First-Year Composition Assessment:
Results for the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 Academic Years

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Executive Summary

In the most recent phase of its decade-long effort 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, Fall 2005, and Spring 2006 semesters. 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. One hundred and ninety portfolios were evaluated, with each portfolio rated as either “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory” for ten essential skills identified in the course guidelines for all sections of ENG 102. In all three semesters, student performance met or exceeded the expectations of the Coordinator of First-Year Composition for eight of the ten skills evaluated. At least 75% of the assessed students demonstrated satisfactory ability in six of the ten essential skills, and at least 64% of the students demonstrated satisfactory ability in two additional skills. 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 82% of the assessed portfolios for each semester providing evidence of these skills. The percentage of portfolios rated as “Satisfactory” was also acceptably high for four other skills, with at least 64% of the portfolios for each semester providing evidence of students’ ability to improve an essay by revising it, conduct research to find appropriate resources, and meet standards for fair usage in citing quotations and paraphrases. Lower rates of satisfactory performance were attained for two skills: documentation format and argumentation. For documentation format, the “Satisfactory” rate ranged from a low of 43% in Fall 2005 to a high of 61% in Spring 2006. For argumentation, the “Satisfactory” rate ranged from a low of 43% in Spring 2005 to a high of 64% in Spring 2006. Although the greatest improvement in student performance occurred in these two categories, they also ranked as the two weakest skills in the assessments for all three semesters.

The consistency of the results for three consecutive semesters suggests that there is no immediate need for additional assessment of the eight essential skills for which acceptably high percentages of students achieved “Satisfactory” ratings.

Of the two areas in which student performance was weakest, documentation format is a relatively minor problem. Taken together, the results for the three documentation skills indicate that students are mastering the principles of fair usage but need more experience to master the minutiae of academic style sheets and the intricacies of documenting Internet sources.

The Coordinator of First-Year Composition should advise instructors to attend to these issues insofar as they can do so without diminishing the time spent on more important skills.

A more pressing concern is argumentation, an intrinsically difficult but essential skill. Improving students’ argumentative abilities should be one of the highest priorities for first-year composition instructors and for faculty members teaching courses that fulfill the new upper-level writing requirement. As first steps toward accomplishing this goal, the Coordinator of First-Year Composition and the Composition Committee should develop a more detailed assessment of students’ argumentative abilities and work with composition instructors to improve instruction in principles of effective argumentation.
Purpose

In the most recent phase of an assessment project that began a decade ago, the English faculty evaluated the writing abilities of students enrolled in first-year composition classes. This phase of the assessment was the first to be completed 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 that was conducted during the Spring 2005, Fall 2005, and Spring 2006 semesters.

The purpose of the assessment was to determine the percentage of ENG 102 students who met ten 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 during the Spring 2005, Fall 2005, and Spring 2006 semesters. The obtained 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 ten 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 assessment of the First-Year Composition Program, the Composition Committee used procedures that it developed, tested, and modified during the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 academic years. 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 requested writing portfolios from 15% of the students enrolled in ENG 102 for the Spring 2005, Fall 2005, and Spring 2006 semesters. The participating students were chosen at random, with two students selected from each daytime non-ESL section of ENG 102. Results were calculated for the obtained sample, which consisted of portfolios from at least 10% of the ENG 102 population for each semester.

Procedures for Assembling Portfolios. During the eleventh week of each semester that the assessment was conducted, 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 day-long grading sessions. 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 an evaluation guide containing detailed guidelines for assessing ten skills (see Appendix F). Using these
tools, evaluators rated each portfolio as either “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory” in the following areas:

- Thesis/Development
- Argumentation
- Research
- 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 nine 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.

**Statistical Analysis Methods.** Each semester’s results were calculated for a confidence index of 95%. A margin of error (M) was calculated for the obtained sample (N) by using the formula $M = 1/\sqrt{N}$. These calculations produced the following margins of errors:

- Spring 2005: $M = 11.5$
- Fall 2005: $M = 18.9$
- Spring 2006: $M = 10.7$

The confidence interval (CI) for each reported result is the reported percentage ($p$) plus or minus the margin of error (CI = $p \pm M$).

For example: in the Spring 2006 assessment, 78% of the obtained sample received “Satisfactory” ratings for documentation of quotations. If the entire 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 percentage rated as “Satisfactory” would be in the range extending 10.7 points above and 10.7 points below the reported percentage for the sample studied in the actual assessment—i.e., in the range from 67.3% to 88.7%.
Results

In this section of the report, the following information is included for each of the ten 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 from each semester.** This table lists the percentage and number of essays that received ratings of “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory” for the assessed skill.
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.

Portfolios Rated Satisfactory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Rating (%)</th>
<th>Portfolios</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2005</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>68/75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2005</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>23/28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2006</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>78/87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.

Portfolios Rated Satisfactory

Spring 2005: 43% (32 portfolios in a sample of 75 portfolios)
Fall 2005: 46% (13 portfolios in a sample of 28 portfolios)
Spring 2006: 64% (55 portfolios in a sample of 86 portfolios)
Research

- The writer's ability to use credible 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 or electronic source that was relevant to the writer's topic.

**Portfolios Rated Satisfactory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spring 2005:</th>
<th>Fall 2005:</th>
<th>Spring 2006:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>89% (67 portfolios in a sample of 75 portfolios)</td>
<td>82% (23 portfolios in a sample of 28 portfolios)</td>
<td>76% (66 portfolios in a sample of 87 portfolios)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* In the Spring 2005 assessment, students' ability to locate electronic sources was evaluated separately from their ability to locate print sources, with separate results recorded for each type of source. These results were reported in the annual assessment report for 2005. However, at times the evaluators from the Composition Committee were uncertain about whether a particular source should be considered as a print source or an electronic source. After discussions failed to resolve this issue, the Composition Committee decided to conflate the categories in future assessments and to report a single result that rated students on their ability to locate appropriate sources, regardless of whether the sources were print or electronic. To facilitate comparisons between the results for the Spring 2005 semester and those for the Fall 2005 and Spring 2006 semesters, in this report the results for the Spring 2005 assessments have been recalculated as a composite score that indicates the percentage rated as “Satisfactory” in either of the two research categories.
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).

Portfolios Rated Satisfactory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spring 2005</th>
<th>Fall 2005</th>
<th>Spring 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rating</td>
<td>81% (61)</td>
<td>79% (22)</td>
<td>78% (68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(portfolios in a sample of 75 portfolios)</td>
<td>(portfolios in a sample of 28 portfolios)</td>
<td>(portfolios in a sample of 87 portfolios)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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).

**Portfolios Rated Satisfactory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spring 2005</th>
<th>Fall 2005</th>
<th>Spring 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rating</td>
<td>65% (49 portfolios in a sample of 75 portfolios)</td>
<td>64% (18 portfolios in a sample of 28 portfolios)</td>
<td>67% (58 portfolios in a sample of 87 portfolios)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Documentation (continued)

► The writer’s ability to use one of the following documentation formats:
  Modern Language Association (MLA), American Psychological Association (APA),
  or Chicago Manual of Style (CMS)

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).

Portfolios Rated Satisfactory

Spring 2005: 57% (43 portfolios in a sample of 75 portfolios)
Fall 2005: 43% (12 portfolios in a sample of 28 portfolios)
Spring 2006: 61% (53 portfolios in a sample of 87 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.

Portfolios Rated Satisfactory

Spring 2005: 67% (50 portfolios in a sample of 75 portfolios)
Fall 2005: 68% (19 portfolios in a sample of 28 portfolios)
Spring 2006: 66% (57 portfolios in a sample of 87 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.

Portfolios Rated Satisfactory

Spring 2005: 95% (71 portfolios in a sample of 75 portfolios)
Fall 2005: 82% (23 portfolios in a sample of 28 portfolios)
Spring 2006: 94% (82 portfolios in a sample of 87 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.

Portfolios Rated Satisfactory

Spring 2005: 91% (68 portfolios in a sample of 75 portfolios)
Fall 2005: 93% (26 portfolios in a sample of 28 portfolios)
Spring 2006: 95% (83 portfolios in a sample of 87 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.

Portfolios Rated Satisfactory

Spring 2005: 92% (69 portfolios in a sample of 75 portfolios)
Fall 2005: 86% (24 portfolios in a sample of 28 portfolios)
Spring 2006: 93% (81 portfolios in a sample of 87 portfolios)
Analysis

To provide an overview of three semesters of assessment data, the following analysis uses two strategies. First, the results for all ten assessment criteria are rank ordered for each semester. This strategy reveals a pattern of strengths and weaknesses that remained consistent throughout the three semesters of assessment. Then the ten assessment criteria are grouped into categories that make the results easier to interpret. Detailed analysis of student performance is provided for each category of skills.

Rank Ordering of Skills

The following table shows the rank ordering (from best to worst) of student ability in the ten skills evaluated each semester, with the percentage of portfolios rated as “Satisfactory” included in parentheses following each skill.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spring 2005</th>
<th>Fall 2005</th>
<th>Spring 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>(95%)</td>
<td>Style (93%)</td>
<td>Style (95%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>(92%)</td>
<td>Mechanics (86%)</td>
<td>Organization (94%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>(91%)</td>
<td>Organization (82%)</td>
<td>Mechanics (93%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis/Development</td>
<td>(91%)</td>
<td>Thesis/Development (82%)</td>
<td>Thesis/Development (90%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>(89%)</td>
<td>Research (82%)</td>
<td>Doc quotations (78%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doc quotations</td>
<td>(81%)</td>
<td>Doc quotations (79%)</td>
<td>Research (76%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revision</td>
<td>(67%)</td>
<td>Revision (68%)</td>
<td>Doc paraphrase (67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doc paraphrase</td>
<td>(65%)</td>
<td>Doc paraphrase (64%)</td>
<td>Revision (66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doc format</td>
<td>(57%)</td>
<td>Argumentation (46%)</td>
<td>Argumentation (64%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentation</td>
<td>(43%)</td>
<td>Doc format (43%)</td>
<td>Doc format (61%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the large margin of error in the percentages reported (M = 10.7 or higher for every semester), the percentages provide little basis for measuring changes in student performance from one semester to another. However, the rank ordering indicates that for three semesters the evaluators have been consistent in their evaluation of students’ most significant strengths and weaknesses. It is noteworthy that four skills—style, mechanics, organization, and thesis/development—are the top ranked skills for all three semesters, while two other skills—argumentation and documentation format—consistently appear as the bottom ranked skills.

Analysis of Skills by Category

Although the assessments included discrete evaluations of ten skills, these skills can be grouped into categories that make the results easier to interpret. The results of the Spring 2005 and Spring 2006 assessments are analyzed in the five sections below. Because the margin of error for the Fall 2005 assessment was particularly
high ($M = 18.9$) due to the small population of students taking ENG 102 in the first semester of an academic year, data from that semester is not included in the analysis that follows.

**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 ten skills evaluated in the assessments, the four in the table below correspond most closely to the minimum standards listed in the catalog.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spring 2005 % satisfactory</th>
<th>Spring 2006 % satisfactory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis/Development</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results for the obtained sample indicate that the vast majority of first-year composition students develop satisfactory ability in all of the basic skills before completing ENG 102.

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 and Spring 2006 assessments of ENG 102 students, the percentage of the obtained sample demonstrating satisfactory ability ranged from 90% 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 assessment of documentation, 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</th>
<th>Spring 2005 % satisfactory</th>
<th>Spring 2006 % satisfactory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Documentation (quotations)</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation (paraphrase)</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation (format)</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>61%</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). The results of the documentation assessment were remarkably consistent for Spring 2005 and Spring 2006, with the “Satisfactory” ratings in each category varying by no more than 4% from one semester to the other. The assessment established that a large majority of ENG 102 students can meet a fair-usage standard for their documentation of quotations, and 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% demonstrating this skill in Spring 2005 and 61% demonstrating the skill in Spring 2006. The relatively poor performance may be attributable in part to students’ extensive reliance on Internet sources. Given that the MLA format for documenting these sources is still evolving and remains arcane, it is not surprising that students encountered difficulties in documenting these sources.

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. What is most significant about the documentation assessment, though, is that the results 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 combined ratings from all evaluators and the ratings from instructors listed in separate rows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spring 2005</th>
<th>Spring 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% satisfactory</td>
<td>% satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined Evaluation</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructors' Evaluation</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>86%</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 most students improved their writing by revising it. It is particularly significant that the instructors' ratings were considerably higher than those of the Composition Committee members. 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 and Spring 2006 assessments included a rudimentary evaluation of students' ability to locate appropriate print or electronic sources to use in their essays. The results of these assessments are reported in the table below, with the combined ratings from all evaluators and the ratings from instructors listed in separate rows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spring 2005</th>
<th>Spring 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% satisfactory</td>
<td>% satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined Evaluation</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructors' Evaluation</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>97%</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 or electronic materials.

Concerning the 13% decline in portfolios rated as "Satisfactory" in the combined evaluations for the two semesters: it should be noted that the decline is not statistically significant in that the difference in the two scores falls within the
confident intervals for the two assessments. (The lower extension of the confidence interval for the Spring 2005 assessment indicates that repeated evaluations of the Spring 2005 population's research skills could yield a “Satisfactory” rate as low as 77.5%, while the upper extension of the confidence interval for the Spring 2006 semester indicates that repeated evaluations of the Spring 2006 population’s research skills could yield a “Satisfactory” rate as high as 86.7%.) More significant than the “Satisfactory” rates for the two semesters is the fact that members of the Composition Committee expressed concerns about whether students in either semester demonstrated the ability to find not merely appropriate sources but the most relevant academic sources for their topics. The Composition Committee members could not reach consensus concerning whether this higher standard is appropriate or attainable in a first-year composition sequence, so the Composition Committee should consider this issue further at an appropriate time.

**Argumentation.** For the purposes of the 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, the percentage of students rated as “Satisfactory” in this category increased substantially from Spring 2005 to Spring 2006:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spring 2005</th>
<th>Spring 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argumentation</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 21% increase in portfolios rated as “Satisfactory” is the most significant improvement in any of the assessment categories. Also noteworthy is that in the Spring 2006 assessment the percentage of students rated as “Satisfactory” exceeded 50% for the first time. Even with the margin of error (M = 10.7) factored into the results, a majority of the students assessed in Spring 2006 demonstrated satisfactory argumentation skills.

It seems probable that much of the improvement can be attributed to the seven workshops offered for the English faculty during the 2005-2006 academic year. One of the reasons for the relatively poor performance in Spring 2005 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 importance of considering opposing positions was stressed in six assessment workshops offered by the Coordinator of First-Year Composition and in an additional workshop on designing assignments in which students summarize and analyze sources. Most composition instructors attended at least one of these workshops, and several instructors reported that the workshops altered their approach to teaching argumentation.
Although there is evidence that the teaching of argumentation has improved in the past year, argumentation remains one of two skills for which a high percentage of students received an “Unsatisfactory” rating. In fact, as was noted above, argumentation appears as either the weakest or the second-weakest skill in all three of the composition assessments conducted since Spring 2005. Given the intrinsic difficulty of the skill, it is possible that a significant number of students will not become proficient at argumentation during their first year of college, despite the best efforts of the English faculty. However, given the particular importance of the skill, improving students’ argumentation abilities should be one of the highest priorities for first-year composition instructors and for faculty members teaching courses that fulfill the new upper-level writing requirement.
**Recommendations**

Given that three consecutive semesters of assessment have yielded consistent results, the English faculty now has a clearer understanding of the writing abilities of students who complete the first-year writing requirement. The results indicate that most aspects of the First-Year Composition Program are working well: in all three semesters, at least 75% of the assessed students demonstrated satisfactory ability in six of the ten essential skills, and at least 64% of the students demonstrated satisfactory ability in two additional skills. In light of these results, there is no immediate need to continue assessing the skills in which high percentages of students have consistently demonstrated satisfactory ability. Instead, the English faculty should refine its assessment procedures and faculty development efforts to focus on the areas in which there is a need for improvement.

Recommendations concerning assessment and training are detailed below.

1. **The Coordinator of First-Year Composition should design and implement a detailed assessment of students’ argumentation skills.**

   Although the most recent assessments indicate that argumentation is one of the two weakest skills for first-year students, the assessments were not designed to yield detailed information concerning students’ argumentative abilities. As a first step toward developing more effective instructional strategies, the English faculty needs more information concerning students’ strengths and weaknesses in argumentation. To acquire this information, the Coordinator of First-Year Composition should develop assessment procedures that focus exclusively on argumentation skills. This assessment should replace the more general assessment that was conducted in the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 academic years.

   If the Coordinator of First-Year Composition immediately begins working on new assessment procedures, a pilot assessment of argumentation could be implemented in either the Fall 2006 or Spring 2007 semester. A large-scale assessment could be implemented one semester later.

2. **The Coordinator of First-Year Composition should continue working with the English faculty to improve how argumentation is taught.**

   Although there is still much to learn about how to improve the argumentation skills of first-year students, evidence suggests that workshops for composition instructors contributed to a significant increase in the percentage of students rated “Satisfactory” for argumentation. These workshops were of two types: six of the workshops focused specifically on preparation for the assessment, and one workshop focused on strategies for designing assignments in which students summarize and analyze sources. For 2006-2007, the Coordinator of First-Year Composition should continue to offer both types of workshop. The assessment
workshop should be revised to address the specific content of the new assessment procedures, and all composition instructors should be encouraged to attend a session of this workshop. The assignments workshop should be repeated, and composition instructors should be encouraged to attend it if they did not do so in 2005-2006. After the new assessment yields more information concerning students’ argumentative abilities, the Coordinator of First-Year Composition should develop more specialized workshops that all composition instructors should attend. Also, the Coordinator of First-Year Composition should continue to be available for individual consultation with composition instructors.

3. The Coordinator of First-Year Composition should encourage composition instructors to devote sufficient attention to teaching a formal documentation format, but only insofar as they can do so without neglecting more important skills.

Although formal documentation is a problem area for first-year students, the problem is minor when viewed in a proper perspective. Taken together, the results for the three documentation skills indicate that students are mastering the principles of fair usage but have not mastered the minutiae of academic style sheets and the intricacies of documenting Internet sources. In these regards the students are similar to professional writers, few of whom are familiar with all of the constantly evolving guidelines for formal documentation. However, most professional writers understand the importance of consulting a style manual or using documentation software to ensure that their documentation conforms to the standards for a discipline, while many students neglect the resources available for producing appropriate documentation.

Because the English faculty considers formal documentation an important feature of academic and professional writing, the Coordinator of First-Year Composition should encourage composition instructors to devote sufficient attention to teaching a documentation format. In teaching documentation, instructors should devote particular attention to showing students how to make effective use of resources such as style manuals or documentation software. However, the Coordinator of First-Year Composition also should remind instructors that following a formal style sheet is one of the least important skills taught in an ambitious writing curriculum. Instructors should discuss formal documentation only insofar as they can do so without neglecting more important skills.

4. The Coordinator of First-Year Composition and the Composition Committee should examine the role of research in the first-year composition curriculum.

Although the assessment results for all three semesters indicate that a large majority of first-year students have satisfactory research skills, members of the Composition Committee could not reach a consensus concerning whether the current standards for research are appropriate. Some committee members
argued that students are able to find appropriate sources but not the most relevant sources for their topics. Other committee members expressed concerns about whether higher standards for research are either appropriate or attainable in a first-year composition sequence. And some committee members questioned whether research should even be included in what they consider to be an overcrowded first-year composition curriculum.

Given the array of opinions expressed about research, the Coordinator of First-Year Composition and the Composition Committee should examine the role of research in the first-year composition curriculum. Although the Composition Committee probably will not be able to explore the issue thoroughly in the 2006-2007 academic year, the committee should do so whenever time becomes available.

5. **Composition instructors should continue to participate in numerous aspects of the assessment project, and the instructors should be compensated for their work on assessment.**

Numerous composition instructors have noted that their teaching improved as a result of participating in the assessment project. Some instructors mentioned that they redesigned their composition courses after attending one or more of the workshops offered in the past two years. Other instructors noted that participating in calibration sessions and day-long grading sessions made them much more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their students and the advantages and disadvantages of specific instructional strategies. And several instructors noted that they would not participate in these activities if they were not paid for their labor. It appears, then, that the assessment project is serving as a useful form of faculty development. Insofar as possible, the college should continue to provide incentives for faculty members to participate in assessment activities.
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 credible sources that are 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 credible sources that are 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.
### Evaluation Form

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thesis and Development</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Does 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>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argumentation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Does 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>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Does at least one</strong> work in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to use sources that are relevant to the writer’s topic?</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documentation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Does at least one</strong> work in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to identify <em>quotations</em> and to provide sufficient documentation to enable readers to find the sources for these quotations?</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Does at least one</strong> work in the portfolio demonstrate the writer’s ability to identify <em>paraphrases</em> and to provide sufficient documentation to enable readers to find the sources for these paraphrases?</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Does 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>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revision</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Does the portfolio contain multiple drafts of one essay</strong>, and do these drafts demonstrate the writer’s ability to improve an essay by revising it?</td>
<td>___</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Does 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>
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<tr>
<th>Style</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Do 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>
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<tr>
<th>Mechanics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do 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>
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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 credible sources that are relevant to the writer’s topic?

A satisfactory portfolio will exhibit the following trait:

- Quotations or paraphrases from either a credible print source or a credible electronic source that is relevant to the writer’s topic.

An unsatisfactory portfolio usually will exhibit the following trait:

- Failure to cite any credible print or 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 have located credible, relevant sources and incorporated ideas from these sources 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 source is credible and relevant. (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 credibility and relevance from the information that the student provides concerning the source and from the way that the source is used in the student’s essay.

- 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

Do 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.
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