



Undergraduate Written Communication ILO Assessment Report

Overview of the Assessment Project

During the 2021-2022 academic year, HPU assessed the Written Communication (WC) competency of our students in general education and undergraduate capstone or upper division courses. This assessment project was the second time we had assessed WC at HPU as part of an established series of annual assessments of five institutional learning outcomes (ILOs): written communication, critical thinking, oral communication, information literacy, and quantitative analysis. Results of graduate written communication ILO assessment will be reported separately.

Methods

We learned from our previous assessment of the WC ILO in AY 2016-2017 that a few assignment parameters were warranted to ensure the WC rubric could be applied uniformly to a variety of artifacts collected from various disciplines. Therefore, in late Spring 2021, the Academic Assessment and Program Review Shared Governance Committee (AAPRC) designed minimal guidelines for the creation of an assignment that could be assessed for this project and provided those guidelines to faculty teaching Fall courses with a WC ILO. The AY 21-22 WC ILO assessment project was introduced at our Fall Faculty Assembly meeting and the assignment guidelines were reiterated and discussed during our annual Assessment Day in August 2021.

Despite several technological issues with the creation of functional project links in Watermark, a total of 286 student papers were collected in Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 from General Education and Upper Division courses by direct upload from Blackboard to Watermark. Rubric norming and assessment of student papers were conducted throughout Fall 2022 by faculty in each College. Assessment scores were downloaded from Watermark, matched with Banner/IPEDs data, and statistical analyses performed in Excel. Results were first reviewed by the AAPRC, reported to administrators and faculty attending our annual Assessment Day in August 2023, and then distributed to faculty involved in the WC assessment project and to individual Programs for use in their 5-year self-studies. This report was approved by the AAPRC and uploaded to our Student Success website.

Assessment Findings

General Education

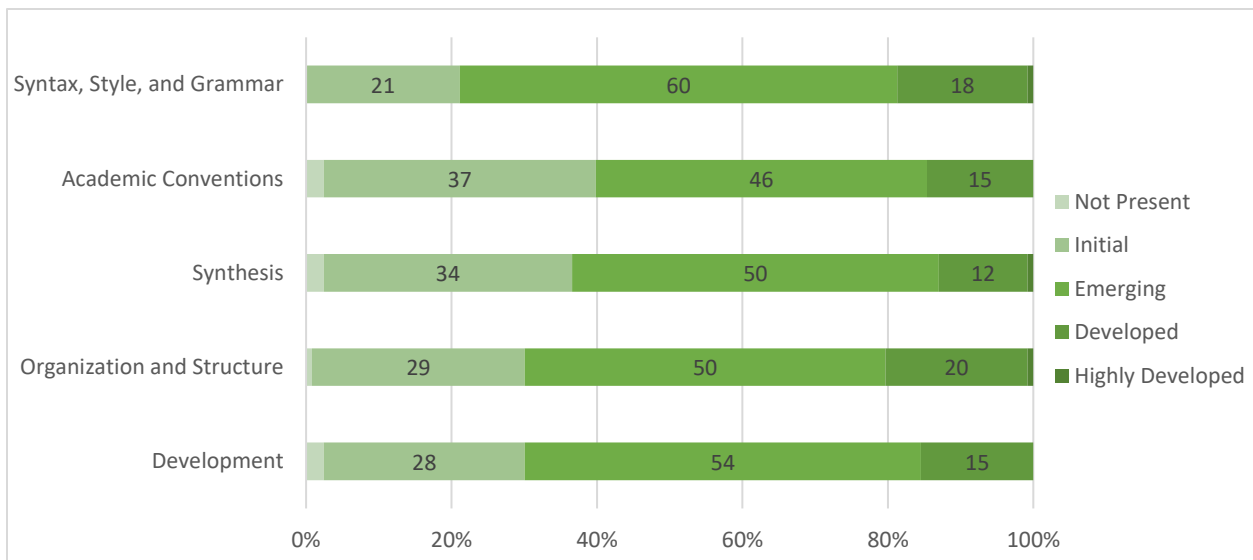
Project Target: 85% of students enrolled in General Education courses will achieve an initial, emerging, developed, or highly developed score for each of the 5 rubric criteria.

In Spring 2022, 123 student papers were collected from 13 sections of three General Education courses: WRI1100 Writing and Analyzing Arguments, WRI1200 Research Argument and Writing, and WRI1250 Introduction to Research in the Humanities. At the General Education level, students reached the preset target in every rubric category (Table 1, Figure 1).

Table 1. AY 2021-2021 General Education Written Communication Results by Criterion (n=123)

Written Communication Rubric Criteria (% ≥ initial)	Number of Students Scoring in Each Category				
	0	1	2	3	4
	Not Present	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly Developed
Syntax, Style, Grammar (100%)	0	26	74	22	1
Academic Convention (98%)	3	46	56	18	0
Synthesis (98%)	3	42	62	15	1
Organization, Structure (99%)	1	36	61	24	1
Development (98%)	3	34	67	19	0

Figure 1. Percentage of General Education Students Scoring in each Category by Rubric Criterion



Upper division

Project Target: 85% of students enrolled in capstone-level courses will achieve an emerging, developed, or highly developed score for each of the five rubric criteria.

In Fall 2021, 28 student papers were collected from two upper division or capstone courses. In Spring 2022, 135 student papers were collected from 14 upper division or capstone courses. Our Upper Division students also reached the preset target in every rubric category.

Table 2. AY 2021-2022 Upper Division Written Communication results by criterion (n=163)

Written Communication Rubric Criteria (% ≥ emerging)	Number of Students Scoring in Each Category				
	0	1	2	3	4
	Not Present	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly Developed
Syntax, Style, Grammar (98%)	0	4	51	78	30
Academic Convention (93%)	0	11	53	70	29
Synthesis (91%)	0	14	53	72	24
Organization, Structure (93%)	0	12	41	78	32
Development (94%)	0	10	43	77	33

Figure 2. Percentage of Upper Division Students Scoring in each Category by Rubric Criterion

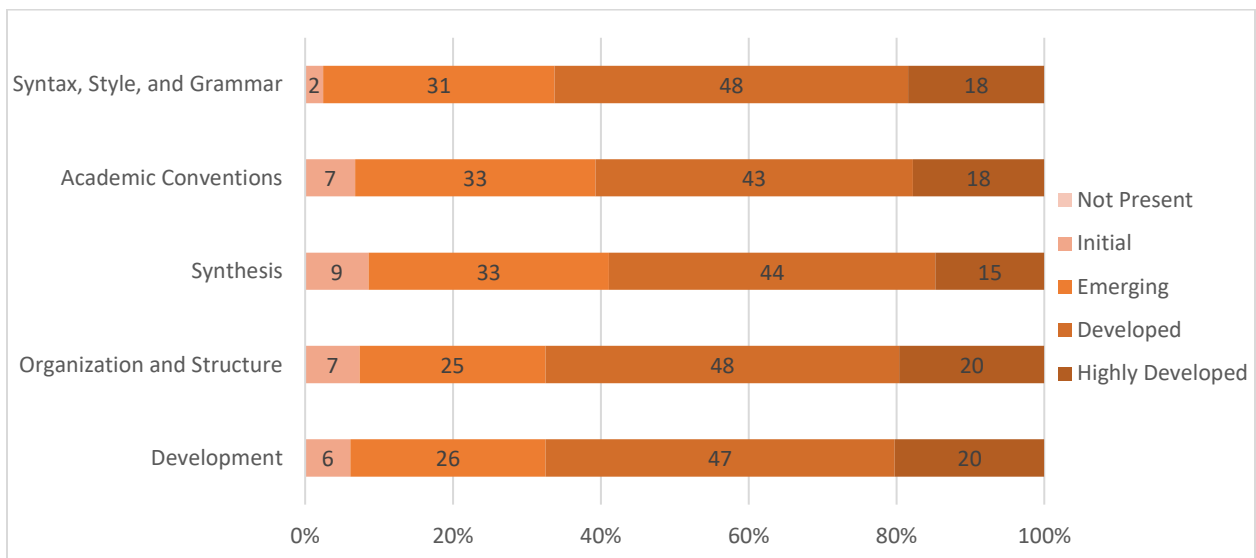


Table 3. Overall mean Written Communication scores (mean ± standard deviation) as a function of student demographics

	GENERAL EDUCATION		UPPER DIVISION			
	mean ± stdev	n	mean ± stdev	n		
Gender	Female	10.6 ± 2.8	91	14.6 ± 3.6	118	
	Male	10.4 ± 3.8	32	15.1 ± 2.9	45	
IPEDS race/ethnicity	Black or African American	9.9 ± 2.0	6	13.0 ± 3.4	7	
	Indian/Alaskan native	6.5	1	na		
	Asian	12.0 ± 2.6	27	15.8 ± 3.4	32	
	Caucasian/White	10.5 ± 3.1	38	15.4 ± 2.7	40	
	Hispanic	10.1 ± 2.9	26	14.5 ± 3.6	29	
	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	na		14.4 ± 3.4	4	
	Two or more races	9.7 ± 2.1	18	14.4 ± 3.5	40	
	Nonresident alien	10.2 ± 2.8	6	12.1 ± 3.7	8	
	First generation college student	YES	10.0 ± 2.6	39	14.4 ± 3.6	56
		NO	10.8 ± 2.9	84	15.0 ± 3.3	107
STEM major	YES	11.1 ± 3.1	43	14.7 ± 3.4	52	
	NO	10.3 ± 2.77	80	14.8 ± 3.4	111	
Semester term	8-week	na		13.2 ± 3.2*	28	
	16-week	10.6 ± 2.8	123	14.8 ± 3.4	135	
Course modality	Face-to-face	10.4 ± 2.7	113	15.1 ± 3.4**	127	
	Hybrid	na		13.7 ± 1.5	6	
	Online	11.9 ± 3.8	10	13.5 ± 3.1	30	
Pell eligible	YES	10.1 ± 2.5	46	14.6 ± 3.4	79	
	NO	10.9 ± 3.8	77	14.9 ± 3.4	84	

* significant as determined by t-test, unequal variance, p<0.05

** significant difference as determined by one-way ANOVA, p<0.05

Discussion

- *How closely do we think these findings reflect the actual level of competence of our students?*
 - The scores at the General Education level were markedly better than our last assessment of Written Communication. In AY 2016-2017, our General Education students did not meet our preset target for any of the rubric categories. This result may be due, at least in part, to “closing the loop” discussions with faculty stemming from the previous WC assessment, and also to some “tightening up” of the project guidelines made available to faculty for creation of the written assignment. The guidelines were meant to normalize the writing assignment so that all of the assignments, regardless of course or level, could be properly assessed using the rubric. In our previous assessment of this ILO, some artifacts didn’t match well with the rubric criteria and, therefore, may have produced lower assessment scores. In addition, we collected and assessed almost 7x as many General Education student papers than were collected for the 2016-2107 project, which lends greater confidence in our 2021-2022 results at the General Education level.

- The AAPRC predicted that upper division students, having had two additional years of college-level writing experience, would score higher than most General Education students in all rubric categories. As a rough approximation of “overall” written communication proficiency for each student, the individual scores in each rubric criterion were totaled to create an aggregate, overall WC score. Indeed, the overall mean score at the General Education level was 10.6 ± 2.8 (mean \pm stdev, $n=123$) and at the Upper Division 14.8 ± 3.4 (mean \pm stdev, $n=163$). This relationship between the means was highly significant, $p < 0.05$. This supports our prediction that Upper Division students had higher WC proficiency than General Education students.
- Overall, the AAPRC agreed that this analysis does provide a reasonable snapshot of the level of Written Communication competence of our students during the 2021-2022 academic year.
- We applied inferential statistics to explore any significant differences in overall mean score as a function of student demographics or course modality (Table 3). It is important to note that these are preliminary statistical analyses and that further analysis of the effects of combinations of student demographic and/or course modality may be warranted. In short:
 - There were no significant differences at either the General Education or Upper Division levels in Written Communication overall scores based on gender, self-reported IPEDS race/ethnicity, first generation college, STEM major, or Pell eligibility.
 - For the Upper Division respondents, mean overall scores of students in the 16-week semester 14.8 ± 3.4 (mean \pm stdev, $n=135$), were significantly higher than the overall mean scores of the students in the 8-week semester, 13.2 ± 3.2 (mean \pm stdev, $n=28$).
 - There was no significant difference between the Written Communication scores of the General Education students enrolled in in-person courses vs. those enrolled in online courses. However, there was a significant difference between modalities at the Upper Division level. The scores of Upper Division students taking in-person courses were significantly higher than those enrolled in either hybrid or online courses. The significance of this relationship was tested with a one-way ANOVA, $p < 0.05$ and will be explored further with HPU’s Director of Online Programs and Academic Partnerships.
- *Were there any problems with the process?*
 - In Fall 2021, we did have some issues with the links used by students to upload their work from our LMS, Blackboard, to Watermark. However, these problems were worked out before Spring 2022 and, despite this initial setback, we feel the sample size was sufficient for this assessment project.

Closing the Loop

- *How shall we use these findings?*
 - The data and findings were presented and discussed with faculty and University administrators at Assessment Day in Fall 2023.
 - The major-specific data have been reported to the respective Program Chairs to be used for their 5-year self-studies.
 - We have posted the University-wide results on our Student Success website to make them available to the University community and to the general public.
 - Our Director of Online Programs and Academic Partnerships will investigate the significant difference found at the upper division between course modalities and determine if instructional support is necessary.
 - In our continuing efforts to “close the loop,” the General Education representative on the AAPRC will present these results at the next meeting of General Education Assessment and Learning Committee for inclusion in the General Education assessment plan.
 - It was noted that writing applications, such as the AI-based writing programs that have become ubiquitous since the completion of this ILO assessment project will need to be addressed thoroughly in our next ILO assessment project.
 - Finally, the AAPRC agreed that given the strong success, we will change the preset target goal to be more rigorous at both levels for AY 2026-2027 when we next assess Written Communication.
- *Are we satisfied with the results? If not, what are we going to do about it?*
 - The Dean and Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, both serving on the AAPRC, will discuss these results with the writing faculty. The AAPRC agreed it is important to determine if these successful ILO assessment results match the impression of writing instructors who will have had a deeper perspective of our students’ skill level given that they are exposed to a broader range of student writing samples at both the General Education and Upper Division levels. Findings and suggestions will be reported back to the AAPRC and, if necessary, implemented into AY 2026-2027 Written Communication ILO assessment plans.
 - In the final analysis, we are pleased with these results which indicate our students met the target goals for written communication and indicate significant improvement in written communication skills as our students progress towards their undergraduate degree.