

THE BUCKNELL UNIVERSITY WRITING REQUIREMENT AND PROGRAM

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BACKGROUND

In May 1981 the Bucknell University faculty provisionally approved a new graduation requirement for writing, to be fulfilled by writing courses in the disciplines. Following two years of experimentally developing and offering such courses, the faculty in May 1983 adopted the requirement and program described below, to go into effect with the freshman class entering in August, 1983. Some modifications were made to the legislation in response to an internal review conducted in the 2004/2005 and 2005/2006 academic years; these changes were approved by the faculty in April 2006 and are reflected in this document.

THE REQUIREMENT

Every candidate for any undergraduate degree must successfully complete three writing courses to be selected from courses designated W1 (one course) and W2 (two courses).

THE PROGRAM

I. Two Aims

Designated writing courses in the University Writing Program have two purposes: to develop expository skills and to teach the use of writing as a means for creating and processing knowledge. Such courses aim to develop students' mastery of written language so that they may discover, organize, and communicate their knowledge.

II. Two Types of Courses

Courses intended to fulfill the University writing requirement are of two types: foundation (W1) and practice (W2).

W1 courses are introductory. They have as one of their primary objectives the teaching of fundamental techniques in writing expository prose. These courses are not to be remedial.

W2 courses are distributive. They offer students guided practice in writing in differing fields across the curriculum. They teach the skills necessary to write for the course/discipline.

W1 and W2 courses may be offered in any department.

III. Summary of Criteria for W1 and W2

Purposes	Common Traits	Differentiating Traits	
		W1	W2
To develop expository skills	1. Writing instruction	Recurring, frequent instruction	Instruction as needed
	2. --in writing process	Introduce writing process	Support writing process
	3. --in expository skills	Teach skills	Support skills; teach techniques needed for the course/discipline
	4. Frequent and substantial writing	No Difference	
To teach the use of language as an instrument for thinking	5. Writing to learn, as well as to communicate	Introduce writing as thinking	Use writing to teach concepts in the course/ discipline

IV. Specific Criteria for W1

W1 courses will:

1. Include recurring instruction in writing.

Methods of instruction will vary. There is no single model for teaching a W1 course. But whether the instructor is assisted in teaching by student peer editors or by tutors, whether to the whole class, to small groups, to individuals, or in combinations of these methods, the important aim is to reinforce the development of skills by frequent instruction (weekly, if possible).

2. Teach the writing process: planning, composing, revising, editing.

By teaching writing as stages in a process, by presenting strategies for each stage, and by allowing time for reworking, instructors enable students to improve thought and to improve communication.

The writing process often varies by discipline and by instructor. Consequently, it is essential that faculty be clear about what is expected of students in the drafting/revising process as well as about the criteria by which writing assignments will be evaluated. Students should be held accountable for meeting these expectations and for treating each stage of the process with an appropriate amount of care.

3. Teach and emphasize the importance of the following expository skills:

- addressing intended audiences
- achieving purposes
- organizing the whole paper, paragraphs and sentences
- choosing appropriate words
- punctuating and spelling correctly

Since the W1 course is the foundation course in composition, it should teach those expository skills that are a) generally recognized elements in higher-level discourse, and b) needed by the majority of students entering Bucknell. Analysis of a writing sample collected from the class of '86, in August 1982, indicated that students entering Bucknell need instruction and practice especially in the first four items on the above list.*

Instructors of W1 courses will stress the importance of these expository skills and students will be held accountable for demonstrating mastery of these skills in their writing. When providing feedback to students on late-stage drafts or final submissions of written work, instructors will point out recurring errors and require students to address these problems.

A standard on-line (electronic) composition handbook¹ will be available to all students and faculty at Bucknell. As a first resource for addressing writing problems, instructors may refer students to the handbook. For more serious problems, the instructor may work with the students individually. Writing Center tutors will similarly be available to help students remedy flaws in their writing mechanics. (See Section VIII.) For wide-spread problems, the instructor may wish to use class time to point out and correct patterns of error.

*Results of the writing sample are reported in The 1982 Writing Skills Assessment of Bucknell Freshmen and Its Implication for Writing Across the Curriculum.

4. Require frequent writing from each student. The instructor, who may be assisted by student peer editors or by tutors, should see a substantial amount of this writing.

For mastery, students need to write more than instructors alone can read. However, a substantial amount of writing should receive response to aid revision. The response need not be time-consuming, but it should be prompt and frequent (weekly, if possible). Response to work-in-progress should occur in addition to evaluation of finished writing for grading.

5. Teach the use of writing as thinking and as a means of creating and processing knowledge.

W1 courses include writing assignments that cause students to engage in intellectual work. Types of assignments may include essays, abstracts, journals, emails, question formulation, field notes, lab notebooks, or short answers to prepared questions, all designed to use language as a resource for inquiry.

V. Specific Criteria for W2

W2 courses will:

1. Provide writing instruction.

Instructors will determine which writing skills or techniques are demanded by writing for the course and will provide instruction in them. Methods of instruction will vary, but appropriate assistance must be provided by instructors, who may be assisted by student peer editors or by tutors.

Instructors of W2 courses will hold students to a high standard in regard to expository skills (see Criterion #3 for W1 courses). Instructors will identify rhetorical problems and/or patterns of error and will work with students either individually or in conjunction with the

¹ The Composition Council will continue reviewing handbook options in 2006-2007.

Writing Center. (See Section VIII.) Instructors may also refer students to the on-line composition handbook² where appropriate.

2. Support the writing process.

W2 courses recognize the benefits of writing in stages to clarify meaning and improve communication. Whenever possible, the schedule of writing assignments will require drafting and re-drafting, will provide response, and will allow time for revision.

The writing process often varies by discipline and by instructor. Consequently, it is essential that faculty members be clear about what is expected of students in the drafting/revising process as well as about the criteria by which drafts will be evaluated. Students should be held accountable for meeting these expectations and for treating each stage of the process with an appropriate amount of care.

3. Teach the techniques of writing needed by students or expected in the discipline.

W2 courses recognize that students enter a course with writing skills on which to build but which may need reinforcement, development or adaptation in a new context. Instructors will teach writing techniques expected in the discipline and will provide review of strategies and methods of research as needed.

4. Require frequent and substantial writing.

W2 courses recognize the need for practice in writing. Students will write often, in multiple assignments or in preparation for one large assignment. Many types of writing (reports, abstracts, summaries, interpretive or argumentative essays, notes, documentation, manuals, fiction, poetry) are appropriate to W2 courses.

5. Use writing to teach subject matter.

W2 courses emphasize that writing enables acquisition and retention of information and ideas. Whenever appropriate, students will be required to put course materials in their own words to explore, internalize and synthesize subject matter in writing. This kind of writing should occur in addition to finished, graded work.

VI. Order of Courses

Students will take one W1 course, for instruction in the first year. They will take two W2 courses, for sustained development throughout the four undergraduate years and for guided practice in differing disciplines, including the major.

W1 courses must be taken in the first year. W2 courses should normally follow W1 courses. A W2 course will count toward the University writing requirement if it follows a W1 (or, in exceptional cases, is concurrent with a W1). At least one W2 course must be taken after the first year. Some majors may require a W2 in the last two years.

VII. Substitutions

² The Composition Council will continue reviewing handbook options in 2006-2007.

Entering students, including those with Advanced Placement English, who wish to substitute a W2 for the W1, must petition the dean of their college to be assessed individually for permission. Such students will take three W2 courses.

VIII. Writing Referral System

In order to build on the working relationship between faculty member and student as a course progresses, a referral system is available. Faculty members should seek to identify ***as early as possible in the semester*** any student who would benefit from additional one-on-one writing tutoring. The faculty member should meet with the student to explain the referral and to identify the areas of writing with which the student needs the most assistance. For a referral to be successful, the student must understand the need for the additional help and must be motivated to follow through with the writing tutor.

The instructor and student will jointly complete a referral form, and copies of the form will be available for the faculty member, the student, and the Writing Center. The referral form will include check boxes that identify the student's problems, some blank space in which the faculty member can provide more detailed information, and a description of upcoming writing assignments in the course for which the student will need help.

The Writing Center will arrange tutoring for the student, either with Writing Center staff or with trained student writing tutors. In some circumstances, it may be beneficial for the student to work with the same one or two tutors throughout the semester to develop a relationship. The faculty member should monitor the situation during the remainder of the semester, consulting with the student and providing feedback to the Writing Center. If deemed useful, the relationship between the student and the Writing Center may continue past the end of the semester.

IX. Writing Course Distribution

It is expected that courses designated W1 and W2 will be widely distributed across the curriculum. Faculty advisers will therefore encourage their advisees to take W courses in a variety of disciplines.

All departments will share in offering W courses. The Academic Council will assure sufficient numbers and types of courses.

X. Administration of the Writing Program

The Composition Council will determine policy for the Writing Program and will coordinate its activities. The Council will have six members who will be appointed by the Committee on Instruction. One of these members will come from the Department of English, one from the College of Engineering, and one from the Library. The other three will be chosen from three different divisions in order to gain the widest University participation. In addition to these six members, the Council will have as permanent voting members the Director of the Writing Program and the Director of the Writing Center. The Council of Deans will appoint non-voting consultants to the Composition Council from the College of Arts and Sciences and from the Engineering College. The Composition Council will be a sub-committee of the Committee on Instruction. Terms of the six non-permanent members will be for three years. By default, the chair of the Composition Council will be the Writing Program Director; if the Writing Program Director is unable to serve as chair, then the Council will elect a chair.

The Writing Program Director and Writing Center Director will both be appointed by the Provost in consultation with the Academic Deans, the Department of English, and the

Composition Council. The Writing Program Director will be a member of the faculty and the Writing Center Director will be a member of the Writing Center staff. Both the Writing Program Director and the Writing Center Director will report directly to the Provost.

The functions and duties of the Composition Council will include:

1. approving plans for assessing student writing;
2. reviewing the assessment data and evaluating the effectiveness of the Writing Program;
3. maintaining criteria for designating courses as W1 or W2;
4. assisting the various departments and faculty members with the design of their writing courses;
5. reporting annually to the Committee on Instruction on the operation of the Writing Program and proposing, for faculty action, any changes in the Writing Program that it wishes to recommend.

The Director of the Writing Program, as a member of the Composition Council, will share in the duties enumerated above, and in addition will:

1. implement the policies determined by the Composition Council;
2. serve as a liaison between the faculty and the Writing Center;
3. consult with and advise faculty members on the design of writing courses;
4. report regularly to the Provost (and annually to COI and to the faculty) about the status of the Writing Program.
5. work with the Writing Center Director to provide support to faculty teaching writing courses.

The Director of the Writing Center, in addition to his/her normal Writing Center duties, will:

1. administer the day-to-day operations of the Writing Center and supervise Writing Center staff;
2. administer the Writing Center budget;
3. report regularly to the Provost about activities of the Writing Center;
4. work with the Writing Program Director to provide support to faculty teaching writing courses.

The Composition Council charges the Writing Center with the following:

1. to provide individual assistance, tutorials, and workshops for students;
2. to conduct faculty development workshops to assist faculty in the teaching of writing courses.
3. to consult with and advise faculty members on the design of writing courses.

XI. Identification of W Courses

The Composition Council will approve courses to be designated 'W' according to the criteria developed by the Council. Faculty members, departments, or programs may propose individual courses for approval. The intention of the Council will be to help all courses meet the criteria. The Council will consult with instructors, departments, and programs as needed to interpret the criteria and to assure that 'W' designations have essentially common meaning across the University. No course may be designated 'W' without approval.

The Council will approve new 'W' courses. Regularly offered 'W' courses will be re-announced each year, and reviewed by the Council every three years to assure the integrity of the Writing Program.

XII. Review of the Program.

The Committee on Instruction fully reviewed the writing program and reported to the University faculty in 1987. Another review was conducted in the 2004/2005 and 2005/2006 academic years and reported to the faculty in April 2006.