

Writing in First-Year Seminars

Learning Goals

The first-year seminar is the gateway to a student's writing experiences at DePauw. Proficient writing skills cannot be learned once in a single writing class but must be practiced over time, for many different audiences, in different situations, and in different genres. Because writing conventions vary from discipline to discipline, students should understand the importance of continuing to investigate how to write in new disciplines after their first-year seminar.

By the end of the first-year seminar students should:

- understand the uses of writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating;
- possess flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proof-reading;
- understand how readers perceive and respond to different forms of writing;
- understand a writing assignment as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing, and acknowledging appropriate primary and secondary sources;
- understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes.

Course Guidelines

1. Instructors should encourage students to understand that *writing is a process and a tool for thinking that can help them learn* by requiring suitable kinds of preparatory and informal writing. We recommend scaffolding assignments—building in staged revision—for at least three of the formal writing assignments.
2. Seminars should require 4-6 formal writing assignments of varying lengths, totaling 16-20 pages of polished, academic prose. Assignments should form a coherent sequence that enables students to build upon the writing skills they are learning and that breaks down large assignments into smaller steps.
3. Faculty should provide timely feedback on student writing. In addition to written commentary on drafts, feedback may also come through individual conferences, in-class group work, peer commentary, reading responses, journals, etc. There is no point at which students are “too good” or already “too competent” to benefit from discussions of language and writing.
4. Reading and other assignments in the course subject should be limited to permit regular, concentrated discussion and work on writing. Common sense must dictate how to apply this rule of thumb: some readings are difficult and a very few pages will suffice; others can be assigned in larger chunks. In choosing readings and other assignments for the course, please consider the relationship between your course goals and your goals for student writing. Readings might provide students with models of good writing in your discipline. By approaching the course topic through writing, instructors help students to understand the relevance of writing to thinking in all disciplines.
5. Students should meet with the instructor for at least two conferences. Such conferences provide a necessary supplement to in-class work on writing. They also help initiate students into intellectual life at DePauw University.
6. Students should be introduced to writing in relation to sources, using proper methods of paraphrase, and issues related to academic integrity including plagiarism.

Assessment and Outcomes

The following assessment and outcome guidelines seek to ensure that students gain writing skills that are transferable to other courses and writing situations.

Students should be evaluated on their ability to:

- write and revise in ways that go beyond corrections to spelling and grammar by addressing higher order structural, argumentative, and stylistic elements;
- write appropriately for different writing tasks, demonstrating an ability to control the focus of papers and paragraphs;

- use appropriate documentation;
- respond to the needs of different audiences by adopting an appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality;
- write with fluency, demonstrating control of such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation and spelling.