

Writing Skills Assessment Report

Assessment of Writing Skills

Nearly all incoming students at Mills take the course *English 001-Critical Reading and Expository Writing* within their first year at the College. This course, offered as several sections each semester, serves as the foundation for the general education writing communication requirement and exposes students to “. . . the college level skills of reading, writing, and critical thinking necessary for students to succeed at Mills and beyond.”¹ In recent years, the College has moved from staffing these courses primarily with tenured/tenure-track faculty to using adjuncts. Concomitant with this shift was the recognition that the English Department would need to articulate a cohesive set of curricular guidelines that would be consistently understood by adjunct faculty in order to ensure the quality of the courses and achievement of the intended student outcomes.

After an initial curricular development project, student papers were used to assess the extent to which the *English 001* experience was resulting in the intended student writing competencies. The current and past directors of the composition program worked with the Assessment Committee to develop a scoring guide for use in assessing student papers produced in the *English 001* course. The scoring guide, found in Appendix A, was approved by the English Department in spring 2005.

At the end of the spring 2005 semester, students were asked to re-submit the one paper that they felt best represented their work in the course. Identifying information was removed from the papers and they were assessed using the scoring guide. The assessments were conducted by tenure/tenure-track faculty who had previously taught *English 001* and each paper was scored independently by two faculty—in cases where the scores provided by the two faculty members diverged by more than 2 points, the paper was assessed by a third faculty member. Assessment results were compiled and summarized by the Office of Institutional Research and Planning.

This pilot project revealed that while students were achieving some of our outcomes—particularly with regard to writing style and mechanics—they were falling short in a number of other areas. (See Appendix B.) Based on these findings, English faculty worked through the summer of 2005 to craft a handbook that contains a new set of curricular guidelines for all *English 001* courses. (See Appendix C.) In the fall of 2005 the composition program director met with all *English 001* instructors and teaching assistants to introduce them to the new guidelines. A qualitative assessment of the new guidelines provided faculty suggestions for improvement. Minor adjustments were made to the curriculum and guidebook based on this input.

In summer of 2006 the assessment project was replicated using student work collected in the 2005-06 academic year. The new curricular guidelines were found to be effective in raising the level of student writing. (See appendix D.)

Assessment of Information Literacy Component of English 001

A major part of the curricular revision was the inclusion of an information literacy component into English 001. The writing skills assessment that was done in 2005 indicated that students

¹ Mills College course catalogue available online at:
<http://www.mills.edu/academics/undergraduate/eng/courses/eng001.php>

needed to improve their understanding of how to use and how to evaluate information in their writing. The English 001 Information Literacy Project, a collaborative effort between the English department faculty and the library staff led to the design and implementation of this information literacy component.

At the beginning of 2005 there were over 11 billion documents available on the indexable web. Because undergraduate students face this kind of information overload, it is imperative that they be able to safely navigate the complex information environment in which we live, i.e., locate, evaluate, and use appropriate information sources that strengthen their academic work and help them meet their overall goals as learners.

The English 001 Information Literacy Project was designed to increase new students' information skills, and also provide them with a base to continue enhancing their information literacy. To achieve this, students are required to use sources in their final English 001 papers, and in that process they each complete an annotated bibliography to help them reflect on their experience of locating and using information. The coursework is supported by library instruction and follow-up meetings with reference librarians. Important key elements of the project are its ability to:

- reach nearly all incoming freshmen;
- embed information literacy into the curriculum; and
- introduce first-year students to the Mills library's resources and services.

The first assessment of this new component took place in summer of 2006 and demonstrated that the collaboration between the composition program and the library has been very successful. Mills is enhancing student information literacy, providing students with the skills and knowledge that they can apply in all of their coursework. Students are able to locate and use Mills' library resources as well as grasp important information concepts that will aid them in finding and using information personally and professionally beyond their college years. (See Appendix E.)

Appendix A

Writing Skills Assessment

General Education Written Communication Skills

Rationale

Graduates of a liberal arts institution should be able to write papers in a variety of contexts, using generally accepted grammar and forms to convey ideas, research findings, and arguments.

Student outcomes

After fulfilling this requirement, a student should be able to:

- A. Demonstrate familiarity with a variety of rhetorical forms and how these forms are used in specific academic disciplines, cultural contexts, and institutions outside the academy;
- B. Write clearly organized essays with the following characteristics: effective paragraphing, thesis development, transitions, use and interpretation of evidence, evidence of larger structure and organization;
- C. Write essays that incorporate examples from other writers, demonstrate critical thinking and interpretation about the ideas of other writers, and use correct documentation for these examples;
- D. Use draft and revision processes, demonstrate understanding of different stages of the writing process, and engage in editing and revision of peer essays;
- E. Write in a style that is both personally expressive and compatible with the specific discipline or context of the project;
- F. Produce essays and other forms of writing free from sentence level error and identify where to get further information about such errors (e.g., how to use a handbook);
- G. Be familiar with and able to use the tools and resources of an academic library in addition to Internet resources;
- H. Be competent in the use of the citation style appropriate to a discipline.

Curricular fulfillment

College 1 (or equivalent), and an additional writing-intensive course

Writing Sample Scoring Guide

Overall Score _____	4. Accomplished (Shows skill; many strengths present)	3. Competent (On balance the strengths outweigh the weaknesses)	2. Developing (Strengths and need for revision are about equal)	1. Beginning (Need for revision outweighs strengths)
Thesis _____	Clear and original thesis of appropriate scope.	Clear but less original or refined thesis.	Thesis is present but needs work in clarity, originality, or scope.	Thesis is weak or inadequate: absent, unclear, or inappropriate in scope.
(B)				
Organization _____	Clear logical progression of ideas and clear logical transitions.	Generally logical progression of ideas and generally good transitions but needs to be honed.	Confusing progression as a whole and or within paragraphs.	Lack of logical progression of ideas and lack of transitions impede understanding.
(B)				
Support _____	Argument is well developed; paper provides appropriate, carefully analyzed supporting evidence.	Argument is reasonably well developed and supported.	Evidence and/or analysis is weak.	Almost no appropriate evidence and/or analysis.
(C)				
Style _____	Successful tone, varied sentence structures, clear and confident prose.	Reasonably successful tone, varied sentence structures, clear prose.	Less successful tone, less varied sentence structures, less clear prose.	Tone, sentence structure, and prose style impede paper.
(E)				
Mechanics _____	Essay demonstrates mastery of standard conventions of spelling, grammar, syntax, and punctuation.	While there may be minor errors, the paper follows standard conventions of spelling, grammar, syntax, and punctuation.	Frequent errors in spelling, grammar, syntax, and punctuation are distracting.	Writing contains numerous errors and spelling, grammar, syntax, or punctuation, that interfere with comprehension.
(F)				

Please indicate the score (1-4) for each objective in the blank space next to the objective title and provide a score for the paper as a whole under *overall Score*.

Appendix B

Writing Sample Scores for 2005

N=46	4. Accomplished (Shows skill; many strengths present)	3. Competent (On balance the strengths outweigh the weaknesses)	2. Developing (Strengths and need for revision are about equal)	1. Beginning (Need for revision outweighs strengths)
Overall	24%	24%	52%	0%
Thesis <i>(B)</i>	22%	37%	37%	4%
Organization <i>(B)</i>	18%	39%	43%	0%
Support <i>(C)</i>	22%	37%	41%	0%
Style <i>(E)</i>	26%	52%	22%	0%
Mechanics <i>(F)</i>	28%	57%	15%	0%

Distribution of Skills Across Overall Writing Ability for 2005

The following tables show the number of papers that fell into each category of skill and overall ability. For example, eight students were considered as *developing* writers overall but *competent* in their thesis.

Thesis

Thesis → Overall ↓	4. Accomplished	3. Competent	2. Developing	1. Beginning
4. Accomplished	10	1		
3. Competent		8	3	
2. Developing		8	14	2
1. Beginning				

Organization

Organization → Overall ↓	4. Accomplished	3. Competent	2. Developing	1. Beginning
4. Accomplished	8	3		
3. Competent		9	2	
2. Developing		6	18	
1. Beginning				

Support

Support → Overall ↓	4. Accomplished	3. Competent	2. Developing	1. Beginning
4. Accomplished	10	2		
3. Competent		9	1	
2. Developing		6	18	
1. Beginning				

Style

Style → Overall ↓	4. Accomplished	3. Competent	2. Developing	1. Beginning
4. Accomplished	9	2		
3. Competent	1	10		
2. Developing	2	12	10	
1. Beginning				

Mechanics

Mechanics → Overall ↓	4. Accomplished	3. Competent	2. Developing	1. Beginning
4. Accomplished	6	5		
3. Competent	5	4	2	
2. Developing	2	17	5	
1. Beginning				

Appendix C
English 001 Handbook

July 2006

Introduction

Dear English One Professors, We are excited to welcome you to the English Department faculty this fall. You are all excellent teachers with varied experiences, and we are delighted to have you here! We are proud of our model: classes of 16; adjunct English 5 workshops instead of a separate remedial track for students otherwise not ready for a college level composition and reading course; carefully selected and trained teaching assistants who work both in the English 1 classroom and in the adjunct workshops and individual tutorials.

Our expectations are high, and after our year long assessment of the English 1 curriculum, we have refined our manual for teaching English One. We welcome your individual styles and ideas, and we also care about our model.

Please send a copy of your syllabus and information sheet (or your working draft) to eng1profs@mills.edu so that we can all share ideas.

Important Dates:

10:00-12:00 MH 322

Orientation for all English One Professors

Monday, August 21

8:30 am to 12:00 MH 322

We all grade English One Placement Exams from. You get to know your colleagues in the department, and we all get a sense of the writing of our incoming students.

Morning snacks and lunch will be provided

Wednesday August 23: Classes begin

If you have logistical questions about offices, phones, copying, etc., please contact Tonianne Nemeth at 510-430-2217 or tnemeth@mills.edu.

I will be sending an email next week that includes contact information for your teaching assistants so that you can connect with them via email over the summer and figure out a good time to meet before classes begin.

Thank you, Ruth, Cynthia, and Kirsten rsaxton@mills.edu,
cyns@mills.edu, ktsaxton@mills.edu

GENERAL INFORMATION

ENGLISH 1: CRITICAL READING AND EXPOSITORY WRITING COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS

English 1 provides an introduction to the college level skills of reading, writing, and critical thinking necessary for students to succeed at Mills and beyond. Students will read strong expository prose from a variety of contexts and will develop their ability to make, support, examine, and defend informed judgments through writing soundly structured and carefully reasoned prose. The course provides a foundation in the formal conventions of college writing; it does not replace courses that address specialized writing conventions within the majors. All undergraduate students must complete this requirement, either through successfully completing English 1, passing out through Advanced Placement Test or Mills Placement Exam scores, or transferring approved composition course credit from another college.

Critical Reading:

Students will hone the skills and pleasures of active critical reading. Students will develop an awareness of the rhetorical choices a writer makes and learn to analyze the effects of these choices in the writings of others and in their own prose. Students will learn to:

- Articulate the main argument and purpose of a text, including identifying its thesis and supporting assertions.
- Recognize and analyze the effectiveness of the assumptions that underlie the text's argument and its supporting evidence.
- Identify the text's presumed audience and consider the effectiveness of its tone and rhetorical choices given that audience (including diction and sentence structure, nature of examples and evidence, development of argument, and overall organizational structure).
- Employ concrete techniques to improve close reading skills, including: careful note taking, re-reading strategies, and attention to rhetorical strategies.

Critical Writing:

Students will learn the writing skills and organizational techniques necessary to plan, execute, and structure a successful essay, specifically:

- Careful planning, including techniques such as brainstorming, freewriting, and drafting to generate ideas, assess the writing situation (i.e. audience and purpose), select a topic, and formulate a thesis.
- Organizational skills, including how to structure essays, arrange ideas into a logical flow using clear transitions, and craft unified and coherent paragraphs.
- Idea development, including how to formulate thoughtful and coherent arguments, address the significance of their assertions, support their assertions with sufficient evidence, envision and address counter-arguments, and flesh out reasoning.
- Revision strategies. Students will be encouraged to see writing as a process that involves multiple drafts, large and small-scale revisions, editing, and peer group input.

Working With Evidence:

Students will learn effectively to support both their written and verbal assertions, specifically to:

- Use the library for research.
- Locate, determine the validity of, and accurately cite sources and provide sufficient evidence that is appropriate to topic and audience.
- Analyze and explicate evidence coherently and in sufficient detail.
- Integrate source material fluently at the idea and sentence levels.

Writing at the Sentence Level:

Students will learn to control general conventions of spelling, grammar, and punctuation. They should:

- Understand the role of reading and writing in developing advanced competence in grammar, punctuation, and prose style.
- Understand and practice effective strategies to develop sophisticated sentence structures.
- Use an up-to-date style manual for effective spelling, grammar, and punctuation solutions.
- Understand common errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation, and learn strategies for avoiding them.

Lifelong Literacy:

Students should learn and begin to incorporate the skills necessary to develop a lasting relationship with the written word. The course seeks to help students:

- Understand that the development and honing of critical thinking, writing skills, and personal voice are lifelong processes sustained by repeated interaction with the written word.
- Learn strategies for selecting and incorporating reading and writing into their lives beyond the classroom.
- Learn strategies for effective, thoughtful, and precise oral communication within the classroom and beyond.
- Understand the relationship between active literacy and reflective participation in society.

WRITING SKILLS TAUGHT IN ENGLISH ONE

ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Perhaps the most critical accomplishment for our students is the ability to construct a clear and well developed argument. In order to do so, she will need instruction in the following areas:

Thesis: how to create one of appropriate scope for assignment; where it works best in paper

Paragraph Cohesion (and topic sentences)

Transitions (between sentences and paragraphs)

Linking Paragraphs to main thesis idea

Facts versus assumptions

Appropriate evidence and how to use it well

Aside from your presentations on this material, some useful ways to teach such skills include:

Rhetorical analyses of sections of a reading assignment (vs. content discussion)

Group or individual classroom draft workshops on their own theses, paragraphs, etc.

Assigning sections of Hacker on writing process etc?

STYLE

Many students approach writing with anxiety and a lack of self-confidence. We want to teach our students to write clear prose that feels both authentic and empowering to them and that is successful to the task at hand.

Some issues to address include:

Active versus passive constructions (when to use and why)

Sentence variety

Clarity and precision of language

Tone (how to recognize, define, control, awareness of audience)

GRAMMAR:

English One professors need to make sure that all students understand and can control the sentence. You will need to spend class time working with students to be sure that they grasp what constitutes a correctly punctuated sentence and why.

Students do not need to spend time on rote lessons on grammar, but need actively and thoughtfully to engage in how to construct a well balanced and grammatically correct sentence. You may work with your TA as to how she can address the particular grammatical needs of her English Five workshop students.

Basic sentence structure: how does a sentence work? Phrases and clauses. Parts of speech, punctuation, etc.

Paragraph Progression (organic progression versus five paragraph essay)

ENGLISH ONE ESSAY ASSESSMENT GUIDE

Overall Score	4. Accomplished	3. Competent	2. Developing	1. Beginning (Need for revision outweighs strengths)
_____	(Shows skill; many strengths present)	(On balance the strengths outweigh the weaknesses)	(Strengths and need for revision are about equal)	
Thesis _____	Clear and original thesis of appropriate scope	Clear but less original or refined thesis	Thesis present but needs work in clarity, originality, or scope	Thesis weak or inadequate: absent, unclear, or inappropriate in scope
Organization	Clear logical progression of ideas and clear logical transitions	Generally logical progression of ideas and generally good transitions but needs to be honed.	Confusing progression as a whole and or within paragraphs	Lack of logical progression of ideas and lack of transitions impede understanding.
Support	Argument is well developed; paper provides appropriate, carefully analyzed supporting evidence	Argument is reasonably well developed and supported	Evidence and/or analysis weak	Almost no appropriate evidence and/or analysis
Style	Successful tone, varied sentence structures, clear and confident prose	Reasonably successful tone, varied sentence structures, clear prose	Less successful tone, less varied sentence structures, less clear prose	Tone, sentence structure, and prose style impede paper
Mechanics	Essay demonstrates mastery of standard conventions of spelling, grammar, syntax, and punctuation	While there may be minor errors, the paper follows standard conventions of spelling, grammar, syntax, and punctuation	Frequent errors in spelling, grammar, syntax, and punctuation are distracting	Writing contains numerous errors of spelling, grammar, syntax, or punctuation that interfere with comprehension.

ENGLISH ONE/FIVE TEACHING ASSISTANTS

The TA will be a second year graduate student who will attend each English One course as well as teach English Five, the linked workshop that meets for one hour once a week. English Five students (up to 8 of your total of 16) will also meet individually with their TA once a week for thirty minutes.

TAs work nine hours per week in Eng1/5: one hour in a group TA meeting; three hours attending Eng1; one hour for Eng 5; and four hours of tutorials. This means they do not have hours available to do clerical tasks for the professors.

English Five is a workshop that assigns no homework and is designed to help those students who have lower scores on the placement test with their writing. The course is P/F. It is not a discussion section. You may discuss ideas and strategies with your TA in re what she is doing in Eng 5 and you should be sure it dovetails with what you are teaching in Eng 1, but you are not responsible for designing her course activities.

TAs may help with things like attendance, grade records, and class discussion or presentations on reading, essay writing techniques, or grammar. While they may comment on homework or meet with students about their drafts, they may never grade essays.

You and your TA will work out how to manage your classroom interaction/roles in English One. Most of us prefer to have the TA take an active role in class discussions, presentations, etc throughout the semester; others prefer to have the TA responsible for teaching for a set number of classes and be more of an observer the rest of the time. You and your TA should regularly touch base about how the classes are going, discuss connections between Eng 1/5 etc...

COURSE INFORMATION SHEETS AND SYLLABI

Remember that syllabi and information sheets are legal documents. Professors must provide a syllabus and information sheet to your students by the second class meeting. We cannot change the weight of grades or number of assignments or make things due earlier than it is stated on syllabus. We can modify readings or delay assignments with ample warning to students. We must clearly delineate how we assess each activity or artifact that counts toward a student's grade.

Mundane but essential details:

- Professor's name
- Course Name and semester
- Class Time and Location
- Office Hours: location, days, times, and by appointment
- Professor's e-mail
- Professor's voicemail (office, not home)
- TA name, e-mail, and info. re. office hours

Course overview and objectives in one or two succinct paragraphs.

Your course overview should dovetail with the course goals stated in this manual and in the general education guide on the Mills web site.

Required Texts

- Electronic reserve readings or a reader that students purchase from the English Department office
- A standard writing handbook: **you will need to order this for your students through the Mills bookstore. You may use efollett on line to do this (Mills code is 830)**

Classroom Policies:

- Attendance (three tardy arrivals or early departures equal an absence for example) impact of unexcused missed classes on grade, etc.
- Class participation, perhaps a statement about respect, honesty, and tone
- Anonymity (all work is public in my classroom, for example)
- In-class assignments, homework, anything besides essays (when due? what if late what if absent, etc?) how graded?
- Plagiarism vs. collaboration and documentation
- Grading standards (the rubric from this manual)

Information about Essays:

- Purpose if not spelled out in course objectives
 - Page length; format (typed, double-spaced, 12-point font, etc.)
 - Process (various steps leading up to draft, peer review, revision, editing) and any special instructions for each step, for ex. multiple copies on draft workshop day
- Information about deadlines

Other Assignments:

Include a section on assignments other than essays, such as grammar lessons, sentence complexity, and paragraph functions, etc. so that students realize the importance of writing that is preparatory to essay writing.

Grades:

- Delineate Percentage for essays
- Include copy of grading rubric included in this manual

Percentage for in-class assignments, homework

Portfolios:

Students submit a portfolio of all graded work at the end of the semester with a cover letter in which they reflect on their work for the semester. Many professors also choose to have students submit a portfolio at mid-semester and to have one on one appointments with the students at this time. Remind them to save all graded work with the comments as well as saving their original work on disk.

Office Hours:

Professors are expected to hold scheduled office hours on at least two separate days of the week, preferably at different times of the day. We are required to hold a minimum of two office hours for one course and three for two courses. Most professors also meet with students by appointment. If you cannot make your office hours, please call Tonianne so she may post a note to that effect.

Other Required Information:

Services for Students with Disabilities: disability@mills.edu 430-2264

Counseling Center: health@mills.edu 430-2219

Writing Center information: The Writing Center in Rothwell: a great resource!! A tutoring center staffed by trained English dept graduate students. Remind students that tutors will not edit papers. Sign up appt sheets are posted on the doors of the Writing Center. We often require students to attend writing center tutorials as part of our English One courses.

Relationship of English 5 to English 1

USEFUL LOGISTICAL INFORMATION

You have a class email alias that consists of your course number and section @mills.edu that you may use to contact your students

In addition to your office computer, you are eligible to use the faculty computer resource room in Sage. This facility offers excellent computers, scanners, etc.

You may ask Tonianne to teach you how to use the file server and the intranet to distribute information to your students

You may use the following Xerox machines: eng dept, e, sage main copier or you may leave Xeroxes to be copied with 24 notice in Sage. Please try to minimize your use of copies by putting readings on the intranet

AV equipment: you may use projectors, computers, overheads, cd players, tape recorders, vcrs etc. You may place an order for AV equipment through the Mills homepage faculty/staff resources.

Post-Forms:

If a student risks failing your class, you must turn in a "post form." This form informs the student, the Dean of Students, and the student's advisor that she is in danger of failing your class. There are no bad ramifications to post forms; they do not remain in her file. They both protect you as a teacher and provide intervention that hopefully will help the student. Mid-semester is a useful time to consider if you need to send our post forms. Do not wait until the last weeks of classes.

Incompletes can only be offered in the case of illness/emergency. See college catalogue for details.

READINGS

GENERAL INFORMATION ON READINGS

The readings in the class must be expository essays, not fiction, poetry, drama, or films.

English One course readings must be chosen with attention to diversity at the levels of race and ethnicity and gender. We encourage you to consider including essays that reflect a range of subjects and authorial positions.

Many students come into English 1 thinking that they know how to write for college courses and that English 1 will be an “easy” course. One of our goals is to make English 1 engaging and challenging; we introduce students to the kinds of complex reading and writing assignments they are likely to have in college courses and provide them with skills to tackle difficult, complex, intellectually challenging reading and writing tasks.

The writing pedagogy associated with this kind of project has been linked to the textbook *Ways of Reading* (Bartholomae and Petrosky) whose pedagogy—developed with work with basic writers—aims to engage students by giving them “real” intellectual challenges academics face without “watering down” the reading and writing projects of introductory writing courses. While this pedagogy has been widely adopted and hailed as successful, the methods behind it and the pedagogical techniques required to make it successful for students are not always as well known. What often happens in writing classes that make a claim to this kind of challenging pedagogy is that students end up frustrated and confused, rather than empowered and better writers.

Thus, when you use the kinds of essays suggested in our English 1 guide, essays that are quite difficult, it is important to structure the rest of your class activities accordingly. Please read the introduction of any of the *Ways of Reading* editions to become familiarized with its pedagogical underpinnings. There are editions in the Mills library and in the English Department office. You can also use the following link www.bedfordstmartins.com

We require that you use at least two essays that are either from *Ways of Reading* (any edition) or that are similar in kind. Each class will cover *at least two and no more than four* of these complex essays. If you want to use an essay that fits the *Ways of Reading* model (of length and complexity) that is not from the book, please run it by one of us first.

- The required unit based on two of these readings requires: two weeks of class time on each and then a return to the two readings (from a different perspective) for three weeks for a seven week cycle.
- If you choose, like many of us, to use only two of these lengthy essays, the rest of your readings are shorter essays that support the goals of your class.
- All readings for the class should be copied and given to the library to put onto the e-reserves (contact Clarence Maybee at the library for instructions cmaybee@mills.edu); this way, students do not have to pay for a book out of which a maximum of only four readings are used.
- Readings in a unit must work together based on building and sequencing. This means you may teach two long (6-7 week) units based on two *Ways of Reading* (or similar) essays per unit, or you may teach shorter essays of your choice during one of these units, or two weeks on a third long one and so forth.

SLOWING DOWN: A SAMPLE SCHEDULE FOR READINGS

As you will see from the sample course schedule, using complex readings at the first year level requires going very slowly, always allowing students different ways to come at the same reading, rather than changing readings every class, or even every week. Beginning college students will rarely come close to grasping the various levels of ideas or essay construction of a difficult essay on one read, and indeed, the whole point of the class is to teach students that, along with revision in their writing, they also can benefit from revising their initial readings of texts. But, to teach this skill it has to be structured into the lesson plan; you can't just tell them "read it again!"

With this concept of slowing down, it is likely you will spend at least two weeks on any given reading, as well as return to that reading at another point in the class. When you include discussing the readings, working on issues of their own writing, and doing peer groups and peer review, a sample unit might look like this:

Slowed down syllabus sample:

Class 1: Opening discussion of essay, key concepts and ideas listed, student reactions, problems and challenges, free write on one concept.

Class 2: Group work on different sections of the essay; personal connections to essay

Class 3: Examine writing assignment for this essay, and discuss what key concepts or passages need further clarification; skill lesson on paragraphing

Class 4 Rough Draft Day

Class 5: Grammar work and identifying more areas in essay that students need to explore to write their essays.

Class 6 Paper due; editing workshop

Obviously, at this pace in a normal 14 week semester, **you will rarely do more than three or four of the complex essays.**

SOME READINGS WE HAVE USED SUCCESSFULLY

Feel free to use these or not.

Language/Identity/Education

Jamaica Kincaid : "Girl" (a great first day of class activity)

Richard Rodriguez "The Achievement of Desire"

Gloria Anzaldua "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" and/or "Entering into the Serpent"

Mary Louise Pratt "Arts of the Contact Zone"

James Baldwin "On Black English"

Amy Tan "Mother Tongue"

June Jordan "Nobody Mean More to Me than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan"

Paulo Freire "The Banking Concept of Education"

Alice Walker "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens"

Virginia Woolf sections *A Room of One's Own*

Adrienne Rich "When we dead awaken, writing as re-vision"

Paule Marshall "Kitchen Table Poets"

Pop Culture:

Susan Douglas "Narcissism as Liberation"

"And Now a Word From Our Sponsors (Feminism for Sale)" Rita Hao

"Cutting Girls Down to Size" and "Advertising and Violence" from *Deadly Persuasion: Why Women and Girls Must Fight the Addictive Power of Advertising* Jean Kilbourne

Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima Book Review M.M. Manning

"Selling Hot Pussy: Representations of Black Female Sexuality in the Cultural Marketplace" bell hooks

"The Black Back Ups" Kate Rushkin

NPR from "This American Life" on Kentucky Fried Chicken Mark Schone

ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS, OTHER WRITING ASSIGNMENTS, AND PORTFOLIOS

ESSAYS

Students will write five graded essays of 5-7 pages each.

You must have returned a graded essay to students by the drop date

Each essay must be peer reviewed. You should return each graded essay no more than one to one and a half weeks after you receive it

Percentage breakdown:

Essay One: 10%

Essay Two: 15%

Essay Three: 15%

Essay Four: 15%

Essay Five (Revision of an earlier essay and due at final exam date): 20%

ASSIGNMENT GOALS

Each essay assignment should have a specific set of goals, and should fit into a larger sequence of goals for the course. The following essay assignments are required for a Mills English 1 class; each of them represents a kind of exercise that typifies academic writing across disciplines.

We believe that students actually need multiple opportunities to write essays in order to actually learn, so any of these topics could be repeated. Indeed, if you think about learning in general, it is unlikely that anyone can “learn” how to do a specific thing if only asked to do it once. Giving students multiple opportunities to try the same kind of writing can help them learn more efficiently than changing the kind of writing you ask them to do on each assignment.

You have great leeway in the essay topics you design. Do beware of crafting specific topics that do much of the student’s thinking for her and/or that require a particular “answer.”

The paper assignments must do the following:

Each essay topic should require the student to craft an argument and use evidence/analysis to support that argument.

One essay should ask the student to connect her own experience to the reading.

One essay should involve creating an argument using two readings.

The fifth essay must be a radical revision of an earlier graded essay that includes organic, thoughtful use of at least one of the bibliographical sources from library assignment. You may either choose which essay the student revises or leave the choice up to her.

LATE PEER CRITIQUE DRAFTS

Teachers should clarify late policies for drafts of assignments. Many of us dock the final paper's grade by one third if the draft has not been provided at the workshop, but the student attends and reviews other students' drafts, and we dock by two thirds if she does not provide her draft or critique other students' drafts.

REVISION

Every essay in the course is revised through our peer review requirement. Many professors require students to revise an essay that receives lower than a C- grade.

SEQUENCING ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS

Sequencing assignments is a way to have two or more writing assignments build on each other, and thus structure the very idea of revision into the course structure. We have found that generally it is only after the third essay in a sequence of related assignments and readings that students reach a level of proficiency with a text.

Sequencing assignments means, for example, that students read and write about a text from one angle or perspective, then a new concept or text is introduced and students go back to the original reading assignment with new questions. Then, there might even be a third assignment which calls on some ideas or issues from the previous two essays, perhaps applying a now familiar concept to a new text (see samples below).

It may feel that everyone is going to go crazy or be bored by working so closely with a few texts. Students will certainly complain at times. But, our goal is to show them that no text can be "mastered" at one go or in one essay. When you use sequencing successfully, students gain confidence in their analytical abilities and writing.

SAMPLE SEQUENCING.

Unit 1: (5 classes)

Reading: Essay A

Writing Assignment # 1 (Apply concept of essay to personal experience or popular culture)

Writing issues to be raised in class: Thesis, paragraphing, complete sentences

Unit 2 (5 classes)

Reading: Essay B

Writing Assignment # 2 (In depth analysis of one essay)

Writing issues to be raised in class: Essay structure and transitions, punctuation and more complete sentences

Unit 3: (4 classes)

Reading: Essays A and B (no new reading)

Writing Assignment # 3 (compares or apply concept from one to other)

Writing issues to be raised in class: Style, different kind of theses, apostrophes (etc).

This then accounts for 15 classes, or about 7 weeks of class, and encompasses three essays. It allows for student to go back and rethink their understanding of both essays in the third unit, which is imperative in teaching them to analyze and complicate their ideas.

One can imagine that the second half of the class might then take up two or three new essays, still using sequencing and similar kinds of assignment creation

PORTFOLIOS

Students will keep and submit a portfolio of all of their written work and they will need to be reminded of this.

You need to meet with them mid-semester to review this portfolio and their progress; you may cancel one class to help mitigate the time spent in these appointments. The portfolio will be turned in once mid-semester and again at the end of the semester.

In each case, the student will write a reflective letter in which she considers her work in the class so far; she will articulate what she thinks about her progress, the writing challenges she faces, etc.

You may either count the portfolio as a part of participation, or homework; giving it a grade or a check—whatever works best for you.

**INFORMATION LITERACY
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ASSIGNMENT**

Information Literacy and English 1

The Mills College English Department and Library have created an information literacy component for the English One curriculum. This component includes the following assignments/activities:

- 1) a class library visit
- 2) student reference library visit
- 3) annotated bibliography assignment
- 4) radical revision paper with inclusion of sources from annotated bibliography

Library Component

Mills librarians will teach students how to use the Mills library's resources to gather information, as well as how to evaluate it. This may be the first time your students have used library sources at Mills. Therefore, the library provides the following guidance to assist students in making the most of the available resources:

1. Web pages: The library hosts web pages for your English 1 students, providing a brief overview of general information about locating, evaluating, and using information as well as specific information about the resources at Mills. Please have your students read the web pages before attending a library session.

<http://courses.mills.edu/courses/public/library/>

2. Class Session in the Library: Your class will meet with a librarian for a session on locating, evaluating and using sources with particular emphasis on how information can be used to meet one's goals, e.g., learning, making an argument, etc. This session takes place at a regular class time during the week of October 30th – November 3rd. Please make an appointment for your class session at the library by contacting Clarence Maybee, Information Literacy Librarian, at cmaybee@mills.edu. Set up this appointment in advance so that it appears on the formal syllabus.

3. Group Reference Session: During the class session in the library, the librarian will ask students to sign up for a mandatory one-hour reference session that will take place outside of class time. Along with English 1 students from other sections, each student will return to the library at her scheduled time and work with a reference librarian to discuss and begin searching for sources to support her paper. These sessions are scheduled to correspond as closely as possible to the time that English 1 students will be working on the fifth paper.

Note: Each student must attend the group reference session she signed up for and no make-up sessions will be made available. Not attending a group reference session should effect a students overall grade in the same way that missing a regular class session would.

Annotated Bibliography Assignment

The annotated bibliography assignment is due shortly before the draft of the fifth paper. When making your syllabus, remember that you need to return the graded annotated bibliography at least one class period before the draft of the fifth paper is due so that the student may benefit your comments.

The annotated bibliography assignment provides a way for you to gain insight into your students' skills in selecting and analyzing sources they use as supporting evidence. Following MLA format, students should include the following three key elements in the text of their annotated bibliographies for each of the three or

four information sources they select and analyze:

- 1. Content Summary:** students should provide a general summary of the content of the source selected.
- 2. Evaluation of Source:** students should analyze the suitability and credibility of the source selected based on the following factors:
 - a. significance associated with different types of materials, e.g., chapter of a book, video segment, web page, journal article
 - b. characteristics of scholarly versus non-scholarly material
 - c. analysis of bias, currency, and author's credentials
- 3. Application:** students should explain how each selected source could be used in the paper as evidence to support the argument or case they are making.

Please do not limit the type of sources that you allow your students to use for their annotated bibliographies or in their papers, e.g., no personal web sites, or only "scholarly" articles, etc. Students should assess the sources and decide for themselves which are appropriate for meeting their needs.

Essay

- The information literacy/library assignment culminates in your students' fifth paper.
- This paper is a radical revision of an earlier paper and is due during finals week.
- In preparation for the fifth paper, students write an annotated bibliography that includes three or four relevant sources that are not part of the course readings.
- The fifth paper must include one or two of these sources.

Remind your students that they will be writing two papers on the same topic, so it should be one in which they have particular intellectual engagement and investment.

Supporting Student Information Literacy in Your Teaching

The Mills English 1 program takes a holistic approach to teaching students to use information by having them experience the interplay between "using" sources to learn about the topic or to support their own arguments, while also learning the necessary skills to find and evaluate useful sources. The Mills librarians address a broad array of student information needs with a primary focus on finding and evaluating appropriate sources. You already teach students to think critically, analyze and use information as supporting evidence in their writing. During this assignment, you should spend some class time discussing the role outside sources of information play in helping students to meet their learning goals. While working on the annotated bibliography and fifth paper, students should reflect on the following questions:

- How can outside sources help define or shape the argument I am putting forth in my paper?
- Are the sources I have selected the best for making my particular argument?

- What are the best ways to use an outside source?
- How has using outside information contributed to my overall goals or personal learning about the topic?

Turning in copies of the Annotated Bibliographies and 5th Papers

The English Department and the Library are performing an assessment to determine the effectiveness of the information literacy component of the English 1 curriculum and need to collect student artifacts for evaluation. Please require your students to turn in **two** copies of their final project that will include: the annotated bibliography and the fifth paper (stapled together). Please submit one of these two copies of the student work to the English Department Office on the 3rd floor of Mills Hall.

Timeline

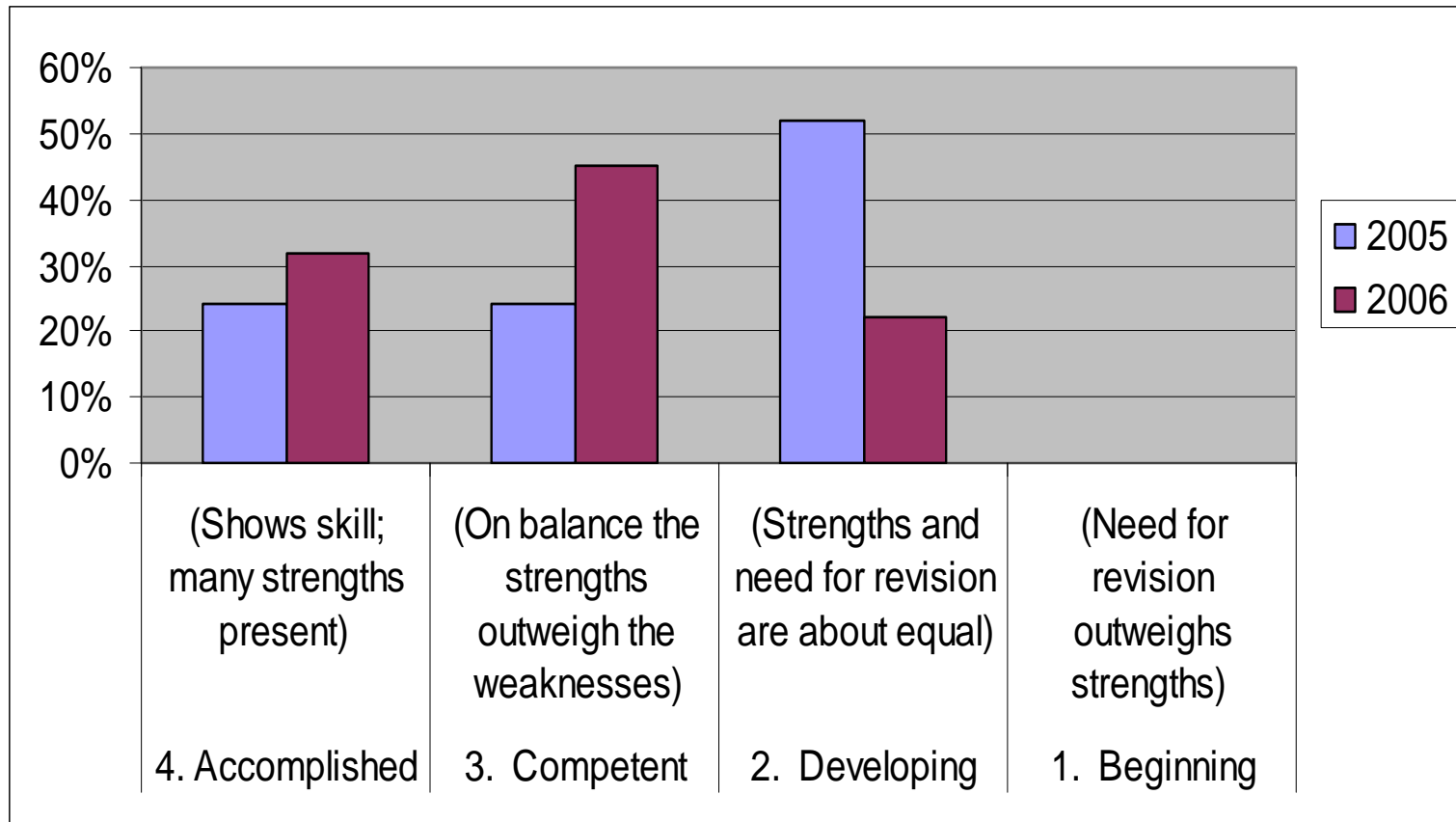
- **Before September 13th** - arrange a time with Clarence Maybee (cmaybee@mills.edu) for your class visit to the library during a regularly scheduled class time during the week of October 30th – November 3rd.
- **At least one week before your class visit** - e-mail your assignment sheet and student topics to Clarence and assign the class to read the web pages provided by the library.
- **Week of October 30th – November 3rd** –Attend prearranged class library visit.
- **November 6th – November 17th** – Students attend a group reference session at the library (when your class visited the library, students selected an individual time).
- **Before December 16th** - turn in copies of the Annotated Bibliographies and fourth and fifth papers to the English Department Office.

Appendix D

Writing Sample Scores for 2005 and 2006

	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006
	4. Accomplished	4. Accomplished	3. Competent	3. Competent	2. Developing	2. Developing	1. Beginning	1. Beginning
	(Shows skill; many strengths present)	(Shows skill; many strengths present)	(On balance the strengths outweigh the weaknesses)	(On balance the strengths outweigh the weaknesses)	(Strengths and need for revision are about equal)	(Strengths and need for revision are about equal)	(Need for revision outweighs strengths)	(Need for revision outweighs strengths)
2005 N=46 2006 N=66								
Overall	24%	32%	24%	45%	52%	22%	0%	0%
Thesis	22%	26%	37%	47%	37%	18%	4%	0%
Organization	18%	27%	39%	45%	43%	29%	0%	0%
Support	22%	26%	37%	41%	41%	41%	0%	0%
Style	26%	33%	52%	50%	22%	17%	0%	0%
Mechanics	28%	41%	57%	45%	15%	14%	0%	0%

Improvement 2005 to 2006



Appendix E

English 001 Final Paper 2005-06 INFORMATION LITERACY Scoring Chart

Overall Score	1 Beginning	2 Developing	3 Competent	4 Accomplished
Number of Freshwomen	3	26	33	8
Choice and Application of Supporting Information	1) no outside source is used 2) outside source does not support paper's argument 3) use/analysis does not support paper's argument	1) outside source refers to topic of the paper 2) use/analysis adds little to the paper's argument	1) outside source is supportive 2) use/analysis generally supports the argument of the paper	1) outside source is very supportive 2) use/analysis of outside source contributes significantly to the argument made in the paper
Number of Freshwomen	2	27	30	11
Bias	1) no outside source is used 2) source has a noticeable bias that is not explained and/or justified in text	1) source has a noticeable bias that is insufficiently supported or misinterpreted (based on explanation given in text)	1) source doesn't have a strong bias 2) source has a strong bias, but it is appropriate based on explanation in text	1) the bias of the source purposefully contributes to the argument made in the paper
Number of Freshwomen	3	21	40	6
Credibility	1) no outside source is used 2) inappropriate source is used and no justification is offered	1) source used is insufficiently supportive or used inappropriately due to misunderstanding (based on explanation in text)	1) type of source used is appropriate	1) type of source used strongly contributes to the argument made in the paper
Number of Freshwomen	4	22	38	6
Paraphrasing or Quoting Mechanics	1) no outside source is used 2) outside material is quoted or paraphrased, but not cited in the text in any way	1) outside material is quoted or paraphrased, but not cited in the text using the MLA format	1) MLA format is used, but error(s) are present	1) virtually no errors in the way that referenced material is cited in the text
Number of Freshwomen	5	28	21	16
References Section of Paper	1) no outside source is used 2) sources are cited in text, but no reference list is provided	1) citation is listed, but formatting is incorrect	1) citation is correctly formatted except for minor errors	1) virtually no errors in citation
Number of Freshwomen	29	10	14	17

First Assessment of Information Literacy Outcomes

n=70	4 (Accomplished)	3 (Competent)	2 (Developing)	1 (Beginning)
Overall	11.43%	47.14%	37.14%	4.29%
Choice and Application	16.71%	42.86%	38.57%	2.86%
Bias	8.57%	57.14%	30.00%	4.29%
Credibility	8.57%	64.29%	31.43%	6.71%
Paraphrasing and Quoting	22.86%	30.00%	40.00%	7.14%
Reference Section	24.29%	20.00%	14.29%	41.43%

Second Assessment of Information Literacy Outcomes

n=39	4 (Accomplished)	3 (Competent)	2 (Developing)	1 (Beginning)
Overall	23.08%	51.28%	20.51%	5.13%
Bias	28.21%	56.41%	7.69%	7.69%
Credibility	23.08%	51.28%	17.95%	7.69%
MLA Citation Formatting	56.41%	33.33%	7.69%	2.56%