

Writing Intensive Courses

Guidelines for Smith Faculty Members from the Committee on College Writing

Preamble

Smith College recognizes in three specific ways the central importance to a liberal education of writing well. First, we provide intensive individual tutoring for any and all students, and a variety of means of academic support for professors, at the Jacobson Center for Writing, Teaching, and Learning. Second, we offer a wide selection of writing-rich courses across the curriculum. Third, we require that in her first year at the College each student take, in a field of her choice, at least one course designated as writing intensive and encourage further work in writing at the intermediate and advanced levels.

Writing-intensive courses at Smith College, notably distinct from courses termed “creative writing” and from courses in which writing is assigned but not evaluated *as writing*, are offered in a variety of disciplines by professors who believe that thinking and writing are inextricably linked and thus that the explicit teaching of writing in fact enriches the content of the course.

These courses, with enrollments that will normally not exceed twenty, will follow paths and draw on techniques in accordance with instructors’ interests and expertise, but certain goals, requirements, and strategies will be common to all.

*Writing intensive courses will devote a significant amount of class time
to teaching students to write with precision, clarity, economy, and some degree of elegance.
That is to say,*

- 1) to articulate a thesis or central argument, or to create a description or report, with an orderly sequence of ideas, apt transitions, and a purpose clear to the intended audience;
- 2) to compose paragraphs that are appropriately focused and fully developed with evidence, explanation, and analysis;
- 3) to identify and to evaluate, when appropriate, suitable primary and secondary sources for scholarly work, demonstrating awareness of library catalogues and databases and of the values and limitations of internet resources;
- 4) to incorporate the work of others (by quotation, summary, or paraphrase) concisely, effectively, and with attention to the models of citation of the various disciplines and with respect for academic integrity;
- 5) to edit work until it is orderly, clear, and free of violations of the conventions of standard written English (grammar, usage, punctuation, diction, syntax).

***To achieve these goals,
a writing-intensive course requires:***

1. students to write a minimum of 15 pages of finished work (not counting drafts and revisions) in at least 3 papers, one of which must be at least 5 pages.
2. students to write in drafts and instructors to provide feedback in at least 2 papers while writing is still in process so that students may incorporate instructors' comments and thus prepare better work.

***In addition, a writing-intensive course will employ
some of the following strategies:***

- Using peer review, tailored to the goals of particular assignments, with prompts enabling students to become constructive readers (“What evidence offered in support of the central argument do you find most compelling?”) as opposed to unhelpful readers (“What did you like best about this essay?”).
- Convening individual conferences devoted to students' writing.
- Employing the “workshop method”—that is, reserving class time for discussing and evaluating writing.
- Incorporating a range of “low stakes” writing activities that will not be evaluated but will inculcate in students the notion that one may both learn to write and write to learn.

Instructors will make students aware of the opportunities for assistance available at the Jacobson Center for Writing, Teaching and Learning.