Coming to Learn: From First-Year Composition to Writing in the Disciplines

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Abstract: The ability of college students to write clearly and competently, both in first-year composition (FYC) and beyond, is often questioned. This qualitative, longitudinal study examines the writing practices and abilities of twelve students, following their performance in their FYC courses to their later studies in Writing in the Disciplines (WID) courses ranging from liberal arts to education, nursing, and science. The primary data source was a series of extended interviews soliciting information about students' writing projects and processes in both FYC and their specific WID courses. To ground the discussion of writing ability in actual student work, portfolios of students' writing projects from three data points—the start of FYC, the end of FYC, and later WID courses—were compiled and reviewed. Some students struggled significantly with various aspects of writing tasks. Yet most students in this study *did* come to learn, as writers, in their progress from FYC to their later work in the disciplines. Indeed, with appropriate instruction, sufficient motivation, intentional curricular design, and recognized good practices for writing in the disciplines, these students could and did write at or near very high levels of accomplishment.

As English professors with interest and expertise in rhetoric and composition, we are often asked why college students write so poorly. The question itself is rhetorical, presuming that students do indeed write poorly, and, in most instances, worse than did those of prior generations. The reasons for student difficulty with writing, when it does surface, are numerous and complex, and many theories abound, from an erosion of standards in today's high schools to an insufficiently rigorous composition requirement. Some may blame technology, others overcrowded classrooms, insufficient resources, or even students' substandard intelligence or motivation.

Although we share concern for those writers who struggle to produce competent prose, it seems to us that the larger, more interesting and encompassing question concerns what students *do* learn about writing over the course of their undergraduate careers. Faculty, administrators, and students generally agree that it is important for students to gain the ability to write effectively as part of their undergraduate education. Anecdotal evidence may suggest some of the difficulties students face in becoming better writers, but a more comprehensive understanding requires a close look at students' classes, assignments, writing, and development.

This paper presents findings from a mixed-method, longitudinal study of twelve student writers, following them from their experience in first-year composition (FYC) on to their studies as

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graduating seniors in specific majors ranging from liberal arts to education, nursing, and science.The data gathered speak with specificity to some of the reasons that student writers vary in levels of ability, as well as to the principles of good practice that promote success in student writing. Foremost among the study's findings are the impacts of writing curricula at various stages of students' undergraduate careers.

Data for the project come from three primary sources: 1) quantitative analyses of student writing performance in FYC; 2) a series of three qualitative interviews soliciting further information about participants' writing projects and processes in both FYC and also their upper-division coursework; and 3) portfolios of student writing.

Background

Complaints about student writing are as old as student writing itself and have continued nearly unabated through each successive generation's entry to the modern academy. In surveys, employers often castigate new employees' communication skills, and in tough economic times, reports have focused on the onerous costs of remedial writing instruction (National Commission on Writing, 2005). More recently, provocatively titled tomes like *The Dumbest Generation*(Bauerlein, 2009) and *Academically Adrift* (Arum & Roksa, 2011) garner headlines with tales of poor student performance on standardized tests and other assessments.

Yet scholarly research working more closely with student writers in the college years has frequently charted gain (Haswell, 1986; Hillocks, 1986), with numerous qualitative studies (Herrington, 1984; McCarthy, 1987; Walvoord & McCarthy, 1990; Herrington & Curtis, 2000; and Beaufort, 2007) examining more closely the complexities of transferring skills and abilities from FYC to later work in the disciplines. Dias et al. (1999) conclude that for a host of reasons, the direct transfer of writing skill from one milieu (such as FYC) to another (such as most WID courses) is nearly impossible, that even "portable" skills like syntactic flexibility and lexical sophistication must be "cultivated" and "engaged" (232). Carroll (2002) finds that the most successful students are those willing to take on new challenges. Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) suggest that students must realize their own ideas while also developing an understanding of their individual majors as coherent fields of diverse voices.

This literature suggests, broadly, that while skill development and transfer of learning during the college years are complex matters, such progress can and does occur. None of these studies adopts the hyperbolic language of the common plaints against student writing, and each of them suggests that even though growth in writing ability during the college years does not come easily, students nonetheless improve significantly in their ability to manage increasingly complex tasks as writers. Graduating seniors interviewed by Light (2001) point in particular to the importance of junior- and senior-level tasks to their development as writers.

Qualitative research examining closely the actual work of student writers points less to contagious "outbreaks" of illiteracy, then, than it does to something more mundane: students striving to learn, through practice and instruction, the skills expected of them. With both public perception and academic research in mind, we strove to understand just what the students in our study *did* come to learn, as writers, in their progress from FYC to their later work in the disciplines.

Context

Our study was conducted at a comprehensive Midwestern public four-year university. The program requires one FYC course, followed by two Writing-in-the-Discipline (WID) course requirements. The single FYC course bears four semester credit hours, includes a significant reading-and-research

component, and is taught by a range of instructors, from teaching assistants in a master's program to adjunct, full-time, and tenured faculty. Although each individual autonomously designs his or her own course and bears full responsibility for its instruction and evaluation, the FYC program as a whole is designed to promote consistency across sections through intensive teacher-training, standard outcomes, shared practices, and a voluntary "common book" project related to a developing university-wide theme.

Beyond FYC, each major program offers at least two WID requirements. Some programs offer, and require, more than two, and in many cases, the students in our study provide reflections and materials from non-WID courses that impacted their development. These courses provide instruction and guidance in the techniques and conventions of writing in specific disciplines. The WID courses are proposed to and reviewed by a faculty committee for their initial approval, though there are no strict guidelines regarding their word counts or other quantitative requirements. With no governing body other than the offering department responsible for their continued oversight, the WID requirement is one that is neither always wholly understood by students nor universally embraced by teaching faculty. Yet at the same time, many faculty and departments have created rigorous, purposeful, and successful WID courses for their students.

Methods

The students participating in this study were college seniors selected from a subset of those who had participated in an earlier assessment of FYC. In the fall of their senior year, we contacted the students still on campus who had participated in the earlier study. Initially, 14 students agreed to participate in the study, though one opted not to continue due to the time commitment participation would require and another dropped out of the study after completing the first interview. Students' participation was voluntary and solicited in full cooperation with local IRB practices and regulations.

Participants were offered a $50 gift card to the university bookstore in exchange for their participation. Although the participants might have been motivated by the gift card, it nonetheless bears mentioning that students who agree to be in a study about writing are perhaps more likely to be interested in writing than students who would not elect to participate. This group of twelve students may well be less representative of the larger population than if they had been selected at random from those who participated in the earlier study. Indeed, the sample size and research design prohibit generalizing from this data to other populations. However, the volume of data collected does offer a richly textured, longitudinal view of the attitudes, behaviors, and experiences twelve students writers exhibited as they moved from writing in FYC to writing for their major fields of study.

Baseline Data: First-Year Composition

The current project uses results of the earlier FYC study as baseline data. In that earlier study, students' essays were evaluated for evidence of accomplishment in six areas linked to the institution's outcomes: argument, purpose, language, conventions, documentation, and overall performance. To measure both students' accomplishment by the end of the term and their improvement across it, the essays included pairs written to similar prompts by the same students at the beginning and again at the end of the term, with each essay rated at least twice in a blind review using a departmental scoring guide. To increase rater objectivity, all raters analyzed a set of sample essays with the scoring guide during a norming session. Inter-rater reliability for the study was 97%, necessitating only a few adjudicated readings by a third rater. (See Appendix A for a copy of the FYC scoring guide.)

In general, the results of the earlier project indicate students enter FYC with at best marginal college-level writing abilities but demonstrate better-than-acceptable performance in the assessed areas by the course's conclusion. (See Appendix B for a summary of the earlier study's results.) For the larger population significant improvement was evident, especially in students' abilities to argue with evidence, address an audience, and document sources. In other areas, particularly students' use of language and conventions, improvement was less notable though still demonstrable. Most of the twelve student writers we profile below demonstrated considerable improvement in their FYC course. (See Appendix C for a summary of the twelve participants' performance in the FYC study.)

Current Focus: Writing in the Disciplines

The current project follows these individuals from their performance in their FYC courses to their later academic work in specific majors ranging from traditional liberal arts curricula to education, nursing, and science and engineering. Participants completed questionnaires from the National Survey of Student Engagement's Writing Practices Consortium, using a five-point Likert scale to self-report their writing experience, first in their FYC courses and then in their later WID coursework.[1] The questionnaire results then provided the structuring device for one of the study's primary data sources: a three-part series of extended interviews following the methodology described by Grant McCracken (1988) in *The Long Interview*.[2] Each of the three interviews began with the questionnaire results and explored a specified domain:

- **Interview 1:** Participant writing processes, projects, instruction and improvement as a writer in FYC.
- **Interview 2:** Participant writing processes, projects, instruction and improvement as a writer in WID courses.
- **Interview 3:** Comparison/Contrast of writing processes, projects, instruction and improvement as a writer in FYC vs. WID; third interview also allowed participants to check (and when necessary clarify) researcher interpretation of previous data.

Interviews were conducted by a team of trained undergraduate research interns. (Appendix E contains copies of the interview guides for each of the three interviews.) Last, to gain an understanding of the disparate types of writing projects participants were completing in their major fields of study, the researchers also collected samples of multiple WID projects from each participant. Data was thus gathered from the following eight sources:

- FYC performance assessment
- Writing samples from FYC
- NSSE questionnaire on FYC writing
- NSSE questionnaire on writing in WID courses
- Qualitative interview on FYC writing
- Qualitative interview on writing in WID courses
- Writing samples from WID courses
- Qualitative interview comparing/contrasting FYC and WID

The gathered data collectively present a detailed portrait of student writers as they negotiate the discursive demands of university-level writing projects. Though the volume of data is considerable, its utility is that it anchors the discussion and conclusions directly to the concrete, specific experiences of each participant.

Participants

Below we profile the study's twelve participants, identified by pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity. Included in the profiles are the students' majors as well as brief remarks on their background, including their progress in FYC. Also included is brief information on the kind and quality of writing projects participants had recently undertaken.

Kate (Biology): Kate indicated in her interviews that she generally enjoyed writing. In the earlier study of FYC, Kate demonstrated improvement in all assessed areas. As a senior, her primary writing projects consisted of lab reports and case studies. Kate's work in the upper division is reflective of her positive attitude toward and strong work ethic for writing. Her written work evidences especially strong understandings of audience, context, and purpose, and it is consistently sophisticated in its development of content. Kate's control of syntax and mechanics is sometimes slightly less mature than some of the other writers in the study, but it is nonetheless clear and correct.

Steve (Composite Engineering): Steve said that in his coursework he was more comfortable working with numbers than writing papers. The bulk of his writing in his major consisted of lab reports and occasional "shop orders," a list of materials necessary for given engineering projects. On occasion, he enjoyed creative writing. Though his writing performance in FYC was initially quite low in the assessed areas, by the end of the course he demonstrated modest improvement. He had carried that improvement over into his major, where he had experienced reasonable success following the elaborate instructions of his professors. Although we cannot ascertain the degree to which the content of his laboratory reports is accurate, we can see in them sufficiently developed understanding of context and purpose, generic and disciplinary conventions, uses of evidence, and control of syntax and mechanics.

Mary (TESOL/Spanish Education): In her major fields of study, Mary produced a wide range of different genres: library and empirical research papers, literature reviews, annotated bibliographies, lesson plans, and teaching philosophies. A self-described perfectionist with aspirations for eventual doctoral study, Mary displayed a rigorous work ethic, a deep and broad knowledge base, interest in writing, and successful work habits. As a writer in both of her majors, she demonstrated sophisticated and mature writing skills. Mary did not participate in the earlier study of FYC.

Hailey (Nursing): Hailey explained that "writing is not my strong point," something she attributed to both her own natural aptitude as well as less than optimal training in prior courses. Though her work in FYC started off poorly, by the end of the course she demonstrated considerable improvement in all assessed categories. For her nursing courses, she often wrote care plans that explained how she would treat particular patients. In addition to writing occasional annotated bibliographies, she also wrote health-education pamphlets, sometimes for an audience of fellow nurses and sometimes for the general public. In terms of quality, Hailey's writing in her major evidences high levels of competence in all areas save syntax and mechanics. We attribute her success in part to her faculty's thorough instructions for (and guidance of) writing tasks, ones which mesh well with Hailey's work ethic and attention to detail and mitigate her lack of interest in writing beyond the necessities of the job.

Sheryl (Nursing): Sheryl demonstrated marked improvement in all areas assessed in the earlier research on FYC. In interviews, Sheryl indicated that she saw writing as an opportunity to learn about her field of nursing, about concepts of wellness and illness, and about her own abilities as a writer. Like Hailey, Sheryl wrote numerous care plans and health pamphlets. She also took courses that required her to engage in reflective journaling about her clinical field experiences, tying that work to programmatic and personal learning outcomes. The varied set of projects Sheryl composed all

evidence high levels of achievement. Though her control of syntax and mechanics is not as polished as some students, all of her work nonetheless shows strong understandings and applications of contexts, audiences, and conventions.

Melanie (Business Education): Melanie indicated that she really did not enjoy writing, preferring instead to rely on her verbal skills to see her through her academic work. In her major field, Melanie encountered persuasive writing, research summary writing, and autobiographical writing. Melanie, unlike most of the students in our study, demonstrated no improvement in her writing from the beginning to the end of the term in FYC; she further, and again unlike most of the students in our study, expressed virtually no interest in any facet of writing in her interviews. Perhaps rather predictably, a lack of improvement is evident in Melanie's upper-division writing, which is pocked with elementary errors, confused in its approach to audience and purpose, generally undeveloped, and almost never indicative of any deep reading or learning. As a student, she said that rather than excelling, she aims "probably just to get by."

Rita (Advertising): A native speaker of Spanish but now highly fluent in English, Rita demonstrated improvement in FYC and continues to do so in her writing in her major. Recent projects include literature reviews, empirical research, and something she referred to as a media plan, a document articulating her ideas for organizing and launching advertising campaigns. Rita also frequently wrote self-assessments of her own work. When not writing for school, Rita enjoyed creative writing, though it was not something she was actively pursuing during this study. Rita was also a frequent user of the university's writing center. Her writing exhibits few of the markers one would commonly associate with a second-language writer. Although her work is not as accomplished in its development or syntax as is the work of some writers, it is consistently effective and appropriate to the demands of audience and context.

Nikki (Health Promotion): Entering FYC with weak writing skills, Nikki made improvement in all areas by the end of the course. As a senior, she was writing literature reviews, collaborative empirical research, and health promotion pamphlets. Nikki also frequently sought tutorial help on her writing from the university's writing center. Her writing in her major attends to concerns of audience and purpose, evidences strong content development and generic/disciplinary conventions, and makes use of research sources. We see Nikki's continual seeking of feedback from her peers, professors, and tutors as an important contributing factor to her continuing development as a writer in her discipline.

Lois (Psychology): Lois indicated that writing was not something she had ever enjoyed. The results of the earlier study revealed that she came into the university with undeveloped writing skills but showed moderate improvement by the end of FYC. Lois was not greatly interested in writing, explaining that she was much more interested in developing as a psychologist than as a writer. As part of her writing for her major, she had to produce an analytical paper of at least twenty-five pages. Her writing showed adequate or better levels of accomplishment, especially in its attention to audience, context, and purpose. Lois was unique in the study in that she never went to visit her professors during their office hours because she feared that in doing so she might be perceived as "dumb."

Evan (Pre-Law): Although Evan's writing showed virtually no improvement on the characteristics we assessed from the start to the end of FYC, his work was nonetheless competent. Evan had spent much of his time and energy during his junior and senior years working toward his senior thesis, an argumentative, research-based analytical report of considerable length. He also frequently wrote legal briefs and reports. As in FYC, Evan wrote competently in his major and, at times, he was capable of considerable accomplishment. His strengths center on use of source material to develop content; he struggles somewhat with use of generic and disciplinary conventions.

Claire (Pre-Law): Like Evan, Claire has had coursework engineered to prepare her for writing her senior thesis; unlike Evan, Claire demonstrated improvement in all areas assessed in FYC. Claire indicated in interviews that she rarely asked her professors for help with her senior thesis because, as she put it, "We are in college. We should be able to figure out stuff on our own." In her major, Claire was especially adept with the nuances of context, audience, and purpose.

Amy (Public Relations): In FYC, Amy showed marginal improvement in only a few of the assessed categories, and in her interviews, Amy notes that she is not motivated to work hard without pressing deadlines. As she put it, "It's almost an adrenaline [rush]" to write against a tight deadline. Her writing in her major—consisting mostly of news and feature story writing—continues patterns that had been established in FYC: a lack of interest in, or effort made towards, improving; a failure to take advantage of an elongated writing process; a lack of even rudimentary understanding of very basic conventions; and a lack of effort to improve her syntactical and mechanical components.

As is evident from the preceding profiles, the twelve students represented a diverse range of majors and interests. For ten of the twelve students, completion of FYC provided an occasion for improvement in almost every area measured. For two students, the course occasioned nearly no demonstrable improvement in any area. Also of interest is the range of participant attitudes and behaviors expressed in their interviews and documented in their behaviors: two exhibited little concern or motivation, while remaining ten took an active and serious approach to their writing.

Discussion: From First-Year Composition to Writing in the Disciplines

This section examines the participating students' transition from FYC into their upper-division coursework. Anchoring the discussion in four objectives common to writing curricula in both FYC as well as the university's two-course WID requirement, here we examine the extent and degree to which the participating students:

- practice the processes and procedures for creating and completing successful writing in their fields;
- understand the main features and uses of writing in their fields;
- adapt their writing to the general expectations of readers in their fields;
- learn the conventions of evidence, format, usage, and documentation in their fields.

Although the students participating sometimes exhibited difficulty with various practices and projects, the data suggest that ten of the twelve participants could demonstrate significant progress towards each objective.

Practicing the processes and procedures for creating and completing successful writing in their fields

In general, the students in this study exited FYC having gained exposure to a relatively common set of processes and procedures for creating and completing successful writing. Brainstorming, outlining, free writing, proofreading, peer critique, and revising formed a common curriculum for participants as they began their university careers. Not all of the processes and procedures from FYC—particularly the more time-consuming or methodical invention heuristics—ultimately became part of students' academic writing repertoire.

However, the data reveal that in FYC nearly all students found some practices that they could productively modify and refine as they worked to meet the writing demands of their majors. In their

upper-division coursework, a few students were using techniques learned in FYC in precisely the same ways that they had learned to use them as freshmen. Mary (TESOL/Spanish Education), for instance, reported that her FYC professor stressed that all writing needed to answer the "so what?" question, a rhetorical move that required the writer to articulate for the reader why the topic mattered. As a senior, Mary said she still strove to answer the "so what?" question in writing for both of her majors, whether in an empirical study in applied linguistics or a philosophy statement for education. Although this sort of direct FYC-to-WID transference pointed at by examples like Mary's were rare, nine of the other students often modified processes and procedures from FYC as they moved into their major fields of study, for example truncating invention heuristics or refining strategies for locating appropriate source material. A near-universal example of this sort of modification emerges in the group's use of peer critique of their writing. All participants had encountered formal peer critique in FYC, though only three of them found the practice to be as useful as they would have liked. The common explanation for this problem in FYC was that participants felt they seldom had peers who could or would give them careful, useful feedback.

Although participants seldom engaged in formal peer critique in their classes, as seniors all but two of them still turned to their peers to receive constructive feedback. Though the guidelines for this informal peer critique were most often unstated or assumed—students generally wanted readers to focus on issues of grammar and clarity—ten of the writers in this study still recognized the value of soliciting opinions from outside readers, making peer critique an especially important part of the FYC curriculum. When these students perceive FYC as a trial space for learning discursive strategies, they can then later adapt these practices to the demands of upper-division courses.

Understanding the main features and uses of writing in their fields

A practice that divided the group was how or whether they made use of their professors as they went about learning the features and uses of writing in their fields. As freshmen, four of the twelve reported that they went to see their professors on multiple occasions in an effort to determine expectations for writing assignments. As seniors, five of the twelve were meeting with professors regularly (the original four plus one more) to discuss their writing. The remaining seven participants claimed that they either rarely or never went to meet with their professors to talk about writing. Given that professors are a logical source of information on discipline-specific discursive features, it is curious that not all students made use of this resource.

In part, the explanation for participants' divergence in this area hinges on the interpersonal dynamics between students and professors. For example, Lois (Psychology) never met with her professors because she found them intimidating and did not want to appear unintelligent. However, interpersonal dynamics hardly account for all students' decision to avoid meeting about writing with their professors.

Indeed, some students who rarely or never met with professors managed to understand what their professors were looking for through channels that did not require face-to-face meetings. Most commonly, the instructional design of students' upper-division classes appears to have been such that they felt little need to conference with professors outside of class. Specifically, participants reported making extensive use of written assignment guidelines, sample papers, and also grading rubrics that their professors distributed. The presence of one or more of these figured prominently into students' ability to understand (or feel they understood) and therefore complete writing assignments successfully without interacting one-on-one with their professors.

Another important way students learned to understand and produce successful writing in their fields was through repetition. Sheryl (Nursing) explained that the stability of the common genres in her

major was such that over time she learned how to write as expected. In numerous nursing classes, Sheryl was assigned patient care plans with common characteristics she was eventually able to anticipate. Sheryl's experience is particularly interesting because she did not find writing particularly easy or enjoyable, yet given enough exposure to a target genre she was eventually able to produce it effectively. Like Sheryl, Steve (Composite Engineering) also reported that he came to understand the main features of writing in his field through repetition. Continued practice at and feedback on his laboratory experiment reports inculcated in him a degree of competence with the genre, even if he explained the process in a way that may suggest a certain amount of suffering: "after a while [it was] just beaten into our skulls to write in a certain way."

Not all students in this study made a concerted effort to try to understand the features and uses of writing in their fields. For example, although Amy (Public Relations) received grading rubrics that communicated her professors' discursive expectations in classes such as News Writing and Feature Writing, she noted that she was not "a real big checklist person." Amy did not use the materials her professors distributed to try to understand how to approach writing tasks. She instead completed her assignments at the last minute, claiming that the key to producing her best work was simply to write under pressure. As she put it, "It's almost an adrenaline [rush] to write" when pressed for time.

Melanie (Business Education), a writer who showed almost no improvement in the FYC assessment, also avoided talking with professors about her writing assignments. (In fact, she claimed she had never gone to meet about anything with any of her professors.) Melanie further stated that she did not know how the grading rubrics her professors distributed were supposed to be helpful. Her attitude toward her written work perhaps explains her reluctance to invest more fully in it: "I've written okay my whole life, so let's just get this over with because it's required." As their interviews and portfolios indicate, neither Amy nor Melanie developed into an especially strong writer on the characteristics we assessed, at least in part because both had adopted practices that did not lend themselves to the production of careful, attentive written work.

These two examples notwithstanding, the other ten participants in the study ultimately did develop an understanding of the features and uses of writing in their fields. For some, this knowledge came through repeated meetings with professors. For others, the instructional design of specific courses yielded opportunities to learn discursive features. Finally, though not all students mentioned repetition as a strategy for learning the main features and uses of writing as did Cheryl and Steve, their simply having multiple opportunities to write in specified genres helped them solidify their understandings of those genres.

Adapting writing to the general expectations of readers in their fields

In general, the participants in this study learned to adapt their writing to the general expectations of readers in their fields, though there was considerable variation with regard to the amount of adaptation each of the participants' majors required. As revealed in the prior study, in FYC students worked within a relatively stable collection of genres: narration, persuasion, argumentation, comparison/contrast, and library research were mainstays of their collective experience. Participants also noted that in FYC they viewed their primary audience as the classroom professor. Once students made the transition into their majors, their written work spread across a range of genres and was targeted at more specialized audiences. It is true that some students' majors required writing that generically speaking was very similar to the work they were asked to produce in FYC (e.g., Evan and Claire, the two Pre-Law majors, were in a field that prizes argumentation above other genres). In most cases, however, the participants were being asked to adapt their writing to meet the needs of increasingly specialized audiences.

For example, Sheryl, Hailey (both Nursing), and Nikki (Health Promotion) all had to produce pamphlets on topics specific to their disciplines. These students each researched their topic under the direction of their professors, then were challenged to translate their developing knowledge into public documents composed for more specific real-world purposes. Their pamphlets had to be targeted to readers outside of the university, including practicing nurses as well as the general public. As Nikki explained, when writing for the general public, she had come to understand that she had to direct her writing at a sixth- to eighth-grade reading level.

Participants also evidenced sophisticated awareness of reader expectations even when their writing was not directed at narrowly defined outside audiences. For instance, Mary (TESOL/Spanish Education) noted that when writing for her TESOL professors, she knew that she needed to pay very careful attention to her field's jargon while also articulating her ideas in a detached, academic tone. However, when writing for her Education courses, she understood that a more personal and approachable articulation of her attitudes towards her subject matter was called for. She and others found the experience of writing in different disciplines and genres instructive in ways that Melanie and Amy—neither of whom was willing to meet with instructors or review scoring rubrics—did not.

Similarly, Kate (Biology) and Steve (Composite Engineering) both referenced an understanding of the ways that lab reports in their respective fields necessitated a particular tone and style. As Steve explained it, for lab reports "you don't say 'think.' It's *what* happened, *is* happening, *did* happen. Not like it *could've* happened' or 'it *might've* happened.' You're supposed to be more concrete."

Thaiss and Zawacki (2006), among others, attribute considerable importance to instructors' contextualizing their tasks and practices. For some students, such elements of instructional design appeared to play a useful role in uncovering audience expectations. For example, Hailey (Nursing) understood her audiences' expectations as a result of written guidelines and rubrics that her professors distributed. Most commonly, however, our participants developed an awareness of audience through instructor response. While writing literature reviews and research reports for courses in her Psychology major, Lois, for instance, utilized professor feedback to learn that she needed to keep her *self* out of the paper as more of a "background figure," a stylistic and tonal adjustment that clearly speaks to her understanding of her audience's expectations.

One of the compelling differences for some of the participants was a change in attitude towards their audiences once they transitioned into their majors. Nikki (Health Promotion), Sheryl (Nursing), Hailey (Nursing), Mary (TESOL/Spanish Education), Kate (Biology) and Amy (Public Relations) all articulated an awareness that, unlike their writing in FYC, their writing in their majors had a function to perform beyond satisfying a professor. That is, while in FYC virtually all of the participants viewed their primary audience as the classroom professor, once into their majors many participants understood that their written work had a larger function to fulfill, one that demanded an expanded, more professional view of audience. For instance, Amy (Public Relations) explained that when writing in her field she had to think about satisfying a newsroom editor because, as she put it, if an editor "sees something wrongly formatted he will just throw it away." (And yet, despite this awareness, Amy regularly submitted written work containing numerous errors, an indication that her sense of her audience's expectations did not in itself motivate precise or accurate writing.) Mary (TESOL/Spanish Education) talked about her recognition that in TESOL her research writing needed to offer something "useful" and "new" to the wider field, a clear articulation of an expanding, more professionally minded view of audience. And Sheryl (Nursing), Kate (Biology), and Nikki (Health Promotion) noted that they used writing as a tool for better thinking and learning, coming to new or better conclusions about their topics as they wrote, a practice suggesting an understanding of audience that extends beyond the paper-for-grade economy common to all of the participants in FYC. For these individuals, an increasingly honed understanding of the generic requirements of the field

appear to have allowed writing to function as a way to expand professional disciplinary knowledge, a purpose that goes well beyond simply satisfying a classroom professor.

Finally, although it is true that learning how to adapt writing to meet field-specific expectations is an ongoing process, what appears clear is that the majority of the participants in this study showed at least some ability to target their writing for specific audiences. However, part of what influenced students' ability to make such adaptations was the level of discursive specificity individual projects required. For example, the lab reports that Kate (Biology) and Steve (Composite Engineering) composed followed carefully prescribed formats. The same is true for the care plans that Hailey and Sheryl (both Nursing) prepared. As a result, for these students meeting audience expectations was largely a matter of following an established format for their work so that it addressed each report heading (e.g., Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Data, etc.). By contrast, both Evan and Claire (Pre-Law) were writing argumentative senior theses that did not follow strict formulae. Hence, it was largely up to them to learn the rhetorical moves that, for instance, would weave a review of previous literature into an original line of research and argumentation. Although both Evan and Claire had learned to meet audience expectations—as evident in their successful completion of their senior theses—the process for doing so was rhetorically and syntactically more abstruse for them than it was for writers whose disciplines favored genres with clearly defined formats and expectations.

The students' ability to adapt their writing for specific readers appeared to be at least partially dependent on how explicitly each field defined its audiences. When students had to write for a clearly labeled outside audience (e.g., the Nursing majors writing for a patient-clientele readership), expectations were clear. However, when the intended audience was some constituency within the academy (e.g., more advanced members of a particular academic discourse community) knowing how to adapt for that audience was less a matter of following a prescriptive format.

Learning the conventions of evidence, format, usage, and documentation in their fields

Students in this study learned conventions of evidence, format, usage, and documentation through a variety of methods and with varying degrees of success. Among many of these students' concerns was their ability to produce grammatically correct and effective sentences. Several students entered the university feeling as though their grammar and usage skills were well developed. Kate (Biology) and Mary (TESOL/Spanish Education), for instance, both began their studies with admirably clear understandings of grammatical convention. More commonly, as was revealed in the FYC assessment, students started their college careers with average or below average understandings of grammar and usage. However, by the conclusion of FYC, all but Melanie (Business Education) were meeting or exceeding expectations in matters of language and convention.

Nonetheless, grammar and usage remained areas of concern for the other writers in this study. For instance, Hailey (Nursing) explained that in her major she had sometimes lost points on assignments because of spelling and grammar errors, a circumstance that lead her to believe that "writing is not my strong point." This self-evaluation is somewhat surprising given that Hailey had shown marked improvement on grammar and usage on the FYC assessment during her first year on campus. Moreover, she had also demonstrated a consistently high level of achievement—all As and Bs—in her major course of study. She did report that she often felt unsure about her writing, explaining that when her professors wrote comments on her papers she often did not know which comments to prioritize. Quite likely, her perceived difficulties with grammar and usage superseded other areas of competence when it came to Hailey's felt sense of herself as a writer.

Not all students who struggled with grammar and usage were aware of their difficulties. The writing that Amy (Public Relations) produced reflected a few consistent patterns of error, though she herself did not seem vexed by this, perhaps because she not only did not recognize her own difficulties but also because she had never received especially low grades on her written work.

In sum, the other students in this study demonstrated acceptable or better understandings of grammar and usage. What seems noteworthy is that almost none of them began their college careers with this understanding. Rather, starting in FYC and, presumably, continuing on into the majors, students received ample opportunity to hone their abilities to produce effective, accurate prose. Kate (Biology), Steve (Mechanical Engineering), Nikki (Health Promotion), Evan (Law and Society), Rita (Advertising), and Mary (TESOL/Spanish Education) all attributed much of their progress in this area to feedback they regularly received from professors, either on drafts as they were composing (Nikki, Rita, and Mary) or on assignments after they had been graded (Kate, Steve, and Evan). Additionally, both Nikki (Health Promotion) and Rita (Advertising) made regular use of the university's writing center to help them address grammar and usage.

With regard to documentation style and format, students reported a range of learning experiences. For example, Hailey (Nursing) learned APA, her major's preferred documentation style, in FYC, though she noted that she still found APA format difficult. Several students learned MLA in FYC and then had to teach themselves their major's preferred style, as was true for Lois (Psychology), Claire (Pre-Law) and Sheryl (Nursing). However, only Sheryl (Nursing) reported finding difficulty in the switch from one documentation style to another. Of the twelve, only Melanie (Business Education) reported that she did not use a specific documentation style, explaining that because she found citation difficult she often—and surprisingly, we might add—found ways to complete assignments without having to incorporate outside sources. Melanie's case notwithstanding, in general students gained exposure to documentation style and format in FYC and then gained greater proficiency and specificity with it once they moved into their major. Of the ten students in the study that we would judge to be clearly meeting or exceeding expectations as writers, all were quite proficient in their discipline's preferred conventions for documentation and format.

Conclusion

The narrative that emerges through the collective experience of the twelve students who participated in this study points towards a number of summative observations about these student writers as they transition from FYC into advanced coursework in their major fields of study. Although these findings cannot be generalized to larger populations of student writers, they can offer depth and insight to a wider appreciation for variables that matter as students move from FYC to writing in the disciplines.

Motivation as Critical Variable

To begin, successful student writers are successful for a wide variety of reasons, not all of which have to do with their professors, courses, or institutions. The ten individuals in this study who performed well on writing tasks both in and beyond FYC exhibited a set of affective characteristics that contributed to their development as writers. We might compile these characteristics—desire to improve, interest in writing, strong work ethic—into an overarching evaluation of motivation. Four of the students in our study exhibited all of these traits, and ten of them, two of the three.

The students in this study who were motivated—either because they wanted good grades or because they wanted to be prepared for a given career—consistently demonstrated competent or, in some cases, excellent writing skills. Their motivation surfaced in a variety of ways, including their willingness to engage in writing as a recursive process complete with multiple revisions, as well as

the lengths to which they would go to ensure that they accurately understood rhetorical tasks. Also, students we identified as successful writers more often sought feedback from others—their peers or professors—and worked conscientiously to incorporate that feedback into their writing. Moreover, these successful writers regularly made more careful use of grading rubrics, sample papers, and assignment guidelines to help them understand audience and purpose. They also were likely to recognize deficiencies in their skill sets and work independently to correct them. Seeking feedback, using resources, and working independently all indicate higher levels of motivation.

The data also revealed that students who were not motivated to improve their writing made little progress learning how to write for their major fields of study. We might wonder if the two students who were less successful would have been better writers had they encountered a course or professor that motivated them. However, given that traits like desire, work ethic, and intellectual interest—characteristics at the very core of motivation—are seated deeply within the individual, it seems unrealistic to expect a single professor, course, program, or administrator to reverse motivation that is suboptimal.

At face value, suggesting that motivation is a critical component of learning to write well may seem simplistic. However, the crux of the issue is actually not that motivated students will *necessarily* be good writers or find writing easy. Several of the participants in this study were not naturally strong writers but achieved success nonetheless through force of their own will. Hence, learning to write well is dependent neither solely on ability nor on a given professor, course, or program. Rather, becoming a competent writer depends upon a particular student's motivation to put forth the requisite effort, something that is largely outside of our control as professors and programs. This is not to say that professors and administrators do not have a persistent obligation to work to inspire students. As discussed below, we feel there *are* steps that institutions can take to create instructional environments where students have greater opportunity to become competent writers.

Role of Instructional Design

The instructional design of individual courses and majors contributes markedly to students' ability to write well. When discussing their ability to understand their fields' procedures, features, uses, audiences, technologies, conventions, and formats, students referenced a common set of helpful instructional practices. Almost across the board, the students reported finding value in receiving written guidelines detailing precise expectations for writing assignments, even when they were writing for professors they had had more than once and when they were writing genres they had produced many times previously. Ancillary to written guidelines, grading rubrics describing what students needed to include and prioritize were almost universally cited as necessary components to understanding how to complete rhetorical tasks. Finally, students in this study pointed to the value they had garnered from examining examples of successful writing assignments, either from their professors or from past students.

These three sources of discursive information—assignment guidelines, grading rubrics, and sample papers—together point to a central truth about what students need if they are to become successful specialized writers: students must have a way to discover their fields' rhetorical, topical, syntactic, stylistic, and format expectations. And, the more easily students can return to and scrutinize this information, the more likely they will be able to understand and subsequently meet those expectations.

Although no professor, curricular design, or program can ensure that all students will write well, the students in this study clearly benefitted when the writing load was distributed across the semester rather than merely collected at the end, in part because such distribution emphasized writing as

essential to academic learning and intellectual development. With regard to feedback on writing, students progressed as writers when they had opportunities for incorporating readers' critiques into their writing and also when they received prompt, purposeful, information-rich feedback from their professors.

Student Understanding of Generic Expectations

To return to our earlier question regarding students' writing performance, the present study does clarify why some students may struggle to write clearly and effectively. When students fail to meet generic expectations, the reason is not necessarily because they did not have time or because they did not make an effort, though at times each of these are certainly plausible explanations, as Amy's and Melanie's cases demonstrate. More broadly, though, when students do not meet expectations it can be because they do not understand them fully. As a result, they may simplify a writing task until it becomes accessible, until they can see a way forward with the project. The participants in this study solved (or attempted to solve) the writing tasks they set for themselves. When their understanding of those tasks was congruent with their professors' expectations, meaningful development could occur. However, when their understandings were simplified versions of their professors' expectations, both their professors and they were likely to be disappointed.

As researchers, we recognize the limitations of this study. No small group of a dozen students can "represent" with accuracy any larger body, and thus we cannot generalize from their performance. This group of twelve students—while from various colleges and majors and levels of ability and accomplishment—had in common their successful completion of first-year composition and subsequent continued progress toward their degree. (Not all enrolled students, of course, make similar progress.) While the small number of participants precludes generalizability, it allows at the same time for the collection and analysis of voluminous and often complex data over a four-year period. Thus students' writing—our primary source of evidence—can be compared and triangulated with interview and survey results and performance assessments over time. Even when taking every measure to ensure the validity of scoring results and consistency of interviewing measures, however, we cannot guarantee that our own analysis of student learning is unflawed. Indeed, in some instances our own conclusions diverged from that of the instructors in students' majors, based as they were on access to different data and, certainly, divergent assumptions about writing and learning. We can, however, present our conclusions with the confidence that they are based upon a rigorous review of student writing collected over years of study and triangulated with multiple secondary and tertiary sources of data. Too few such studies exist.

Indeed, the very subject of transfer of learning from first-year composition to writing in the disciplines is by its very nature difficult to examine. No two students undertake exactly the same path towards their degree, and most will encounter a range of different instructors with varying practices and expectations. What and how students learn to write in FYC can only begin to prepare them for the diverse range and expectations of WID coursework, and the considerable diversity of genres across the disciplines can make cross-disciplinary comparisons suspect. Even though any longitudinal, qualitative study of student learning in different disciplines will encounter these same difficulties, such work nonetheless provides a more nuanced and descriptive analysis than can any single assessment or survey instrument.

Most of the students in this study came to college with limited writing skills: eight of the twelve performed at levels lower than "acceptable" on their first assessed essay in FYC. Yet given sufficient investment in their work they improved significantly by the end of their first semester of writing instruction. Once they progressed into their majors, these students usually succeeded with the kinds

of writing tasks that matter in their respective disciplines given reasonable levels of motivation along with appropriate instructional materials. Those students who did not improve as writers, or who struggled mightily to do so, exhibited less-than-exemplary attitudes and behaviors nearly from the start of their academic careers, leaving them unable or unwilling to take the steps that are necessary for bettering their writing skills. As a consequence, such students were not able to improve their writing in the same ways, or to the same degrees, as students who were more motivated to learn how to write, more responsible in following their writing teachers' instructions, and more diligent in their efforts. However, these struggling students and their difficulties tell only a small part of the story of this research. The far greater number of student writers in this study instead exhibited strong degrees of success with their written work, an indication to us that with appropriate basic skills instruction, sufficient motivation, intentional curricular design, and recognized good practices for writing across the curriculum, students can write at or near very high levels of accomplishment.

Appendix A - First-Year Composition Scoring Guide

	Argument claims & evidence	Purpose structure, content, & one	Language sentencing, paragraphing, diction	Conventions usage & correctness	Documentation function & format	Overall effectiveness
0 problematic	Claims are unidentifiable, unreasonable, and/or unsupported with evidence. Use of evidence is problematic—irrelevant to (or unsupportive of) claims	Structure, content, and/or tone indicate major problems in addressing the knowledge and attitudes of the audience. Problems denote fundamental lack of understanding of logical and rhetorical concepts.	Essay evidences multiple, major, and systematic weaknesses in language, sentencing, paragraphing, and/or diction. Problems denote fundamental lack of understanding of rhetorical and grammatical concepts.	Essay evidences multiple, major, and systematic errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and/or usage. Problems denote fundamental lack of understanding or persistent misapplication of rules and conventions.	Essay does not cite sources purposefully or appropriately; citations are frequently absent, incomplete, or incorrect. Problems denote fundamental lack of understanding or purposes and methods of formal documentation.	Essay does not demonstrate overall coherence; is not clearly based on an adequate reading of assigned text(s); and/or evidences multiple and major problems as indicated in previous five sections.
1	An essay may be marked a "1" in any area only if it clearly does not meet the criteria for "problematic" (0) or "acceptable" (2) completely or consistently.					
2 acceptable	Claims are identifiable, reasonable, and supported	Structure, content, and/or tone indicate only	Essay evidences minor or occasional	Essay evidences only minor or occasional	Essay demonstrates only minor or occasional	Essay demonstrates overall coherence

	with evidence from readings. Evidence is relevant to claims and presented intelligibly.	minor or occasional problems in addressing the knowledge and attitudes of the audience.	weaknesses in language, sentencing, paragraphing, or diction.	errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and/or usage.	errors, lapses, or gaps in documentation. A formal system (e.g. MLA, APA, CBE, Chicago) is recognizably employed.	based on reading (interpreting, analyzing, critiquing, and/or synthesizing) of assigned text(s); demonstrates competence in previous five sections.
3	An essay may be marked a "3" in any area only if it clearly does not meet the criteria for "acceptable" (2) or "exemplary" (4) completely or consistently.					
4 exemplary	Claims are intelligent and make purposeful, appropriately documented use of authoritative source material as supporting evidence. Evidence is supportive of claims, varied in type and source, and presented authoritatively.	Structure, content, and tone are adapted appropriately to the knowledge and attitudes of the audience.	Essay evidences vivid, concrete language; concise, varied sentences; unified, cohesive paragraphs; gender-inclusive English; and a college-level vocabulary.	Essay evidences careful proofreading, editing, and correcting of the final copy for common errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and usage.	Essay demonstrates purposeful, rhetorically effective use of a formal documentation system (e.g. MLA, APA, CBE, Chicago). Citations are consistent, complete, and correct, according to the conventions of the system.	Essay demonstrates sophisticated, rhetorically persuasive argument based on careful critical reading (interpreting, analyzing, critiquing, and/or synthesizing) of assigned text(s); demonstrates accomplishment in each of previous five sections.

Appendix B - Prior Study of Student Learning in First-Year Composition

During the 2005-06 academic year, a randomly selected sample of student essays from FYC was assessed for evidence of student accomplishment in six areas: **argument, purpose, language, conventions, documentation,** and **overall** performance. So as to measure both students' accomplishment by the end of the term and their improvement across it, the essays culled included pairs written to the same prompt by the same students at the beginning and again at the end of the

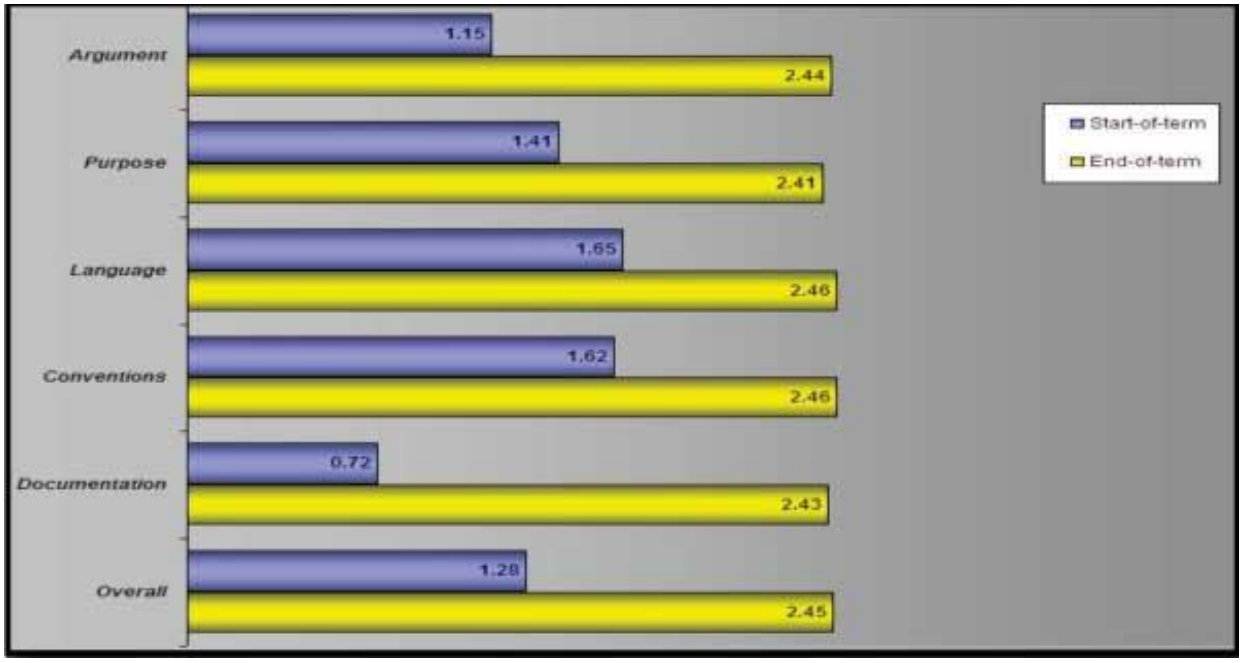
semester. In a scoring session, each essay was rated twice in a blind review a detailed scoring guide (See Appendix A).

The results indicate that on average students enter the course with at best marginal ability in those areas assessed, but demonstrate better-than-acceptable performance in all areas by its conclusion. In some areas—especially students' abilities to argue with evidence, address an audience, document their sources, and in their overall performance—students' improvement was found to be strikingly significant. In others, particularly their use of language and conventions, improvement was less notable, but still nonetheless demonstrable.

Results from Essay Group 1, Start-of-Term Compared with Essay Group 2, End-of-Term

	Start-of-Term Performance				End-of-Term Performance		
1	Problematic (Below Expectations)	Acceptable (Meets Expectations)	Exemplary (Above Expectations)	2	Problematic (Below Expectations)	Acceptable (Meets Expectations)	Exemplary (Above Expectations)
Argument	56%	43%	1%	Argument	13%	42%	44%
Purpose	42%	56%	2%	Purpose	10%	52%	38%
Language	29%	66%	6%	Language	7%	56%	37%
Conventions	29%	67%	4%	Conventions	8%	52%	40%
Documentation	77%	21%	2%	Documentation	11%	50%	39%
Overall	50%	47%	3%	Overall	9%	48%	42%

Comparative Mean Scores for All Essays, Start-of-Term and End-of-Term (4.0 scale)



Also examined were the number and percentage of students whose second essays (from the end of term) demonstrated improvement in the outcomes measured. A vast majority—typically between 75

to 90 percent of our students—demonstrated at least moderate improvement (of a full 1.0 score or more) on the outcomes measured. Furthermore, considerable percentages of students demonstrated **significant** improvement: over 40 percent of the students demonstrated significant improvement (of 1.5 or more) in the **purpose** and **overall** outcomes, 55 percent in the **argument** outcome, and over 70 percent in **documentation.**

Appendix C - Participants' Performance in First-Year Composition Study

Table 1 shows how the twelve students who participated in this study performed on the earlier FYC study conducted at the beginning of the term. Their performance ranged from "problematic" (score 0) to "acceptable" (score 2) with only a couple of students scoring above this level on a couple of the assessed outcomes.

Table 1. FYC Results of Study Participants, Start-of-Term

FYC Start	argument	purpose	language	conventions	documentation	overall
4						
3			oo	o		
2	oooo	oooooo	oooooooo	oooo	o oo	ooooooo
1	oooo	ooo	o	ooooo	ooooo	oooo
0	oooo	ooo	o	oo	oooo	o

Table 2 shows how these same twelve students performed on the same assessment conducted at or near the conclusion of FYC. Their performance ranged from "acceptable" (score 2) to "exemplary" (score 4) with only a single student scoring below acceptable levels on the assessed outcomes.

Table 2. FYC Results of Study Participants, End-of-Term

FYC End	argument	purpose	language	conventions	documentation	overall
4	oooo	ooo	oooo	ooo	oo	ooo
3	oooo	ooooo	oooo	ooooo	oooooo	ooooo
2	oo	oooo	oooo	ooo	ooo	ooo
1	oo			o	o	o
0						

The improvement reflected on Table 2 correlates closely with the larger findings. For the larger population, especially students' abilities to argue with evidence, address an audience, and document their sources, improvement was found to be strikingly significant. In others, particularly their use of language and conventions, improvement was less notable though still demonstrable. These twelve writers had, as had a significant majority of the student population, demonstrated considerable improvement in FYC.

Appendix D - NSSE Consortium Study of Writing Survey

1. **DURING THE CURRENT SCHOOL YEAR, for how many of your writing assignments did you do each of the following?** *5=All assignments, 4=Most assignments, 3=Some assignments, 2=Few assignments, 1=No assignments.*

	5	4	3	2	1
1A Brainstormed (listed ideas, mapped concepts, prepared an outline, etc.) to develop ideas before starting assignment					
1B Talked with your instructor to develop your ideas before you started drafting your assignment					
1C Talked with a classmate, friend, or family member to develop your ideas before you started drafting your assignment					
1D Received feedback from your instructor about a draft before turning in your final assignment					
1E Received feedback from a classmate, friend, or family member about a draft before turning in your final assignment					
1F Visited a campus-based writing or tutoring center to get help with your writing assignment before turning it in					
1G Used an online tutoring service to get help with your writing assignment before turning it in					
1H Proofread your final draft for errors before turning it in					

2. **DURING THE CURRENT SCHOOL YEAR, in how many of your writing assignments did you:** 5=All assignments, 4=Most assignments, 3=Some assignments, 2=Few assignments, 1=No assignments.

	5	4	3	2	1
2A Narrate or describe one of your own experiences					
2B Summarize something you read, such as articles, books, or online publications					
2C Analyze or evaluate something you read, researched, or observed					
2D Describe your methods or findings related to data you collected in lab or field work, a survey project, etc.					
2E Argue a position using evidence and reasoning					
2F Explain in writing the meaning of numerical or statistical data					
2G Write in the style and format of a specific field (engineering, history, psychology, etc.)					
2H Include drawings, tables, photos, screen shots, or other visual content into your written assignment					
2I Create the project with multimedia (web page, poster, slide presentation such as PowerPoint, etc.)					

3. **DURING THE CURRENT SCHOOL YEAR, for how many of your writing assignments did YOUR INSTRUCTORS do each of the following?** *5=All assignments, 4=Most assignments, 3=Some assignments, 2=Few assignments, 1=No assignments.*

	5	4	3	2	1
3A Provided clear instructions describing what he or she wanted you to do					
3B Explained in advance what he or she wanted you to learn					
3C Explained in advance the criteria he or she would use to grade your assignment					
3D Provided a sample of a completed assignment written by the instructor or a student					

3E Asked you to do short pieces of writing that he or she did not grade					
3F Asked you to give feedback to a classmate about a draft or outline the classmate had written					
3G Asked you to write with classmates to complete a group project					
3H Asked you to address a real or imagined audience such as your classmates, a politician, non-experts, etc.					

4. **BEFORE YOU GRADUATE, which of the following have you done or do you plan to do?** *Response options: 4=Done, 3=Plan to do, 2=Do not plan to do, 1=Have not decided.*

	4	3	2	1
4A Prepare a portfolio that collects written work from more than one class				
4B Submit work you wrote to a student or professional publication (magazine, journal, newspaper, collection of student work, etc.)				

Appendix E - Interview Guides

First-Round Interview Guide

1. **Discussion of the WRITING PROCESS you undertook in FYC.** (Potential topics include brainstorming, research, reading, drafting, workshopping, revising, proofreading, editing.)
    a. What did your FYC course aim to teach you about the writing process?
    b. What were you normally asked to do in terms of the writing process?
2. **Discussion of the kinds of WRITING PROJECTS you were asked to do in FYC.** (Potential topics might include narration/description, summary, analysis, evaluation, research, methodology, argument, visuals/media.)
    a. Can you describe the kinds or types of writing projects you completed in FYC?
    b. What were the goals or the purposes of the kinds of writing you completed?
3. **Discussion of the KINDS OF INSTRUCTION you received in FYC.** (Topics might include instructions, explanations, grading criteria, sample work, informal writing, workshopping/peer review, collaborative writing, writing for specific audiences.)
    a. For your assignments, can you describe the kinds of instruction or support you were provided?
    b. What activities or instructions do you recall as being helpful to you?
4. **Discussion of your own IMPROVEMENT AS A WRITER from the beginning of FYC to the end.**
    a. What kinds of learning, if any, most improved your abilities during the course?

   b. What, if anything, does your final paper for the course demonstrate that your first paper does not?
   c. With what elements of writing did your work most demonstrate success?
   d. With what elements of writing did your work most demonstrate struggle?

Second-Round Interview Guide

1. **Discussion of the WRITING PROCESS you undertook in your recent projects.** (Potential topics include brainstorming, research, reading, drafting, workshopping, revising, proofreading, editing.)
   a. What did your courses aim to teach you about the writing process?
   b. What were you normally asked to do in terms of the writing process?
2. **Discussion of the kinds of WRITING PROJECTS you are asked to do in your recent projects.** (Potential topics might include narration/description, summary, analysis, evaluation, research, methodology, argument, visuals/media.)
   a. Can you describe the kinds or types of writing projects you completed?
   b. What were the goals or the purposes of the kinds of writing you completed?
3. **Discussion of the KINDS OF INSTRUCTION you received in your recent courses.** (Topics might include instructions, explanations, grading criteria, sample work, informal writing, workshopping/peer review, collaborative writing, writing for specific audiences.)
   a. For your assignments, can you describe the kinds of instruction or support you were provided?
   b. What activities or instructions do you recall as being helpful to you?
4. **Discussion of your own IMPROVEMENT AS A WRITER from FYC to the current year.**
   a. What kinds of learning, if any, most improved your abilities during the recent year?
   b. What, if anything, does your recent work demonstrate that your earlier work does not?
   c. With what elements of writing does your recent work most demonstrate success?
   d. With what elements of writing does your recent work most demonstrate struggle?

Third-Round Interview Guide

1. Describe the focus and purposes of the interview: to compare and contrast results of the First and Second Round Interviews; to review the interviewee's comments from the First and Second Round Interviews; and to review the written Summary Reports of the prior interviews.
2. Ask your participant for any connections, comparisons, or contrasts evident in the two written reports.
3. Follow up on (3) above, asking for clarification, extension, examples, omissions, etc.
4. Present your own preliminary analysis, and ask your participant for comments, reactions, examples, etc.
5. Invite your interviewee to comment on their participation in the project.

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Notes

[1] These questions were used with permission from the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and the Council of Writing Program Administrators. See Appendix D for a copy of the questionnaire.

[2] The authors wish to thank research interns Sarah Botzek, Sarah Certa, Jenna Gleisner, Heather Mead, Alexandra Nugent, Kelli Straley, Holly Thompson, and Grant Withrow for their excellent work conducting and coding the peer-to-peer interviews used in this article.

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