

Reading and Composition Curricular Goals and Guidelines ¹

Approved by the L&S Executive Committee on April 13, 2011

Curricular Goals

Reading and Composition (R&C) courses should be designed to encourage students to write frequently and attentively enough for them to experience how writing extends thought. Through frequent writing, class discussions, and conferences, 1A and 1B will introduce relatively inexperienced writers to the process, pleasure, and discipline of composing. Because frequent practice in writing and reading is the focus of the requirement, work produced by the students should serve as a primary text.

In their overall design and instructional activities, these courses should provide frequent occasions for students to practice the interconnectedness of reading, thinking, and writing.

There are a number of skills that are essential to effective writing and reading. These skills are learned by and for writing, and they are extended by and for reading.

They include:

- *Establishing increasing authority over whole structures.* For writers, this means expressing a full and balanced presentation of their ideas. For readers, this means comprehending the relation of the parts to the whole.
- *Moving from the concrete to the abstract and vice versa.* Writers control the interplay of the abstract and the concrete to engage the mind of the reader and to involve the reader progressively in the development of the writer's idea. In principle, what students practice as writers they heed as readers. They recognize the move from the abstract to the concrete not only in unfolding ideas but also in establishing patterns of analysis and evaluating the evidence they propose for their readings and analyses.
- *Practicing the distinction between observation and inference.* This skill trains writers and readers to replace fruitless opinionating with original perception sustained by pertinent evidence; it also trains them to establish increasing intellectual independence.
- *Practicing rewriting.* Writers discover in rewriting a way to open up and to clarify what is in their idea. Rewriting offers writers the opportunity to understand and to explain the fullness of their ideas. Habitual rewriting means that students know how to spend time working on an idea until they make it their own, until, that is, they establish authority over it.
- *Practicing rereading.* (Rereading in this sense parallels rewriting.) Readers with a

¹ This document was excerpted and revised from the November 6, 1989 R&C Guidelines.

similar appetite for the fullness and understanding that rewriting provides come to expect such fullness and understanding from texts other than their own, and they reread these texts to discover and appreciate new dimensions of that fullness.

Guidelines

The first semester (typically 1A) requirement is normally defined as a four-unit course to be taken during the freshman year requiring the composition of a series of short essays. The second semester (typically 1B) requirement is normally defined as a four-unit course to be taken during the sophomore year requiring less frequent longer essays with revision to be practiced throughout the semester.

Writing

Both the first and the second semester courses stress writing and revision, reading and rereading.

The first semester course offers students frequent practice in a variety of forms of discourse leading toward exposition and argumentation in common standard English. The course develops the students' fluency with sentence, paragraph, and thesis-development skills, with increasingly complex applications. A short essay is normally assigned at the beginning of the semester to assess the students' writing skills. Students will be assigned a minimum of 32 pages of writing, to be divided among a number of short essays (2-4 written pages). The students will be required to revise at least three of these essays.

The second semester course aims at developing students' fluency in writing longer and more complex papers, with specific attention to the development of their research skills and their ability to incorporate source material effectively. A short essay (approximately three typewritten pages) is normally assigned at the beginning of the semester to assess the students' writing skills and to refresh students of the skills practiced in the first course. Students will then be assigned two progressively longer essays (totaling at least 16 typewritten pages), with at least an equal number of pages of preliminary drafting and revising.

Reading

Because learning to write cannot be done outside of a context of reading, frequent practice in both writing and reading should be the focus of both first and second semester courses. Readings should be of two kinds: 1) published materials, of both a literary and non-literary character, including expository or argumentative essays not unlike the sort that students are asked to read and write during their college careers; and 2) essays produced by students themselves. The instructors of these courses are encouraged to construct focused reading lists that introduce students to a coherent area of intellectual inquiry. Readings should be substantive, chosen to spark critical thinking and model the elaboration of complex critical arguments, as well as to facilitate student writing projects. For example, they might focus on issues of student interest, provide particularly good examples of writing skills, represent literary experiences that are valuable in their own right, or integrate reading and writing in any number of other pedagogically-sound ways. Texts chosen for R&C courses should be intellectually accessible to lower-division students without prior work in the discipline, as well as complex enough to invite and reward rereading in the spirit of the R&C curricular goals.

Final Assessment

The final exam requirement for R&C courses should be satisfied through an alternative form of assessment (i.e. paper, project, portfolio) that demonstrates the students' mastery of the art of writing and revision in relation to the specific reading requirements of the course. This alternative form of assessment should be due no earlier than the first day of the final exam week, as required by the academic senate. The paper, project or portfolio may be included in the minimum 32 pages of writing stipulated above.