

CSUSB's First-Year Composition Program:

Information and Resources for Instructors

First-year students at CSUSB satisfy their first-year writing requirement (G.E. A.1) by completing one of three course sequence options:

Stretch Composition:

ENG 102A-103A-104A

OR

ENG 102B-103B-104B, a parallel sequence for multilingual students

Accelerated Stretch Composition:

ENG 105-106

Advanced First-Year Composition:

ENG 107

All three sequences are grounded in the same philosophy and attend to the kinds of knowledge that students need as writers negotiating intellectual terrains. The difference among them is the amount of time that students have to fulfill their G.E. writing requirement and the additional attention to writing, reading, and thinking that extended time allows.

Placement into the sequences is accomplished via a directed self-placement process (DSP).

DSP is an alternative to timed placement tests and replaces use of the English Placement Test (EPT) at CSUSB. Students choose the appropriate sequence for themselves with the support of an interactive online survey that engages them in reflective assessment of their reading and writing practices. The system also provides an overview of FYC course options and offers suggestions about placement based on survey results. Students will complete the DSP process prior to registration and select the course option that best “fits” them.

Students will take all courses in the sequence with the same instructor and the same students at the same day and time each quarter. All of the courses in the sequences provide credit towards graduation, and the final course in each sequence fulfills the G.E. A.1 requirement.

Program Philosophy and the Subject Matter of First-Year Composition Courses

While the English department at CSUSB advocates flexibility and agency in teaching and promotes academic freedom for all faculty members, we also know that all curricula are guided by a particular set of philosophical assumptions that shape the work instructors ask students to do in a given course. First-Year Composition (FYC), as a GE requirement, acts as a program

rather than a set of fully independent courses, and requires that we ensure some consistency, commonality, and commensurateness of experience for students across these sections. We believe that we can best promote this needed consistency while protecting instructor choices by offering a programmatic philosophy for all sections. Thus all sections and instructors for FYC should be guided by the following key definitions, assumptions, and principles:

Subject Matter of FYC Courses:

Unlike other courses, in which the topic and texts of a course might be perceived as its subject matter, the subject of FYC is conceptual knowledge about writing and language that we animate with, in, and through our course materials. Each FYC course should seek to engage students in a study of this question: how do we, as writers, use language to make knowledge and participate in textual conversations meaningfully? The subject of FYC might thus be summed up as the study of the roles of language, context, purpose and genre as they create meaning.

[The Subject Matter of Composition: an Overview \(Boland\)](#)
[Sample Course Descriptions \(Costino\)](#)

Philosophical Assumptions Underpinning the Above View of the Subject of FYC:

- Language constitutes meaning. It shapes what we know and how we know it.
- The language of a particular community or discipline embeds the habits of mind and ways of doing business of that community. These discourses shape who we are as well as what we know. They identify us and help create our identities, our subjectivities. As students or apprentices in a community begin to overtake the language of that community, they also begin to overtake the ways of thinking and seeing associated with it. The discourse carries and enacts the ideologies of the community.
- Writing consists of a series of choices (about content, genre, style, etc.) made in particular contexts; the contexts of writing are implicated in relations of power; as such, the contexts of writing help determine what can and cannot be said (and what can and cannot be heard).
- Genres are a kind of social action that allows writers to engage with others. While they may have recognizable boundaries or features, they are flexible forms of writing that writers typically mix in order to construct their meanings. Attention to genres can help students determine what can be said in a given set of circumstances as well as how it can be said.
- Reading and writing are interconnected processes. Writers enter conversations and communities through their words, which means writers must also be readers of text, of contexts, and of culture more generally, if they want their writing to be heard.

- Becoming literate in the information age is a social process. While students should develop the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively needed information, education in information literacy must also include critical reflection on how information is organized and how such informational structures both shape and are shaped by the social, cultural, and ideological contexts in which they are produced. It is this metaknowledge that will allow students to make informed and independent decisions in other situations beyond FYC.
- Knowledge production is intertextual and requires that writers think, in part, with other people's ideas. Part of being literate is learning the text integration and citation practices of particular communities.

[Bibliography: Relevant Scholarship \(Boland\)](#)

Principles of Course Design

Each first-year composition sequence (ENG 102-103-104; ENG 105-106; ENG 107) should be conceived as ONE first-year writing course stretched over the designated number of weeks. Each course should offer students a sense that the class has a subject and project of its own beyond “prep” for other classes.

[Sample syllabus and assignment sequence \(Hyon\)](#)

[Two-Quarter Syllabus Schedule and Assignment Sequence \(Costino\)](#)

Choosing Readings

The selection of readings should be guided by the following purposes for including reading in composition classes: (1) They create a set of ideas or subject of inquiry (a theme) that the course will address or raise and that students write in relation to; (2) they provide a context for writing that determines the ways in which the theme will be addressed in relation to a given audience; and (3) they serve as rich examples of the kinds of choices, strategies, and options available to writers. Decisions about the quantity and pacing of course reading should reflect these purposes for reading in a composition class.

[Text Recommendations](#)

Using Readings

Writing—text production—ultimately drives the central subject of the course. Course readings should be selected and assigned so as to provide a context and conversation for writing. They should be discussed as rhetorical acts, as material shaped by and shaping

specific generic choices for specific purposes. They also serve as materials that students integrate into their own writing as they enter into the conversation that the coursework defines.

[Teaching Reading overview \(IUPUI\)](#)

[Strategies for Reading Actively, Critically and Rhetorically](#)

[Sample Assignment: Reading Comparison Chart \(Rowan\)](#)

[Sample Reading Journal Assignments \(Rowan\)](#)

Writing Assignments

Writing activities should be planned to build across the quarter(s), so that strategies used in earlier papers will support more advanced text production in later ones. Thinking in terms of project areas rather than isolated papers may best foster this approach. Each project unit should include a culminating text (e.g., a formal paper or other polished project text), but should also include a number of less formal writing activities that support the reading, writing, and thinking required of the culminating text. The number of culminating assignments is not fixed; however, instructors may find it useful to have between two and four, keeping in mind that more complex, multi-component culminating texts will necessitate (appropriately) fewer such assignments during the quarter. Specific writing assignments should ask students to think rhetorically about genre and other writerly concerns; instructors should not assign isolated “modes” papers (e.g. the compare/contrast essay, the persuasive essay, the narrative, and so on.), since these do not effectively reflect the complexities of genre and context.

By the end of each quarter, students should have completed the equivalent of 10-15 final-revised pages. Because these culminating texts will involve multiple drafts and revisions, the total number of pages produced across these drafts will much exceed the 10-15 final pages. In addition, these pages do not include the variety of less formal writing assignments (e.g., reading responses, etc.) that students will complete in each culminating text unit.

[Sample Assignment Sequence \(Hyon\)](#)

[Sample Essay Assignment \(Rowan\)](#)

[Sample Assignment Sequence \(Costino\)](#)

Scaffolding

In addition to the sequencing principles described in the “Writing Assignments” section, above, instructors should consider how the internal scaffolding of individual projects provides experience with various activities and strategies that writers typically utilize, along with opportunities to reflect on how those activities and strategies enable the writer’s making of meaning. These shorter “along-the-way” assignments within a project/unit thus provide support for unfamiliar or challenging writing tasks, pay explicit attention to

strategies for reading critically and rhetorically, and ask students to interrogate their own writing and the contexts and conversations they are entering.

[Sample Quickwrites \(Rowan\)](#)

[Reading Comparison Chart \(Rowan\)](#)

[Reading Journal 1 \(Rowan\)](#)

[Reading Journal 3 \(Rowan\)](#)

Attending to Information Literacy

Assignments that require students to conduct research should ask students to identify their own academic inquiries and purposes for seeking out information. They also should provide them with opportunities for learning how to find, evaluate, and use information that will help them address their inquiries. In addition, such assignments should help students understand the relationships among published genres, research methodology, and the kind of knowledge being made. Librarians are available for consultation and collaboration on these assignments.

[Pfau Library Critical Information Literacy Laboratory](#)

Attending to Citation Practices and Issues of Intellectual Property

Citation practices should be taught with reference to the contextual nature of knowledge production. Assignments should offer students and teachers opportunities to discuss the conventions of research and citation as they are shaped by social purposes and underlying ideologies and located in academic and civic communities.

Revision

In order to develop a critical perspective about what they know about writing, students should have the opportunity for feedback, revision, and reflection.. Feedback may take the form of teacher comments, class writing workshops, peer critiques, and student-teacher conferences. Revision assignments may direct students to rewrite an assignment in response to feedback or may ask students to rethink a previous assignment in a new context or genre. Reflection can be fostered through meta-cognitive writing and/or self-assessments.

[Sample Reading Journal 4 \(Rowan\)](#)

[Sample Reflective Memo \(Rowan\)](#)

Grammar and Vocabulary

Sentence mechanics, grammar, vocabulary, usage, and punctuation should be taught in relation to real rhetorical contexts and purposes (the students' texts, the texts of other course readings) and not as discrete skills via acontextual exercises. Form, at all levels, from the sentence to the document, matters, but only in relation to the writer's rhetorical project.

[Teaching Grammar in Context \(Glascott\)](#)

Goals and Outcomes

Students will gain experience in:

- close reading of texts to improve understanding of the ways that word choice, syntax, and structure constitute ideas;
- analyzing texts to apprehend more fully the relationship between language use, power, and social hierarchies;
- discerning the various ways that generic strategies and formal, stylistic, tonal language, and discursive conventions can be manipulated to contribute to meaning-making in particular contexts;
- designing their own academic inquiries and developing strategies for finding, evaluating, and integrating information purposefully in a given context;
- generating their own texts by making use of various generic strategies and particular language conventions for particular contexts;
- creating texts that respond to the language, discourse, and power dynamics in given contexts;
- critiquing their own ideas, form, and style in light of the contexts for which they are writing and with awareness of the generic choices they are making;
- substantively revising their own writing to improve form, style, and generic strategies and to intervene in a given rhetorical and discursive context

Grading

The grading structure for the first year writing program reflects the idea that each sequence should act as one holistic course stretched across the quarters of the sequence. Thus, students do not receive letter grades until the terminal course in their sequence. Earlier courses are graded credit/no credit.

102, 103, 105 – Credit/No Credit

104,106,107 – A, B, C No Credit

Given that the earlier classes in a sequence build toward the culminating course, instructors should consider how the grade of “Credit” will be determined within 102, 103, and 105 in relation to what it will signal to students as they move into the next course in the sequence. Conceptually and pedagogically, student success (and therefore their grade) in the final course of a sequence is contingent upon the work they have done in previous quarters. We know, for example, that students will not do well in ENG 104 if they have not done the work (the reading and writing assignments) in ENG 102 and ENG 103. Logistically, however, grades for a given quarter must be determined by the work that takes place in that particular quarter. Thus, instructors should seek to foster within students self-awareness of their own accomplishments as writers as they make their way through the sequence and an appreciation of the ongoing project of writing across quarters. Within these terms, each instructor has latitude to establish his/her own grading policies.

[Overview of Formative & Summative Assessment \(Boland\)](#)
[Sample Grading Policy for Course Sequences \(Costino\)](#)