

**State Council for Higher Education for Virginia**  
**Assessment of Competencies**  
**WRITTEN COMMUNICATION**  
**UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON**  
**August 15, 2022**

**Definition.** The ability to develop and communicate ideas effectively in writing as appropriate to a given context, purpose, and audience. It includes a variety of styles, genres, and media, including computer-mediated communications.

**Learning Outcomes.** Written communication proficiency was evaluated by measuring students' abilities in four categories as expressed in essays written for a Writing Intensive course in one's major discipline.

Students will demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of the varying strategies to convey arguments, main ideas and support/evidence.

Students will demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of the varying patterns of composition organization and development.

Students will demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of the audience, the role of the writer, and rhetorical strategies.

Students will demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of writing conventions and correctness.

**Standard(s) for Proficiency.** Of the four rating categories (limited proficiency, minimal proficiency, average proficiency, and high proficiency), at least 85% of students will receive an overall rating of *average* or *high*. It is also our goal for each student to score at least 85% for *each* of the four learning objectives. The assessment provides a point of comparison to gauge the proficiencies of a cross-section of all of our students in written communication.

**Description of Methodology Used to Gather Evidence of Proficiency.** Essays were collected from Education 311, a writing seminar with our Writing Intensive designation in the Education program; and four courses in Psychology, one at the 300 level and three seminar courses at the 400 level. All are writing intensive. Of the 68 students enrolled, 47 papers were collected and evaluated (some of the seminar courses in Psychology were group projects). The papers were scored after semester's end using the four-point rubric noted above. Scoring is blind, using non-instructors outside of course grades.

**Summary.** Results of this assessment are presented in the tables below. The results of the Writing Intensive assessment for 2022 are compared to 2019, the last time this competency was reported to SCHEV. The first two learning outcomes, "Argument" and "Organization" both meet the benchmark of 85% of students at *average* or *high proficiency* and in both cases, results have improved over 2019's results. The benchmark of 85% is not met for two of the learning outcomes, "Voice" and "Editing." Editing has improved over 2019, although still not at the benchmark; and "Voice" was scored lower than 2019.

Seventy-five percent of students received an overall rating of 11 or higher (out of a possible 16), which is also below the benchmark selected.

## Results of Written Communication Assessment by SLO, 2019 and 2022

	Arguments 2019	Arguments 2022	Organization 2019	Organization 2022	Voice 2019	Voice 2022	Process 2019	Process 2022
Proficient	86%	87%	84%	89%	71%	60%	63%	70%

The results broken out by assessed course provide some suggestions that might be valuable to the individual disciplines.

## Results of Written Communication Assessment by SLO, by course assessed

	Arguments	Organization	Voice	Process
Educ 311	73%	82%	45%	45%
Psych 350	94%	94%	71%	71%
Psych 411	100%	100%	100%	100%
Psych 412	100%	100%	100%	100%
Psych 413	83%	83%	33%	75%

## Recommendations:

These results should be discussed with the new writing center director. The new director may have some ideas about why certain elements of writing have scored highly than other learning outcomes, while not vastly below the benchmark, have not been as successful. Given that the group project papers scored 100% across the board, it is possible that grading via this format might make it difficult to understand the nuances of the work of individual writers, and we should discuss whether we want to continue to assess group papers in this way. The Education Associate Dean suggests that the recruitment of an unrelated Education professor to do assessment may help understand assessing voice for education papers, which can be challenging if one is not familiar with the potential audiences.

With the writing center director and faculty assessors and instructors, we should discuss how to assess the “writing process” learning outcome more precisely as it has been stumbling block for assessors. It has been historically evaluated as related to writing “errors,” which is not what is meant by this learning outcome.

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## Scoring Scale and Rationale

Scoring Criteria	Limited to No Proficiency (1)	Somewhat Proficient (2)	Proficient (3)	High Proficiency (4)	Score/ Rating
<b>(LO1) Ideas:</b> Students will demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of the varying strategies to convey arguments, main ideas, and support/ evidence.	No evidence of a controlling idea; no substantiation of argument; no evidence or support; no references.	Some evidence of a controlling idea but may wander from the argument; some evidence or support; minimal substantiation of argument	Adequate controlling idea or argument; satisfactory references; satisfactory substantiation of argument; adequate examples and support.	Exceptional controlling idea or argument; significant amount of references and/ or evidence/ support; excellent substantiation of argument	P= 3 or higher  F=2 and below
<b>(LO2) Organization:</b> Students will demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of the varying patterns of composition organization and development.	Does not demonstrate a working knowledge of varying patterns of composition organization and development; argument or main idea is difficult to decipher and/ or follow; little to no development of the argument/ main idea occurs.	Demonstrates some knowledge of the varying patterns of composition organization and development; argument or main idea is minimally evident; some development occurs but not enough to clearly substantiate the argument/ main idea.	Demonstrates an adequate knowledge of the varying patterns of composition organization and development; argument or main idea is evident; development of this main idea or argument occurs but is not sophisticated to which collegiate writing should aspire.	Demonstrates a superior knowledge of the varying patterns of composition organization and development; argument or main idea is clear and concise; development of this argument/ main idea occurs with sophistication.	P= 3 or higher  F=2 and below
<b>(LO3) (Appropriate Writer's Voice):</b> Students will demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of appropriate voice, tone, and rhetorical strategies for a specified audience.	Does not demonstrate knowledge of audience awareness or use of appropriate rhetorical strategies; word choice and tone may not be appropriate for specified audience; slang and clichés may be used.	Demonstrates some knowledge of audience awareness and/ or use of appropriate rhetorical strategies; may lapse into inappropriate tone or word choice periodically; some use of slang and clichés may be used.	Demonstrates an adequate knowledge of appropriate audience awareness and use of rhetorical strategies; minor lapses in tone and word choice may occur within the paper.	Demonstrates a superior knowledge of appropriate audience and use of rhetorical strategies; skillfully employs rhetorical strategies when needed; word choice and tone are appropriate for the intended audience; is not without a few minor lapses in voice and tone.	P= 3 or higher  F=2 and below
<b>(LO4) (Process):</b> Students will demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of the writing process.	Does not demonstrate a working knowledge of the writing process; shows no substantial evidence of the writing process.	Demonstrates some knowledge of the writing process but the evidence may be inconsistent.	Demonstrates a satisfactory knowledge of the writing process; there may still be errors and inconsistencies, but the process is still clear and understandable.	Demonstrates a superior knowledge of the writing process; while the essay is not error-free, the process is clearly defined and consistent.	P= 3 or higher  F=2 and below
<b>Total Score/ Rating</b>					<b>/16</b>

An overall score of 11 or higher is passing while a score of 10 or lower is not passing.