

**To:** SOCI 100W Instructors and Coordinators  
**From:** Tom Moriarty, Director of Writing Across the Curriculum  
**Re:** Spring 2017 Assessment Pilot (HIST, PSYC, SOCI 100W)  
**Date:** September 5, 2017  
**CC:** Thalia Anognos, AVP of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs  
 Carlos Garcia, Sociology Dept. Chair  
 Ron Rogers, Associate Dean, College of Social Science

**Key Findings**

- Your students are doing well in a number of areas, especially Context of and Purpose for Writing. They generally understand the tasks being assigned to them and are writing in ways that are appropriate for their audience.
- About 75% of your students perform adequately or above in the area of correctness, 58% in the area of content development, and 67% in finding and using good sources.
- The area that needs most work is textual conventions. The results suggest that your students are generally composing grammatically correct sentences and paragraphs, but only a little more than half of them are writing like Sociologists and using your field’s disciplinary conventions correctly.

**Key Suggestions**

Work with the Writing Across the Curriculum program to develop workshops on the following topics:

- How to help your students understand and use the conventions of your discipline – how to argue and write like a Sociologist. The WAC program will be addressing this issue by offering seminars for faculty to develop guides to writing in specific disciplines.
- How to help your students find and evaluate sources.
- How to design exercise to teach students how to critique sources.
- How to help students develop focused research questions and more thoughtful and focused thesis statements.

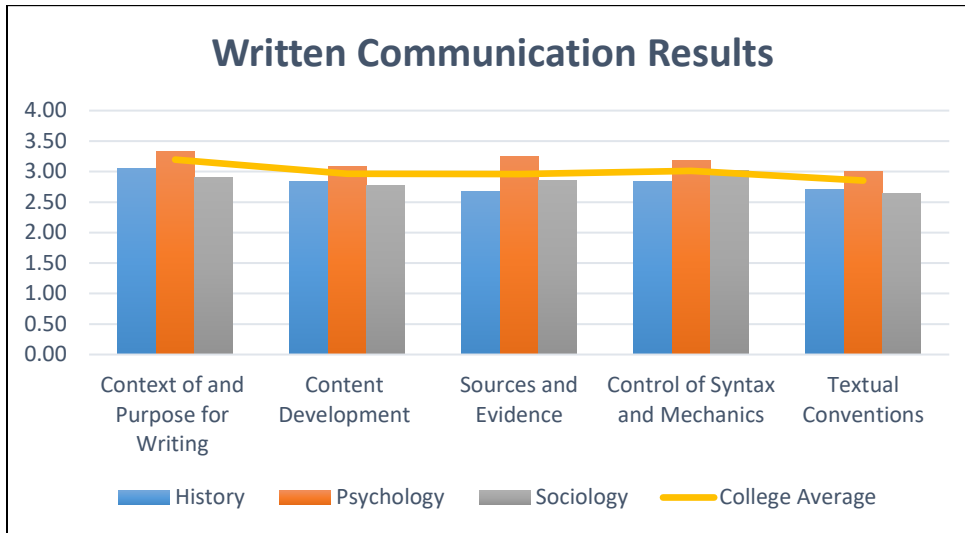
**Results: Average Scores for Your Students Compared with Your College**

Sample papers were scored for five dimensions of written communication, using a 4-point scale, as shown in the table below.

<i>Dimensions Scored</i>	<i>Scoring Scale</i>
Context of and Purpose for Writing Content Development Sources and Evidence Control of Syntax and Mechanics Textual Conventions	<p><b>4: Accomplished.</b> These students are performing well above the minimum level of competence.</p> <p><b>3: Competent/Adequate.</b> These students are performing at or slightly above the minimum level of competence.</p> <p><b>2: Developing.</b> These students are performing slightly to somewhat below the minimum level of competence, but are developing toward it.</p> <p><b>1: Needs Improvement.</b> These students are performing well below the minimum level of competence.</p>

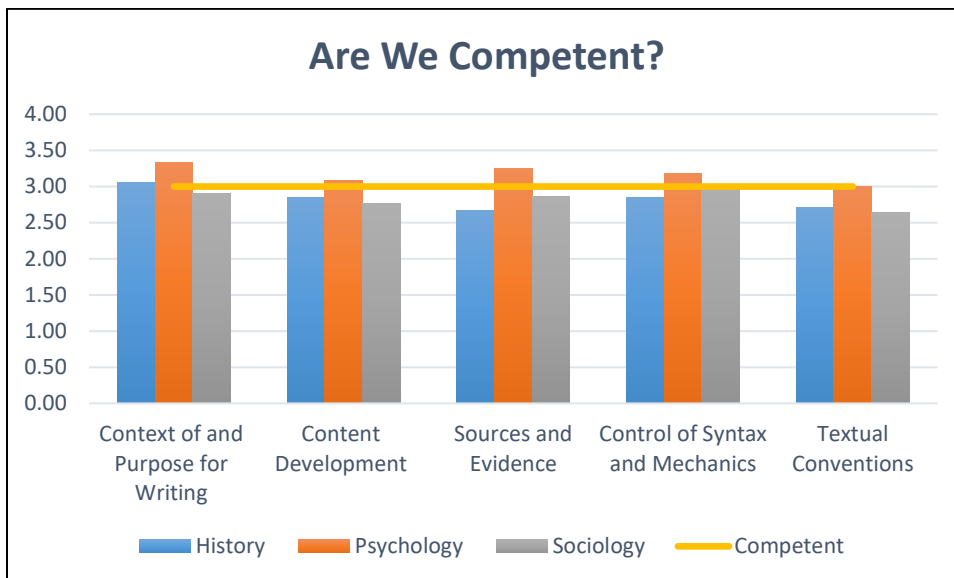
**Table 1.** Dimensions of Written Communication scored and scale used to score them.

The average scores for your students on each dimension, compared with other students in your College, are shown in the figure below.



**Figure 1.** Psychology generally scored slightly above the College average, while History and Sociology scored slightly below.

Average scores for your students compared to the “Competent” score of 3 are shown in the figure below.



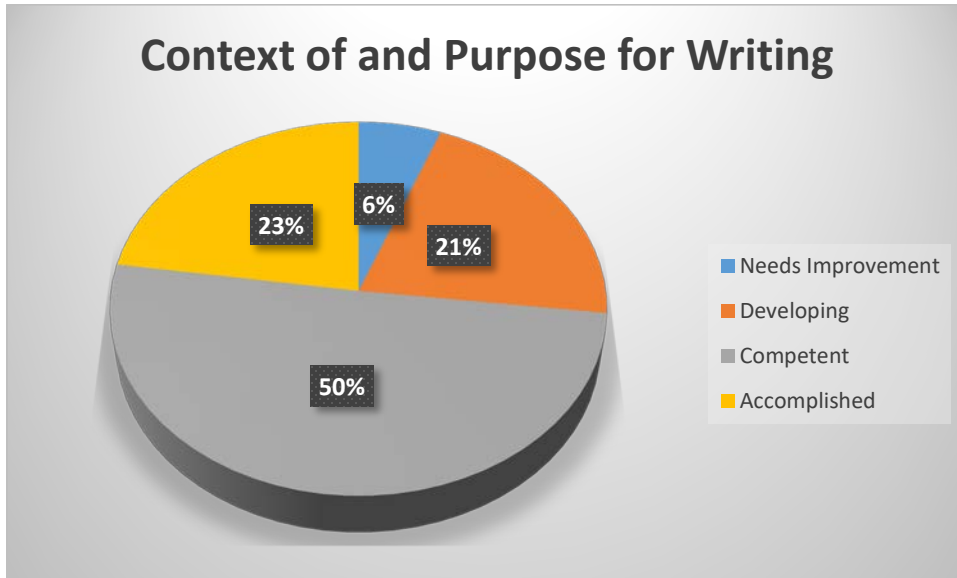
**Figure 2.** Psychology averaged slightly higher than competent (score of 3) on most dimensions, while History and Sociology scored at competent or slightly below.

### Results: Frequency of Scores for Each Dimension

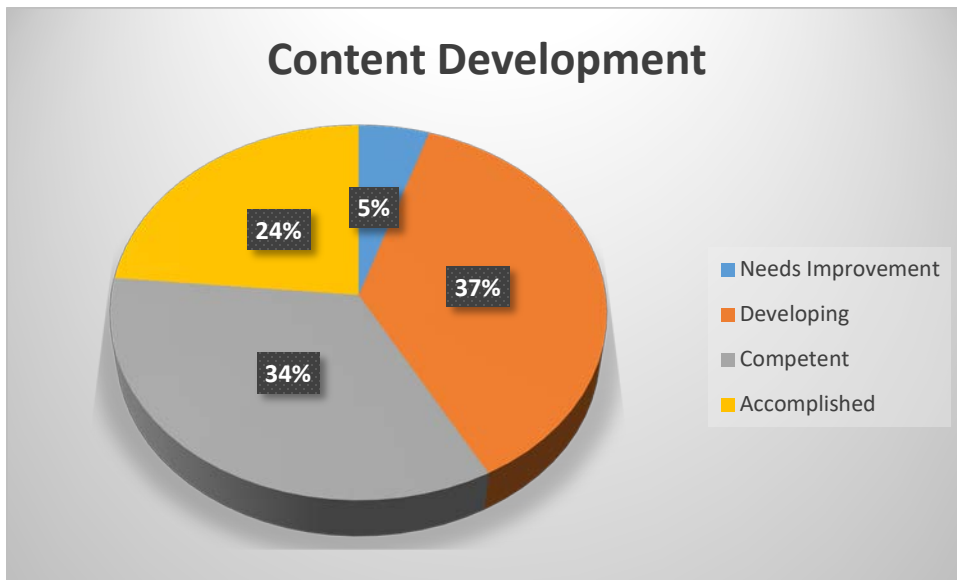
The next set of scores show what percentage of your students are performing at each level on the dimensions measured. Based on our rubric, the scores can be interpreted as follows:

- 4: These students are performing well above the minimum level of competence.
- 3: These students are performing at or slightly above the minimum level of competence.

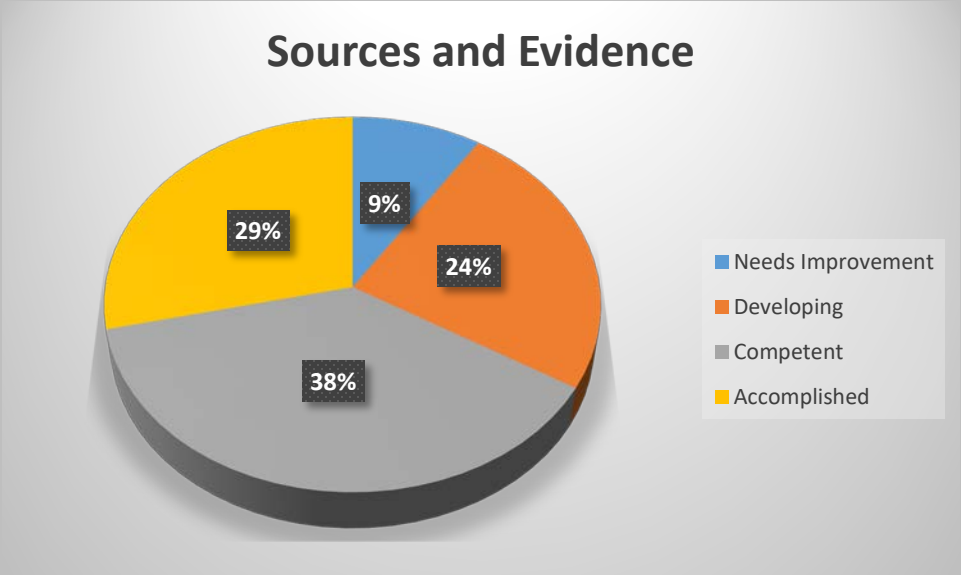
- 2: These students are performing slightly to somewhat below the minimum level of competence, but are developing toward it.
- 1: These students are performing well below the minimum level of competence.



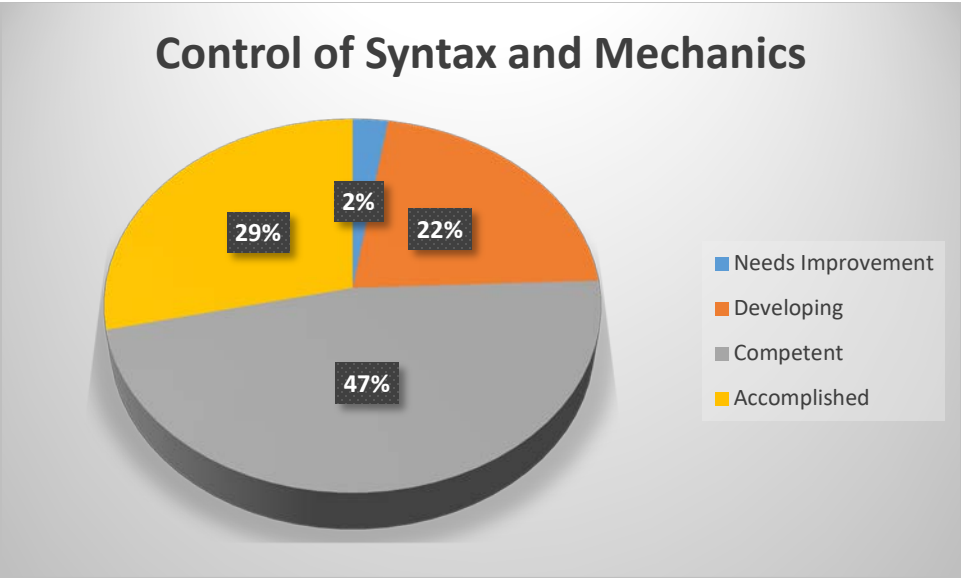
**Figure 3.** Your students do an okay job consider context, audience, and purpose in their writing, with 73% of them scoring competent or better on this dimension.



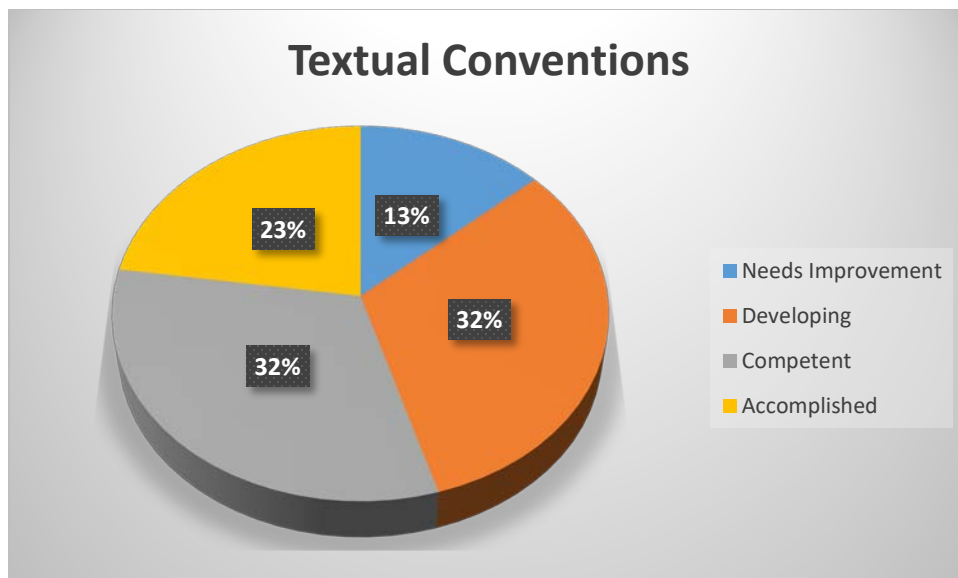
**Figure 4.** 58% of your students use appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work. Most of the remaining students seem to be on their way.



**Figure 5.** 67% of your students demonstrate consistent use of credible, relevant sources to support ideas that are situated within the discipline and genre of the writing. 33% need work finding and using good sources.



**Figure 6.** 76% of your students use appropriate and correct language, syntax and tone and achieve clarity throughout their writing, with few errors that impede meaning. 24% of your students need work in this area.



**Figure 7.** A bit more than half of your students consistently use important textual conventions particular to your discipline and write like Sociologists. 45% of them need work.

#### *What Your Students Are Doing Well, What Needs Work*

Your students are doing well in a number of areas, especially Context of and Purpose for Writing. They generally understand the tasks being assigned to them and are writing in ways that are appropriate for their audience.

About 75% of your students perform adequately or above in the area of correctness, 58% in the area of content development, and 67% in finding and using good sources.

The area that needs most work is textual conventions. The results suggest that your students are generally composing grammatically correct sentences and paragraphs, but only a little more than half of them are writing like Sociologists and using your field's disciplinary conventions correctly.

#### **Results: Qualitative Comments and Impressions From Our Scorers**

Every ten papers, scorers noted trends that they saw in the papers, areas where students were consistently having problems. Here is what they found:

- Paragraph structuring is an issue for most students.
- Thesis statement and research question lacking in many.
- Academic sources = problem area.
  - In general, these papers need more emphasis on the research that is really out there. Some papers had only one source per topic. While a few papers questioned the validity of the research, the majority did not or did a poor job.
  - Overall, my impression is that these students often used primary sources that were short and were from textbooks that they had used in previous classes. They did not go and look for more difficult and longer sources. They relied on excerpts and short text.
- They also overgeneralized their arguments. Just because one person said something, it does not have to be true for a whole gender/race/social class.

#### **What We Can Do Now**

The Writing Across the Curriculum program can help you develop professional development opportunities for your instructors that address these findings. We can provide stipends for instructors

both inside and outside your department to develop workshops (for example, Psychology instructors might be tapped to develop workshops on how to help to help students find and assess sources). And we can offer stipends for your faculty to attend them.

Based on the findings from this assessment, we could develop workshops on the following topics:

- How to help your students understand and use the conventions of your discipline – how to argue and write like a Sociologist.

## **Appendices**

### **Methodology**

Three readers scored 125 sample papers, with each paper being read and scored twice. All papers were randomly assigned and scored anonymously, and readers did not know the scores given by other readers. Papers were read and scored online, with all scores submitted via a Qualtrics survey. Scorers were asked to write down general impressions and note trends after every ten papers they read.

The following number of papers were scored from each discipline:

- History: 27
- Psychology: 36
- Sociology: 62

The following faculty members scored the papers:

- Mary Wilson (History)
- Jason DeHaan (Sociology)
- Tracy DeHaan (Sociology)

All scorers read both inside and outside their own disciplines.

### **Raw Data Available for Download on WAC Website**

Raw data, as well as copies of all assessment reports, are available at the following address:

[www.sjsu.edu/wac/assessment](http://www.sjsu.edu/wac/assessment)

### **Rubric**

All papers were scored using the SJSU Written Communication rubric. The rubric is based on the AAC&U Values rubric and is customized in consultation with disciplinary specialists to fit the disciplines being assessed. Copies of the blank SJSU Written Communication Rubric and the customized one used for this assessment are attached.

Dimension	1 Needs Improvement	2 Developing	3 Competent	4 Accomplished
<b>Context of and Purpose for Writing</b>	Demonstrates <b>minimal attention to context</b> , audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., expectation of instructor or self as audience).	Demonstrates <b>awareness of context</b> , audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., begins to show awareness of audience's perceptions and assumptions).	Demonstrates <b>adequate consideration of context</b> , audience, and purpose and a clear focus on the assigned task(s) (e.g., the task aligns with audience, purpose, and context).	Demonstrates a <b>thorough understanding of context</b> , audience, and purpose that is responsive to the assigned task(s) and focuses all elements of the work.
<b>Content Development</b>	Uses <b>appropriate and relevant content</b> to develop <b>simple ideas in no or very few parts</b> of the work.	Uses <b>appropriate and relevant content</b> to <b>develop and explore ideas through most of the work</b> .	Uses <b>appropriate, relevant, and compelling content</b> to <b>explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work</b> .	Uses <b>appropriate, relevant, and compelling content</b> to <b>illustrate mastery</b> of the subject, conveying the writer's understanding, and <b>shaping the whole work</b> .
<b>Sources</b>	Demonstrates <b>an attempt to use sources</b> to support ideas in the writing.	Demonstrates <b>an attempt to use credible and/or relevant sources</b> to support ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing.	Demonstrates <b>consistent use of credible, relevant sources</b> to support ideas that are situated within the discipline and genre of the writing.	Demonstrates <b>skillful use of high-quality, credible, relevant sources</b> to develop ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing
<b>Control of Syntax and Mechanics</b>	Uses language that <b>sometimes impedes</b> meaning because of <b>many errors in usage</b> .	Uses language and syntax that <b>generally conveys</b> meaning to readers with clarity, although writing <b>may include some minor errors</b> that impede meaning and/or clarity.	Uses appropriate language, syntax and tone and <b>achieves clarity throughout with few errors that impede meaning</b> . Syntax may not be as robust as a 4.	<b>A robust array of sentence structures and language choices</b> demonstrate mastery of genre conventions, tone and clarity, and are virtually error-free.
<b>Textual Conventions</b>	<b>Attempts to use</b> a consistent system for basic organization and presentation.	<b>Follows expectations</b> appropriate to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s) for basic organization, content, and presentation	<b>Demonstrates consistent use</b> of important conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s), including organization, presentation, and stylistic choices	<b>Demonstrates detailed attention to and successful execution</b> of a wide range of conventions appropriate to the discipline including organization, presentation, and stylistic choices

Before we begin reading and scoring papers from a particular discipline, please consider the following questions and modify / add to the rubric.

**Discipline:**

<p>What is the context and purpose for these kinds of papers?</p>	
<p>What content (arguments, data, ideas) is appropriate and relevant for this discipline?</p>	<p>Is this a Sociological argument? Expands beyond the individual to institutional and/or systemic influences and causes. Research begins in society. An isolated example does not count as data. Anecdotes don't really count. Context is vital all the time.</p> <p>History – Analyze the evidence you introduce. Interpret, explain, and analyze it back to your thesis. Why did you choose this evidence to support this, and why? Research has to relate back to culture and society in the past. Can relate to the individual or the bigger picture. Can be either. Context is vital all the time.</p> <p>Psychology looks more at the individual. Only social psych looks at social conditions. Others look more at brain and chemical imbalances. Research begins and ends in the individual. Evidence based on research.</p>
<p>What are credible and relevant sources for this discipline?</p>	<p>Peer reviewed papers and articles and books. University presses and respected publishers are best.</p> <p>Academic or government websites. For data about social problems.</p> <p>Data and evidence from reputable think tanks and university centers. Also nonprofits.</p> <p>History: Primary sources. Includes anything from memoirs to diaries to letters to archeology. Films, other primary sources.</p>
<p>What are the textual conventions of this discipline? Specify the expectations (and what is appropriate) of this discipline in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization</li> <li>• Content</li> <li>• Presentation</li> <li>• Formatting</li> <li>• Stylistic choices</li> </ul>	<p>Sociology: ASA. (Less commas, spell out fist names. Slightly different order on reference page. Then like APA.)</p> <p>Psychology: APA</p> <p>History: Turabian version of Chicago style. Focused on signaling and citing. Clear who is talking. Lotsa footnotes or endnotes. Historians don't leave breadcrumbs, they leave obvious radioactive BB's so others can find their sources.</p> <p>No 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person in any of these. Prefer active, but occasional passive is okay.</p> <p>History: Can write in past or present tense, must just be consistent.</p> <p>Sociology: Just be consistent in tense.</p> <p>SOC/PSYC: Need headings and subheadings that are thematic. Organize thematically, NOT chronologically.</p> <p>HIST: No headings less than 15-20 pages. Usually not chronological. Set up a thesis and follow it with one focused, long argument.</p>

	<p>HIST: Quotes are not generally used. Paraphrase and summarize. If you do quote, use brackets to fit the quote into the context of the sentence and ellipses, too, if you removed anything.</p> <p>PSYC/SOC: Use quotes sparingly. Only when it is absolutely necessary.</p> <p>Quotes need to be explained. Can't just fall from the sky into the paper. All paraphrasing and summarizing has to be signaled.</p> <p>Papers are generally double-spaced. Long block quotes get single space.</p> <p>History footnotes are single space, double space between notes. Smaller font than original font.</p>
<p>What else would you like to know about your students' writing in this discipline? Possibilities include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documentation systems</li> <li>• Collaborative writing</li> </ul>	

**Note:** Information Literacy will be assessed using a separate rubric (AAC&U Value Rubric). Readers will score a paper for Written Communication, then flip back through it and score for Information Literacy.

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<b>Context of and Purpose for Writing</b>	Demonstrates <b>minimal attention to context</b> , audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., expectation of instructor or self as audience).	Demonstrates <b>awareness of context</b> , audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., begins to show awareness of audience's perceptions and assumptions).	Demonstrates <b>adequate consideration of context</b> , audience, and purpose and a clear focus on the assigned task(s) (e.g., the task aligns with audience, purpose, and context).	Demonstrates a <b>thorough understanding of context</b> , audience, and purpose that is responsive to the assigned task(s) and focuses all elements of the work.
<b>Content Development</b>	Uses <b>appropriate and relevant content</b> to develop <b>simple ideas in some parts</b> of the work.	Uses <b>appropriate and relevant content</b> to <b>develop and explore ideas through most of the work</b> .	Uses <b>appropriate, relevant, and compelling content</b> to <b>explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work</b> .	Uses <b>appropriate, relevant, and compelling content</b> to <b>illustrate mastery</b> of the subject, conveying the writer's understanding, and <b>shaping the whole work</b> .
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<p>What are credible and relevant sources for this discipline?</p>	
<p>What are the textual conventions of this discipline? Specify the expectations (and what is appropriate) of this discipline in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization</li> <li>• Content</li> <li>• Presentation</li> <li>• Formatting</li> <li>• Stylistic choices</li> </ul>	
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