

## Writing Benchmarks

The Writing Across the Curriculum program at Brooklyn College developed the Writing Benchmarks to provide a map of the development of a student's writing over the course of their college career. The Writing Benchmarks describe four stages of development:

- Stage 1: Foundational
- Stage 2: Intermediate
- Stage 3: Proficient
- Stage 4: Accomplished

The Writing Benchmarks provide a detailed rubric of the four stages. Instructors may use this rubric as a suggestive set of guidelines for addressing student writing skills at different course levels and in different fields. The benchmarks also offer language that may be useful in designing clear writing assignments.

### Notes for instructors

- Because not all incoming freshmen are foundational writers, and not all graduating seniors are Accomplished writers, these stages are meant to describe general progress across the four categories of writing skills. We urge instructors to keep these levels of development in mind when designing writing assignments and assessing student work.
- Most writers will develop at different rates in each of the categories and may find themselves described in more than one of the levels in the benchmarks. Certainly, within a given class, students are likely to be writing at different stages of development.
- Most writers will find that they are more advanced writers in some disciplines (e.g., within their major) than in others.
- In trying to locate your students in the benchmarks, it is useful to think about each category of the rubric separately and to evaluate writing by skill, rather than within any given level.
- The language of the benchmarks may be helpful in clarifying your expectations in a given writing assignment, and help students to understand the specific writing skills they are expected to demonstrate.

Students are not always aware of the writing expectations of their courses. Having access to this rubric will allow them to gauge their skills and take initiative to improve them. By mapping the progression of writing skills from Foundational to Accomplished, we hope both professors and students can have a better sense of writing expectations and which skills to focus on and assess in a given course.

## Notes for students

The Writing Across the Curriculum program at Brooklyn College developed the Writing Benchmarks to suggest standards for clear, meaningful writing. The benchmarks describe standards of writing, from Foundational to Accomplished, in a number of categories. You may find it useful to consult the benchmarks as a:

- supplement to the instructions and guidelines a professor has provided for an assignment,
- way to evaluate a draft you would like to revise before submitting,
- tool to generate questions for your professor before an assignment is due,
- reference to consult after you have received comments on a first draft from your professor,
- tool that provides categories of feedback when reviewing a peer's paper,
- set of common terms you can bring to office hours with your professor, or a session with a tutor at the Learning Center,
  - reference you can use to identify and articulate where you encounter a challenge or confusion, and
  - set of categories around which you can set personal goals for an assignment, a semester, a year, or several years.

Every reader has his or her own individual stylistic preferences. Different disciplines and different cultures adopt varied writing conventions, which might include different methods of organization, word choice and tone. However, there are certain principles that usually carry across disciplines. For example, even though you may write very different papers for biology and English courses, the professors in each of these courses will expect that your paper has a logical flow of ideas, and that you support your claims with evidence.

You can use the benchmarks to take stock of your current level, recognize your growth, and prioritize and focus on what you would like to work on improving. For instance, if your professors have suggested that you work on your discussion of outside sources in your essays, you can consult the "Analysis and Insight" benchmarks to assess where you currently stand and what you can do to improve. The Writing Benchmarks may seem overwhelming at first. You may find the benchmarks most helpful if you focus on one or two areas at a time.

## Stage 1: Foundational Organization

Addresses the main points of the writing assignment. Arguments follow for the most part logically, if not necessarily elegantly or unencumbered by extraneous material. Understands the basic format of the assignment, and develops a thesis, introduction and conclusion. Demonstrates some ability to make use of feedback to revise writing.

## Analysis and Insight

Demonstrates a generally accurate understanding of sources although the summary or explanation may be incomplete or not fully relevant. Offers evidence to support some claims. Makes some connections between readings and one's own ideas, although these may not be clearly explained. Identifies references to others' ideas consistently.

## Language and Mechanics

Demonstrates control of language but with little structural variety. Meaning is generally clear despite some distracting errors in grammar, usage and mechanics. Word choice and sentence structure are clear, if not varied. Shows awareness of writing style and different modes of self-expression in writing. Makes basic use of quotations.

## Disciplinary Conventions

Demonstrates a developing awareness of disciplinary conventions and an ability to conduct basic background research, making use of general library catalogs or databases. Meets basic formatting requirements. Uses a general form of citation.

## Stage 2: Intermediate

### Organization

Addresses all points of the writing assignment and develops a coherent thesis. Organizes paper in a pattern proper to the assignment. Arguments follow logically, with effective use of transitions. Makes use of feedback to revise writing.

### Analysis and Insight

Demonstrates overall understanding of readings through appropriate summary and explanation, with some analysis. Makes effective use of evidence to support arguments. Explains appropriate connections between readings and one's own ideas. Identifies others' ideas consistently and correctly.

### Language and Mechanics

Demonstrates control of language with some structural variety. Word choice is usually appropriate and supports clarity in content. Grammar, usage and mechanics are mostly correct, and meaning is clear throughout. Demonstrates ability to quote correctly and paraphrase when appropriate. Writes in a style appropriate to the assignment.

### Disciplinary Conventions

Demonstrates awareness of disciplinary conventions in background research and formatting. Begins to experiment with appropriate disciplinary tone and terminology. Writing reflects an awareness of foundational concepts in the discipline. Consistently cites sources, if not in the correct form for the discipline.

## Stage 3: Proficient

### Organization

Addresses all points of the writing assignment analytically, with a strong focus, coherence and a clearly defended thesis. Makes excellent use of transitions. Demonstrates the ability to make constructive use of feedback to revise writing.

### Analysis and Insight

Demonstrates a strong understanding of sources through analysis of relevant texts, data and evidence. Uses evidence effectively to develop arguments. Makes analytical connections between others' ideas and one's own ideas, and integrates references to others' ideas consistently and correctly.

### Language and Mechanics

Demonstrates clear control of language. Word choice is varied and appropriate to the assignment. Grammar, usage and mechanics are correct. Demonstrates the ability to integrate quotes and to effectively and accurately paraphrase. Uses writing as a mode of self-expression; style is appropriate to the assignment.

### Disciplinary Conventions

Demonstrates choice of sources appropriate to the discipline. Follows basic disciplinary conventions of structure and formatting, and writes in a voice appropriate to the discipline. Writing reflects an engagement with key issues in the discipline. Correctly and consistently uses citation appropriate for the discipline.

## Stage 4: Accomplished

### Organization

Addresses the writing assignment analytically and perhaps imaginatively, with superior focus and coherence. Argument is developed cogently with a clear logical progression and little extraneous or irrelevant material. Demonstrates the ability to make highly effective use of feedback to revise writing.

### Analysis and Insight

Demonstrates critical understanding and evaluation of sources through insightful analysis of relevant texts, data and evidence. Makes effective use of evidence to develop incisive arguments. Makes insightful connections to other's ideas, and integrates references to others' ideas smoothly.

### Language and Mechanics

Demonstrates a sophisticated and nuanced use of language with effective variety in structure. Word choice is specific and precise. Grammar, usage and mechanics are handled with assurance. Fully integrates quotations and paraphrases in a manner appropriate to the assignment. Demonstrates distinctive style that is well-suited for the writer's subject and intention.

### Disciplinary Conventions

Demonstrates use of discipline-specific research tools, and makes effective use of sources and formatting appropriate to the discipline. Confidently uses a structure and voice appropriate to the discipline. Writing reflects a critical engagement with key discourses in the discipline. Confidently and consistently uses citation appropriate for the discipline.