



W

Courses at the University of Connecticut

→ Frequently Asked Questions [by Faculty]

Is the purpose of my W course to teach students to write in my discipline or teach them to write more generally?

Both, but the emphasis is on writing in your own discipline.

Are guidelines for W courses different at regional campuses?

No. W courses, regardless of location or level, should meet the same four criteria. For those course requirements, please see the University Writing Center website. As with Storrs, most regional campuses have writing specialists to assist faculty and writing centers that offer tutoring.

Can I enroll beyond the 19 cap by giving out permission numbers?

Please don't. Enrolling beyond 19 requires approval from the General Education Oversight Committee.

Does any kind of writing count toward the 15 page minimum?

No. Only writing that moves through a revision process counts. This does not mean that *all* writing in a W course must be revised—after all, many kinds of informal, exploratory, and one-shot writing can be quite valuable for student learning—but instead that *at least* 15 pages of formal, revised text must be assigned. Collaboratively composed texts can count as part of those 15-pages.

Does the W requirement dictate that any specific genres must be assigned?

No. Those will depend on your discipline and course. Some W courses center on one 20-page research project (usually composed in stages), while others include three or four shorter essays; some feature specialized genres (policy briefs, lab reports, proposals, abstracts, case study analyses, etc.), while others incorporate a mix of genres.

Do I need to assign a research paper?

No, but many W courses hinge on research and address how to evaluate, incorporate, and document sources. When assigning research projects, many faculty opt to divide them into smaller, progressive components (proposal, annotated bibliography or

literature review, section drafts, whole draft), each of which occasions response.

Should I require that students buy a separate book on writing?

That is up to you. If looking for advice on writing handbooks, discipline-specific writing guides, or online resources, the University Writing Center can make suggestions and get you examination copies. We can also help you create a print or online writing guide customized to your course.

Exactly how much writing instruction do I need to include, and how can I balance it with other course content?

This will vary and is left to the wisdom of each instructor. Note that “writing instruction” means more than imparting rules for grammar, usage, and documentation; it also involves teaching students to explore and shape their ideas, analyze their audiences, frame arguments, gather evidence effectively and ethically, understand genre conventions, and attend to style. Many faculty reserve writing instruction for their comments on drafts or their individual conferences with students. Many build it into lectures and discussions, showcase models of successful and unsuccessful writing, introduce mini-lessons on key stylistic points, and hold writing workshops on days when drafts are due. Writing instruction should complement rather than compete with course content: learning to write in a discipline means learning to think, argue, research and communicate with the community of scholars in a given field.

Can a final writing project substitute for a final exam?

Maybe. The general rule is that 100 and 200 level courses require final exams, but exceptions are possible. Check with your department in advance of the semester to see if a final exam exemption has been approved for the course; the department can also request one from the dean. For courses numbered 300 and above, the instructor can make such decisions without consulting the department.

What kinds of revision should be built into my W course?

You choose. It usually entails commenting on drafts or conferencing with students in advance of their final submission of papers. Other options include having students critique each others' drafts (be sure to structure and supervise such peer review), holding small group tutorials, or bringing drafts before the whole class for review.

Should I grade drafts?

That is your choice. Some opt to grade them; some deliver a tentative grade ("If this draft were your final version, it would merit a D because..."); some hold off on grading to encourage exploratory thinking and risk-taking. In any case, when responding to drafts your focus should be on *formative* comments: that is, posing questions, affirming what is working, pointing out shortfalls, and making suggestions so that students can *put your comments to use as they revise*.

Are there UConn-wide standards for evaluating student writing?

No. You set the criteria appropriate for your course and discipline. If interested, you can find several discipline-specific sample grading rubrics on the University Writing Center website. We recommend that you distribute your expectations for writing and your grading policy early in the semester.

How should I respond to sentence-level errors in student writing?

Set high standards for editing and stick to them, but also help students meet those high standards. Error-ridden *final submissions* of assignments should not pass. We might expect more frequent sentence-level problems in drafts, because there writers tend to focus more on finding their purpose, shaping their ideas and structure, and gathering evidence. Some faculty address sentence-level concerns by working with students individually; some introduce occasional in-class lessons on key usage, style or documentation matters. Another option is referring (but not requiring) students to make appointments with the Writing Center, where we often work toward helping students edit their own work. As a general rule, *avoid line editing an entire student draft*, as this is often counter-productive because it means that you are editing *for* the student. While you should respond throughout a draft to a student's

ideas, structure, and voice, better to line edit no more than the first 20% of the text; for the latter 80%, jot a check in the margin for each grammatical or documentation error. This alerts students to the frequency of their surface errors but allows you to engage with the intellectual and structural substance of the text.

How do I deal with potential cases of plagiarism?

When planning your course, consider ways to promote academic integrity: discuss in class the ethical standards and documentation conventions for your discipline; on your syllabus include the plagiarism policy and your expectations for intellectual work; create detailed assignments tailored to your course; require students to complete the on-line plagiarism module in WebCT; alert students to potential problems in early drafts; and never accept final papers for which you haven't seen the required drafts. If you discover plagiarism, please inform your home department and the Dean of Student's Office; also see the Student Code of Conduct (www.dosa.uconn.edu).

Shouldn't my students have learned to write and document sources in Freshman English?

In Freshman English students grapple with complex readings from the humanities and social sciences; they practice interpretation, argument, and research; and they write several essays, some of which incorporate sources. They write and revise at least 30 pages of text. Still, because academic writing is a deeply contextual activity, no single course can prepare students for the range of writing they encounter across a college curriculum, nor can any single course inoculate students from making sentence-level mistakes in other contexts. When students receive consistent and rigorous response to their writing across courses and over a number of years, they develop into skilled and versatile writers.

Where can I get more information about the W requirement or get assistance with my course planning?

The General Education Oversight Committee sets W policy and oversees W courses. The University Writing Center offers faculty and teaching assistants workshops, online resources, and individual consultations. We also make individualized tutorials in writing available to all UConn students.