

Written Communication: Understanding Achievement of Institutional and General Education Learning Outcomes

Cal Poly Pomona is deeply committed to ensuring an educational experience that fosters student learning and success for every student. As part of that commitment, every year, the Office of Assessment and Program Review will select Undergraduate Learning Outcomes to examine. This year, we are focusing on the Written Communication and Information Literacy outcomes. This report summarizes the direct evidence of student achievement of **Written Communication** skills based on the institutional learning outcome (using verbal, written, visual and listening skills to communicate persuasively and coherently and the general education student learning outcome (write effectively for various audiences). In addition, responses to related questions on the 2017 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) are presented as indirect evidence.

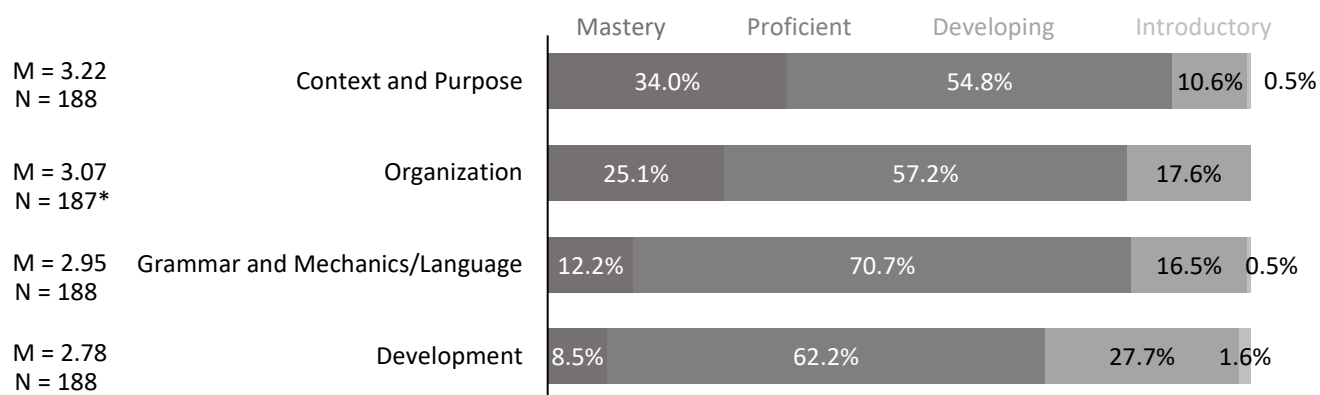
Direct Evidence: Written Communication Rubric

This year the Office of Assessment and Program Review pilot tested a new assessment approach. In spring 2019 faculty from each of the eight colleges and the library provided the Office of Assessment and Program Review with assignment descriptions and written artifacts from their students with senior-standing for scoring with the Written Communication Rubric (Appendix). A random sample of 188 artifacts written by seniors representing the eight colleges was selected for scoring with the Written Communication Rubric. Identifying information (e.g., names, course details) was then redacted from artifacts in the sample.

In early summer 2019, 15 faculty members from multiple departments and colleges participated in a norming session prior to applying the rubric to the written artifacts. Over a two-day period, each artifact was independently read and scored by two faculty members. If there was a discrepancy greater than two points in scores, the artifact was scored by a third reviewer. Scores were calculated by computing an average for each criterion, which was then rounded down to a whole number.

The Written Communication Rubric defined written communication through four components and four levels of performance. The chart below displays the percentage of students who scored at each level of achievement.

Written Communication Rubric Scores
Percentage of Students at each Achievement Level



*Please note the smaller sample size for organization is due to an artifact that did not demonstrate the rubric component.

Additional statistical analyses were undertaken to compare students by gender, URM status, and first-generation status. No statistically significant differences were found.

Indirect Evidence: National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

The NSSE assesses the extent to which students engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development. The data provided below are from CPP's 2017 participation.

Both CPP freshmen and seniors reported that they have prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in significantly less often than their peers in the comparison groups. However, both CPP freshmen and seniors reported that their experience at CPP contributed approximately "Quite a Bit" to their development in writing clearly and effectively, which was similar to their peers in comparison groups.

Written Communication: NSSE Item Scores

During the current school year, how often have you:					
1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Very Often		Mean Response			
		CPP	IPEDS	CSU	Carnegie Class
Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in?	FY	2.40	2.47*	2.57*	2.53*
	SR	2.28	2.37*	2.41*	2.46*

*Please note that these scores are significantly different from the corresponding CPP score, $p < .05$

To what extent has your experience at this institution:					
1 = Very Little, 2 = Some, 3 = Quite a Bit, 4 = Very Much		Mean Response			
		CPP	IPEDS	CSU	Carnegie Class
Contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in writing clearly and effectively?	FY	2.81	2.82	2.86	2.86
	SR	2.98	2.96	3.00	3.05

Summary

Overall, the evidence from the NSSE and the Written Communication Rubric scores presents a mixed picture regarding the level of achievement for students at CPP.

Scores on the Written Communication Rubric indicate that the vast majority of seniors were scored as writing at the "Proficient" level across all four components of the Rubric. In fact, 83% of seniors performed at the "Mastery" and "Proficient" levels on Grammar and Mechanics. On the NSSE, while CPP seniors reported that their institution contributed "Quite a Bit" to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in writing clearly, but they also reported only "Sometimes" preparing two or more drafts of papers and assignments before turning them in. Preparing a draft before writing the finalized product not only increases the efficiency of the writing process, but also the quality of the finished product (e.g., Glynn, Britton, Muth, & Dogan, 1982; Kellogg, 1988).

It is important to consider the educational experience of the students when examining their level of achievement on a learning outcome. For instance, classes are required to have writing assignments as part of their curriculum; however, we might consider the type and rigor of writing assignments that are provided. It is also important to examine the types of feedback provided to students regarding their writing skills throughout the curriculum.

Improving Student Learning

Discussing this report with faculty and/or staff in your program will help to determine the program-level actions needed in order to improve student achievement in the Written Communication outcome. If you have evidence of learning for a related program outcome, you might include it in your discussion of the University evidence.

As you review the Written Communication evidence, here are a few questions that you might consider:

- For which components of Written Communication do you feel students demonstrated satisfactory levels of achievement?
- For which components of Written Communication do you feel students need to improve?
- What types of assignments are used in your program to develop student's ability to write effectively for various audiences?
 - What format do you require students to use for written assignments (e.g., essay, question and answer, structured report)?
 - What are the page length requirements?
 - Do you review drafts of the written assignment and provide constructive feedback?
- What modifications to your courses or program can be made to ensure students are learning to write effectively and improve on the components you identified as needing improvement? While not an exhaustive list, typical categories of changes made as a result of assessment evidence include modifications to:
 - Curriculum (e.g., add a course or change the sequence of courses)
 - Pedagogy (e.g., require more written assignments, require drafts of written assignments, dedicate a specific amount of class time to a skill you identified as needing improvement, incorporate a class activity to enhance student learning)
 - Resources allocation (e.g., establish a standard syllabus for a key course, develop a departmental peer tutoring program)
- What recommendations do you have for CPP to improve student's written communication skills?
- Do you have any suggestions for improving the methodology used for the pilot assessment approach followed this year?

It is important that you keep a record of the decisions you make about the evidence, and the actions you take to improve Written Communication skills. The Office of Assessment and Program Review will request this information as a follow-up to this report.

References

- Glynn, S. M., Britton, B. K., Muth, K. D., & Dogan, N. (1982). Writing and revising persuasive documents: Cognitive demands. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 74, 557-567. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.74.4.557
- Kellogg, R. T. (1988). Attentional overload and writing performance: Effects of rough draft and outline strategies. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 14, 355-365. doi: 10.1037/0278-7393.14.2.355

Appendix

Written Communication Rubric

Evaluation Criteria	Mastery (4 pt.)	Proficient (3 pt.)	Developing (2 pt.)	Introductory (1 pt.)
Context and Purpose for Writing	Demonstrates thorough consideration for the context, audience, genre, and purpose of the assigned task(s).	Demonstrates adequate consideration for the context, audience, genre, and purpose of the assigned task(s).	Demonstrates inconsistent consideration for the context, audience, genre, and purpose of the assigned task(s).	Demonstrates minimal consideration for the context, audience, genre, and purpose of the assigned task(s).
Organization	Organization of key ideas fully supports the thesis/purpose of the written work (introduction, body and conclusion).	Organization of key ideas supports the thesis/purpose of the written work (introduction, body and conclusion), however there is a disproportional emphasis from one idea to another.	Organization of key ideas partially supports the thesis/purpose of the written work (introduction, body and conclusion) and there is a disproportional emphasis from one idea to another.	Organization of key ideas does not supports the thesis/purpose (introduction, body and conclusion) and ideas may be random.
Development	Development of ideas is logical with sophisticated transitions.	Development of ideas could use improvement and transitions are mostly appropriate.	Development of ideas is random and transitions are sequential (such as first, second, third, etc.) rather than sophisticated/logic based.	Development of ideas is not aligned to the task, random and lacks transitions.
Grammar and Mechanics/Language	Writing is nearly error free.	Writing contains a few errors, which do not impede overall understanding.	Writing may include errors, which confuse the reader but do not impede overall understanding.	Writing contains many errors, which impedes overall understanding.