

Outcomes for First-year Writing

The Virginia Tech First-year Writing Program is designed to address seven specific learning outcomes. The first five of these are adapted from the recommendations of the [Council of Writing Program Administrators](#) (WPA), a national association of college and university faculty working with and for writing programs across the nation. The final two outcomes—oral presentation skills and visual literacy—parallel university-wide learning goals.

These outcomes are addressed in all three First-year Writing courses (1105, 1106, & H1204), but each course also has a specific focus and specific requirements related to the work of college writing.

I. Rhetorical Knowledge

Effective communication begins with an awareness of the rhetorical dimensions of writing and speaking. After completing the first-year writing curriculum, students should be able to use their awareness of rhetorical situations to both critically engage texts and produce original compositions.

II. Critical Thinking, Reading, & Writing

We use writing to communicate to others, of course, but writing can also be the beginning of inquiry, allowing one to reflect on the material one is reading or researching. After completing the first-year writing curriculum, students should be able critically to use writing and reading to learn and communicate, and they should understand the intimate connection between language and knowledge.

III. Processes

Writing is a process, though one that admits of much diversity. While not everyone works the same way, it is important to understand writing as both a process and a product. After completing the first-year writing curriculum, students should understand the common features of writing processes, and they should be aware of and able to use the processes that work best for them as individuals, helping them to create the best possible writing product.

IV. Knowledge of Conventions

Of course, every good writer knows that it is important to pay attention to conventions of spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Conventions go beyond these concerns, however. Different rhetorical situations call for different kinds of texts and different ways of addressing audiences. After completing the first-year writing curriculum, students should understand basic spelling, grammar, and punctuation conventions, and they should understand the relationships among conventions, rhetorical situations, and genres.

V. Writing in Electronic Environments

Today, one must constantly adapt to emerging technologies, but these technologies still possess rhetorical dimensions and are often themselves valuable composition tools. After completing the first-year writing curriculum, students should understand the relationships among rhetorical situations and electronic environments, and they should be comfortable using such environments in all parts of the writing process.

VI. Visual Literacy

The visual dimension of writing reaches beyond examining visual texts. After completing the first-year writing curriculum, students should possess the skill to use visuals as a means of composing and communicating. They should also understand the relationship between visuals and the texts in which they appear; they should understand the importance of attending to a composition's appearance—to its visual design.

VII. Effective Oral Presentation Skills

In both one's academic and professional career, it is important to feel comfortable speaking in front of an audience. A piece of writing is not the same as its oral delivery, and it is important to understand the advantages and constraints of both communication methods. After completing the first-year writing curriculum, students should be aware of strategies for feeling comfortable speaking in front of an audience. They should also understand the relationships among rhetorical situations and written and oral communication.

Composition Courses:

English 1105: Introduction to College Composition

English 1105 is an introduction to college-level composition. In this course, students are introduced to composition's rhetorical dimensions; they are asked to consider the purpose, audience, occasion, and genre that are called for in a variety of writing, speaking, or visual assignments.

This course also focuses on writing processes, asking students to brainstorm topics, to write drafts, and to revise their writing based on reflection and peer feedback. As students read and respond to each other's papers, they will learn an important step in addressing readers' concerns. Each student's writing is taken seriously, and they are asked to engage seriously with their peers' writing as well.

Writing and reading go hand-in-hand, of course, so students are asked to read challenging articles, essays, and prose, and to consider paintings, films, or other visual compositions. College composition begins from the assumption that written, visual, and spoken texts can be in conversation with each other. Thus, the readings serve as both models of effective communication and as beginning places for a student's own arguments and analyses.

Learning Objectives

By completing English 1105, students will...

- Gain knowledge of composition's rhetorical dimensions.
- Use writing as a tool for critical thinking and reflection.
- Practice writing as a process by using various brainstorming, invention, revision, and editing strategies.
- Write in several genres that utilize analysis, reflection, narrative, critique, and argument skills.
- Practice using the conventions of written, spoken, and visual composition.
- Practice writing and creating in digital environments.

Course Requirements

- A *minimum* of 3 papers for formal grading. Major papers in English 1105 tend to be 4-10 pages in length, depending on the topic and the task.
- A *minimum* of 20 pages of informal writing, such as journal responses, discussion board postings, blogs, proposals, etc.
- *At least* one group oral presentation including the use of visual elements. (Many instructors include individual presentations as well.)

English 1106: Writing from Research

English 1106 builds on the skills learned and practiced in English 1105. As its name implies, however, English 1106 is also an introduction to writing with sources, both primary and secondary. For example, students are asked to find and cite sources from the library and the Internet, but they are also asked to conduct primary research—or “fieldwork”—using tools such as interviews, observations, and surveys.

In addition to practicing research skills by searching for and collecting primary and secondary sources, students will practice synthesizing elements of research into coherent wholes. Successful synthesis of research requires that one understand and interpret one’s sources and put them in conversation with each other. This work also emphasizes correctly documenting and attributing one’s sources.

Learning Objectives

By completing English 1106, students will...

- Continue to practice writing as a process, using multiple invention and revision strategies.
- Write in several genres that require paraphrase, synthesis, analysis, evaluation, argument, and documentation skills.
- Practice writing from primary and secondary research, developing different types of research projects that use fieldwork, library, and online research methods.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the conventions of bibliographic citation.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the uses of source material of all types, taking care to always distinguish between source material and one’s own work.

Course Requirements

- A *minimum* of 3 graded papers written from sources. Major papers in English 1106 tend to be 5-15 pages in length with proper citations.
- A *minimum* of 20 pages of informal writing, such as journal responses, discussion board postings, blogs, proposals, etc.
- *At least* one individual presentation including the use of visual elements. (Many instructors include group presentations as well.)

English H1204: Honors English

Honors English is open to all Virginia Tech students whose entrance scores indicate that they qualify for the course. To find out whether or not your scores qualify you for English H1204, contact [Jennifer Mooney](#), the Assistant Chair of the English Department, before you sign up for an honors section.

As English H1204 is an honors-level course, students can expect to work both with close analysis and research, including traditional library research, online research, and fieldwork. The reading in Honors English is chosen to deepen one's critical reading, writing, and thinking skills. Students should expect reading and writing assignments to be at an advanced level, reflecting this course's honors designation.

Learning Objectives

Honors English reviews the content of English 1105 and focuses on the work of English 1106 at the Honors level. See the learning objectives for those courses.

Course Requirements

- A *minimum* of 3 graded papers written from sources. Major papers in Honors English tend to be 5-25 pages in length with proper citation.
- A *minimum* of 20 pages of informal writing, such as journal responses, discussion board postings, blogs, proposals, etc.
- *At least* one individual presentation including the use of visual elements. (Many instructors include group presentations as well.)

English 3754: Advanced Writing

Advanced training in writing analytical and critical essays. Practice in addressing a range of audiences and in using varied styles and organizational patterns. Workshop and conference for students in arts and humanities, as well as for technical and extension students who wish to address non-specialized audiences and to practice forms outside their own fields. Junior standing required.