

**Assessment of General Education Writing Competency  
2006**

Program/Department: Language and Literature      Submitted by: Kenneth Tiller

Period Covered by Report: Fall 05-Spring 06

**Key Learning Outcomes: What should students be able to do AFTER completing this program? State learning outcomes simply and in measurable terms. Please limit the number of outcomes to five or fewer.**

**If your department reports on General Education competency areas (writing, foreign language, quantitative reasoning, scientific reasoning), please use this form to report on those areas in a separately generated document.**

1. Students should organize their writing effectively.
2. Writing should have a unifying principle or idea.
3. Paragraphs should be well developed.
4. Sentences should be complete and grammatical with varied structures.
5. Word choice should be effective, and diction should be appropriate to the context.
6. Primary and secondary material should be integrated, and sources appropriately cited.

**Please link learning outcomes to the College's Desired Accomplishments/Goals.**

1.1	(skills necessary to continue to educate themselves)	Outcomes 1, 2, 3, 5
1.2	(assume responsibility of citizenship)	Outcomes 1, 2, 3, 5
1.3	(appreciate and respect diverse cultures)	Outcomes 2, 5
1.7	(value honor and integrity)	Outcome 4
3.3	(strengthen the quality of K-12 education)	All outcomes

**Through what courses/assignments will you ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn this? List key courses, capstones, internships, experiences, etc.**

ENGL 101                      Composition  
ENGL 102                      Composition  
ENGL 103H                    Honors Composition  
ENGLISH COURSES NUMBERED 301-326

**Please list all tools used for assessing student achievement (CRTs, MFTs, capstones, exit interviews, external reviews, etc.). Choose a minimum of three tools.**

1. All outcomes are assessed at the beginning of students' first writing course and at the end of ENGL 102. In 2005-2006 these skills were assessed by using an in-class writing assignment on the first day of their first writing class and by using

- their final research projects for ENGL 102. For placement, we used a six-point holistic scoring guide. For the final essay, we used the Writing Competency Rubric adopted college-wide for writing courses. We believe that the use of the new rubric has enabled us to assess student skills in the various components of effective writing: the ability to choose a thesis; to organize an essay; to divide paragraphs up into reasonable and useful units which begin with effective topic sentences; the ability to use grammatical, effective and appropriate language; and also the ability to incorporate primary and secondary evidence into their written work, using correct documentation methods and avoiding plagiarism.
2. We also used the Writing Competency Rubric in classes that students take to satisfy their general education requirement in literature. Since these courses are also designed to improve students' writing, students receive writing instruction and significant feedback on their writing in these courses. We asked that faculty who teach these courses fill out the Writing Competency Rubric for the respective class' final written project.
  3. All College departments use the Writing Competency Rubric to evaluate students' final papers/projects in capstone classes or in upper division writing intensive classes in those few majors which do not have capstones

**How will you assess how well your students are learning? List standards/performance indicators, etc., taking care to provide quantifiable means (for example, all students should earn a minimum 50% on exit exam; 65 % should earn a minimum 70%; with a rubric, indicate the scale used, the levels of competence, what is identified as “competent,” and what constitutes competence for each outcome measure, what percentage of students you would expect to see at each level, etc.). Be sure to spell out criteria.**

1. We will continue to use the Writing Competency Rubric to evaluate final essays for the composition programs. Our goal for composition is for 100% of students to achieve an average rating of 3; 40% will achieve a 4; 10% will achieve a 5.
2. For upper-division literature courses, we expect that all students will achieve an average of 3; 50% will receive a 4 and 10%, a 5.
3. For the capstone course, we would again expect to see all students averaging a 3 or better; 60% will receive a 4, and 30% a 5.

**How often, when, and under what circumstances will you gather the relevant data?**

Data will be gathered each semester. Students take a placement exam (which is evaluated by using the Holistic Scoring Guide), generally in the fall semester. In the spring, students take ENGL 102, and their final exam essay will be evaluated by using both the Holistic Scoring Guide and the Writing Competency Rubric. (The ENGL 102 essays are evaluated blindly, since faculty generally know the students fairly well—even including their handwriting—by the end of the Spring semester.) Off-sequence students (those who take ENGL 101 in the spring and ENGL 102 in the fall, will also be evaluated using these same instruments.

Students write a research paper in ENGL 102 and in ENGL 103H. Each essay will be evaluated by using the Rubric for Student Research Papers.

Each semester, students who are taking a class that counts for the general education requirement in literature (courses numbered 300-326), will be evaluated by using the Writing Competency Rubric on the final written paper.

We have recently added components to our assessment of the writing competency of our students. We now use the Writing Competency Rubric for ENGL 102 final essays and in courses students take to satisfy their general education requirement in English literature, beginning in the spring of 2006. The Writing Competency Rubric has been used for a couple of years to evaluate students' final paper/project in the capstone. What follows is the data collected last academic year (2005-06).

**Summarize what has been learned about how well students are achieving desired outcomes.**

### **Fall 2005**

Using the UNC Holistic Scoring Guide in the Fall of 2005, we evaluated the work of 243 students. The following are the scores our students received:

Score	Number of students	Percentage of the Whole
1	4	1.6
2	5	2.1
3	121	49.8
4	55	22.6
5	52	21.4
6	6	2.5

This method was used to determine which students would need further training before moving to ENGL 101/102. The nine students who received a score of 1 or 2 in the fall were moved back to ENGL 099 where they received basic training in language use and in essay composition. They would not have been enrolled in ENGL 102 by the spring of their freshmen year.

### **Spring 2006**

This year, we decided to use the Writing Competency Rubric in the spring of 2006 to assess our students' final essays in ENGL 102, rather than the Holistic Scoring Guide. The rubrics evaluate a set of competency items on a scale of 1 to 5, with five indicating the highest level of proficiency and a one representing the lowest. We felt that essays students had had the time to revise would give us a better understanding of the extent to which they had received writing competency. Moreover, using a rubric instead of the holistic scoring guide would give us an idea about which aspects of writing our students found challenging, even though we had to sacrifice the comparative value of the previous method.

### Item Analysis

We had a sampling of 120 students—slightly more than half—for whom we assessed research papers for ENGL 102. The following results indicate student proficiencies in five different competency areas (see enclosed rubric). The results were as follows:

Item A: Thesis	Number of Students	Percentage of the Whole
1	1	0.83%
2	12	10.0%
3	43	35.83%
4	38	31.8%
5	26	21.67%

Using the goals established for general education writing, this score indicates that just almost 90% of all freshmen who successfully completed ENGL 102 achieved competency in stating and defining a thesis, in compliance with the goals we had set for the program. Those who did not succeed were not evaluated. This result is impressive, given that the goal for introductory (300 level) courses is for all students to perform at level 3 or above. The results also show that we slightly exceeded our goals of 50% of all students performing at level 4 or above (53.4%) and exceeded our goal of 10% receiving a 5 (21.6%).

Item B: Organization	Number of Students	Percentage of the Whole
1	1	0.83%
2	26	21.67%
3	37	30.83%
4	36	30%
5	20	16.67%

Although not as impressive as the results for item A, we still find that 87% of students completing ENGL 102 have achieved proficiency in organizing their work—within five percent of our stated goal. This result lagged only slightly behind our goal of 50% at level 4 (46.7%) but significantly ahead of our 10% goal for level 5. To address this concern, the writing faculty has agreed to stress organizational skills through formal exercises and classroom presentations.

Item C: Paragraphing	Number of Students	Percentage of the Whole
1	1	0.83%
2	14	11.67%
3	53	44.15%
4	38	31.68%
5	14	11.67%

These results are closer to the success rates of item A above. Just over 88% achieved proficiency; 52% scored a 4 or better, again exceeding our goal of 50%, and the 11.67% who scored a 5 was slightly ahead of our goal of 10%.

Item D: Language	Number of Students	Percentage of the Whole
1	1	0.83%
2	21	17.5%
3	52	43.34%
4	31	25.83%
5	15	12.5%

Based on these findings, language use appears to be more of a problem than paragraphing or thesis construction. Nonetheless, over 81% of freshmen were performing this competency area at the level of proficiency or above. We lagged behind our goal of 50% scoring 4 or better, with just under 38% achieving this mark, though we again exceeded our goal of 10% making the highest score. Language has traditionally proved to be a more difficult area to address as problems with language often reflect deep problems with grammar and usage. Drills in grammar usually prove ineffective. Nonetheless, the department plans to do more close exercises with sentence construction and to utilize the writing center to a greater degree, by referring students who exhibit persistent problems in this area.

Item E: Sources*	Number of Students	Percentage of the Whole
1	3	2.83%
2	34	28.3%
3	41	33.97%
4	26	21.69%
5	16	13.21%

According to this rubric, approximately 67 % of students have achieved proficiency in the area of using and documenting sources, significantly behind our stated goal. Only 35% scored a 4 or better while 13.21% scored a 5 (ahead of our projected goal). Clearly, this area represents the area of greatest concern for students exiting the freshman writing program. One possible reason for this comparatively low mark may lie with the rubric itself, which treats documentation on the works cited page and research incorporated into the paper as the same thing, when most of the faculty felt they were two different areas. Many students incorporated research while not providing correct documentation, without a works cited page, for instance. In either event, the score indicates an issue that will need to be addressed in the next academic year.

To address this problem, the writing faculty agreed to expand research requirements for ENGL 102. In the past, students have spent the last six to eight weeks on an extensive research paper. In the future, we will add at least two shorter research papers to the first eight weeks.

\*Because this was the first year in which we employed a research competency rubric, research papers were unavailable for fourteen of the 120 students. The above results are based on a total of 106 essays.

**Total**

Totaling and averaging all scores for the group, we find an average score of 1 for 1.25% of all students, 2 for 20%, 3 for 31% with an average of 3, 30% with an overall average of 4

and 17.75% with an average of 5. Although we are not yet meeting our goal of 100% of students scoring 3 (minimum proficiency or above), we did near our goal of 50% writing at level 4 (47%) and exceeding our goal of 10% at the highest level by 7.5%.

### **Action Plan**

As stated above, we observed minor problems with organization and language. The writing faculty has collectively agreed to stress organizational skills through formal exercises and classroom presentations. We have also agreed to work innovatively with various ways of addressing problems with language, including exercises with sentence construction and greater utilization of the Writing Center, where students receive one-on-one tutoring for their specific language issues. Research and documentation proved to be the greatest trouble area. The writing faculty has expanded the research component of ENGL 102 to include short research essays administered during the first half of the course, leading to the long research paper with which the course concludes.

### **General Education Literature Courses**

This year we also initiated an assessment of introductory-level English literature courses (those numbered 300 through 326) using the Writing Competency Rubric devised and edited for a college-wide writing assessment program that examined five critical areas of writing: clarity and strength of thesis; organization of writing; paragraph development; language use; and sources and documentation. The rubric divided each category into five levels of proficiency, with five indicating excellence in the selected area and one indicating serious deficiency, and with three indicating minimal college-level proficiency in each area. Our goal was to have students performing all areas at level three or above upon completion of the introductory literature course with 50% achieving a 4 and 10% a 5. The courses examined included: ENGL 300 (How to Read Literature); ENGL 301 (Appalachian Literature); ENGL 303 (African American Literature); ENGL 306 (Western Literary Traditions II); ENGL 307 (Arthurian Literature); ENGL 325 (Selected Readings from British Literature I); and ENGL 326 (Selected Readings from British Literature II). Each of these courses fulfills the college's general education requirement for literature.

Members of the faculty assessed 127 papers. The following results indicate student proficiencies in five different competency areas (see enclosed rubric). These papers assessed by the department yielded generally encouraging results. To provide an overview, I totaled scores awarded for all five sections of the rubric. Overall student performance at the level of 5 achieved 175 marks (or 28.4%); at level four, 121 (or 36%); at level 3, 165 (or 27%); forty-three at level two (or 7 %); and only 11 marks at level one (or 2 %). These results indicate that an average 89% of all students are writing at a minimum level of proficiency. Specifically, students were deemed especially proficient in constructing a thesis (item one) with only seven of the students evaluated scored a one or two. Similar success can be reported of item two, organization, where only eleven students scored one or two. Five students received less than proficient marks in paragraphing (item three) and only three were judged as deficient in language use (item four). Taken as a whole, these results show a promising rate of success in writing among our general education literature students.

The one major area of concern was item five, research and documentation, twenty-two students received scores of one or two. Two possible explanations may exist for the higher rate of non-proficiency in these areas. One might be the nature of the courses, most of which stress reading and analysis of a wide range of literary texts. Because they stress breadth more than depth, it is often not feasible to include a piece of researched writing in these courses. As a result, research skills learned in ENGL 102 are not being reinforced at the level of the introductory literature course. Again, the need to separate the areas of documentation and research in the rubric itself may have to be considered. This problem—if it is a problem—could be addressed either by the inclusion of at least a modest research component in these courses and / or by more rigorously stressing documentation methods in literary essays. Overall, however, results indicate that introductory level literature courses in English are promoting the development of proficient college-level writing.

The results were as follows:

Item A: Thesis	Number of Students	Percentage of the Whole
1	1	0.8
2	7	5.5
3	24	18.9
4	48	37.8
5	47	37

Although 6.3% of 127 students assessed scored below the minimum level of proficiency, we did exceed our goal of 50% scoring four or better and our goal of 10% scoring 5 by substantial margins (18% and 27% respectively). This result correlates with findings for ENGL 102, where students did consistently well with thesis statements.

Item B: Organ.	Number of Students	Percentage of the Whole
1	0	0
2	12	9.5
3	33	26
4	38	30
5	44	34.5

These results show that over 90% of 127 students surveyed achieved minimal competence upon completion of the course. Although 9.5% of students assessed scored below the level of proficiency on this item, it is worth noting that no students achieved the lowest score possible. Furthermore, this result shows substantial improvement from ENGL 102 into the general literature courses. 64.5% of those assessed scoring a 4 or 5 (14.5% above our projected goal) and 34.5% scoring a five, exceeding our goals by 24.5%

Item C: Paragraph.	Number of Students	Percentage of the Whole
1	0	0
2	9	7

3	34	27
4	52	41
5	32	25

These results show a consistent rate of success among general literature students coming out of ENGL 102, with approximately 93% achieving minimal competency (but note again the absence of any scores of 1), 66% writing at level 4 or above and 25% writing at level 5.

Item D: Language	Number of Students	Percentage of the Whole
1	0	
2	3	2.3
3	45	35.5
4	50	39.5
5	29	22.7

These numbers suggest two important facts: first, that over 97% of 127 students are using language proficiently; in this area, we came within 2.3% of achieving our goal of total writing proficiency upon completion of introductory literature courses. In this area, the 62.2% of students achieving 4 or 5 is well ahead of our projected goal of 50%, as is the 22.7% who used language at the highest level of proficiency.

Item E: Sources*	Number of Students	Percentage of the Whole
1	10	9.3
2	12	11.2
3	29	27
4	33	31
5	23	21.5

These scores are clearly low and represent the most troubling aspect of general literature program; 79.5% of students had achieved proficiency in using and documenting sources. Although this result falls well below our stated proficiency goals, it does show substantial improvement over the 33% failing to use evidence and documentation in ENGL 102. Furthermore, the 52.5% who scored a 4 or 5 exceed our goals and the 21.5% achieving a 5 actually exceeds our stated goal of 10%. We will address this problem by the incorporation of at least one research component into papers for general education credit.

\*Because this was the first year in which we employed a research competency rubric and because the courses assessed often stress unresearched papers, research papers were unavailable for 20 of the 127 students. Evaluators marked "n/a" on this item and the results are omitted from this report. The above results are based on a total of 107 essays.

Total	Complete Scores	Percentage of the Whole
1	11	1.8
2	43	7
3	165	26.8
4	221	36
5	175	28.4

Averaging all scores shows that general literature courses are generally successful in developing and reinforcing writing skills: the 91% proficiency rate (With proficiency defined as 3 or better) is close to our goal of total proficiency, and indeed may be as close as we can reasonably expect to come given the number and variety of students who come through these courses. We are ahead of our projected goal of 50% at 4 or better by 14.4% and substantially exceeded our projected goal of 10%. When we add scores of 2 and 1, we find only 54 out of a total of 527 marks, or slightly over 10%. These results confirm the success our program is achieving in the transition from composition to literature courses. They incidentally argue for maintaining the 3-hour literature requirement as part of the college's general education curriculum.

**Action Plan: What plans have you for the future based on the data gathered that will aim to improve student learning/achievement? Should students perform at less than the standard expected, what steps will the department take to improve their learning/performance? What steps does the department anticipate to improve the program otherwise?**

Although the majority of our goals have been met, there are some deficiencies; we recommend that the following steps be taken:

- 1) Continue to collect and analyze the data to address problem areas such as research and documentation.
- 2) With freshman courses, the writing faculty has collectively agreed to stress organizational skills through formal exercises and classroom presentations. We have also agreed to work innovatively with various ways of addressing problems with language, including exercises with sentence construction and greater utilization of the writing center, where students receive one-on-one tutoring for their specific language issues. Research and documentation proved to be the greatest trouble area. The writing faculty has expanded the research component of ENGL 102 to include short research essays administered during the first half of the course.
- 3) Make adjustments to courses, especially regarding research and documentation. Specifically, we plan to expand the research component of ENGL 102. It currently calls for an extended research project to be undertaken during the final six to eight weeks of the semester. This year we asked that all sections include at least two shorter research essays during the first half of the course leading to the final research paper at the end of the course and to give more formal class time to training in research and documentation methods.
- 4) Include a research component in the general education literature classes.
- 5) We will encourage faculty besides those who teach English to conduct more writing-intensive courses, which will help students improve their writing skills and to reinforce skills learned in ENGL 102. The English faculty will be available to assist other instructors in this area.

- 6) We should also adjust certain goals upward for students in the general literature program. It seems obvious that students are exceeding expectations regarding better than average scores. I recommend that the goal of 50% scoring four / 10% scoring five be applied to students exiting ENGL 102 and that we aim for 60% at level four / 20% at level five for students going through the general literature courses. These goals more accurately reflect the progress students are making.

### Senior-level courses

In the summer of 2006, the English division of the Department of Language and Literature conducted a survey of 295 essays produced in upper-division classes (300-level or above), including both upper-division courses and capstone courses. Each department was responsible for evaluating its own essays using the writing competency rubric adopted by the college. Members of our department collated and interpreted data, analyzing what the information told us about students' level of writing ability. Separate reports were submitted for each department's essays (see attached documents). Below are the overall scores.

All essays (295 total)

item	#students <3	% below 3	competency rate
A Thesis	31	10.51	89.49
B Organiz	38	12.88	87.12
C Para	24	8.14	91.86
D Lang	22	7.46	92.54
E Sources	21	7.12	92.88

Analysis: Accepting a score of "3" on the rubric as competent, our goal is to achieve complete competency (100% in all categories) for students coming out of our writing-intensive courses. The evidence indicates that we fall short in all areas, though not significantly so (and the data raises the question as to whether or not complete competence is a realistic goal). Further, no area stands out as exceptionally strong or weak. Item "B" organization, was somewhat weaker than the other areas, with an overall rate of just over 87% whereas item "E," sources, was somewhat stronger at just under 93% competency.

### Plan of Action

- 1) English faculty will encourage the development of more writing intensive courses in all departments and will offer assistance in this area to other instructors.
- 2) The Department of Business and Economics will require its majors to take a course in writing, beginning in the fall of 2007
- 3) The Department of Mathematics and Computer Science plans to involve English faculty in the capstone course, asking them to help students develop improved writing skills.

- 4) The Department of Education is offering one-hour seminars in writing each semester and requiring more writing assignments, including reflection through writing in candidates' portfolios.
- 5) Art majors must take their seminar papers to the Writing Center for assistance.
- 6) Psychology faculty have added "Writing in Psychology" as a course and recommend it to all students who will be taking Senior Seminar.
- 7) The General Education Committee and an ad hoc committee, the Jefferson Committee, are looking into ways to introduce more writing into the curriculum and to require more writing intensive courses.