

Writing-Intensive Course Criteria Checklist

Whether a course is “writing intensive” depends on much more than the amount of writing in a course. The amount of writing is less important than the purpose the writing serves, the amount of course time devoted to the improvement of writing, and the instructor’s plan for providing in-process feedback to students. General guidelines concerning the minimum amount of writing are listed in #5 below, but requirements will vary according to the discipline, type and level of course. When evaluating course proposals, the TCAC Advisory Committee will consider these questions:

1. Is writing integral to course design? Does the writing work to promote and evaluate learning of course content? Y N
2. Does writing support the QEP objective of enhanced critical and creative thinking? In addition to gathering, summarizing, and reporting information, will students engage in the sorts of writing that inspire critical and creative thinking (e.g., application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation or critique of information and/or ideas)? Y N
3. Are writing assignments consistent with the values and practices of the discipline represented by the course, and do they invite students to practice the multiple forms or genres of writing that occur in that discipline (e.g., process reports/analyses, literature reviews, position papers, abstracts)? Y N
4. Will students receive in-process feedback from the instructor and revise and edit their work to better meet the learning objectives of the particular writing assignment? Is some feedback via student-instructor conferences and/or written comments from the instructor, and does this feedback focus on substantive writing issues, e.g., issues of purpose, audience, idea development, accuracy, tone, clarity of presentation? (Feedback in the form of peer review is appropriate in some cases but should not replace instructor feedback.) Y N
5. If the course as described satisfies the first four criteria listed above, the amount of writing will almost certainly be acceptable, as the writing assignments are integral to the course. A simple rule-of-thumb would be that the majority of the grade is determined by individually authored written work. However, a more quantitative, problem-solving oriented course (e.g. physics, computer science, chemistry, mathematics, etc.) may be acceptable with only 30-40% of the course grade dedicated to writing, while a course that more naturally involves writing (English, history, philosophy, etc.) may have 70% or more of the course grade dedicated to writing. Upper level courses should have more writing than lower level courses. Does the course meet this standard? Y N
6. It is expected that a writing intensive section of a multi-section course will differ from a “regular” (non-WI) section of the same course, in terms of pedagogy. Although the percentage of course grade and amount of writing may be similar, the approach to teaching will be different. Instructors in writing-intensive courses are expected to require multiple drafts of more assignments, provide more feedback on substantive writing issues (see #4 above), devote more class time to the improvement of writing skills, and assess students’ work on critical-thinking criteria. Does the course meet this standard? Y N
7. While at least half of the writing for the course should be formal (e.g., out-of-class papers with well-defined, discipline-appropriate purposes and audiences that have gone through a process of drafting, revising, and editing), informal writing is helpful and encouraged. Informal writing includes, but is not limited to, in-class essay exams, journals, and reading responses. Does the course meet this standard? Y N