

Department of English Assessment Yearly Report
Undergraduate Component
2006 - 2007

INTRODUCTION

The English department continued its foundational assessment activity—the senior exit portfolio compiled as part of our capstone experience. Our assessment activities continued to focus on areas that lend themselves to specific definition and specific measurement. In previous years, we have refined our goals for majors, have refined our process of undergraduate program assessment, and are making ongoing changes to our curriculum.

UNDERGRADUATE COMPONENT

I. Assessment Activities

Specific assessment activities were conducted for our capstone experience.

A. Program Goals: See Attachment, "Goals of Studies in English for Graduating English Majors." These goals have been refined based on our discussions of program goals and assessment outcomes of our capstone experience. In summary, the goals include the abilities to examine a text from multiple cultural, critical, and contextual perspectives and use modern research tools with the ability to evaluate critically the use of sources.

In addition, English participated in the university's Assessment Day activities. A report of the day and its outcomes, "English Department Assessment Day Activities and Outcomes, April 2007," is attached.

B. Learning Outcomes/Data Collection: Specific assessment data were collected for the capstone experience (see the attachment, "English Major Assessment Report, 2006-07."). Learning outcomes for the capstone experience match those goals in the Attachment, "Goals of Studies in English for Graduating English Majors." Students in all strands (Literature, Writing, and Education) submit portfolios that demonstrate knowledge of at least three genres, six literary periods, and three cultures in addition to American and British literatures, and of at least three literary critical theories, in addition to New Critical explication. Assessment descriptors, developed from those goals, are also attached.

C. Results: See the attachment, "English Major Assessment Report, 2006-07." Level 4 portfolios demonstrate outstanding strengths in all areas; level 1

portfolios would seriously lack any demonstration of mastery of knowledge or abilities. Here is a summary of the results:

Fall 06/Spring 07

| Level | Rating |
|--------------|---------------|
| 4 | 11 |
| 3+ | 17 |
| 3 | 17 |
| 2+ | 7 |
| 2 | 1 |
| 1 | 0 |

II. BOT Initiative 3 Compliance: National data to establish a benchmark for performance do not exist for the Liberal Arts English major strands. Our department has studied assessment procedures from English departments at other universities. We have also worked hard to establish departmental goals and desired outcomes consistent with norms for knowledge and skills at other institutions and that are designed to prepare our students for the worlds of work and continued education. We are also considering the usefulness and feasibility of checking majors' GRE scores to assess how our graduates do on this standardized exam.

III. Plans: Continue to search for ways to include assessment throughout the program. We have implemented our plan to revise the English major curriculum to move majors more quickly into 400-level courses and out of the more generalized 300-level general education literature courses; Fall 03 was the first semester of implementing this change. We will need to track and evaluate the impact of this curriculum change once enough time has passed to gather reliable patterns of data; however, feedback from faculty teaching our 400-level courses has been extremely positive. English has been in the situation in which, because of General Education requirements, our 300 and 400-level literature classes are in demand not only from majors, but also from all students across Marshall. As such, we were finding a large number of non-majors in our 400-level classes, making the 400-level experience for our majors an extension of the General Education class. Now, instructors report that they are able to do much more in their 400-level classes, given the larger number of majors we are finding there. In addition, for the past two years the English Majors Committee has been systematically reviewing the data from our process of scoring student portfolios. As part of that review, they have begun to identify trends in the numbers, including those that suggest areas of weakness among our students. In response, the Committee has developed a number of initiatives designed to address the observed weaknesses of our program. One of these is the

development of theory-intensive courses, which would provide students the opportunity to study theory in courses beyond Senior Seminar. Plans to put these courses into place are currently underway. The Committee also plans to continue to meet with small groups from the entire English faculty to discuss the implications of the data for our program.

IV. Assistance Needed: Feedback and continued support from the UAC are needed, and of course, time and effort as well. Because we cannot look to ready-made tests or instruments, it's necessary for us to develop methods from scratch, or to research other programs and institutions to find other good ideas and to avoid re-inventing the wheel. This particular aspect is especially resource-intensive, given the nature of English studies. Obviously, such activity is essential for growth and meeting our mission; however, it requires much prioritizing and proportioning of already limited resources. As assessment activities continue to play more of a role in department activities, more and more time from faculty is demanded, and from where this time will come I am not certain. We had an especially difficult time finding funding for our assessment practices last spring. Traditionally, faculty who participate in the two days of undergraduate program assessment receive a very modest stipend for their time. Last spring, however, funding was lost with the freeze on department budgets, and as result, those faculty who scored portfolios in May only just received their stipend in December, over six months later, and then only because of a creative reallocation of funding on my part.

V. What has the department learned? We still question if the portfolio method of assessment best serves all our majors. The English Education majors seem best served by the portfolio system; English Literature majors may be better served by a thesis-type capstone and assessment activity. English Writing majors continue at a disadvantage in our assessment process (and capstone)—they seem least prepared to meet our general English major requirements (in terms of literature exposure and literary theory); the department continues its discussion of how these writing strand students might be better served by our program. Assessment scoring will no longer feed back into the students' grades for their capstone course.

Additionally, we have tracked assessment scores by strand and learning outcomes to see where our students' strengths and weaknesses lie; we are also able to look critically at the assessment tool itself using these figures (see the attached spreadsheet that begins with the heading, "SCORE AVERAGES OF ALL STUDENTS").

The assessment results for our undergraduate program for AY 2006-2007 continue to show that our English majors are meeting the exit goals we've set for them. To

measure how well our students meet these goals, we require each senior to produce a portfolio of work from their English courses. These portfolios are blindly scored on a four point scale (4=Excellent; 3=Good; 2=Satisfactory; 1=Unsatisfactory). In 2006-2007, all students passed the portfolio requirement. The vast majority passed with a good (3) or higher, and no student received an unsatisfactory score.

As noted above, the English Major Committee continues to review the data we've accumulated from the portfolio scoring. These data include student scores for all of the descriptors on our portfolio assessment instrument. That is, we score students not only on the overall quality of the portfolio, but also on particular areas, including their knowledge of literary genres, periods, theories, etc.; their ability to write in various modes, to analyze texts, to apply knowledge, etc; their strand expertise; and their ability to write self-reflectively about their own educations.

The spreadsheets we've created break numbers down by average scores overall, average scores in individual areas, and averages by strand. After reviewing the data individually, we located a number of trends evident in the data. The one trend that seemed most pronounced—and that we therefore have spent most of our time discussing—is the difference in scores between literature strand students and writing strand students. At times, the average scores in the writing strand are a whole point behind those in the literature strand. We discussed the possible reasons for this, such as the differences in coursework within the strands, the goals of English 420 (the senior capstone course), and potential weaknesses in the assessment rubric.

To address this gap, we've discussed how to make English 420 more about intensive study that would serve as a capstone experience better suited to a student's strand expertise. This led to a discussion about the possibility of having a separate section of 420 for writing strand students, one that would provide them a writing capstone better suited to their studies and interests in writing, and the possibility of revising the strand course requirements. The English Major Committee has been exploring all of these options through conversations and meetings with the larger department; no clear route for change has been decided yet.

Marshall University
Assessment of Student Outcomes: Component/Course/Program Level

Component Area/Program/Discipline: English / Undergraduate 06-07

| Component / Course / Program Level | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|--|
| Student Outcome | Person or Office Responsible | Assessment Tool or Approach | Standards/Benchmark | Results/Analysis | Action Taken |
| <p>1. KNOWLEDGE</p> <p>Demonstrate a fundamental knowledge of</p> <p>1) A variety of texts from a range of genres, periods, and cultures, including American and British literature and relevant contextual material.</p> <p>2) Critical theory and relevant applications, including the history and/or structures of the English language.</p> <p>3) Other subject expertise as required by the strand.</p> | <p>Dr. David Hatfield, Chair, English (ext. 66638); Dr. Janet Badia, Director of Undergraduate Studies, English (ext. 62357)</p> | <p>Senior Exit Portfolio Evaluation—students assemble in their ENG 420 capstone course a portfolio that includes knowledge of at least three genres, six literary periods, and three cultures in addition to American and British literatures, and of at least three literary critical theories, in addition to New Critical explication.</p> | <p>See the attached documents, “Assessment Descriptors....”</p> | <p><u>Fall 2006</u></p> <p>Level 4 5</p> <p>Level 3+ 9</p> <p>Level 3 10</p> <p>Level 2+ 4</p> <p>Level 2 1</p> <p>Level 1 0</p> <p><u>Spring 2007</u></p> <p>Level 4 6</p> <p>Level 3+ 8</p> <p>Level 3 7</p> <p>Level 2+ 3</p> <p>Level 1 0</p> | <p>Discussion among faculty about how to strengthen the writing strand is underway; also developed a theory-intensive course descriptor to help guide students towards courses that could help them meet portfolio requirements in theory. During Assessment Day, we also realized the disconnect between our exit goals and the assignments students actually complete throughout their coursework before 420 and are working to remedy this problem.</p> |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|--|
| <p>2. ABILITIES</p> <p>1) Analyze, interpret, and explicate texts (poetry, prose, drama, film, etc.), correctly applying literary or technical terms as relevant.</p> <p>2) Examine a text from multiple perspectives, including critical and theoretical approaches, applying terms and approaches correctly.</p> <p>3) Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a text (which may include one's own, or another student's writing).</p> <p>4) Organize and present arguments orally and in writing.</p> <p>5) Write formal essays effectively and write for different purposes and for different audiences.</p> <p>6) Use professional research tools, showing both accuracy in format and the ability to choose, introduce, provide background for, and evaluate researched sources properly.</p> | <p>Dr. David Hatfield, Chair, English (ext. 66638); Dr. Janet Badia, Director of Undergraduate Studies, English (ext. 62357)</p> | <p>Senior Exit Portfolio Evaluation—students assemble in their ENG 420 capstone course a portfolio that includes knowledge of at least three genres, six literary periods, and three cultures in addition to American and British literatures, and of at least three literary critical theories, in addition to New Critical explication.</p> | <p>See the attached documents, “Assessment Descriptors....”</p> | <p><u>Fall 2006</u></p> <p>Level 4 5</p> <p>Level 3+ 9</p> <p>Level 3 10</p> <p>Level 2+ 4</p> <p>Level 2 1</p> <p>Level 1 0</p> <p><u>Spring 2007</u></p> <p>Level 4 6</p> <p>Level 3+ 8</p> <p>Level 3 7</p> <p>Level 2+ 3</p> <p>Level 1 0</p> | <p>Discussion among faculty about how to strengthen the writing strand is underway; also developed a theory-intensive course descriptor to help guide students towards courses that could help them meet portfolio requirements in theory. During Assessment Day, we also realized the disconnect between our exit goals and the assignments students actually complete throughout their coursework before 420 and are working to remedy this problem.</p> |
|---|--|---|---|--|--|

Assessment Descriptors for A Highly Successful Exit Portfolio (4)

The 4-level portfolio clearly meets all but one exit goal, and, through 3-6 (or more) designated formal essays plus informal and reflective writings, shows 4-level knowledge and abilities, defined below.

Knowledge. The highly successful Portfolio demonstrates the student's fundamental knowledge of:

- 1.1 A variety of texts including at least 3 genres, 6 periods, and 3 cultures in addition to American and British literatures. These other "cultures"—a term broadly interpreted to include groups that are race and gender-based—may be chosen from the following literatures: Caribbean, Appalachian, Southern, World, Native American, African-American or Women's literature. Novel choices of cultures must be justified in reflective writing.
- 1.2 At least three literary critical theories, in addition to new critical explication.
- 1.3 The history and/or structures of the English language. This may be met with an 8-12 page research paper on Grammar, History of the Language, Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, OR evidence of a substantial project, exercise, or report about the history or structure of English or translations into English. The project shows accurate and resourceful use and analysis of data.
- 1.4 Subject expertise required by student's strand: writing and creative writing work must meet Writing criteria applicable to it: literature strand majors must show the knowledge and abilities required in these Descriptors; education strand majors must have teaching plans that are teachable, practical, and show substantial accurate knowledge of content and educational sources.

Abilities. The highly successful portfolio demonstrates the student's abilities to:

- 2.1 Analyze, interpret, and explicate texts, engaging closely with the text; correctly apply literary or technical terms as relevant.
- 2.2 Examine texts from multiple perspectives, including critical and theoretical approaches, applying terms and approaches correctly.
- 2.3 Evaluate a text's strengths and weaknesses (including the student's formal essays) logically and in detail.
- 2.4 Demonstrate evidence of having presented logical and convincing arguments orally and in writing.
- 2.5 Write formal essays as defined in the Formal Writing Rubric* and write for different purposes and audiences
- 2.6 Use professional research tools, showing accuracy in format and ability to properly choose, introduce, provide background for and evaluate researched sources.

**Formal Writing Rubric* for formal analytic writing, creative and technical writing, the latter with provisos noted below. Highly successful formal writing:

- Clearly defines an understandable topic or purpose; may use literary devices to engage reader
- Supports topic or purpose by effective, concrete details. Descriptions and narratives have sensory details, thick description, clarity in explanation; other kinds of writing have explanation, factual details, concrete instructions, textual quotations and their analyses, and/or lines of reasoning that develop ideas thoroughly.
- Avoids obvious generalizations and padding
- Develops ideas and descriptions logically and fully; has coherent, effective transitions, some of which are sophisticated, hinging on points in the description or argument.
- Balances and emphasizes points appropriately.
- Varies sentence length and form throughout the essay; for technical or business writing, varies structures, but may often use middle-length sentences to communicate effectively with readers whose educational levels vary
- Has a lively and accurate vocabulary with few or no misused words; achieves appropriate level of formality—formal for professional, informal and colloquial for reflective and creative works
- Has few or no grammatical or mechanical problems
- Uses MLA format properly correctly and appropriately

**Reflective writing* for the Portfolio has some traits described above—purpose, specificity and detail, grammatical correctness, variety and balance—but it may use an informal tone. It should attend, and through sensory and/or factual details rather than generalizations, explain and exemplify learning processes, achievements, and goals. Self-consciously, it aims at discovery, self-knowledge, and self-analysis. Length: three-seven pages for the introductory essay; 1 pages or less for briefer essays introducing and contextualizing sections of the portfolio—Best Work, Formal Writing, Informal Writing, and Strand Expertise. Some students also include a brief essay giving context for each formal essay.

Assessment Descriptors for A Good Exit Portfolio (3)

The 3-level portfolio clearly meets all but two exit goals, and, through 3-6 designated formal essays plus informal and reflective writings, shows 3-level skills and traits, defined below.

Knowledge. The good portfolio should demonstrate the student's fundamental knowledge of:

- 1.1 A variety of texts including at least 2 genres, 4 periods, and 2 other cultures in addition to American and British literatures. Other "cultures"—a term broadly interpreted to include groups that are race and gender-based—may be chosen from the following literatures: may be chosen from these literatures: Caribbean, Appalachian, Southern, World, Native American, African-American or Women's literature. Novel choices of cultures must be justified in reflective writing.
- 1.2 At least two literary critical theories, in addition to new critical explication.
- 1.3 The history and/or structures of the English language. This may be met with an 8-12 page research paper on Grammar, History of the Language, Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, OR evidence of a substantial project, exercise, or report about the history or structure of English or translations into English. It may lack accuracy in a few details.
- 1.4 Subject expertise required by student's strand: writing and creative writing work must meet Writing criteria applicable to it: literature strand majors must show the knowledge and abilities required in these Descriptors; education strand majors must have teaching plans that show basic structures of a teachable, practical lesson plan and good knowledge of content and educational sources.

Abilities. The good portfolio should demonstrate the student's abilities to:

- 2.1 Analyze, interpret, and explicate texts, engaging with the text well, but with occasional lapses in detail; correctly apply most literary or technical terms but may misuse one or two.
- 2.2 Examine texts from multiple perspectives, including critical and theoretical approaches, applying terms and approaches more or less correctly with occasional lapses in application.
- 2.3 Evaluate a text's strengths and weaknesses (including the student's formal essays) logically and in detail, although some lapses are permissible
- 2.4 Have organized and presented logical and convincing arguments orally and in writing; some lapses in detail are permissible;
- 2.5 Write formal essays as defined in the Formal Writing Rubric* and write for different purposes and audiences
- 2.6 Use professional research tools, showing both accuracy in format and ability to properly choose, introduce, provide background for and evaluate researched sources.
- 2.7

**Formal Writing Rubric, Good*— for formal analytic writing, creative and technical writing, the latter with provisos noted below:

- Defines an understandable topic or purpose, though it may be less focused than level-4 writing
- Supports topic or purpose by effective, concrete details, but may have lapses in detail. Descriptions and narratives have sensory details, sufficient description, clarity in explanation; other kinds of writing have explanation, factual details, concrete instructions, textual quotations and their analyses, and/or lines of reasoning that develop ideas well but with lapses.
- May have some generalizations and padding in topic paragraph, but generalization does not impede support
- Develops ideas and descriptions well; has effective transitions, though some are mechanical
- Balances and emphasizes points but may have lapses in balance
- Varies sentence length and form in most paragraphs, though it may have some monotony; for technical or business writing, varies structures but may use middle-length sentences to communicate effectively with readers whose educational levels vary.
- Has an accurate vocabulary, but may have a few misused words; achieves appropriate level of formality—formal for professional, informal for reflective
- May have a few grammatical or mechanical problems, but these do not impede understanding.
- Uses MLA format properly when appropriate.

Reflective Writing for the Portfolio has some traits described above—purpose, specificity and detail, grammatical correctness, variety and balance—though it may have occasional lapses in these traits. It may use an informal tone. It should attend and through sufficient details and a few generalizations, explain and exemplify learning processes, achievements, and goals. Self-consciously, it aims at discovery, self-knowledge, and self-analysis, though it may lack sophistication compared to four-level writing. Length: a minimum of three pages for the introductory essay; 1 page or less for brief essays introducing and contextualizing sections of the portfolio—Best Work, Formal Writing, Informal Writing, and Strand Expertise. Some students also include a brief essay giving context for each formal essay.

Assessment Descriptors for A Satisfactory Exit Portfolio (2)

The 2-level portfolio clearly meets all but three exit goals, and, through 3-6 designated formal essays plus informal and reflective writings, shows 2-level skills and traits, defined below.

Knowledge. The satisfactory portfolio should show the student's knowledge of:

- 1.1 A variety of texts including at least 2 genres, 4 periods, and could (but probably will not) lack any identified work in cultures in addition to American and British literatures. Other "cultures"—a term broadly interpreted to include groups that are race and gender-based—may be chosen from the following literatures: may be chosen from among the following literatures: Caribbean, Appalachian, Southern, World, Native American, African-American or Women's literature. Novel choices of cultures must be justified in reflective writing.
- 1.2 At least one literary critical theory, in addition to new critical explication.
- 1.3 The history and/or structures of the English language. This may be met with an 8-12 page research paper on Grammar, History of the Language, Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, OR evidence of a substantial project, exercise, or report about the history or structure of English or translations into English. This project may have some inaccuracies but achieves its goal.
- 1.4 Subject expertise required by student's strand: writing and creative writing work must meet Writing criteria applicable to it: literature strand majors must show the knowledge and abilities required in these Descriptors; education strand majors must have teaching plans that show adequate structures of a teachable, practical lesson and satisfactory knowledge of content and educational sources.

Abilities. The satisfactory portfolio should demonstrate the student's abilities to:

- 2.1 Analyze, interpret, and explicate texts, but may overuse summary and paraphrase; apply literary or technical terms but with some errors.
- 2.2 Examine texts from several critical and theoretical perspectives, applying terms and approaches deliberately and usually correctly, but may lack full understanding at times.
- 2.3 Evaluate a text's strengths and weaknesses (including the student's formal essays) logically but writing may lack detailed analysis and full explanation at times.
- 2.4 Have organized and presented arguments orally and in writing but with some lapses in logic and detail
- 2.5 Write formal essays as defined in the Formal Writing Rubric* and write for different purposes and audiences
- 2.6 Use professional research tools, showing frequent accuracy in format and some ability to properly choose and introduce researched sources.

**Formal Writing Rubric. Satisfactory*— formal analytic writing, creative and technical writing, the latter with provisos noted:

- Has a topic or purpose that may be difficult to support due to generalization.
- Supports topic or purpose, but may lack details or explanation or may not use these well; other kinds of writing attempt explanation, factual detail, concrete instruction, textual quotation and analyses, but may lack detail, clarity, or linkage among ideas. Lines of reasoning may be weak.
- Generalization and vagueness may make some ideas difficult to support.
- May not develop ideas and descriptions logically and fully; may lack coherent, effective transitions and/or well focused paragraph topic sentences.
- May not balance and emphasize points appropriately.
- Uses less varied sentence length and form; may have some choppy sentences; for technical or business writing, does not vary structures frequently.
- Has lapses in word choice or usage but still achieves formality
- Has grammatical or mechanical problems that may impede readability but not comprehension.
- Uses MLA format when appropriate, but may not format correctly.

•Reflective writing has some traits described above—purpose, some specificity and detail, and sufficient control over grammar and mechanics to create understanding. It may use an informal tone. This reflective writing may seem general or vague in its use of details, or sometimes inappropriate in its sense of audience. It recognizes and discusses some learning processes, achievements, and goals, but analysis may be somewhat general. Length: three-seven pages for the introductory essay; essays of one-page or less introducing and contextualizing sections of the portfolio—Best Work, Formal Writing, Informal Writing, and Strand Expertise. Some students also include a brief essay giving context for each formal essay.

Assessment Descriptors for An Unsatisfactory Exit Portfolio (1)

The 1-level portfolio meets four or fewer exit goals, and, through 3-6 designated formal essays plus informal and reflective writings, shows 1-level skills and traits, defined below.

Knowledge. The unsatisfactory portfolio demonstrates the student's knowledge of:

- 1.1 A variety of texts including at least 2 genres, 3 periods, and could lack any identified work in cultures in addition to American and British literatures. Other "cultures"—a term broadly interpreted to include groups that are race and gender-based—may be chosen from the following literatures: may be chosen from among the following literatures: Caribbean, Appalachian, Southern, World, Native American, African-American or Women's literature. Novel choices of cultures must be justified in reflective writing.
- 1.2 No literary critical theory, in addition to new critical explication.
- 1.3 The history and/or structures of the English language. This may be met with an 8-12 page research paper on Grammar, History of the Language, Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, OR evidence of a substantial project, exercise, or report about the history or structure of English or translations into English. This project may lack accuracy in many details.
- 1.4 Subject expertise required by student's strand: writing and creative writing work must meet Writing criteria applicable to it: literature strand majors must show the knowledge and abilities required in these Descriptors; education strand majors must have teaching plans that but they may not be teachable, practical, or show content knowledge.

Abilities. The unsatisfactory portfolio:

- 2.1 May not analyze, interpret, and explicate texts, but may use summary and paraphrase only; and may not apply literary or technical terms or often may use them inaccurately.
- 2.2 Examines texts from only one perspective, or, if it includes more than one critical and theoretical approach, may not apply ideas, terms or techniques appropriately or show understanding of the theories or texts
- 2.3 Does not evaluate a text's strengths and weaknesses (including the student's formal essays) convincingly due to illogical assertions, lack of detail, or faulty organization; may only paraphrase
- 2.4 Have organized and presented arguments orally and in writing, but may lack organization, detail and logic.
- 2.5 Demonstrates ineffective formal essay traits as defined in the Formal Writing Rubric* and does not show the ability to write for different purposes and audiences
- 2.6 May not use professional research tools, or may incorporate sources awkwardly into writing; makes consistent errors in format.

**Formal Writing Rubric.-Unsatisfactory* formal analytic writing, creative and technical writing, the latter with provisos noted:

- Has a topic or purpose too obvious or general to argue; states the obvious, lacks focus.
- Fails to present sensory details or evidence, or does not link them to argument through reasoning and explanation
- Does not present fully developed ideas or presents them randomly
- Has paragraphs that may appear random, and/or may lack transitions or internal organization.
- May not balance and emphasize points at all; may devote detail to insignificant rather than to significant points
- May have sentences that often are choppy, repetitive and unvaried.
- Has frequent, substantive errors in word choice and phrasing.
- Has grammatical or mechanical problems that may impede comprehension.
- Uses MLA format inappropriately

Reflective Writing

Uses a general or vague approach and may not create clear point of view; may be grammatically and stylistically weak: unvaried, imbalanced, random, and lacking transitions. may lack analysis and sense of audience. Length: three-seven pages for the introductory essay; one page or less introducing and contextualizing sections of the portfolio—Best Work, Formal Writing, Informal Writing, and Strand Expertise. Some students also include a brief essay giving context for each formal essay.

Instructions to Readers for Capstone Portfolios, Fall 2003

This year, we read Senior Portfolios after norming, making time for this process as we have not always done in prior years. Our goal in norming is not to obliterate subjectivity but to help us form a set of standards that we can apply as consistently as possible to this particular set of readings. Norming procedures are outlined below and followed by reading instructions for the scoring process itself.

Norming Procedures

Before our reading date and time, 9:00 a.m. Wednesday, December 10, please arrange time to read the Descriptors for all four scores. Please note and record questions or concerns. Then arrange time to read sample portfolios of the various writing strand majors in my office which already have been scored. Take your time with each of the samples to get a sense of what those descriptors “look like” in practice. Again as you read and review sample, scored Portfolios, take notes on questions, concerns, comments for discussion. On the day of our actual scoring session, we will begin by discussing the Descriptors, addressing questions or concerns, and then move on to scoring one actual Portfolio. You will score this Portfolio using the score sheet, applying the descriptors. After you have scored one Portfolio, you will exchange it with another reader’s Portfolio. Without looking at the prior reader’s score sheet, you will read and score this second Portfolio. You will then pair up with the other reader, and discuss the process and your interpretations to resolve differences but also to just understand what the Descriptors mean. We will then address questions that arise out of this process. Having begun the “actual scoring” through this test-run, you will move on to do first and second readings of Portfolios.

What to Expect in the Portfolios

Expect a wide range of writing styles and levels of success at each style. Seniors this year demonstrated the usual range of skill and knowledge variations when the course started: as before, some strands of English Education majors lack the period coverage and analytical writing skills that literature strand majors have due to the limitations of their curriculum requirements; some Honors students with Writing or Literature strand majors, however, have a wide range of formal essays that cover any and all periods available here--from classical literature to contemporary. Remember too that some students here also achieve considerable skills in theory and analytical writing. Furthermore, students who are merely satisfactory as analytical writers may demonstrate marvelous reflective writing skills. It is our job to inhabit these ambiguities and inconsistencies.

Some specifics: While the course itself has attempted to provide skills and knowledge of periods missing from some students’ backgrounds as well as expose students to criticism and theory, and while some giant learning curves have moved many students’ skill- and knowledge- levels considerably, you can still expect to find some 2- and quite a few 3-level portfolios. Be aware, though, that four- and three-level portfolios, the highly successful and good portfolios, will not achieve the same levels of expertise as you demand from graduate students. Efforts, for example, to vary sentence structure or to use metaphor may show consistency but lack taste; a level-three portfolio writer’s success at sentence variety may vary considerably throughout an essay if he or she has just starting learning to edit, but cannot find time or energy to “do” every paragraph as well as he or she does some. Our norming process will help us reach consensus about how to score such puzzling writing, and hopefully also provide us with fruitful discussion.

How to Score the Portfolios

- *Have your norming process in mind, and any concerns you have; be prepared to give up some pet peeves, and value some writing elements you may not always value in your courses. The Descriptors now guide you.
- *Read the Portfolio once globally—thinking about how it meets the Descriptors in general.
- *Then begin the scoring itself, by using the student’s map to help you find where he or she thinks particular criteria on the descriptor sheets are met; numbers on the map are keyed to the Descriptor numbers.
- *Mark the student’s identification number from the first page of the portfolio atop the scoring sheet.
- *Put your name or a code name; students have asked the scorers identify themselves, but since this would be a new practice, those professors who prefer to remain anonymous may do so.
- *Mark the scoring sheet individual goal-lines as you read; often you’ll find it easy to score certain items, more difficult for others.
- *Use the following markers on the score sheet for each goal: + (4); (3); (2); - (1)
- *After you’ve marked the goals, use the same markers for the Reflective writing spaces..
- *Simply count your markers afterwards, and quantitatively decide your final overall score 4, 3, 2, or 1
- *Explain scores of 3 or 2 or 1 in the language used on the Descriptor sheets, that is, use those phrases rather than your own teacherly language as much as possible so that students can see how the written comments fit the chosen score descriptor

(continued)
Strand Expertise

Scoring the students' English strand expertise remains a more fluid issue than we would like, but here are some guidelines:

Literature The formal essays meet the knowledge and skill criteria for a particular score; analytical writing meets the criteria for Formal Writing Rubric; informal writings meet reflective writing criteria

Writing The formal and informal essays meet the knowledge and skill criteria for a particular score; analytical writing meets the criteria for Formal Writing Rubric; informal writings meet reflective writing criteria. When scoring strand expertise, exclude the purely analytical aspects of the Formal Writing Rubric—it's been worded to permit application to various kinds of writing.

Education The formal and informal essays meet the knowledge and skill criteria for a particular score; analytical writing meets the criteria for Formal Writing Rubric; informal writings meet reflective writing criteria. When scoring strand expertise, consider the student's lessons plans as real products---are the works used seemingly appropriate to the grade level? Do the plans show evidence of knowledge of the work and period? Do the plans seem suited to timeframes? Are they manageable?

Problems

Remember that each Portfolio will be read by at least two professors: problems will be resolved by an assigned reader whose job it is to resolve conflicting scores.