Results of the First-Year Composition Assessment for the Spring 2005 Semester

Prepared for:    Diane R. Lapkin
                Vice President of Academic Affairs

                Anita V. M. Shea
                Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences

                Steven Carter
                Chairperson of the English Department

Prepared by:    Paul Jude Beauvais
                Coordinator of First-Year Composition

June 15, 2005
Contents

Executive Summary ........................................................................................................ 1
Introduction and Purpose ............................................................................................... 2
Procedures ...................................................................................................................... 3
Results ............................................................................................................................ 5
  Thesis/Development .................................................................................................... 6
  Argumentation ............................................................................................................ 7
  Research ...................................................................................................................... 8
  Documentation ........................................................................................................... 10
  Revision ...................................................................................................................... 13
  Organization ............................................................................................................... 14
  Style ............................................................................................................................ 15
  Mechanics .................................................................................................................. 16
Analysis .......................................................................................................................... 17
Recommendations .......................................................................................................... 21
Appendices ...................................................................................................................... 24
  Appendix A: General Principles for ENG 102 Classes ............................................ 24
  Appendix B: Information for Students ..................................................................... 27
  Appendix C: Instructions for Assembling a Portfolio ............................................... 30
  Appendix D: Composition Portfolio Information Sheet .......................................... 31
  Appendix E: Evaluation Form .................................................................................... 32
  Appendix F: Evaluation Guidelines .......................................................................... 33
  Appendix G: Factors Involved in Calculating Results ............................................. 44
Executive Summary

As part of its ongoing efforts to assess the effectiveness of writing instruction at Salem State College, the English faculty evaluated writing portfolios assembled by students enrolled in ENG 102 Composition II for the Spring 2005 semester. Students were selected at random to participate in the assessment, and each participant prepared a portfolio containing a selection of essays completed to fulfill the requirements for his or her section of ENG 102. Seventy-five portfolios were obtained, a total that constitutes a ten percent sample of the student population enrolled in ENG 102 for the semester.

Members of the English faculty evaluated the seventy-five portfolios to determine whether they provided evidence of eleven essential skills identified in the course guidelines for all sections of ENG 102. Each portfolio was rated as either “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory” for each skill, with the initial rating provided by the student’s instructor. Then the portfolio was evaluated by a member of the English Department’s Composition Committee, who also rated the portfolio as either “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory” for each skill. For any skill on which the instructor and committee member disagreed in their ratings, another member of the Composition Committee provided a third evaluation.

For nine of the eleven skills evaluated, students’ performance met or exceeded the expectations of the Coordinator of First-Year Composition, with 65% or more of the assessed portfolios rated as “Satisfactory.” The highest rates of satisfactory performance were attained for four basic skills—organization, mechanics, style, and the ability to state and develop a thesis—with at least 91% of the assessed portfolios providing evidence of these skills. The percentage of portfolios rated as “Satisfactory” was also acceptably high for five other skills, providing evidence of students’ ability to improve an essay by revising it, conduct research to find appropriate print and electronic resources, and meet standards for fair usage in citing quotations and paraphrases. However, only 57% of the assessed portfolios provided evidence that students have sufficient knowledge of an academic documentation format, and only 43% of the portfolios provided evidence of students’ ability to construct an argument in which they support their own position while also considering opposing positions.

Taken in total, the results of the Spring 2005 assessment indicate that most aspects of the first-year composition program are working well and should be retained. However, improvements are possible in two areas. Because argumentation was the only skill on which a majority of the assessed students were rated as “Unsatisfactory,” improving students’ performance on this skill will be the primary objective for the 2005-2006 academic year (and, if necessary, for the 2006-2007 academic year). A second objective will be to identify better methods for teaching documentation skills throughout the first-year composition curriculum. The Coordinator of First-Year Composition will work with the Composition Committee and the English faculty to accomplish both of these objectives.
Introduction and Purpose

During the 2004-2005 academic year the English Department initiated the most recent phase of the English Composition Assessment Project that began in 1996. This phase is the first to be conducted since Spring 2003, the semester that the English Department implemented a new first-year composition curriculum with consistent instructional practices and objectives for all sections of ENG 101 Composition I and ENG 102 Composition II. During the Fall 2004 semester, the English Department’s Composition Committee designed and tested a plan to assess writing portfolios assembled by students enrolled in ENG 102 classes. After analyzing the results of a pilot study, the Composition Committee approved a plan for a large-scale assessment to be conducted during the Spring 2005 semester.

The purpose of the Spring 2005 assessment was to determine the percentage of ENG 102 students who met eleven objectives that are listed in “General Principles for the Design of ENG 102 Classes,” a document that was approved by the English faculty in 2002. (See Appendix A for excerpts from this document.) To accomplish this goal, the Coordinator of First-Year Composition solicited a representative sample of writing portfolios assembled by students enrolled in ENG 102 classes for the Spring 2005 semester. Seventy-five portfolios were evaluated by ENG 102 instructors and by members of the Composition Committee, with each portfolio receiving a grade of either “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory” for each of the eleven writing skills identified as essential for students to master during their first year of undergraduate study. Because the assessment measured the skills of students who were nearing completion of the first-year composition sequence, the assessment serves as a useful indicator of issues to consider as the English Department continues its efforts to improve writing instruction. It also provides information that may help faculty members to form realistic expectations and to develop an appropriate curriculum for the upper-level writing requirement that will be implemented in 2006.
Procedures

For the Spring 2005 assessment of the First-Year Composition Program, the Composition Committee used procedures that it developed, tested, and modified during the Fall 2004 semester. These procedures are described below.

**Population.** To assess the writing abilities of students who were nearing completion of the first-year composition curriculum, the Coordinator of First-Year Composition identified a representative sample from the 749 students enrolled in ENG 102 for the Spring 2005 semester. Two students were selected at random from each of fifty-two sections of ENG 102, and portfolios were requested from these students. Of the 104 portfolios requested, seventy-seven were received. After two portfolios were removed for evaluators to use in calibration exercises, the assessment was conducted using the remaining seventy-five portfolios. Results were calculated based on the obtained sample of seventy-five portfolios (ten percent of the total ENG 102 population) and also on the solicited sample of 102 portfolios (fourteen percent of the total ENG 102 population).

**Procedures for Assembling Portfolios.** During the eleventh week of the semester, ENG 102 instructors received the names of the students who were selected to submit portfolios. During the twelfth week, instructors notified the students, gave them a two-page handout titled “Information for Students Selected to Participate in the First-Year Composition Assessment” (see Appendix B), and set up appointments to meet with the students during the fourteenth week of the semester. At the meetings during the fourteenth week, instructors gave students written instructions for assembling the portfolio (see Appendix C) and offered suggestions concerning which essays to include in the portfolio. Students were instructed to submit portfolios with completed cover sheets (see Appendix D) no later than the last day of final exams for the semester.

Each portfolio contained no fewer than two and no more than four essays written by the student to fulfill assignments for his or her section of ENG 102. Students submitted rough drafts as well as the final copy for one essay; for the other essays, students submitted final copies only. Because the purpose of the assessment was to evaluate the effectiveness of the first-year composition program and not the success of individual students or instructors, students were instructed to remove their names and the names of their instructors from all essays included in the portfolios.

**Procedures for Evaluating Portfolios.** All portfolios were evaluated by ENG 102 instructors and by members of the Composition Committee. Before evaluating the portfolios, ENG 102 instructors either attended a one-hour training session or were contacted individually by the Coordinator of First-Year Composition to ensure that they understood the assessment procedures. The instructors then conducted their evaluations independently before submitting portfolios to the English Department secretary. Members of the Composition Committee evaluated portfolios at two
seven-hour grading sessions on May 23 and 24, 2005. Both of these sessions began with the committee members evaluating a test portfolio to calibrate their grading standards.

All evaluators used an evaluation form (see Appendix E) and a twelve-page evaluation guide containing detailed guidelines for assessing eleven skills (see Appendix F). Using these tools, evaluators rated each portfolio as either “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory” in the following areas:

- Thesis/Development
- Argumentation
- Research using print sources
- Research using electronic sources
- Documentation of quotations
- Documentation of paraphrases
- Documentation format (MLA, APA, or CMS)
- Revision
- Organization
- Style
- Mechanics

Each portfolio was evaluated by no fewer than two and no more than three evaluators. The first evaluator for each portfolio was the ENG 102 instructor who taught the section for which the student was registered. The second evaluator was one of the seven members of the Composition Committee. For any skill on which the first two evaluators disagreed in their assessment, a third evaluation was provided by another member of the Composition Committee.

**Confidence Interval and Confidence Level.** A confidence interval and level were calculated based on the solicited sample of 102 students (who constituted fourteen percent of the total population of 749 students). For this population, a confidence interval of no larger than 6.2 was consistent with a confidence level of 95%. In other words: if the total population of students were evaluated instead of just a sample, and if the evaluation were conducted one hundred times, the statistical model predicts that in ninety-five out of the one hundred evaluations the results would be in the range extending 3.1 points above and 3.1 points below the reported percentages for the sample studied in the actual assessment. (See Appendix G for a more detailed explanation of factors involved in calculating results.)
Results

The following information is included below for each of the eleven skills that were assessed:

- **A brief description of the assessed skill.** These descriptions are adapted from major objectives included in the course guidelines for all sections of ENG 102, and the wording corresponds to that used in the evaluation sheets that were completed by evaluators. (See Appendix E for the evaluation sheet.)

- **A description of the traits required for a “Satisfactory” score.** These descriptions are adapted from the scoring guide that was provided to all evaluators. (See Appendix F for more detailed information concerning the evaluation criteria.)

- **A table showing results for the obtained sample.** This table lists the percentage and number of the seventy-five essays that received ratings of “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory” for the assessed skill.

- **A table showing results for the solicited sample.** This table lists the percentage and number of the 102 solicited essays that received ratings of “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory” for each skill, and it also lists the percentage (26%) and number (27) of solicited portfolios that were unavailable for assessment.

For each skill, the two tables can be used to calculate an interval that contains the actual percentage of the total ENG 102 population possessing satisfactory ability. The highest possible percentage of students possessing satisfactory ability appears in the table for the obtained sample as the percentage achieving a “Satisfactory” rating for the skill. The lowest possible percentage of students possessing satisfactory ability can be calculated from the table for the solicited sample by subtracting 3.1 (the lower extension of the confidence-interval correction) from the percentage of the solicited sample achieving a “Satisfactory” rating. (For a more detailed explanation of factors involved in calculating the results, see Appendix G.)
Thesis and Development

► The writer’s ability to state a clear thesis and to support it in well-developed paragraphs

To receive a rating of “Satisfactory” for this skill, a portfolio was expected to contain at least one essay that exhibited all of the following traits:

- A thesis stating a point that could be developed adequately in an essay of the length that the student wrote,
- Development at sufficient length to enable the reader to understand or accept the thesis that the essay developed,
- Phrasing and structure that were sufficiently clear to enable the reader to understand the thesis and to recognize how the essay developed it.

Results for Obtained Sample (75 portfolios)

Satisfactory: 91% (68 portfolios)  
Unsatisfactory: 9% (7 portfolios)

Results for Solicited Sample (102 portfolios)

Satisfactory: 67% (68 portfolios)  
Unsatisfactory: 7% (7 portfolios)  
Unavailable: 26% (27 portfolios)
Argumentation

► The writer’s ability to analyze opposing positions and to explain how these positions relate to the writer’s own position

To receive a rating of “Satisfactory” for this skill, a portfolio was expected to contain at least one essay that exhibited all of the following traits:

- A clear statement of the writer’s own position on an issue about which reasonable people may disagree,
- Sufficient evidence to prove that the writer’s position had merit,
- A fair explanation of at least one position that differed from the writer’s position,
- A reasonable explanation of why the writer disagreed with the opposing position.

Results for Obtained Sample (75 portfolios)

Satisfactory: 43% (32 portfolios)
Unsatisfactory: 57% (43 portfolios)

Results for Solicited Sample (102 portfolios)

Satisfactory: 31% (32 portfolios)
Unsatisfactory: 42% (43 portfolios)
Unavailable: 26% (27 portfolios)
Research

► The writer’s ability to use print sources that are relevant to the writer’s topic

To receive a rating of “Satisfactory” for this skill, a portfolio was expected to contain at least one essay that exhibited the following trait:

- Either quotations or paraphrases from a print source that was relevant to the writer’s topic.

Results for Obtained Sample (75 portfolios)

Satisfactory: 81% (61 portfolios)
Unsatisfactory: 19% (14 portfolios)

Results for Solicited Sample (102 portfolios)

Satisfactory: 60% (61 portfolios)
Unsatisfactory: 14% (14 portfolios)
Unavailable: 26% (27 portfolios)
Research (continued)

► The writer’s ability to use electronic sources that are relevant to the writer’s topic

To receive a rating of “Satisfactory” for this skill, a portfolio was expected to contain at least one essay that exhibited the following trait:

- Either quotations or paraphrases from an electronic source that was relevant to the writer’s topic.

Results for Obtained Sample (75 portfolios)

Satisfactory: 72% (54 portfolios)
Unsatisfactory: 28% (21 portfolios)

Results for Solicited Sample (102 portfolios)

Satisfactory: 53% (54 portfolios)
Unsatisfactory: 21% (21 portfolios)
Unavailable: 26% (27 portfolios)
Documentation

- The writer's ability to identify **quotations** and to provide sufficient documentation to enable readers to find the sources for these quotations

To receive a rating of “Satisfactory” for this skill, a portfolio was expected to contain at least one essay exhibiting both of the following traits:

- Quotations that were marked sufficiently well to adhere to the principle of “fair usage” (that is, to avoid qualifying as plagiarism),

- Sufficient documentation to enable readers to find the original sources for quotations (regardless of whether the documentation followed the conventions of the MLA, APA, or CMS format).

**Results for Obtained Sample (75 portfolios)**

- Satisfactory: 81% (61 portfolios)
- Unsatisfactory: 19% (14 portfolios)

**Results for Solicited Sample (102 portfolios)**

- Satisfactory: 60% (61 portfolios)
- Unsatisfactory: 14% (14 portfolios)
- Unavailable: 26% (27 portfolios)
Documentation (continued)

The writer's ability to identify **paraphrases** and to provide sufficient documentation to enable readers to find the sources for these paraphrases

To receive a rating of “Satisfactory” for this skill, a portfolio was expected to contain at least one essay exhibiting both of the following traits:

- Paraphrases that were marked sufficiently well to adhere to the principle of “fair usage” (that is, to avoid qualifying as plagiarism),

- Sufficient documentation to enable readers to find the original sources for paraphrases (regardless of whether the documentation followed the conventions of the MLA, APA, or CMS format).

Results for Obtained Sample (75 portfolios)

![Bar chart showing the distribution of satisfactory and unsatisfactory results.]

Satisfactory: 65% (49 portfolios)
Unsatisfactory: 35% (26 portfolios)

Results for Solicited Sample (102 portfolios)

![Bar chart showing the distribution of satisfactory, unsatisfactory, and unavailable results.]

Satisfactory: 48% (49 portfolios)
Unsatisfactory: 25% (26 portfolios)
Unavailable: 26% (27 portfolios)
Documentation (continued)

► The writer’s ability to use the MLA, APA, or CMS format for documenting sources

To receive a rating of “Satisfactory” for this skill, a portfolio was expected to contain at least one essay exhibiting all of the following traits:

- Quotations presented in the MLA, APA, or CMS format (with only minor deviations from the format’s conventions),
- Paraphrases presented in the MLA, APA, or CMS format (with only minor deviations from the format’s conventions),
- Bibliographic citations in the MLA, APA, or CMS format (with only minor deviations from the format’s conventions).

Results for Obtained Sample (75 portfolios)

- Satisfactory: 57% (43 portfolios)
- Unsatisfactory: 43% (32 portfolios)

Results for Solicited Sample (102 portfolios)

- Satisfactory: 42% (43 portfolios)
- Unsatisfactory: 31% (32 portfolios)
- Unavailable: 26% (27 portfolios)
Revision

► The writer’s ability to improve an essay by revising it

To receive a rating of “Satisfactory” for this skill, a portfolio was expected to contain at least one essay exhibiting the following trait:

- Multiples drafts demonstrating that the writer made substantive changes that improved the essay.

Results for Obtained Sample (75 portfolios)

Satisfactory: 67% (50 portfolios)
Unsatisfactory: 33% (25 portfolios)

Results for Solicited Sample (102 portfolios)

Satisfactory: 49% (50 portfolios)
Unsatisfactory: 25% (25 portfolios)
Unavailable: 26% (27 portfolios)
Organization

The writer’s ability to arrange information effectively in an expository (i.e., non-narrative) format

To receive a rating of “Satisfactory” for this skill, a portfolio was expected to contain at least one essay exhibiting both of the following traits:

- An overall organizing scheme that allowed readers to perceive the essay as a cohesive expository (non-narrative) text,
- Arrangement into paragraphs that were well focused.

Results for Obtained Sample (75 portfolios)

Satisfactory: 95% (71 portfolios)
Unsatisfactory: 5% (4 portfolios)

Results for Solicited Sample (102 portfolios)

Satisfactory: 70% (71 portfolios)
Unsatisfactory: 4% (4 portfolios)
Unavailable: 26% (27 portfolios)
Style

- The writer’s ability to write in a style that is appropriate for an audience of well-educated adults

To receive a rating of “Satisfactory” for this skill, the majority of the essays in the portfolio were expected to exhibit the following trait:

- Phrasing that was appropriate for the author’s purpose and audience.

Results for Obtained Sample (75 portfolios)

Satisfactory: 91% (68 portfolios)
Unsatisfactory: 9% (7 portfolios)

Results for Solicited Sample (102 portfolios)

Satisfactory: 67% (68 portfolios)
Unsatisfactory: 7% (7 portfolios)
Unavailable: 26% (27 portfolios)
Mechanics

► The writer’s ability to use standard American English grammar, punctuation, and spelling

To receive a rating of “Satisfactory” for this skill, the majority of the essays in the portfolio were expected to exhibit all of the following traits:

- Standard American English grammar,
- Standard American English punctuation,
- Standard American English spelling.

Results for Obtained Sample (75 portfolios)

Satisfactory: 92% (69 portfolios)
Unsatisfactory: 8% (6 portfolios)

Results for Solicited Sample (102 portfolios)

Satisfactory: 68% (69 portfolios)
Unsatisfactory: 6% (6 portfolios)
Unavailable: 26% (27 portfolios)
Analysis

Although the Spring 2005 assessment included discrete evaluations of eleven skills, these skills can be grouped into categories that make the results easier to interpret. The results of the assessment are analyzed in the five sections below.

**Basic Skills.** One useful category contains skills that could be called “basic”—i.e., skills that most instructors expect students to have developed to a fairly high level before entering college. In the Salem State College undergraduate catalog, these skills are listed as "minimum writing standards" that students must meet to earn a grade of "C" or above for any writing assignment. Of the eleven skills evaluated in the Spring 2005 assessment, the four in the table below correspond most closely to the minimum standards listed in the catalog.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Satisfactory (% of obtained sample)</th>
<th>Satisfactory (% of solicited sample)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis/Development</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results for the obtained sample indicate that the vast majority of first-year composition students develop satisfactory ability in the basic skills before completing ENG 102. Even the conservative figures for the solicited sample suggest that no less than two thirds of the students can meet these minimum standards.

It also is worth noting some data suggesting that the percentage of students demonstrating satisfactory ability may increase at each stage of students’ progress through the first-year composition curriculum. In an assessment conducted in 2002, 77% of an obtained sample demonstrated satisfactory basic skills when tested at a placement session during the summer before the students began their undergraduate studies. Also in the 2002 assessment, 85% of an obtained sample demonstrated satisfactory basic skills when tested during the twelfth week of ENG 101. In the Spring 2005 assessment of ENG 102 students, the percentage of the obtained sample demonstrating satisfactory ability ranged from 91% to 95% for the four basic skills. Although the available data is insufficient to demonstrate that the first-year composition program should be credited for the improvement in students’ abilities, it is probable that the program was a factor in the students’ success.

**Documentation Skills.** Although the ability to document sources is identified in the undergraduate catalog as a “minimum standard” for acceptable writing in any course, considerable evidence suggests that many students do not possess this skill when they begin their undergraduate studies at Salem State. To address this problem, the English faculty added documentation instruction to the curriculum for ENG 101 when the faculty revised the first-year curriculum in 2002. Since the new
curriculum was implemented in 2003, documentation has been taught in both ENG 101 and ENG 102, allowing students to learn basic principles of fair usage earlier in their academic careers and to devote attention to the minutiae of academic style as the students progress through the curriculum.

In the Spring 2005 assessment, students were evaluated on their ability to document quotations, document paraphrases, and use the MLA, APA, or CMS documentation format. The results of these evaluations are included in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documentation (quotations)</th>
<th>Satisfactory (% of obtained sample)</th>
<th>Satisfactory (% of solicited sample)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation (paraphrase)</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation (format)</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In evaluating students' ability to document quotations and paraphrases, the evaluators were instructed to use two standards: fair usage (i.e., whether the documentation was sufficient so that the use of the source did not qualify as plagiarism) and recoverability (i.e., whether the documentation was sufficient to allow readers to locate the original source of the quotation or paraphrase). As the assessment progressed, it became clear that all evaluators were considering fair usage but some were not considering recoverability or were considering it under the “format” criterion instead of the “quotation” and “paraphrase” criteria. However, the assessment did establish that a large majority of ENG 102 students can meet a fair-usage standard for their documentation of quotations, and it is probable that a majority can meet this standard for the more difficult task of documenting paraphrases.

Students were less successful in demonstrating the ability to use an academic format for documentation, with 57% of the obtained sample and 42% of the solicited sample rated as “Satisfactory” for this skill. However, it is worth noting that the ENG 102 instructors rated 89% of the students as “Satisfactory,” while the first evaluators from the Composition Committee rated only 43% of the students as “Satisfactory.” Several explanations are possible for this disparity. In some cases, the instructors seem to have based their evaluations in part on materials that were not included in the portfolios. For example, some portfolios contained essays with accurate in-text citations but no Works Cited page. Several of these essays were rated as “Satisfactory” by the instructors but “Unsatisfactory” by the committee evaluators, a phenomenon that led committee evaluators to wonder whether the Works Cited pages had been inadvertently omitted from the portfolios. In other cases, though, it seemed probable that the instructors were unaware of recent changes in the MLA format.

The Composition Committee will need to consider methods for improving instruction in documentation. However, it seems probable that many students may
need more than one year to master the details of an academic format. On the other hand, the results of the assessment provide a basis for instructors in any class to assume that most students master the principles of fair usage by the time that the students complete ENG 102.

**Revision.** Another important skill is the ability to improve an essay by revising it. In assessing this skill, evaluators considered whether students were able to make substantive changes in an essay instead of simply copyediting the essay to eliminate formal flaws. The results of this evaluation are reported in the table below, with the ratings of instructors and the combined ratings from all evaluators listed in separate columns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Satisfactory (% of obtained sample) Instructors’ Evaluation</th>
<th>Satisfactory (% of obtained sample) Combined Evaluation</th>
<th>Satisfactory (% of solicited sample)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revision</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is worth noting that revision is a particularly difficult skill to assess when students are composing with computers. Although most students do retain some early drafts of their work, students also make changes in a draft and then replace the original file instead of saving the new version as a separate file. This practice ensures that multiple drafts are an imperfect record of the students’ composing process. Nevertheless, ample evidence was available to prove that a majority of students improve their writing by revising it. It is particularly significant that instructors rated 84% of the portfolios as “Satisfactory.” Unlike the evaluators from the Composition Committee, the instructors were in contact with the students while they were composing their essays. For this reason, the instructors probably were better judges of how well the students revised their work.

**Research Skills.** The Spring 2005 assessment included a rudimentary evaluation of students’ ability to locate appropriate print and electronic sources to use in their essays. The results of this evaluation are reported in the table below, with the ratings of instructors and the combined ratings from all evaluators listed in separate columns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Satisfactory (% of obtained sample) Instructors’ Evaluation</th>
<th>Satisfactory (% of obtained sample) Combined Evaluation</th>
<th>Satisfactory (% of solicited sample)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research (print)</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research (electronic)</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that the evaluators from the Composition Committee based their evaluation on the information provided in the students’ essays, but instructors had
access to the original sources that the students cited. Given the instructors’ access to the source materials, the instructors’ ratings probably are a more accurate indicator of students’ ability to locate appropriate sources. However, even the lower combined ratings suggest that a large majority of students can locate appropriate print and electronic materials.

Also worth noting is one methodological problem in the assessment of research skills. Evaluators from the Composition Committee noted that at times they were uncertain whether a particular source should be considered as a print source or an electronic source. This problem occurred when students were citing the online versions of print publications such as newspapers. The guidelines for what qualifies as a print or electronic source will need to be made clearer for the next assessment.

**Argumentation.** For the purposes of the Spring 2005 assessment, argumentation was defined as the ability to analyze opposing positions and to explain how these positions related to the writer’s own position. As the table below shows, only a minority of students demonstrated that they possess this skill.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argumentation</th>
<th>Satisfactory (% of obtained sample)</th>
<th>Satisfactory (% of solicited sample)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When members of the Composition Committee discussed the poor results for this skill, the committee members identified two main reasons that students received an “Unsatisfactory” rating for argumentation. One reason was that students often failed to engage the ideas expressed by those who opposed the students’ position on an issue. In some cases the students did not acknowledge opposing positions, while in other cases the students made passing reference to such positions but did not consider them sufficiently. Some of these students offered reasonable support for their own position, but their essays did not meet the criteria for a “Satisfactory” rating. The other reason that students received an “Unsatisfactory” rating was that they failed to include an argument essay in their portfolios. These students may or may not possess the ability to construct a satisfactory argument; all that can be concluded is that they did not provide evidence of the ability.

It seems reasonable to conclude that some students were unaware of the faculty’s expectations concerning what qualifies as a satisfactory argument. It also seems reasonable to conclude that some sections of ENG 102 placed more emphasis on teaching research than teaching argumentation. The Coordinator of First-Year Composition will need to work with composition instructors to improve students’ performance in future assessments of argumentation skills.
Recommendations

Although the results of the Spring 2005 assessment indicate that most aspects of the First-Year Composition Program are working well, some possibilities exist for improving the instruction that students receive and for improving the procedures used for the assessment. Recommended changes are detailed below.

Recommendations for Improving Composition Instruction. To improve the writing instruction that first-year students receive, the following actions should be taken:

1. **The Coordinator of First-Year Composition and the Composition Committee should work with the English faculty to improve how argumentation is taught and to ensure that portfolios accurately represent students’ ability in this skill.**

   Argumentation was the only skill on which a majority of the obtained sample and a plurality of the solicited sample were rated as “Unsatisfactory.” However, as noted above, these results do not justify the conclusion that most ENG 102 students possess unsatisfactory argumentation skills. Instead, the results justify the somewhat less troublesome conclusion that a majority of students did not demonstrate these skills. Part of the problem almost certainly was that during the 2004-2005 academic year the English faculty devoted considerable attention to improving how research is taught in ENG 102, so argumentation might have been viewed as a less significant aspect of the course. Also, some students with good argumentation skills may not have understood exactly how they would be assessed on argumentation.

   A first step toward improving the argumentation skills of students should be to encourage all ENG 102 instructors to devote more attention to the topic and to make their expectations clearer. This alone may prove sufficient to produce a significant improvement in students’ performance on the next assessment. If this does not prove to be the case, then one or more workshops on teaching argumentation should be scheduled for the Spring 2006 or Fall 2006 semesters.

2. **The Coordinator of First-Year Composition and the Composition Committee should work with the English faculty to improve how formal documentation is taught and to ensure that portfolios accurately represent students’ ability in this skill.**

   Although a majority (57%) of the obtained portfolios provided evidence that students know how to use an academic documentation format, the success rate for this skill was lower than the success rate for the other documentation skills that were assessed. As noted earlier in this report, the lower success rate may be attributed in part to students inadvertently omitting Works Cited pages
from essays that they included in their portfolios. This problem should be easy to correct. However, the English faculty also should consider whether it is using the best available strategies for teaching documentation and whether sufficient attention is being devoted to this skill in both ENG 101 and ENG 102. The Coordinator of First-Year Composition and the Composition Committee should consider whether the faculty would benefit from a workshop on teaching documentation.

**Recommendations for Improving Assessment Procedures.** To improve the procedures for future assessments, the following actions should be taken:

1. **More part-time faculty members should be included on the team of Composition Committee members who evaluate portfolios.**

   The consensus among all members of the Composition Committee—full-time and part-time—was that they benefited significantly from participating in calibration sessions and evaluating numerous portfolios during the two seven-hour grading sessions. These sessions made the committee members much more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of our students and the advantages and disadvantages of specific instructional strategies.

   At present the Composition Committee consists of five full-time faculty members and two part-time faculty members. Although the committee cannot be allowed to become too large to function efficiently, expanding the membership to nine members for the assessment sessions makes sense. Adding two part-time faculty members to the committee would increase the annual cost of assessment by $1,260 ($630 per additional member), but doing so would be a useful method of faculty development.

2. **Assessment workshops for ENG 102 instructors should be expanded, and incentives should be provided for instructors to participate in these workshops.**

   It is noteworthy that the ENG 102 instructors and the evaluators from the Composition Committee achieved a consensus rate of 65% or higher in their evaluations for eight of the eleven skills assessed. For these skills, tie-breaking third readings were required for 35% or less of the portfolios. However, the consensus rate probably would be higher if ENG 102 instructors participated in a calibration session similar to those conducted for the committee members. Such a session would also provide to the instructors some of the same benefits mentioned by the committee members (and described above). If a calibration session were added to the other activities that already are included in the training workshop for instructors, the workshop would need to be expanded to two hours.
It should be noted that instructors already are performing three to five hours of unpaid work when they grade portfolios from their students. The instructors should not be expected to take on an additional task without pay. If instructors were paid thirty dollars per hour (the current pay rate for committee members), the total cost for workshops would be approximately $2,400 for the 2005-2006 academic year. Funds for this purpose were requested in the budget proposal submitted on April 26, 2005 by the Coordinator of First-Year Composition.

3. **The procedures for evaluating documentation skills should be revised.**

   In the Spring 2005 assessment, some evaluators were uncertain about how to evaluate students’ ability to quote and paraphrase sources. In evaluating these skills, some instructors considered only whether students could meet a fair-usage standard while other instructors considered both fair usage and recoverability as requirements for a rating of “Satisfactory.” The Coordinator of First-Year Composition should revise the assessment guidelines to eliminate confusion about how to assess these skills.

4. **The procedures for evaluating research skills should be revised.**

   In the Spring 2005 assessment, some evaluators were confused about what qualifies as an electronic source. The most troublesome cases involved sources that exist in both print and electronic forms. The Coordinator of First-Year Composition should revise the assessment guidelines to eliminate confusion about how to classify sources.

5. **Efforts should be made to ensure that the percentage of students submitting portfolios remains constant or increases.**

   Under ideal circumstances, 100% of the solicited portfolios would actually be obtained for evaluation. However, given the high attrition rate for first-year students, such a goal is not attainable. To continue conducting meaningful assessments, the English faculty must continue to obtain portfolios from approximately 75% of the solicited sample. This rate will ensure that the evaluated portfolios represent approximately 10% of the total population enrolled in ENG 102. The Coordinator of First-Year Composition should consider strategies to increase the sample size if possible or to maintain it at the current level if it cannot be increased.
Appendix A

General Principles for ENG 102 Classes
[Excerpts from the Course Guidelines]

Objectives

Students in ENG 102 will learn how to contribute to ongoing conversations in an academic community. In doing so, students will learn techniques for drafting and revising analytic and persuasive essays based on critical reading of nonfiction prose. Students will also learn methods for conducting library research and the details of at least one system of formal documentation.

Goals

Students in ENG 102 will develop the following knowledge and skills:

1. The ability to use flexible composing processes that are well suited to the types of writing produced by professionals in academic fields,

2. An understanding of how the rhetorical relationships among writer, audience, and message should influence their writing,

3. The ability to use writing to sharpen their own analytic and critical-thinking skills,

4. The ability to participate in the written exchanges of a community of writers who share some common concerns, and, more specifically,
   a. The ability to draw on their reading and first-hand experiences in order to verify, critique, and extend the arguments offered by other members of the community,
   b. The ability to critique and refine their own ideas in light of new knowledge that they develop through their reading and other experiences in the course,
   c. The ability to construct reasonable and persuasive defenses of their positions when these positions are critiqued by advocates of other positions.

5. The ability to analyze the writing conventions of common genres and to produce texts that conform to those conventions, including
   a. The grammar, spelling, and punctuation conventions of standard American English,
   b. The conventions of unity, organization, and support that are common in analytic writing and academic research.
6. The ability to use effective processes for revising and improving their work, including
   a. Processes for evaluating responses from readers and for using those responses in revising an essay,
   b. Processes for proofreading an essay to ensure that it conforms to the conventions of standard American English.

7. An understanding of principles for integrating source materials into their writing, including
   a. The conventions for fair usage of sources and formal documentation detailed by the Modern Language Association (MLA), American Psychological Association (APA), or another entity considered authoritative in an academic discipline,
   b. Techniques for emphasizing their original ideas while also acknowledging how other writers have influenced their thinking.

8. An understanding of some basic methods for conducting library research using print and electronic resources.

Activities

Each instructor of ENGL 102 is free to choose the teaching strategies that s/he deems most effective. However, each instructor will adhere to the following principles:

1. Students in ENG 102 will be expected to write at least 30 pages of edited prose. The writing assignments should include at least three essays in which the students position their own ideas in relation to other writers' thoughts on a topic. These essays should employ formal documentation procedures detailed by the Modern Language Association (MLA), American Psychological Association (APA), or another entity considered authoritative in an academic discipline.

2. Students in ENG 102 will be expected to read at least one and no more than three full-length books (or the equivalent in shorter works). At least one book (or the equivalent in shorter works) should be nonfiction prose.

3. Each instructor will provide students with ongoing feedback concerning their progress in the course. This feedback will include regular written assessments and/or conferences for each student during the course of the semester.

4. Each instructor will devote attention to the processes of writing as well as the product. Instructors will use strategies that help students to identify topics, to draft their essays, and to revise their essays. Teachers are not obligated to allow students to revise already-graded essays in order to improve their grades; however, if teachers do not
allow such revisions, they should provide opportunities for students to receive feedback and to revise before an assignment receives a grade. This policy applies to major assignments but not to homework exercises or other "minor" assignments.

5. Each instructor will create opportunities for students to become acquainted with and respond to other students' work. The most common technique to accomplish this goal is the use of peer-response groups; however, other techniques are acceptable.

6. Each instructor will devote some time to teaching students how to locate sources in books, periodicals, and online databases that are available in or through the Salem State College library.

7. Each instructor will be responsible for helping students resolve problems in the use of standard American English grammar, punctuation, spelling, and the elements of style. While grammar instruction should not occupy much classroom time in ENG 102, it is almost certain that some students will need assistance to resolve lingering problems. Teachers should address these problems on a case-by-case basis.

Schedule

Instructors will have broad latitude in designing the schedule for their sections of ENG 102. However, a typical schedule would include the following units:

Weeks 1-3: Exposition. Students will review the basic principles of expository writing that were covered in ENG 101.

Weeks 4-9: Analysis of Nonfiction Texts. In this unit students will develop their abilities in critical reading and analytic writing. The unit will begin with an emphasis on summary and then move to writing assignments that involve analyzing, comparing, and evaluating nonfiction readings. While completing these assignments, students also will learn procedures for quoting, paraphrasing, and documenting sources. In addition, they will begin exploring how to locate materials in the college library.

Weeks 10-15: Persuasion. In this unit students will write persuasive essays in which they offer their own opinions concerning a topic and support their opinions with reasonable arguments and examples of their own and also with quotations and paraphrases drawn from their reading. In doing so they will learn how to foreground their own ideas while also acknowledging other writers' views. Throughout the unit students will conduct research to locate sources that they will cite in their essays.
Appendix B

Information for Students Selected to Participate in the First-Year Composition Assessment

Students: if your instructor notifies you that you have been selected to participate in the first-year composition assessment, the instructor will talk with you about what you will need to do. However, below you’ll find answers to many of the questions that students ask about the assessment. Please read this information carefully.

How was I selected to participate in the first-year composition assessment?

You were selected at random by the Coordinator of First-Year Composition. You were not chosen because of any personal characteristics such as age, gender, or ethnicity. You were not chosen because of the quality of your work in ENG 102. Your number was drawn in a random selection of students from your section of ENG 102.

What is the purpose of the assessment?

The purpose of the first-year composition assessment is to determine how well the first-year composition program is accomplishing its goals. To do this, the Composition Committee and English instructors evaluate writing portfolios assembled by a random sample of students who are enrolled in ENG 102. This evaluation helps the English faculty to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the composition program.

Because the purpose of the assessment is to evaluate the overall performance of the program, not the performance of individual students or instructors, you will not receive a grade for your work. You will submit your work anonymously, and the results of the assessment will not contain any reference to individual students. Instead, the results will report the percentage of students who demonstrate skills that are taught in the first-year composition program. These percentages will show how well the program is succeeding—they will not show how well individual students or instructors are succeeding.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

You will submit your work anonymously. Neither your name nor your instructor’s name will appear on any of the work in your portfolio. You will remove these names before you submit your work.

Other people also will work to ensure that you remain anonymous. Your instructor will remove your name and his or her own if you forget to do so, and members of the Composition Committee will cross out these names if they slip by your instructor and you. No names will appear on any of the evaluation forms. As was noted above, the purpose of this assessment is to evaluate the program, not the individual students or instructors participating in the program.
Will I need to do work not required of other students in my ENG 102 class?

You will not need to complete any writing assignments other than those required of all the students in your section of ENG 102. The only extra task required of you is that you will need to select no fewer than two and no more than four of the papers that you wrote in ENG 102, and you will need to submit unmarked copies of these papers to your instructor. For one of these papers you will also need to include rough drafts.

What should I include in my portfolio?

Your portfolio should contain no fewer than two and no more than four essays that you wrote for your ENG 102 class. Your instructor will assist you in selecting which essays to include.

The essays that you select should demonstrate that you have the following skills:

- The ability to state a clear thesis and to support it in well-developed paragraphs,
- The ability to analyze opposing positions and to explain how these positions relate to your own,
- The ability to locate print and electronic sources relevant to your topic,
- The ability to use accurate quotations and paraphrases that are documented correctly using the MLA, APA, or CMS format,
- The ability to arrange information effectively and to write in a style that is appropriate for an audience of well-educated adults,
- The ability to use standard American English grammar, punctuation, and spelling,
- The ability to improve an essay by revising it.

Most of the essays should be works that you consider “well written.” However, not every essay has to demonstrate every skill. For example, you may include an essay in which you do a particularly good job of stating and developing a thesis, even if the essay doesn’t contain quotations or consider opposing positions. However, it is important that, taken together, the essays demonstrate all of the skills listed above.

For one (and only one) of the essays in your portfolio you should include rough drafts as well as a polished (or “final”) version. The rough drafts should allow evaluators to determine how well you revised and copyedited that essay. It’s okay if you or your instructor has written comments on the rough drafts—they do not need to be unmarked. However, the polished copy should be unmarked—no comments or grades should appear on it.

For the other essays in your portfolio, you should include only a polished (or “final”) version. These essays should be unmarked.
How and when should I submit my portfolio?

Please submit your work in the folder that your instructor will provide. **Submit the portfolio to your instructor no later than the last day of final exams.**

Will my portfolio be returned to me, and will I receive the results of the assessment?

No. Because students’ names will not appear in any of the portfolios, it will be impossible to return portfolios or report results for individual students. **If your portfolio contains work that you want to keep, please make a copy before you submit the portfolio.**

What should I do if I have questions?

Talk to your instructor. He or she should be able to answer most of your questions.
Appendix C

Instructions for Assembling a Portfolio

**Students:** use this folder to **submit your portfolio to your ENG 102 instructor no later than the last day of final exams.** Please remember to **complete the form that is stapled to the front of the folder.**

Before you submit your portfolio, please examine all of its contents and **black out all references to your name, your instructor’s name, and the section number of your ENG 102 class.**

**What to include in the portfolio:**

Your portfolio should contain **no fewer than two and no more than four essays** that you wrote for your ENG 102 class. Your instructor will assist you in selecting which essays to include.

The essays in your portfolio should demonstrate that you possess the following skills:

- The ability to state a clear thesis and to support it in well-developed paragraphs,
- The ability to analyze opposing positions and to explain how these positions relate to your own,
- The ability to locate print and electronic sources relevant to your topic,
- The ability to use accurate quotations and paraphrases that are documented correctly using the MLA, APA, or CMS format,
- The ability to arrange information effectively and to write in a style that is appropriate for an audience of well-educated adults,
- The ability to use standard American English grammar, punctuation, and spelling,
- The ability to improve an essay by revising it.

Most of the essays should be works that you consider “well written.” However, **not every essay has to demonstrate every skill.** What does matter is that, **taken together, the essays demonstrate all of the skills listed above.**

For **one** (and only one) of the essays in your portfolio **you should include rough drafts as well as the final version.** The rough drafts should allow evaluators to determine how well you revised and copyedited that essay. It’s okay if you or your instructor has written comments on the rough drafts—they do not need to be unmarked. However, **the polished copy should be unmarked**—no comments or grades should appear on it.

For the other essays in your portfolio, **you should include only a polished (or “final”) version.** These essays should be unmarked.
Appendix D

Composition Portfolio Information Sheet

Students: use this folder to submit your portfolio to your ENG 102 instructor.

For detailed information about what to include in your portfolio, see the sheet of Composition Portfolio Instructions that is enclosed in this folder.

Please provide all of the information that is requested below.

1. Write the date that you are submitting the portfolio: ___________________

2. Circle the number of essays contained in the portfolio: 2 3 4

3. Provide the title* of the one essay for which you have included rough drafts as well as an unmarked final copy:

____________________________________________________________

4. Provide the titles* of the one-to-three essays for which you have enclosed unmarked final copies only:

____________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________

*If an essay doesn’t have a title, list it as “Untitled” and provide information that will enable the evaluators to identify it—for example, the date that appears on the first page or a five-to-ten word description of the essay’s topic.

5. Write “yes” on the line to confirm that you have examined the contents of your portfolio and blacked out all references to your name, your instructor’s name, and the section number of your ENG 102 class: ______________

Instructors:

6. Write “yes” on the line to confirm that you have examined the contents of the portfolio and blacked out any remaining references to your name, the student’s name, and the section number of your ENG 102 class: ______________

7. Write “yes” on the line to confirm that you have enclosed a completed “Instructor’s Evaluation” form: ______________

Instructors should submit portfolios to either Elaine Cruddas in Meier Hall 216 (the English Department office) or Paul Beauvais in Library 03 no later than the last day of final exams.
## Appendix E
### Evaluation Form

**Answer each question by checking either "Yes" or "No":**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thesis and Development</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does <strong>at least one</strong> work in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to state a clear thesis and to support it in well-developed paragraphs?</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Argumentation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does <strong>at least one</strong> work in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to analyze opposing positions and to explain how these positions relate to the writer’s own position?</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does <strong>at least one</strong> work in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to use print sources that are relevant to the writer’s topic?</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does <strong>at least one</strong> work in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to use electronic sources that are relevant to the writer’s topic?</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Documentation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does <strong>at least one</strong> work in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to identify quotations and to provide sufficient documentation to enable readers to find the sources for these quotations?</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does <strong>at least one</strong> work in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to identify paraphrases and to provide sufficient documentation to enable readers to find the sources for these paraphrases?</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does <strong>at least one</strong> work in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to use the MLA, APA, or CMS format for documenting sources?</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Revision</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the portfolio contain multiple drafts of <strong>one</strong> essay, and do these drafts demonstrate the writer’s ability to improve an essay by revising it?</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does <strong>at least one</strong> work in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to arrange information effectively in an expository (i.e., non-narrative) format?</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Style</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do <strong>most</strong> of the works in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to write in a style that is appropriate for an audience of well-educated adults?</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mechanics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do <strong>most</strong> of the works in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to use standard American English grammar, punctuation, and spelling?</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

Evaluation Guidelines

To evaluate a portfolio, each evaluator will complete a form that contains eleven yes/no questions concerning specific writing skills. In evaluating each skill, the evaluator will check “Yes” if the portfolio provides evidence that the writer’s ability level is satisfactory. The evaluator will check “No” if the portfolio provides evidence that the writer’s ability level is unsatisfactory.

Guidelines for evaluating each skill are contained in the sections that follow.

Thesis and Development

► Does at least one work in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to state a clear thesis and to support it in well-developed paragraphs?

A satisfactory essay usually will exhibit all of the following traits:

• A thesis stating a point that can be developed adequately in an essay of the length that the student has written,

• Development at sufficient length to enable the reader to understand or accept the thesis that the essay develops,

• Phrasing and structure that are sufficiently clear to enable the reader to understand the thesis and to recognize how the essay develops it.

An unsatisfactory essay usually will exhibit at least one of the following traits:

• Neither an implicit nor an explicit thesis,

• A thesis so obvious that it does not require an essay to support or develop it,

• A thesis so poorly stated that the reader is unable to discern the point of the essay,

• Development that is insufficient to convince the reader that the thesis has been explained or supported adequately.
Argumentation

► Does at least one work in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to analyze opposing positions and to explain how these positions relate to the writer’s own position?

A satisfactory essay usually will exhibit all of the following traits:

- A clear statement of the writer’s own position on an issue about which reasonable people may disagree,
- Sufficient evidence to prove that the writer’s position has merit,
- A fair explanation of at least one position that differs from the writer’s position,
- A reasonable explanation of why the writer disagrees with the opposing position.

An unsatisfactory essay usually will exhibit at least one of the following traits:

- No explanation or an unclear explanation of the writer’s position on an issue about which reasonable people may disagree,
- No support or extremely illogical support for the writer’s position,
- No explanation or an extremely biased explanation of a position that differs from the writer’s position,
- No explanation or an unreasonable explanation of why the writer disagrees with the opposing position.
Research

► Does at least one work in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to use print sources that are relevant to the writer’s topic?

A satisfactory portfolio will exhibit the following trait:

- Either quotations or paraphrases from a print source that is relevant to the writer’s topic.

An unsatisfactory portfolio usually will exhibit the following trait:

- Failure to cite any print source that is relevant to the writer’s topic.

► Does at least one work in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to use electronic sources that are relevant to the writer’s topic?

A satisfactory portfolio usually will exhibit the following trait:

- Either quotations or paraphrases from an electronic source that is relevant to the writer’s topic.

An unsatisfactory portfolio will exhibit the following trait:

- Failure to cite any electronic source that is relevant to the writer’s topic.

Some additional issues to consider:

- The primary purpose of assessing this skill is to ensure that students are identifying relevant sources and incorporating ideas from them in their essays.

- The student’s ENG 102 instructor may have access to the student’s source materials, so the instructor will be presumed to be the best judge of whether the student possesses research skills.

- Unlike the student’s ENG 102 instructor, the external evaluator (that is, the evaluator from the Composition Committee) will not have access to the original source materials. This will limit the evaluator’s ability to determine whether a student is selecting appropriate sources and accurately representing their content. (These limitations will be noted in the report of the assessment results.) However, even without access to the original sources, the external evaluator should be able to form an impression of a source’s relevance by examining how the student uses the source in the essay.
• In judging whether a source is relevant to a student’s topic, the external evaluator should be guided by the information that the student provides concerning the source and by the way that the source is used in the student’s essay. (If a source seems to support or explain an issue that is germane to the essay’s topic, then the evaluator should consider the source relevant.)

• In judging whether a student is representing a source accurately, the external evaluator should be alert for gross distortions of well-known sources and inconsistencies in the student’s discussion of any source’s content. If the evaluator detects distortions or inconsistencies, he or she may take them into account in deciding whether to give the portfolio a satisfactory rating for this skill.

• In evaluating a student’s research skills, the evaluator should not consider documentation skills (e.g., the student’s ability to use an appropriate academic format for quotations, paraphrases, and bibliographic citations). Documentation is a separate item in the assessment.
Documentation

► Does at least one work in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to identify quotations and to provide sufficient documentation to enable readers to find the sources for these quotations?

A satisfactory portfolio usually will exhibit both of the following traits:

- Quotations that are marked sufficiently well to adhere to the principle of “fair usage” (that is, to avoid qualifying as plagiarism),
- Sufficient documentation to enable readers to find the original sources for quotations (regardless of whether the documentation follows the conventions of the MLA, APA, or CMS format).

An unsatisfactory portfolio usually will exhibit at least one of the following traits:

- No quotations or inaccurate quotations,
- Unmarked or insufficiently marked quotations, so that the use of sources does not qualify as “fair usage” and instead would be considered plagiarism,
- Insufficient documentation for quotations, so that readers will not be able to locate easily the original sources and the pages in those sources from which quotations are taken.

► Does at least one work in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to identify paraphrases and to provide sufficient documentation to enable readers to find the sources for these paraphrases?

A satisfactory portfolio usually will exhibit both of the following traits:

- Paraphrases that are marked sufficiently well to adhere to the principle of “fair usage” (that is, to avoid qualifying as plagiarism),
- Sufficient documentation to enable readers to find the original sources for paraphrases (regardless of whether the documentation follows the conventions of the MLA, APA, or CMS format).

An unsatisfactory portfolio usually will exhibit at least one of the following traits:

- No paraphrases or inaccurate paraphrases,
• Unmarked or insufficiently marked paraphrases, so that the use of sources does not qualify as “fair usage” and instead would be considered plagiarism,

• Insufficient documentation for paraphrases, so that readers will not be able to locate easily the original sources and the pages in those sources from which paraphrases are taken.

► Does at least one work in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to use the MLA, APA, or CMS format for documenting sources?

A satisfactory essay usually will exhibit all of the following traits:

• Quotations presented in the MLA, APA, or CMS format (with only minor deviations from the format’s conventions),

• Paraphrases presented in the MLA, APA, or CMS format (with only minor deviations from the format’s conventions),

• Bibliographic citations in the MLA, APA, or CMS format (with only minor deviations from the format’s conventions).

An unsatisfactory essay usually will exhibit at least one of the following traits:

• Significant deviations from the MLA, APA, or CMS format for the in-text citations of quotations,

• Significant deviations from the MLA, APA, or CMS format for the in-text citations of paraphrases,

• Significant deviations from the MLA, APA, or CMS format for bibliographic citations.

Some additional issues to consider:

• Although the faculty wants students to master the basic conventions of an academic documentation format, what matters more than the minutiae of a format are the basic principles of fair usage and recoverability: documentation should indicate all quoted and paraphrased material and should enable readers to identify the source texts and then find the pages from which quotations or paraphrases were taken.

• The student’s ENG 102 instructor may have access to the student’s source materials, so the instructor will be presumed to be the best judge of whether the student possesses satisfactory documentation skills.
Unlike the student’s ENG 102 instructor, the external evaluator (that is, the evaluator from the Composition Committee) will not have access to the original source materials. This will limit the external evaluator’s ability to determine whether a student is quoting or paraphrasing accurately and whether the bibliographic citations are accurate. (These limitations will be noted in the report of the assessment results.) However, even without access to the original sources, the external evaluator should be able to detect some problems in documentation.

In judging whether a student is quoting a source accurately, the external evaluator should be alert for telltale signs of an inaccurate quotation (e.g., incorrect grammar in a quotation from a reputable source, pronoun references that suggest a source is paraphrased instead of quoted verbatim, and so on).

In judging whether a student is paraphrasing a source accurately, the external evaluator should be alert for telltale signs of an inaccurate paraphrase (e.g., attributing to a source a position that is obviously inconsistent with the source’s public statements on a topic).
Revision

Does the portfolio contain multiple drafts of one essay, and do these drafts demonstrate the writer’s ability to improve an essay by revising it?

To receive a **satisfactory** rating for this skill, a portfolio should have the following trait:

- Multiples drafts demonstrating that the writer has made substantive changes that improve an essay.

To receive an **unsatisfactory** rating for this skill, a portfolio should have the following trait:

- No evidence (or insufficient evidence) to demonstrate the writer’s ability to make substantive changes that improve an essay.
Organization

- Does at least one work in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to arrange information effectively in an expository (i.e., non-narrative) format?

A satisfactory essay usually will exhibit all of the following traits:

- An overall organizing scheme that allows readers to perceive the essay as a cohesive expository (non-narrative) text,

- Arrangement into paragraphs that are well focused.

An unsatisfactory essay usually will exhibit at least one of the following traits:

- No sense (or an insufficient sense) of an overall organizing scheme appropriate for an expository essay that isn't a narrative,

- Paragraphs that are insufficiently focused.
Style

Do most of the works in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to write in a style that is appropriate for an audience of well-educated adults?

A satisfactory essay usually will exhibit the following trait:

- Phrasing that is appropriate for the author’s purpose and audience.

An unsatisfactory essay usually will exhibit at least one of the following traits:

- Phrasing whose vagueness, ambiguity, or complexity makes the writer’s meaning very difficult for the reader to understand,
- Phrasing that a well-educated reader would consider immature or inappropriate for the writer’s purpose.

Occasional lapses in style should not prevent a portfolio from receiving a satisfactory rating in this category. However, if half or more of the works in the portfolio contain flaws that are sufficiently severe to undermine the writer’s purpose for writing, then the portfolio should receive an unsatisfactory rating for this category.
Mechanics

Do most of the works in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to use standard American English grammar, punctuation, and spelling?

A satisfactory essay usually will exhibit all of the following traits:

- Standard American English grammar,
- Standard American English punctuation,
- Standard American English spelling.

An unsatisfactory essay usually will exhibit at least one of the following traits:

- Grammar errors that make the writing very difficult to understand or that consistently distract the reader,
- Punctuation errors that make the writing very difficult to understand or that consistently distract the reader,
- Spelling errors that make the writing very difficult to understand or that consistently distract the reader.

Occasional lapses in grammar, punctuation, and spelling should not prevent a portfolio from receiving a satisfactory rating in this category. However, if half or more of the works in the portfolio contain flaws that make the writing very difficult to read or that consistently distract the reader, then the portfolio should receive an unsatisfactory rating for this category.
Appendix G

Factors Involved in Calculating Results

An ideal assessment of first-year composition students would include either the results for the total population of ENG 102 students or the results for 100% of a representative sample of ENG 102 students, with all portfolios rated as either “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory” for each skill and no portfolio classified as “Unavailable for Evaluation.”

Although a representative sample of portfolios was solicited for the assessment, only 74% of that sample was obtained. Because it is impossible to calculate the extent to which the quality of students’ work was a factor in the decision of the students who did not submit portfolios, it is impossible to determine whether the obtained sample accurately represents the skills of the total population of ENG 102 students. However, it is reasonable to assume that the students who did not submit portfolios probably would be less likely to produce satisfactory work than those who did submit portfolios. So the results reported in the tables for the obtained sample probably overestimate the percentage of students possessing satisfactory ability. The percentages reported as “Satisfactory” in these tables should be considered the maximum percentage of the total population that could merit this rating.

On the other hand, the results reported in the tables for the solicited sample underestimate the percentage of the total population possessing satisfactory ability. Although these tables report the results for a representative sample, 26% of that sample is categorized as “Unavailable for Evaluation.” If portfolios from these students had been assessed, they would have been rated as either “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory,” increasing the numbers and percentages in either or both of these categories.

Because confidence intervals and levels must be based on a representative sample in order to be meaningful, they were calculated based on the solicited sample and not the obtained sample. For the solicited sample, a confidence interval of no larger than 6.2 was consistent with a confidence level of 95%. If the bottom extension—3.1—of the confidence interval is subtracted from the percentage of students reported in the table for the solicited sample as achieving a “Satisfactory” rating, the result is the minimum percentage of the total population that could merit a “Satisfactory” rating for the skill.

In other words: if the total population of students were evaluated instead of just a sample, the statistical model predicts that in ninety-five out of one hundred evaluations the percentage of students achieving a “Satisfactory” rating would be no less than 3.1 below the percentage reported as “Satisfactory” in the tables for the solicited sample. And the percentage achieving a “Satisfactory” rating would be no higher than the percentage reported as “Satisfactory” in the tables for the obtained sample.