

FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERGRADUATE WRITING COMPETENCY

Introduction

Curriculum Development and Review
Setting Standards for Undergraduate Writing
Identifying Learning Outcomes for Writing
Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced Proficiency

p. 1

p. 2
p. 4
p. 4
p. 7

Standards for Undergraduate Writing

Rhetorical Knowledge
Critical Engagement
Writing Process

p. 8

p. 9
p. 10
p. 11

Implementing the Standards

Using the Standards to write Learning Outcomes
Setting Assignments
Weighting Assignments
Using Criteria to Evaluate Student Writing
Grading Rubric

p. 12

p. 12
p. 14
p. 16
p. 17
p. 18

Further Reading

p. 19

INTRODUCTION

The Framework for Undergraduate Writing Competency is intended to inform the development and review of program curriculum. It was created to address undergraduate writing proficiency through the development of university-level standards, and is part of a comprehensive strategy to improve student writing across OCAD University.

The Framework has been developed with reference to standards for writing and communication, including the Canadian Language Benchmarks, the WPA Framework for Success in Post-secondary Writing, the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards and the QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Art and Design Education (see Further Reading).

Although undergraduate writing standards are not specific to art and design education, the Framework has been crafted in consideration of the variety of purposes writing serves at OCAD University—pedagogical, scholarly, creative, professional—and the particular needs of studio education and practice.

The diversity of the OCAD University curriculum accommodates a range of learning activities and a rich variety of ways of teaching and assessing students. The Framework is not intended to advocate a specific instructional method or a curriculum, nor does it provide explicit or prescriptive instructions about how or what instructors should teach.

Instead, the goals of the Framework are to set an institutional standard by making explicit what students need to achieve to produce university-level writing and to provide guidance to program chairs and faculty in the development and review of program and course curriculum.

The Introduction that follows provides clarification and context for the Standards for Undergraduate Writing (in the central section of the Framework) by defining terms and explaining how the Standards should be understood in the broader context of the University and curriculum development and review.

The third section of the Framework, the Implementing the Standards section, provides guidance to program chairs and faculty in the implementation of the Standards in the development and renewal of program and course curricula, with specific guidance for writing program-level learning outcomes and preparing course outlines for courses with writing components.

Setting Standards for Undergraduate Writing

The purpose of setting standards for undergraduate writing is to articulate in clear and comprehensible language what students need to be able to demonstrate in order to become proficient writers. Their value is that they provide clear and consistent expectations for student writing and, when set within a framework for teaching and learning, guide the development of curriculum.

The Standards are a set of descriptive statements about successive levels on the continuum of writing ability according to which learners demonstrate an understanding and application of writing knowledge and skill. They are broken down into two types of statement: learning outcomes for writing and benchmarks for achieving them.

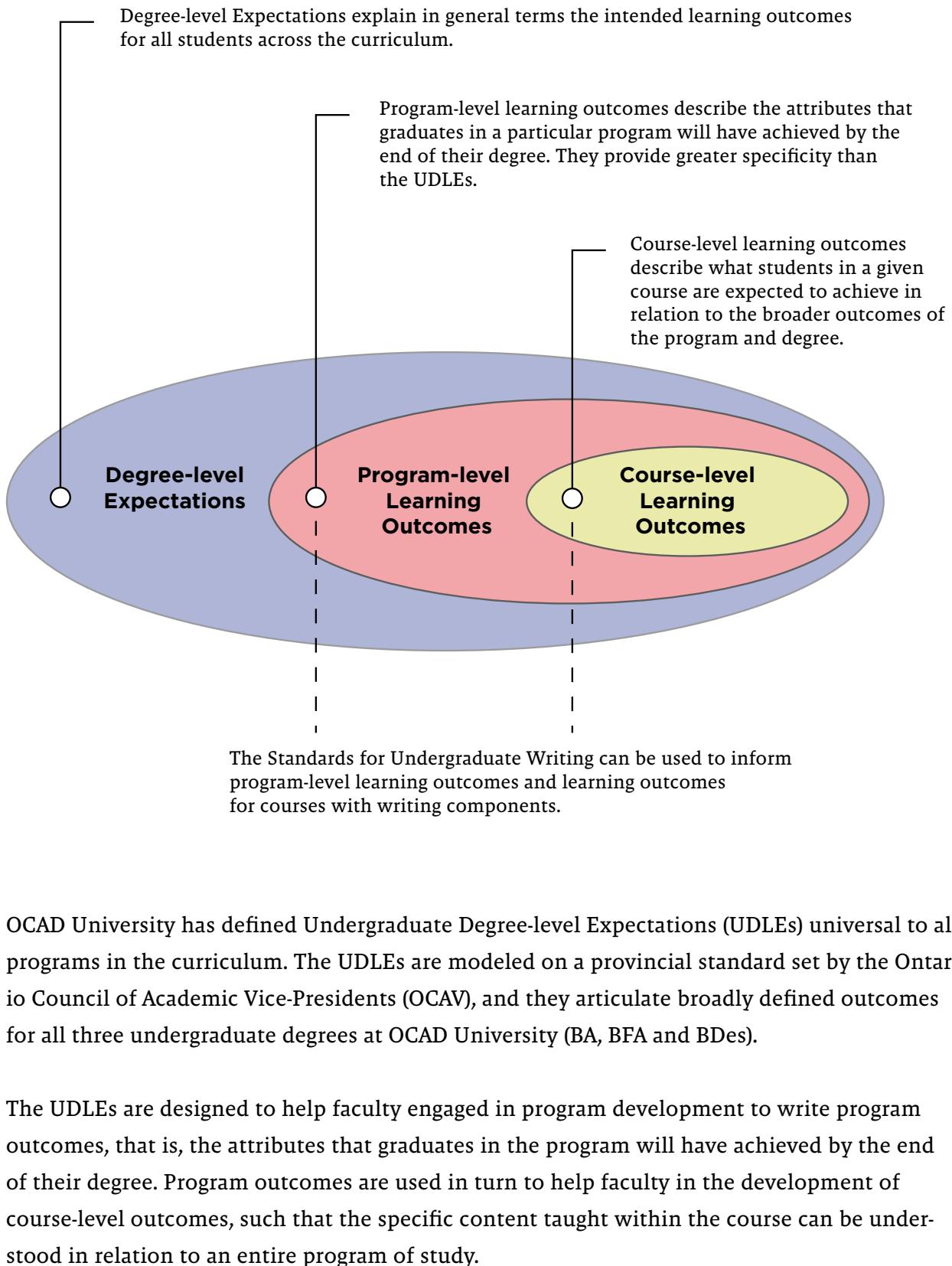
The learning outcomes for writing identify the attributes that most students should be able to demonstrate by the end of an undergraduate degree. They are global statements that do not specify where in the curriculum or at what year level students should have achieved any particular attribute of writing proficiency.

The benchmarks, by comparison, describe the stages through which a student will progress to become a proficient writer for university. As such, the benchmarks must be demonstrable and measurable in the practice of teaching and learning.

Curriculum Development and Review at OCAD University

Curriculum development and review processes at OCAD University align learning activities, course content and assessments within a course with the overall course-level learning outcomes.

The learning outcomes of each course build on each other and work together to help students to achieve the program-level learning outcomes. Program-level learning outcomes are, in turn, informed by Degree-level Expectations.



Well-written course-level learning outcomes will, in turn, help instructors to align their expectations for students with instructional strategies and learning activities. Outcomes must also be measurable in student assessments.

The Standards described in the Framework are not intended to add to the existing Degree-level Expectations for undergraduates, nor are they intended to replace other outcomes in the curriculum, including those related to the practice of art and design.

Rather, the Standards provide more specificity and context for the UDLEs, with particular emphasis on the methodologies and application of knowledge, and communication skills. They are intended to supplement the interpretation of the UDLEs in the development of program outcomes, in particular, in the development of writing-specific curricula.

In fact, all programs at OCAD University already have writing embedded within their curricula. The Standards can be used to help program faculty articulate clear and appropriate expectations for undergraduate writing in the program, and to align its existing writing curriculum with university-level standards and to enhance it where necessary.



Identifying Learning Outcomes for Writing

The writing that students produce is not, by itself, a learning outcome. It is the result of a process that takes place in very particular learning contexts.

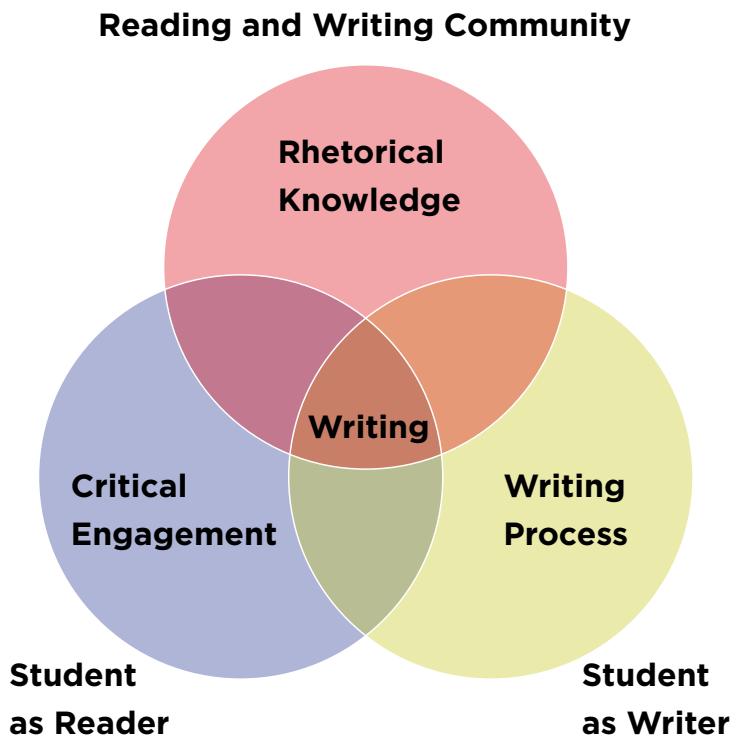
When we say that we want our students to become proficient writers for university, what we mean is that we want them to have mastered a range of knowledge and skills, some of which we associate conventionally with the writing process itself, such as good grammar and effective style, but some of which are discretely connected to their ability to engage critically with discipline-specific subject matter and to communicate using very specific conventions of written communication.

Effective writing therefore requires the integration of several learning outcomes, some of which may not, on their own, lead to writing — such as developing research skills or thinking critically — but which are nevertheless integral to university writing.

In the Framework, these outcomes have been narrowed into three categories:

- 1. Rhetorical Knowledge**
- 2. Critical Engagement**
- 3. Writing Process**

Students need to develop proficiency in all of these categories in order to become good writers.



Rhetorical Knowledge

“Rhetorical knowledge” refers to the student’s awareness of the reading and writing community within which their own activity is situated. A rhetorically aware student considers:

- Why am I writing? For myself or for others?
- Who am I trying to reach? Peers? Employers? Potential patrons?
- How casual or formal should I be?
- What have others said? How have they approached it?
- Is this the best structure or style to use for my purpose?

Critical Engagement

“Critical engagement” refers to the student’s ability to initiate and self-direct inquiry in the process of engaging with and producing new knowledge, and to use a range of analytical strategies that are sometimes encapsulated by the related terms “critical reading” and “critical thinking.” The critically engaged student does not assume that knowledge acquisition is unidirectional and automatic, flowing from the source to the student, but rather understands that knowledge is a discourse or interaction. When engaging with a text, object or idea, a critically engaged student considers:

- How does this text, object or idea do what it does?
- What are its individual parts?
- How do the parts work together to accomplish its purpose?
- Why does this text, object or idea use the materials, styles or media it does?
- How do those affect my understanding or reading?

Writing Process

“Writing process” refers to the student’s awareness that writing is a process rather than a product (the act of writing of an essay versus the essay itself), that the process requires the use of a variety of tools and strategies to produce the result, and that the student is the agent of this process. A writer does not simply set words down on paper; a writer generates ideas, maps concepts, plans, drafts, revises and edits. A student with an awareness of writing process might:

- Use free-writing as a tool to discover potential research directions or ideas for their creative process;
- Draft a paper several times before it begins to take shape;
- Use a whiteboard and post-it notes to help them organize their work.



Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced Proficiency

The learning outcomes for writing set out in the Standards describe what students must achieve to become proficient writers for university. They are also organized into three levels of proficiency or benchmarks that reflect the level of mastery a student has achieved of any specific competency.

The levels have been developed according to two criteria:

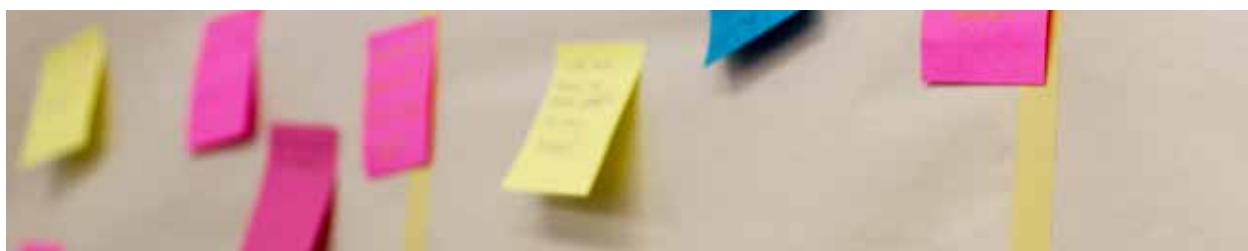
1. complexity of cognitive process; and
2. degree of independence demonstrated by the student.

The Benchmarks move from lower-order learning activities (recalling, identifying, describing) to more sophisticated activities (analyzing, evaluating, synthesizing, creating).

The levels are not necessarily intended to correspond to year levels in the curriculum since students are typically expected to engage with a range of learning activities at all year levels requiring both lower and higher order skills.

Proficiency is therefore also determined by the degree to which the student is able to achieve the outcome independently, or, conversely, the degree of guidance the instructor is required to provide. The degree of guidance might include, for example, how a learning activity is introduced and explained, how students are guided through the process and how much formative assessment they receive.

Whereas the learning outcomes for writing are global statements that are intended to inform the development of writing-specific program outcomes, and might be understood as a supplement to the UDLEs, the Benchmarks provide greater specificity for progressing through stages in the development of writing skill and might therefore be used to inform course-level learning outcomes.



STANDARDS FOR UNDERGRADUATE WRITING

Rhetorical Knowledge The ability to analyze and act on an understanding of the audience, purpose and context of writing.	rhetorical situation conventions of writing modes of writing
Critical Engagement The ability to gather information about and analyze a situation, text or object, and make thoughtful decisions based on that analysis.	critical inquiry information needs analysis
Writing Process The ability to identify, select from and apply a variety of tools and strategies for writing.	research use of sources writing and editing



RHETORICAL KNOWLEDGE:

The ability to analyze and act on an understanding of the audience, purpose and context of writing.

BENCHMARKS

By the end of an undergraduate degree, students should be able to:

	Beginner:	Intermediate:	Advanced:
rhetorical situation	recall and describe aspects of rhetorical situation, and respond with guidance to audience, purpose and context using conventions of language and style appropriate to the situation;	explain and evaluate rhetorical situation, and engage with audience, purpose and context appropriate to the situation with some guidance;	act independently to evaluate rhetorical situation and apply an understanding of audience, purpose and context;
conventions of writing	recall and describe discipline-specific conventions of writing such as terminology, structure and appropriate use of sources and begin to apply their understanding with guidance;	apply discipline-specific conventions of writing with some guidance;	evaluate discipline-specific terminology, and act independently to select and apply elements of structure, source use and citation style;
modes of writing	recall and describe the difference between modes of writing, and demonstrate proficiency in at least one mode such as description or exposition.	analyze and evaluate strategies of different modes and conventions of writing, and demonstrate proficiency in more than one mode.	synthesize the strategies of different modes and conventions of writing independently and fluidly in the creation of original written work.

CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT:

The ability to gather information about and analyze a situation, text or object, and make thoughtful decisions based on that analysis.

BENCHMARKS

By the end of an undergraduate degree, students should be able to:

	Beginner:	Intermediate:	Advanced:
critical inquiry	recall and describe discipline-specific knowledge appropriate to their level of study;	identify their information needs for a particular purpose, act on those needs and begin to evaluate with some guidance the information gathered;	evaluate and synthesize discipline-specific knowledge appropriate to their level of study;
information needs	identify their information needs for a particular purpose and act on those needs with guidance;	demonstrate an understanding of and begin to evaluate discipline-specific knowledge appropriate to their level of study;	work independently to gather and evaluate information appropriate to their needs, and describe criteria used to make information decisions and choices;
analysis	identify and describe formal features in the analysis of a situation, text or object, and begin to apply that knowledge in oral, visual and written expression with guidance.	analyze and evaluate formal features in the analysis of a situation, text or object, and apply that knowledge with some guidance.	work independently to analyze a situation, text or object, and synthesize their results in the creation of new knowledge.

WRITING PROCESS:

The ability to identify, select from and apply a variety of tools and strategies for writing.

BENCHMARKS

By the end of an undergraduate degree, students should be able to:

	Beginner:	Intermediate:	Advanced:
research	select a research topic from among a range of choices and, with guidance, use selected information-gathering tools to conduct research;	identify a research topic and select from a range of information-gathering tools to conduct research with limited guidance;	identify and research a topic independently, and explain the criteria used to select from a range of information-gathering tools;
use of sources	quote, paraphrase, summarize and cite primary and secondary sources with guidance;	quote, paraphrase, summarize and cite primary and secondary sources with some guidance;	demonstrate competence in the abstraction and use of information from primary and secondary sources;
writing and editing	recall and describe tools and strategies for the process of writing, from generating ideas to drafting, revising and editing, and begin to select and apply those strategies with guidance.	select from and apply a variety of tools and strategies for the process of writing with some guidance.	select from and apply a variety of tools and strategies for the process of writing independently.

IMPLEMENTING THE STANDARDS

The Standards for Undergraduate Writing are intended to guide program chairs and faculty in the development of curriculum. Detailed below are several strategies that can be used to implement the Standards through the creation and review of program and course-level learning outcomes, and to guide faculty in the development of instructional methods and assessment strategies.

Using the Standards to write Learning Outcomes

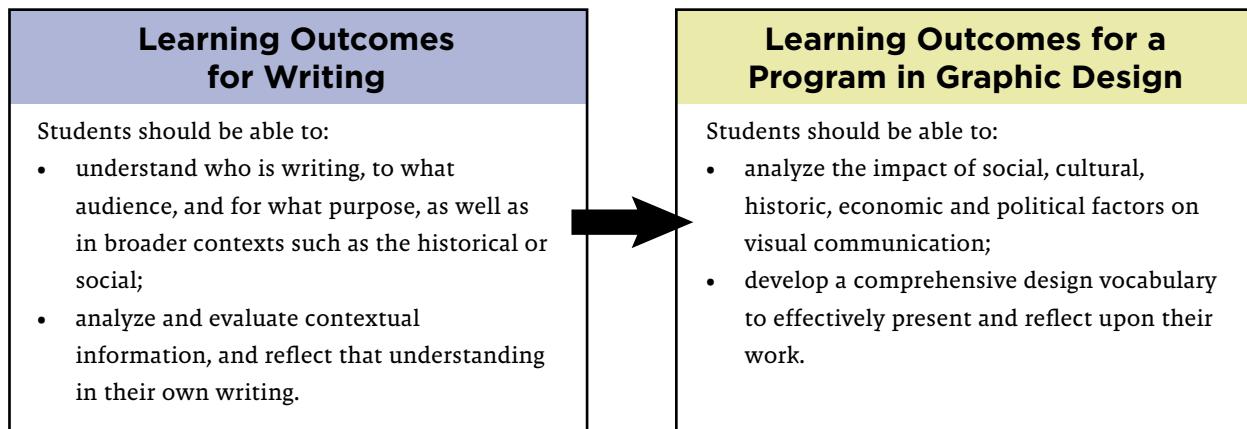
The Standards describe the writing knowledge and skills that students studying in any program at OCAD University will achieve. Program and course-level learning outcomes, by comparison, describe the knowledge, skills and attitudes students will develop during a specific course of study. As such, they provide curriculum-specific detail about instructional strategies, learning activities and assessment measures.

As with the Undergraduate Degree-Level Expectations (UDLEs), which define institutional degree outcomes across programs, program faculty must decide how to interpret the Standards for program and course curricula:

- at the program level, by selecting and prioritizing the learning outcomes according to the attributes of a graduate in the program; and
- at the course level, by mapping the Benchmarks (staged into beginner, intermediate and advanced levels) to year-specific learning outcomes.

At the program level, the interpretation of the Standards will vary from program to program, and no student studying in any particular program will necessarily be expected to achieve the outcomes at the same pace, or through the same or similar instructional methods and assessment measures.

The example on page 13, the language of which is adapted from the Graphic Design program, demonstrates how program outcomes might be mapped in relation to corresponding learning outcomes for writing as set out in the Standards. The program outcomes are two of several that might be related to writing activities—among a range of other outcomes for the program—though they may not necessarily require that students submit or an instructor assess written assignments.



At the course level, the progression from beginner to intermediate to advanced-level benchmarks is not intended to correlate directly to year-specific outcomes (i.e., beginner-level to first-year, intermediate to second-year, and so on).

For example, it may be desirable or necessary in a first-year course to require students to engage in more sophisticated methods of research and writing. The degree of sophistication of the outcome, however, might be balanced with instructional strategies that provide greater degrees of guidance and learning support.

The example on page 14 (a hypothetical course for Graphic Design) proposes three very writing-specific learning outcomes. It should be emphasized that such specificity about writing is not to be expected for all courses, but that a writing-intensive course such as this would be one course within a varied program of theoretical and practice-based study.

In the case of this writing-intensive course, however, each of the three learning outcomes corresponds to the three categories of learning outcomes for writing set out within the Standards. Note as well that the degree of cognitive complexity required by the learning activities (describe, evaluate, analyze, apply) corresponds, for the most part, to the intermediate level of the Benchmarks. Moreover, each of the learning outcomes can be measured by specific assessments.

OCAD University's Faculty & Curriculum Development Centre (FCDC) provides a variety of resources for faculty developing program and course curricula, including a helpful guide to Writing Learning Outcomes. For further information, visit the OCAD U website or contact the FCDC at: fcdc@ocadu.ca

VISD 2BXX Design Thinking for Visual Communication

Design practice is becoming increasingly more interdisciplinary, socially focused and complex. Designers, historians and theorists of design have adopted (and adapted) new modes of thinking about design as a practice and a profession, including a number of methodologies originating outside of the discipline. This course explores a broad range of contemporary models in design thinking, with a focus on communication in design disciplines. Theoretical and methodological frameworks from semiotics to critical design will provide a lens for the analysis of alternative practices. Students will read contemporary texts, analyze exemplary design practices through case studies and be challenged to view design in an expanded field of related disciplines and practices.

Learning Outcomes	Assessed By (methods below)
<p>By the end of the course, students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• describe and evaluate diverse design methodologies and theories through critical reading, analysis and writing;• analyze design thinking within a historical and cultural context;• apply critical frameworks in practice-based studies through critical writing and discussion.	<p>2, 3</p>
Methods of Assessment <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. A series of bi-monthly critical reader-response exercises that build towards a basic annotated bibliography.2. A series of monthly case studies that contextualize specific instances of design activity and output in the 20th Century.3. A semester-long project that documents a particular designer's or studio's output in relation to specific theories and methodologies.	

Setting Assignments

While the language of the Standards will help individual instructors to develop course-specific learning outcomes, they might more usefully inform the methods instructors use to teach and assess their students.

If instructors have clearly identified the learning objectives for their course and the corresponding activities in which students will engage, assignments can be developed creatively or adapted flexibly, as appropriate to the year level of study.

As noted above, the Benchmarks are not intended to correspond directly to year levels in the curriculum. When developing assignments, instructors should bear in mind both the complexity of the cognitive process and the degree of guidance they are going to provide.

The Benchmarks do not advocate for a particular curriculum, nor do they prescribe particular writing assignments. However, precedents for writing assignments in different year levels already exist in the OCAD University curriculum.

All undergraduate students are required to take ENGL 1B04/1B05 The Essay and the Argument. The course learning outcomes, shown on page 16, explain that students will develop a foundation of critical reading and writing skills at the beginner level, which can then be built upon in subsequent courses in their program of study.

In higher level courses in the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Sciences, for example, including the Digital Futures and Visual and Critical Studies programs, students are expected to develop their intermediate and advanced-level research, analytical and writing skills in the essay mode as they progress through higher levels of study.

Most programs in the Art and Design Faculties also require students to develop their research and writing skills in the third and fourth years of their programs.

Students in the third year are commonly required to complete research methods courses that include such activities as researching secondary sources, writing abstracts and annotated bibliographies, and preparing thesis or research project proposals.

Although the nature of the writing expectations vary widely from program to program, most Art and Design programs require their students to complete a thesis or equivalent, usually combining research and writing (often referred to as “theory”) with studio creation.

In addition, discipline-specific modes of writing in Art and Design programs include, among many others, such examples as design briefs, artist statements, statements of methods and materials, exhibition reviews, project descriptions and grant applications.

Beginner

At a beginner level, students are expected to *learn, recognize, identify and define* information with frequent and explicit guidance from the instructor.

Intermediate

At an intermediate level, students are expected to *analyze, evaluate, apply and synthesize* information with some guidance from the instructor. Instructional scaffolding provides students with a framework within which they feel comfortable working independently.

Advanced

At an advanced level, students are expected to *understand, analyze, evaluate and synthesize* information independently. The instructor provides occasional guidance and advice.

ENGL 1B04/1B05 The Essay and the Argument

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- write in several modes (personal reflection, description, analysis, comparison, synthesis);
- read, analyze and respond to a variety of texts in the essay genre;
- support an argument both orally and in writing using various rhetorical strategies;
- effectively locate, select, integrate and cite primary and secondary sources; and
- write a short, compelling research paper.

Weighting Assignments

As noted above, the Benchmarks can be gauged to learning activities and course assignments according to two criteria: the complexity of the cognitive process and the degree of guidance provided.

A third consideration instructors should bear in mind is the weighting of writing assignments, to mean both

- the value according to specific assessment criteria in the grading index for any particular assignment; and
- the overall weight given to the assignment in the final grade.

In a 100-level course, for example, instructors might require their students to engage with research methodologies specific to their discipline, but if they have identified clear, concise or effective writing as an important learning objective, they may wish to give more value to the quality of writing in the assignment's grading scheme.

By the same token, it may not be desirable to assign a research essay worth 30 or 40% of the final grade in a 100-level course, but instructors might require their students to engage in lower-stakes learning activities worth less of the final grade.

Course instructors must decide how best to integrate the Standards into course and assignment design according to the requirements of their program and the needs of their students. If desired, the FCDC is able to provide guidance and support: fcdc@ocadu.ca

Using Criteria to Evaluate Student Writing

Students learn well when expectations are communicated clearly and effectively, and when expectations are consistent across, or progress logically through, a program of study.

When developing criteria, instructors should identify the discrete types of knowledge and skill students need to demonstrate for a specific learning activity. The criteria for an argumentative essay, for example, might include such criteria as

- strength of thesis,
- structure of argument,
- use of evidence, and
- clarity of writing.

Each of the criteria specifies the type of knowledge or skill (thesis, argument, evidence, writing), but also the qualitative attribute that will be measured (strength, structure, use, clarity).

Not only do students need to understand the expectations for any given assignment, but also what they need to do to achieve a specific grade level — and conversely, what they did not achieve when their work is returned to them.

A grading index can be communicated to students in a detailed Assessment or Grading Criteria document that explains expectations by grade level, or in an abbreviated rubric that might also be used to assist the instructor in communicating the evaluation to the student (see the example on page 18).

The advantages of using grading rubrics are numerous. Grading rubrics:

- set clear expectations for students in advance;
- ensure graders assess students more consistently, to the same standards;
- can be used to train or guide Teaching Assistants;
- provide feedback for each of the criteria students must meet; and
- can be used formatively to help students identify and improve upon their weaknesses.

	A	B	C	D	F
strength of thesis	complex thesis; critical, abstract, original thought; strongly analytical; offers persuasive, coherent argument.	clear, cogent thesis; convincing; analytical.	thesis is clear but descriptive, summative or impressionistic; (somewhat) underdeveloped.	thesis is not debatable or is unclear; rudimentary summary or description.	no thesis.
structure of argument	logical; organic; compelling; integrated with and supports thesis; essay structured by coherent argument.	logical; orderly; coherent; mostly integrated with thesis; essay structured as argument.	some parts of argument linked illogically or incoherently; not fully integrated with thesis; essay organized by text chronology or description.	paragraphs, sentences linked illogically or incoherently; not integrated with the thesis; some, little attempt at organization.	no order; incoherent; much irrelevance; no argument; very repetitive.
use of evidence	careful close reading of text; excellent attention to local textual detail such as form and figures of speech; insightful, critical analysis; quotation with explanation.	effective, apparent close reading of text; good attention to local textual detail such as form and figures of speech; adequate analysis/ quotation.	some evidence of close reading; some attention to local textual detail; inadequate analysis/quotation; textual detail needs context; examples not fully integrated into argument.	little evidence of close reading; inadequate attention to local textual detail; tends towards generalization or description; no analysis; little quotation; not integrated.	no attempt at close reading; little evidence of having read the text; no textual quotation.
clarity of writing	concise, elegant; few errors; good vocabulary; very effective use of critical terms.	clear, concise; minor errors; good vocabulary; incorporation of attempt to use critical terms.	some errors of syntax, grammar, word choice, punctuation; colloquial, idiomatic language.	serious errors of grammar, syntax; errors mar understanding.	repetitive; incomprehensible.

FURTHER READING

Canadian Language Benchmarks: English as a Second Language for Adults,
Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2012)

*Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Information Literacy Competency
Standards for Higher Education* (2000)

Writing Program Administrators (WPA) Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition,
Council of Writing Program Administrators (2008)

Framework for Excellence in Postsecondary Writing, Council of Writing Program Administrators,
National Council of Teachers and National Writing Project (2011)

Subject Benchmark Statement: Art and Design, The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher
Education (UK) (2008)

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