1. Definition & Overview

Writing-Intensive Courses (WICs) provide explicit instruction about how to write; student writing receives substantive feedback from instructors and peers, and revisions, when successful, respond to this feedback.

WICs familiarize students with what counts as a successful appeal in a given discipline, what kinds of evidence are most likely to be persuasive, and the forms common in the discipline. The WIC offers students experience writing for and interacting with the kind of audiences typical of that course’s discipline. Students thus learn to produce writing of the kinds that will be expected of them in the future.

Students not only learn to write in these courses; they also write to learn. WICs treat students’ writing as essential to the learning process. Instructors use writing as a means for students to learn course content and to achieve the course’s learning outcomes.

2. Best-Practices Guidelines

The minimum standard features of a WIC, according to national best-practices, are as follows:

- **Integration**: Writing is integral to the course and its content, central to the learning process, not simply tacked on as an exercise or to fulfill a summative requirement.
- **Instruction**: Students receive instruction about the writing process (drafting, revision) as well as about how to complete and succeed on writing assignments.
- **Feedback**: Students receive frequent, timely, and meaningful feedback toward revision that is substantive, concerning idea or argument development, evidence, and organization, rather than only correction of mechanics.
- **Revision**: At least one assignment requires substantial revision in response to feedback and resubmission for the final grade.
- **Quantity**: Assignments total a minimum of 15-20 typed pages, which may include multiple forms, such as case studies, lab reports, journal writing, research papers, etc., as appropriate to the style and purpose in the discipline or profession.
Faculty-Student Ratio: The faculty-student ratio is in the range of 1 to 25 (at a maximum), factoring in TAs if used as part of writing instruction in larger courses.

Ideally, WIC syllabi will clearly exhibit all six of the above characteristics, whether in the overview, assignments, scheduled activities, accompanying rubric(s), and/or grading criteria.

3. Learning Outcomes

In addition to including learning outcomes that deliver discipline or profession-specific content and skills, WIC syllabi will include one or more learning outcomes that directly addresses the teaching and learning of writing.

At a summary level, the WIC learning outcome could be stated like this: Students will learn to write persuasively, analytically, and with appropriate support to an audience, in a style, and using the conventions of this discipline. The following two sets of writing learning outcomes make that intention more specific:

1) The Association of American Colleges and University’s “Written Communication” Essential Learning Outcome (ELO) and accompanying VALUE Rubric.
2) The CU Denver Composition Program Core-Area learning outcomes and rubric.

Ideally, all WIC courses should work with one or both of these sets of outcomes and rubrics in course design and delivery, as evidenced in the syllabus.

It also would be appropriate to a WIC course to make use of one or more of the following four ELOs, at the discretion of the faculty member and as appropriate to the discipline or profession: Critical Thinking, Reading, Teamwork, and Integrative Learning.

This concludes the abbreviated WIC best-practices guidelines document. The complete version additionally includes a Suggested Resources or references section and a Sample Courses section.
4. Suggested Resources

General


Assignments

Evaluation


Revision


5. Sample of Writing-Intensive Courses at CU Denver

Mary Lee Stansifer, International Marketing, CU Denver School of Business [additional information forthcoming]

Esther Sullivan, Sociological Theory, CU Denver Department of Sociology [additional information forthcoming]

Beth Allen, Family Psychology, CU Denver Department of Psychology [additional information forthcoming]