify weak writers before they arrive on campus, so we can use Orientation and Liberal Arts Advising to make recommendations to them about which type of WI course is most appropriate for them
How We Assess First-Year Writing
2013 Rubric

• Statement of the thesis (or main goal)
• Paragraph development
• Complexity of thought
• Command of written English
• Overall
2013 Rubric (expanded)

2. **Paragraph development**

*Exemplary:* Paragraphs are consistently well structured and developed. They are organized around a clearly stated, well-positioned central argument, which is thoroughly and convincingly supported with evidence. The evidence is fully explicated and analyzed. The sentences are coherent (they are clearly linked) and unified (they stay on topic).

*Adequate:* Paragraphs are well structured but manifest lapses in development. They exhibit all the essential elements—argument, evidence, explication, and analysis—but, often enough, these elements could be developed more fully and/or in a more orderly manner. The sentences may show minor lapses in coherence and unity.

*Needs work:* The paragraphs are poorly developed. They barely manifest the essential elements, or not at all. The sentences often show major lapses in coherence and unity.
Smith College
Writing Intensive Assessment Scoring Sheet (2013)

Case ID # 136
Reader ID # J6

Directions for portfolio readers: After reading the portfolio, follow these three simple steps: 1. complete the grid below by checking the level of achievement for each category; 2. circle the large font Needs Work, Pass, or Exemplary (the overall score); and 3. give the student some feedback about her work. Portfolios rated Needs Work and Exemplary will be read at least twice. Please refer to the rubric for definitions of the categories at each level of achievement.

Step 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Needs Work</th>
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<tbody>
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Step 2.

Needs Work  Pass  Exemplary

Step 3. Comments:
An introductory study. Some details can be more clearly contextualized (as with "top" + "bottom" layers) to substantiate conclusions about them, implications drawn from them.

Step 4. How strongly do you agree with the student's assessment of her own writing?

Strongly Agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly Disagree
### Smith College Writing Intensive Assessment Scoring Sheet (2013)

**Case ID:** 136  
**Reader ID:** 16

**Directions for portfolio readers:** After reading the portfolio, follow three simple steps: 1. complete the grid below by checking the level of achievement for each category; 2. circle the large-font Needs Work, Pass, or Exemplary (the overall score); and 3. give the student some feedback about her work. Portfolios rated Needs Work and Exemplary will be read at least twice. Please refer to the rubric for definitions of the categories at each level of achievement.

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#### Step 2.

**Needs Work**  
**Pass**  
**Exemplary**

#### Step 3. Comments:

An introductory study. Some details can be more clearly contextualized (as with "1st. and 2nd. layers") to substantiate conclusions about them, implications drawn from them.

#### Step 4. How strongly do you agree with the student's assessment of her own writing?

- Strongly Agree  
- Agree  
- Disagree  
- Strongly Disagree

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**Smith College Writing Intensive Assessment Scoring Sheet (2013)

**Case ID:** 136  
**Reader ID:** 17

**Directions for portfolio readers:** After reading the portfolio, follow three simple steps: 1. complete the grid below by checking the level of achievement for each category; 2. circle the large-font Needs Work, Pass, or Exemplary (the overall score); and 3. give the student some feedback about her work. Portfolios rated Needs Work and Exemplary will be read at least twice. Please refer to the rubric for definitions of the categories at each level of achievement.

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#### Step 2.

**Needs Work**  
**Pass**  
**Exemplary**

#### Step 3. Comments:

Clear and organized, but choppy and passive sentences and analysis that opens up so many unanswered questions. Text feels quite unsophisticated—oversimplified.

#### Step 4. How strongly do you agree with the student's assessment of her own writing?

- Strongly Agree  
- Agree  
- Disagree  
- Strongly Disagree
Smith College
Writing Intensive Assessment Scoring Sheet (2013)

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Needs Work Pass Exemplary

Step 3. Comments:

An introductory study. Some details can be more clearly contextualized (as with "fig. + "bottom" layers) to substantiate conclusions about them, implications drawn from them.

Step 4. How strongly do you agree with the student's assessment of her own writing?

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Smith College
Writing Intensive Assessment Scoring Sheet (2013)

Case ID#: 136
Reader ID#: 17

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Step 2.

Needs Work Pass Exemplary

Step 3. Comments:

Clean + organized, but choppy passive sentences and analysis that opens up so many unanswered questions. Poor ends quite unsophisticated — oversimplified.

Step 4. How strongly do you agree with the student's assessment of her own writing?

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
Agree!
Smith College
Writing Intensive Assessment Scoring Sheet (2013)

Directions for portfolio readers: After reading the portfolio, follow these steps: 1. complete the grid below by checking the level of achievement for each category; 2. circle the large box Needs Work, Pass, or Exemplary (the overall score); and 3. give the student some feedback about her work. Portfolios rated Needs Work and Exemplary will be read at least twice. Please refer to the rubric for definitions of the categories at each level of achievement.

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### Step 2

- **Needs Work**
- **Pass**
- **Exemplary**

### Step 3

Comments:  
- Have thesis or purpose? If not, how?  
- Is it clear? Is it focused? How? What changes?  
- Is the writing logical? How? 
- How is the writer's voice internal? How does it feel?  

### Step 4

How strongly do you agree with the student's assessment of her own writing?

- Disagree
- Strongly Agree
- Agree

Language skills

- [ ] 1强
- [ ] 2中
- [ ] 3弱

Please note that the assessment is based on the student's work.
### Writing Intensive Assessment Scoring Sheet (2013)

**Case ID#: 160**  
**Reader ID#: 2**

**Directions for portfolio readers:** After reading the portfolio, follow three simple steps: 1. circle the large box Needs Work, Pass, or Exemplary (the overall score); and 3. give the student some feedback about her work. Portfolios rated Needs Work and Exemplary will be read at least twice. Please refer to the rubric for definitions of the categories at each level of achievement.

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<td><strong>Statement of thesis or main goal</strong></td>
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</table>

**Step 3. Comments:**
- Suggesting organization of ideas, use of examples, and argumentation.
- Weak thesis statement and topic sentence.
- No clear thesis.
- Lack of depth here.

**Step 4. How strongly do you agree with the student's assessment of her own writing?**
- **Strongly Disagree**
- **Disagree**
- **Agree**
- **Strongly Agree**
**Step 1.**

<table>
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**Step 2.**

- **Needs Work**
- **Pass**
- **Exemplary**

**Step 3. Comments:**

- Need the student to provide analysis of what went wrong.
- Sentences must be original. They feel-placeholder.

**Step 4. How strongly do you agree with the student's assessment of her own writing?**

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

---

**Step 2.**

- **Needs Work**
- **Pass**
- **Exemplary**

**Step 3. Comments:**

- Clearly pass?
- Paragraphs lack unity and topic sentence.
- No clear thesis. Little depth here.

**Step 4. How strongly do you agree with the student's assessment of her own writing?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
Disagree!
Can’t we work this out?
Can’t we work this out?
Can’t we work this out?
Writing Assessment 2012-13: Summary of Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Needs Work</th>
<th>Pass</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Overall Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Thesis</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph Development</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>59.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity of Thought</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>59.5%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command of English</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Score</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=164

Smith College Office of Institutional Research.
Writing Assessment 2012-13:
Overall Score* by WI Course Type

- Needs Work
- Pass
- Exemplary

First Year Seminar
(N=109)
- Needs Work: 25.7%
- Pass: 57.8%
- Exemplary: 16.5%

English 118
(N=55)
- Needs Work: 36.4%
- Pass: 60.0%
- Exemplary: 3.6%

*Difference is statistically significant (p<.05 chi-square)
Smith College Office of Institutional Research.
Writing Assessment 2012-13: Overall Score by First Generation Students

Differences are not statistically significant.
Smith College Office of Institutional Research.
Writing Assessment 2012-13: Overall Score by SAT Writing Score

- Low SAT Writing Score (<670) (N = 52)
  - Needs Work: 30.8%
  - Pass: 61.5%
  - Exemplary: 7.7%

- High SAT Writing Score (670 or higher) (N = 53)
  - Needs Work: 24.5%
  - Pass: 54.7%
  - Exemplary: 20.8%

Differences are not statistically significant.
Smith College Office of Institutional Research.
Writing Assessment 2012-13: Overall Score by Reader Rating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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Differences are not statistically significant.
Smith College Office of Institutional Research.
Writing Assessment 2012-13: Overall Score* by Citizenship

*Difference is statistically significant (p<.05 chi-square)

Smith College Office of Institutional Research.
Writing Assessment 2012-13:
Overall Score by Country

Needs Work | Pass or Exemplary
---|---
Other International (N=12) | 58.3% | 41.7%
Chinese Citizen (N=13) | 38.5% | 61.5%

Differences are not statistically significant.
Smith College Office of Institutional Research.
Reader Feedback/Conversations

- Do we agree about what qualifies as good writing?
- Importance of writing instruction
- Role of ENG and FYS
- Value of seeing a broad range of writing outside of our own classes
- Value of reading others’ assignments
- Use of assessment at individual level
Writing Assessment (next)

- Writing committee decided to continue assessment of best piece of writing from WI courses every three years.
  - Year 1: conduct assessment
  - Year 2: report results and start acting on findings
  - Year 3: implementation of changes
- Start planning for departmental collection of data for student writing (seniors) in order to assess writing development.
Writing Assessment at Smith

• What have we learned?
• Where do we go from here?
• What are our major goals for the assessment of writing long-term?
• What do faculty need to know about student writing?