

# Guidelines for Writing-Intensive Course (WIC) Proposals

## A. THE WRITING-INTENSIVE COURSE GRADUATION REQUIREMENT

Kent State University established a writing-intensive graduation requirement for all baccalaureate-seeking students who enrolled fall 1992 or later as new freshmen. Beginning with the 1994-1995 *Undergraduate Catalog*, all students were required to complete at least one upper division course designated as “writing intensive” with a minimum C (2.0) grade. The University Requirements Curriculum Committee (URCC) is responsible for approving writing-intensive course proposals before submission to the Educational Policies Council (EPC).

## B. REQUIREMENT CRITERIA AND PRINCIPLES

The university-wide writing-intensive course graduation requirement, as approved by the Educational Policies Council, established the following basic criteria for designating a course as “writing intensive” for the purposes of satisfying the requirement.

To be approved as a writing-intensive course (WIC), the course:

1. must be upper division;
2. must be designed, at least in part, to help students become effective writers in a specific discipline;
3. must involve a substantial amount of writing; and
4. must provide students with at least one writing assignment where there is an opportunity for guided revision before grading occurs.

In addition, the final grade in the WIC must reflect the student’s writing performance in that course.

The following basic principles were also set forth in the EPC resolution establishing the requirement:

5. Normally, a writing-intensive course is a content course rather than a course in writing as a basic skill.
6. The course is not intended as an additional requirement but as a designation of a course already included in a major.
7. Students should fulfill the requirement by taking a course in the major. In rare instances, a student may use a writing-intensive course from another discipline, with approval from the student’s major department/school.

The First Periodic WIC Review Report (April 2007) recommended a course section size maximum of 25 and recommended that a minimum of 50 percent of the final course grade should be based on writing assignments.

## C. GUIDELINES

The following guidelines should be used by departments and schools in the development of writing-intensive courses and in the preparation of the Writing-Intensive Course (WIC) Information Form.

**Item 1: The course must be upper division.**

All writing-intensive courses must be at the 30000 and 40000 level.

**Item 2: The course must be designed, at least in part, to help students become effective writers in a specific discipline.**

Each department should submit proposals based on discussions among its relevant faculty who develop agreed upon expectations about: **(1)** what constitutes “writing” of various kinds in that particular discipline; **(2)** how course assignments reflect or are representative of the different kinds of writing practices current in the discipline and profession; **(3)** how the assignments are structured to integrate the practice of these different kinds of writing with course content; and **(4)** how writing in the discipline becomes a method of learning specific material as taught within courses in this discipline. In evaluating each proposal, department and college curriculum committees should carefully consider the evidence regarding each of these issues.

Results of such departmental discussions and agreements will be reported on the WIC Information Form. This form—along with a revised Basic Data Sheet, Certification of Curriculum Proposal and master syllabus—will be submitted for each course proposed as “writing intensive.”

**Item 3: There must be a substantial amount of writing.**

Ideally, a proposed course establishes the following expectations: a student will engage in structured writing experiences that emphasize writing as a process; the course includes a broad array of preparatory and substantive writing activities; and the writing assignments build in intensity with an increasing level of expectations over the duration of the course. *A focus on writing as a central element of the course will be a strong indication that it provides a “substantial” and “intensive” writing experience.*

Because a variety of approaches may be appropriate, the guidelines do not specify a minimum number of pages, types of writing, or number of writing experiences required to meet this criterion. Courses may require *numerous* short written assignments or the traditional, longer term paper but with several preliminary or preparatory writing assignments related to a “final” submission. The writing may be descriptive or analytical. When a course requires several shorter pieces, the length as well as the content (whether descriptive or analytical, for example) and the extent to which the various pieces of writing are interrelated and build upon one another may, in combination, demonstrate that the writing should be considered “substantial.”

Although neither a minimum number of assignments nor a minimum number of pages is required, the amount of writing should be consistent with the performance and grading expectations discussed in Item 5 below.

The guidelines also do not establish a minimum number of credit hours for courses that fulfill the requirement, but the standard has been the three-credit course. If two-credit courses are approved, it would be under the following circumstances: first, the student is required to take more than one course (for a total of more than the standard three credits); or second, the writing in the course is at least as “substantial” as that in the standard three-credit course, and the writing comprises a larger percentage of the course grade. One-credit add-on courses are normally not approved (see Item 6 below). However, if such courses are approved, the entire grade must be based on the writing (see Item 5 below).

**Item 4: At least one of the assignments must provide students with an opportunity for guided revision before grading occurs.**

Guided revision requires that the instructor provide written feedback on the *draft* submitted for at least one of the writing assignments. In addition, *active communication* between the student and instructor (in particular, out-of-class meetings) is strongly encouraged. Additional instructional methods may also be effective, such as use of classroom sessions for discussions on positive and negative elements of the writing in the draft documents or peer review by other students in the class. At minimum, the student must receive written feedback from the instructor *with the opportunity* for individual meetings if requested by the student. It is also important that the assignment to be revised is initially due and returned with instructor comments *early enough* in the term to allow sufficient time for consultation with the instructor, revision, and resubmission prior to the end of the semester.

Several additional points should be noted. First, to provide an *opportunity* for revision does not require that the student actually revises the paper, although it is anticipated that instruction about the writing process would emphasize the value of revision. Second, the opportunity must be provided to *all* students in the class, regardless of performance on the draft. Third, it should be clear that the draft is *not* simply “returned to the students and revised according to the instructor’s comments.” Rather, instructor comments should provide general guidance and overall suggestions that will assist students as they develop their own revisions. Fourth, the assignment is not to be graded until after the revision. Fifth, if the assignment is submitted in stages—for example, an outline, bibliography, first draft, and a revised final paper—it is acceptable to assign grades to the outline and bibliography (even if revision is also allowed on these two components) as long as the first draft is not assigned a grade prior to revision.

In some sense, a “substantial” portion of the total amount of writing should be allowed revision. A minor piece of the total writing (for example, an outline) should not be the only writing assignment allowed revision. Because of the increased instructional demands required by writing-intensive courses, especially the process of guided revision, the class maximum should be 25 or below. If the expected class maximum will be above 25, the department must describe efforts to reduce class size to 25 or below and explain how the writing-intensive nature of the course will be maintained with the larger class size.

**Item 5: The grade in the course must reflect the student’s writing performance.**

Students are required to pass the writing-intensive course with a grade of “C” or above. This grade must reflect the student’s writing performance and must include a measure of the student’s effectiveness as a writer within the discipline.

Specific elements included in the assessment of writing performance will vary from course to course and may range from basic skills to the organization and clear expression of ideas and the use of critical thinking skills in developing and supporting arguments. Assessment of writing performance must also include those elements specific to the individual discipline (such as methods, techniques, styles, or kinds of writing). Although basic skills (spelling, punctuation, grammar, use of footnotes and citations, etc.) may be included, the assessment must go beyond these skills to include more substantive elements of the writing process.

It is recognized that approaches to integrating writing assignments into course content will vary and that some writing assignments may be “ungraded.” However, because the writing-intensive course must be completed with a grade of “C” or above, the percentage of the course grade that is based on the writing assignments needs to be carefully considered. In planning the course, the instructor should ask if the failure to earn a “C” average on writing assignments would result in a course grade below a “C.” If not, then the percentage assigned to writing assignments may be inadequate. Essay exams are excluded from the final grade percentage based on writing unless it is clear that essay questions constitute writing in the discipline and/or it is specified in the course syllabus that the writing itself is evaluated as a significant part of the exam grade.

Given these requirements, it is normally expected that a minimum of 50 percent of the final course grade will be based on the writing assignments. In many cases, it will be more. If the final course grade percentage is below 50 percent, departments must explain what efforts have been made to meet this standard and provide a rationale for granting an exception.

One-credit add-on courses are normally not approved (see Item 6 below). However, if such courses are approved, the entire grade must be based on the writing.

**Item 6: A writing-intensive course is a content course, rather than a course in writing as a basic skill.**

Based on this principle, proposals for “individual investigation” courses will not be approved. It is also this principle that underlies concerns about “add-on” courses. The reluctance to approve add-on credits stems from five concerns: **(1)** a desire to place emphasis on the writing process within a discipline; **(2)** to have writing in the discipline integrated into course content; **(3)** to have writing in the discipline become a method of learning specific material within courses in the discipline; and **(4)** to have writing and the writing process discussed within course and class contexts. The final concern is of a different nature: **(5)** the desire to avoid adding credit hours to major requirements. Departments or schools must provide sufficient rationale and evidence for any exception to this principle.

**Item 7: The course is not intended as an additional requirement but as a designation of a course already included in the major.**

Monitoring of credit hours for major requirements and degree requirements is left to the determination of the appropriate curricular bodies.

**Item 8: Students should fulfill the requirement by taking a course in the major. In rare instances, a student may use a writing-intensive course from another discipline, with approval from the major department or school.**

This guideline does not absolve *any* unit of its obligation to provide writing experiences within the major. It does recognize that, on an occasional basis, a student may request approval to fulfill the requirement by taking a course in an area outside the major discipline. With regard to interdisciplinary majors, courses in the respective areas have been approved as writing intensive. In cases where a student changes majors or has multiple majors, the writing-intensive requirement will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the department and college.