

FIRST-YEAR WRITING PHILOSOPHY

In the First-Year Writing Program, we believe a variety of assignments, workshops and other writing-focused activities help writers to develop confidence and broaden their range of skills and strategies. We believe students learn best when they are engaged in a meaningful intellectual inquiry, focused around questions worth exploring via writing. As a result, while each instructor will determine the content of the readings and assignments for his or her FWS section, we ask that each instructor create a coherent *composition* course that engages students in rigorous and engaging inquiry-based writing.

While individual readings and assignments may differ, each FWS course shares the same goals for student outcomes: Rhetorical Knowledge, Critical Reading and Writing, Process Knowledge, Knowledge of Conventions, and Awareness. These outcomes have been revised and adapted from the [National Council of Writing Program Administrators](#).

SHARED OUTCOMES

1. Rhetorical Knowledge:

Successful completion of FWS will help students:

- to focus on a purpose and respond to the needs of different audiences.
- to understand that different rhetorical situations (consisting of audience, writer, purpose, time and culture) require adopting appropriate voice, tone, level of formality, genre and format.
- to write in several genres.

2. Critical Reading and Writing Skills

Students who successfully complete FWS will be better able:

- to use reading and writing as a means of critical inquiry, which means working to understand, summarize, and analyze the ideas of others.
- to understand academic writing assignments as a series of tasks including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources.
- to integrate their own ideas with those of others.
- to understand the relationships among language, knowledge, and power.
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3. Process Knowledge

Students who successfully complete FWS will be develop:

- awareness that it usually takes multiple drafts to create a successful text.
- flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proofreading.
- skills in responding to and critiquing their own and others' works and incorporate the useful feedback of others.
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4. Understanding of Conventions:

Students who successfully complete FWS will gain:

- common formats for different kinds of texts, from academic to public, and understand that appropriate formats vary given the rhetorical situation.
- appropriate means of documenting their work.
- Control over surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

5. Knowledge of Writing in Electronic Environments:

Students who successfully complete FWS will be able to:

- Use digital technology for drafting, reviewing, revising, editing, and sharing texts.
- Locate, evaluate, organize, and use research material collected from electronic sources, including scholarly library databases.
- Understand the different strengths and limitations related to both print and electronic composing and texts.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

In addition to these shared outcomes, all FWS classes at BC include the following features:

An Overarching Inquiry:

To help give coherence to the assignments and create a logic in terms of sequencing, every FWS class should be loosely structured around a central question. This question is not meant to make this a topics course, but instead to provide a 'refrain' to which the course can return, as a way to reinforce the close connection between writing and thinking. Some recent courses have included place-based inquiries, inquiries related to language and power, and inquiries related to writing and identity.

Conferences:

Instructors will set up individual conferences with each student *at least four times per semester* to discuss each student's writing projects, goals, and challenges. Conferences should last at least 15 minutes for individual conferences and longer if in small groups (three students = 45 minutes). Conference weeks should be scheduled deliberately as part of the semester and should appear on the syllabus. A conference counts as a class meeting for students, so a missed conference should count as an absence

Assigning Nonfiction in the Genre in which students will be writing:

While individual instructors are encouraged to assign a wide range of texts, including essays, memoirs, letters, political speeches, academic articles, and reviews of books, films, and music, each FWS course should work within these two constraints: (1) the majority of the assigned readings must be nonfiction prose; (2) the reading assignments must be primarily in the same genres that the students are asked to write in their assignments.

Reading Works by Students and Professional Writers:

One belief of the BC FWS program is that students learn well while reading the polished and in-process writing of other students, as well as the finished work of professional writers and scholars. Each section includes some polished writing by students. *Fresh Ink* is an online publication of student writing that you can use in the class for examples of student writing. (include link to Fresh Ink).

Four to Five Formal Papers:

While instructors have a great deal of flexibility around the assignments they create, to assure that courses are consistent in workload and rigor, an equivalent of four to five formal papers plus a good deal of informal writing (reading responses, journals, in-class writing etc.) is the amount of work desirable for the course. This work can take the form of independent papers or assignments that build on one another in some ways.

Introduction to Research Resources at BC Library:

For many students at BC, FWS is the only course they will take that promises to introduce them to the resources of the BC library system. As such, all FWS courses should include one or more opportunities for students to engage in research writing and should include an orientation to the library led by a BC librarian. You can register for a library visit to your class through the BC library website.

Portfolio Grading:

To underscore the value of revision and reflection, at least some portion of the FWS final grade is based on a portfolio that the students create and reflect on near the end of the term.

A portfolio can include either the entire body of work—including journal entries and exploratory drafts—that the student has produced during the semester or a representative sampling of the best work; in any case, a portfolio should give students a chance to demonstrate the quantity, quality, and range of their writing; to work on several essays over a long period of time.. Each portfolio includes some informal, speculative, one-draft writing as well as several more finished, carefully revised essays. A successful portfolio demonstrates the writer's rhetorical skill, versatility, and willingness to experiment and revise. A portfolio also includes some reflective component in which students assess the work they have accomplished in the course.

Published Student Writing:

Each section of FWS gives students opportunities to read the writing of their classmates and to in some way "publish" their own writing during the semester. Student essays can be photocopied and distributed, read aloud in workshop, posted to a class web page, and/or published in "class magazines."

Instructors are encouraged to nominate outstanding essays for our Dever Freshman Writing Prize (details announced in March each year). Also, students can submit their own work to *Fresh Ink*, an online publication of essays from FWS.

Faculty Development:

All teaching fellows are required to complete (successfully) a graduate seminar—Composition Theory and the Teaching of Writing—in the year prior to their teaching and submit and revise their syllabus over the summer for approval by the FWS Director. All FWS TFs are expected to attend and participate in mentoring groups and weekly practicum meetings throughout the academic year. In addition, staff members are encouraged to attend optional workshops offered by the FWS administrators on specific topics of writing instruction, technology use, or research skills. Staff and FWS students are encouraged to attend talks by writers sponsored by the FWS program or other campus groups and to make connections between the intellectual life of campus and the work of their writing seminar.