

## Writing Plan Narrative, 2nd Edition

*Please retain section headers and prompts in your plan.*

Department of Psychology - Writing Plan Narrative, 2nd Edition  
Summer 2022  
Summarized by WEC Liaison, Professor Benita Jackson

### **Introductory Summary:**

*Briefly describe the reasons this department became involved in the WEC project.*

The PSY department became involved with the Writing-Enriched Curriculum (WEC) program for several key reasons. One reason is that in 2013 the department overhauled the curriculum to more effectively sequence courses across introductory, intermediate, and upper-levels so students would have a better-scaffolded academic progression through the major in skill development, and smaller classes at the 200-level. Writing is such a core skill for the major that engaging with the WEC process was a natural next step in refining a larger curricular revision. A second reason for involvement with WEC is that, while writing is a skill that faculty in our department value, we could use support in developing and implementing our pedagogical approaches across the departmental curriculum. Though writing well is fundamental for being skilled enough to meaningfully contribute to the field, most of our faculty developed our own writing abilities through trial and error, and received neither formal field-specific writing instruction nor formal pedagogical training about how to teach writing within the major. More broadly, as a department we value strong writing as a well-honed skill with two key impacts that transcend the discipline: strong writing is a bedrock of liberal arts training, and effective writing instruction can be a vehicle for advancing social equity and inclusion by ensuring that all of our students—regardless of background and preparation—are given rich opportunities to develop this key academic skill.

*Key findings and what is new in the 2nd Edition. Key implementation activities proposed.*

In Year 1, the key findings resulting from our department’s WEC process meetings were that we articulated five overarching areas of writing in psychology, and started a first-draft rubric operationalizing those ideas into measurable criteria that could be used and adapted in grading across courses at each level. This “flexible uniformity” in grading criteria for writing assignments is designed to facilitate clarity for both faculty and students in what constitutes good writing, and offer a specific way to diagnose and address places where students need to develop their skills—and where faculty need support to teach more effectively. In Year 2, starting from assessments conducted in Summer 2021 of 300-level seminars from Spring 2021, we developed



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the rubric into something more usable by refining the categories and dropping those (such as drafting and mindsets) that were not subject to grading. Our key implementation for Year 3 will be to use the newly-refined rubric resulting from our work in Year 2 in our classes Year 3, Fall 2022. We will use the evolving rubric both for assessment and also prospectively as a teaching tool. In Spring 2023, we will discuss how well it worked and further refined it as needed. Our department voted that we all would try it out, so hopefully we will have a sense of how useful it is across levels (introductory, intermediate, upper-level) and content areas (Mind/Brain, Health/Illness, Person/Society) of the curriculum.

### Section 1: DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC WRITING CHARACTERISTICS

*What characterizes academic and professional communication in this discipline?*

- *There have not been substantial revisions to this section of the Writing Plan.*
- There have been substantial revisions to this section of the Writing Plan. (Discuss these explicitly.)

### Section 2: DESIRED WRITING ABILITIES

*With which writing abilities should students in this unit's major(s) graduate?*

- *There have not been substantial revisions to this section of the Writing Plan.*
- *There have been substantial revisions to this section of the Writing Plan. (Discuss these explicitly.)*



### Section 3: INTEGRATION OF WRITING INTO UNIT'S UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM

*How is writing instruction currently positioned in this unit's undergraduate curriculum (or curricula)? What, if any, course sequencing issues impede an intentional integration of relevant, developmentally appropriate writing instruction?*

- **There have not been substantial revisions to this section of the Writing Plan.**
- There have been substantial revisions to this section of the Writing Plan. (Discuss these explicitly.)

### Section 4: ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT WRITING

*What concerns, if any, have unit faculty and undergraduate students voiced about grading practices? Please include a menu of criteria extrapolated from the list of Desired Writing Abilities provided in Section 2 of this plan. (This menu can be offered to faculty/instructors for selective adaptation and will function as a starting point in the WEC's longitudinal rating process.).*

- There have not been substantial revisions to this section of the Writing Plan.
- **There have been substantial revisions to this section of the Writing Plan. (Discuss these explicitly.)**

Assessment of student writing was the substantive focus of Year 2. Over the years, concerns around grading writing from students included the perception that students were writing for professors' idiosyncratic preferences instead of more objective criteria across the department that reflected the larger field. Faculty would like to disabuse students of this sentiment as well as— independent of honorable intent—disentangle ourselves from acting in accordance with “grading by whim.” In particular, over the course of especially the 3 meetings we held Spring 2022 we developed and refined a working rubric.

A key “aha” moment in Year 2 came during our final meeting when we realized that not only might we use the rubric for assessment but also as a tool for teaching. The two broad categories for writing in the discipline that we distilled were “Content” and “Process.” The developed and refined rubric can be found here:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/17Vzm3xk8xZ7Ta8lf24W0OIBZ490WY1R4J8MoxwPh tQE/edit?usp=sharing>



**Section 5: SUMMARY OF IMPLEMENTATION PLANS, including REQUESTED SUPPORT and RELATION TO PREVIOUS IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES**

*What does the unit plan to implement during the period covered by this plan? What forms of instructional support does this unit request to help implement proposed changes? What are the expected outcomes of named support?*

At the final general (non-WEC) department meeting of the Year 2, we discussed the pros and cons of incorporating the writing rubric into all levels of our curriculum. We eventually settled on implementing it in the Fall 2022 (in whatever way instructors see fit), and discussing effectiveness Spring 2023. The vote on the proposal was seven in favor and two abstentions. The liaison will be in touch closer to Fall 2022 about meeting for those who are interested to share perspectives about rubric implementation—likely once in September and once toward the end of the term. After those meetings, we will have a sense of what if any instructional support faculty are willing to receive. At the very least, having a WEC representative at our meetings will be important support to give us an outside perspective. It might be we invite WEC or Jacobson Writing Center staff to discuss best practices around using rubrics, but that remains an empirical question. It also might be that in Year 3 Spring, or sometime in Year 4, the department presents the working rubric to undergraduates (say, in an open forum) to elicit feedback.

**Section 6: PROCESS USED TO CREATE THIS WRITING PLAN**

*How, and to what degree, were a substantial number of stakeholders in this unit (faculty members, instructors, affiliates, teaching assistants, undergraduates, others) engaged in providing, revising, and approving the content of this Writing Plan?*

The content of this Writing Plan was developed across 4 WEC-designated meetings over the year with participation from a sizable portion of the tenure-ladder and contingent faculty. Strongest representation came from junior faculty. Though we missed the presence and counsel of senior faculty who were unable to attend, given that the future of the department is with the junior tenure-ladder faculty, that they were fully represented means that WEC as a long-term project is more likely to be seen through. While senior faculty were likely constrained by duties elsewhere in 2021-22, their sustained input is welcome next year and in years following, whether during WEC meetings or more informally. More detailed integration between meetings was led by WEC liaison Benita Jackson, with individual consultation from Randi Garcia, Yael Granot, and Michele Wick, and especially WEC Personnel Sara Eddy. Undergraduates were not included in this phase. In Year 3 they will be, because at the least students will be exposed to the working rubric in their courses. Faculty likely will elicit more student feedback Year 3 and beyond.



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However, in Year 3 the department will be running on minimal staffing because of leaves and likely will not have capacity for this until Year 4 because faculty bandwidth will be taken with handling our heavy advising loads and a search for a tenure-track cultural/developmental position.

Of note: Year 2 was the second pandemic year. Our department's advising load has been heavy and especially in Fall 2021, student satisfaction with college courses (across the country) were at an all-time low, perhaps because of the strains of learning while back on campus for many was still burdened by the larger world situation. Thus, it was with unexpected but palpable pleasure that we ended discussing the working rubric with such excitement around the possibilities for teaching writing.

**Meeting 1, October 2021** - Department Faculty: Katherine Clemans, Patty DiBartolo, Randi Garcia (Liaison while Benita Jackson was on sabbatical), Michele Wick, MJ Wraga. WEC Personnel: Sara Eddy

**Meeting 2, February 2022** - Department Faculty: Katherine Clemans, Jill de Villiers, Patty DiBartolo, Randi Garcia, Yael Granot, Benita Jackson, Brianna McMillan, Michele Wick. WEC Personnel: Sara Eddy

**Meeting 3, March 2022** - Department Faculty: Katherine Clemans, Jill de Villiers, Randi Garcia, Yael Granot, Benita Jackson, Brianna McMillan, Michele Wick, MJ Wraga. WEC Personnel: Sara Eddy

**Meeting 4, April 2022** - Department Faculty: Randi Garcia, Benita Jackson, Brianna McMillan, Michele Wick, MJ Wraga. WEC Personnel: Sara Eddy

