

English

Students need to engage texts critically and identify a theme or idea. They must be able to identify these before they can move on to any deeper analysis.

Faculty Viewpoint

Knowledge & Skills Foundations

Students who perform well and derive the greatest benefit from entry-level university English courses are students who are prepared for thoughtful study, students who are engaged in the material and the process of learning, students who are curious, persistent and realistic. The following discussion presents in greater detail the skills and attributes that help make these students successful.

Reading, Comprehension & Literature

Successful students connect reading to writing and thinking skills. Reading is an active process that, if done well, involves asking questions and noticing patterns along the way. Active reading includes making notes, summarizing and critiquing the material. Many students read in a mechanical manner—just following the words on the page—instead of using active reading strategies.

Once students understand what it means to be active readers, their next step is to think critically about what they have read. Successful students recognize an effective thesis and how it is constructed. Reading is interactive and leads to experiential and literary connections. Successful students are prepared to answer questions such as, “How does this text make you feel?” and “What features of the text made you feel this way?”

It is important, too, to be able to take a position about the material and defend that position in a discussion. Students need to realize that one piece of writing can evoke a

variety of interpretations and that subjectivity, including personal experience and opinion, influences possible reactions.

The ability to paraphrase reading assignments shows whether a student comprehends the material. Paraphrasing requires that students pay close attention to and understand both the literal meanings and connotations of words. While reading, successful students decide which pieces of information are important and relevant to the current assignment, noting the specific points that support the argument they plan to present.

Students who are ready for introductory literature courses come to the university familiar with a range of world literature. They are aware of major U.S. and British authors—both men and women—and representative literary works from a variety of cultural traditions. These students have had exposure to non-literary sources as well: documents such as the Magna Carta or the Declaration of Independence. With that exposure, students have a better understanding of the range of writing from which their literature courses will draw.

Awareness of cultural contexts is important, but students need to be familiar with literary forms and genres, as well. The ability to distinguish between different forms and genres of writing is crucial. Students should be able to recognize forms, such as a novel, poem, play, essay, short story, and be able to identify what makes a biography different from a novel, or a short story different from an essay. To understand the purposes and possibilities of various forms, students need to be able to tell the difference between genres: comedy, epic, tragedy, romance and others.

Writing & Editing

Grammar is the basis for good writing. Good writing demands that writers consistently use proper sentence structure. Students in college are expected to know how to diagram a sentence and recognize how this process helps them understand words and their functions within a sentence. It is also important to understand the specific ways correct grammar makes writing clearer and helps communicate more effectively.

Students should know basic grammatical terminology and the parts of speech. They should distinguish between clauses, phrases and complete sentences. The mechanics of writing is simply a subset of writing skills.

Faculty Viewpoint

All students can benefit from more attention to writing mechanics. A review of work samples from students in entry-level courses reveals a high level and array of grammatical errors. In order to succeed in and benefit from writing and literature courses, students must have a good grasp of writing conventions.

Good writers use language to express ideas, not simply to describe events. Student writing must be coherent, and students need to think rhetorically when they write, consider the audience, carefully select the evidence used to support ideas, cogently present the

overall argument and understand the purposes of their writing. To achieve this, successful students write an outline before they start the larger piece, then use the outline as a tool to develop a detailed structure, as well as a guide while writing.

Successful students also understand how to support an argument well enough that a strong position emerges, while at the same time understand the consequences of taking a particular position. Defending a position requires an attuned knowledge of the material—which also tends to improve students' ability to think about what they write.

Writing is just the beginning. Editing is the most important part of the writing process. Going through several drafts of a particular paper is routine for a college-level assignment. Often, students rely too heavily on the computer spell-checker in place of references and careful revision. Students need to be able to proofread, check for mistakes on their own and appreciate the value of the revision and re-writing processes. These processes improve writing ability; they help students be better writers and improve grades on written assignments.

Information Gathering: Notes & Research

Students are expected to take useful notes during the many lectures they attend during their first year of college. To be useful, a set of notes should be more than just a transcript of what a professor has said. It is all too common for many new college students simply to fill up pages without sufficiently evaluating the relative quality and importance of the information delivered by the instructor. Students are expected to pay close attention and engage with presented materials, both written and verbal. This requires taking in information, analyzing it and recording that which is meaningful and useful.



A huge part of the information gathering process takes place outside of the classroom. Successful students know how to make a research plan and carry it out: What questions need to be asked, who has the knowledge and authority to answer them and what sources can be used to answer those questions? Also, students should have, or at least be able to develop quickly, the following skills:

1. The ability to identify a source. Students must understand what plagiarism is and understand the ethics of writing. It is essential to know what borrowing ideas from other authors means, how to paraphrase properly and how to cite sources.
2. The ability to distinguish the degree of quality and reliability of information. Many students often accept unreliable information from the Internet or other unverified sources.
3. The ability to connect information from sources to support an argument. Students need to know the difference between primary and secondary sources and ask themselves whether the evidence they have found is weak or strong, and how that evidence helps create a cogent argument.
4. The ability to be disciplined in doing research, regardless of what the field may be. The humanities use good research, just as the sciences do.

Students should have read English, American and world literatures and know many of the important authors and key works. They should be able to identify a literature's country of origin.

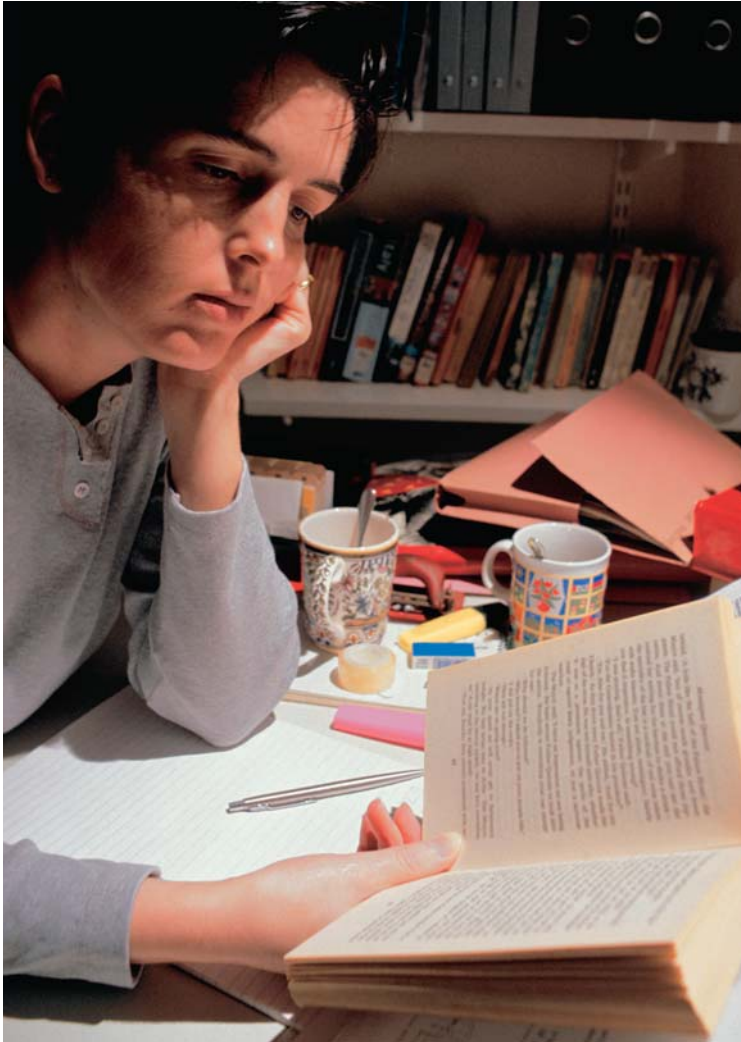
Faculty Viewpoint



Analysis, Critique & Connections

In addition to the ability to engage in reading and to present a solid structure and argument in writing, students need to think analytically about the information they collect. Students should be able to:

1. Categorize information thematically. Doing so allows students to see the larger constructs inherent in the information and see the relationships between ideas and attendant concepts and theories. Then, students can identify the main message and avoid becoming overwhelmed by details.
2. Go beyond facts presented in readings or lectures. Students must allow questions to emerge from the text, identify connections with other concepts they have learned and imagine alternatives to a text's final content message or conclusion.
3. Be aware of the difference(s) between summary and description, and interpretation and analysis.



4. Move between general and specific ideas when analyzing information.
5. Think comparatively and make connections across texts and points of view, enriching and expanding the understanding of the materials.

Once the information is gathered and the analysis process is underway, the most important skill to employ is critical reflection. Critical reflection goes beyond “I liked it,” or “I didn’t like it.” When asked to evaluate a piece of writing, students are expected to answer questions

that do not necessarily have right or wrong answers. This requires reflective and critical thinking. It is crucial that students be able to discuss questions in depth and effectively defend a position based on their analysis of the material.

At the college level, students must also be able to accept constructive criticism of their own work without taking it personally. Many students are unable or unwilling to argue effectively, nor can they differentiate between criticism and critique. To succeed in discussion classes and written work, critical skills are essential.

Students need to be willing to receive a critique of their work without perceiving it as an attack on their integrity, intelligence or creativity. A good refutation of your argument is not a personal attack; it does not mean that you are talentless or a bad person.

Faculty Viewpoint

Successful students are able to integrate personal experiences and knowledge with the material they encounter in their coursework. Information comes from a variety of sources—whether it is from a different class or department, personal observation or public knowledge, students should be able to connect ideas and concepts across sources. Making such connections helps students understand the interdisciplinary nature of knowledge.

Successful students have opinions. They are able to assert their opinions and ask bold questions. By thinking out their opinions, students develop a consciousness and a distinct voice. At the same time, students need to understand that “I” statements are rarely acceptable in formal academic writing. Opinions may be a good thing, but they need to be substantiated and supported by empirical evidence.

Orientation Towards Learning

Time management is a key part of research, coursework and effective participation. College level study often takes more time than students are prepared to spend. Incoming students must learn how to set aside enough time for reading and study and to understand that some assignments take many hours. The ability to start early and to budget time effectively are essential skills.

Students who participate in public discourse—by reading newspapers, following the course of world events and considering how those events play out in the U.S.—are ready to participate in academic discussion. Such discussion requires give and take, and students should have ideas and questions to add to the conversation. It is necessary for students to ask questions and to understand why it is important to do so. To benefit from material presented in classes, students need to be engaged with their instructors and to ask questions that go beyond what is presented in class.

Young students are often quick to make broad generalizations. What they tend not to deal with are the specifics. They don't know that you're supposed to support positions with references. They can say the world is screwed up, but think they can leave it at that without being more specific.

Faculty Viewpoint

To be able to discuss a piece of literature, students must have a basic understanding of its place in history. Placing text in its historical context can help students understand where they themselves fit and how societal contexts influence writing and thinking.

The same applies to geography: To understand fully the impact of a piece of literature, students must be able to place it

in a geographical context. Students must understand how that geographic setting influences the content of the work.

Students need to be open-minded and willing to consider a variety of viewpoints, texts and phenomena that may differ from what they may have learned before. Such open-mindedness helps students understand the ways in which knowledge is constructed. It broadens student perspectives and helps students deal with the novelty and ambiguity often found in new materials.

I wish students had a willingness to go deeper, to get beneath the surface of the text or the surface of the argument and discover what the substance is. I wish they were willing to try to do that more often.

Faculty Viewpoint

As tasks become more challenging, it is often difficult for new college students to maintain acceptable levels of attention and application. It is essential that students approach their work with an open mind and willingness to push forward. Students are almost always capable of following through; more often, they are simply unwilling to try and keep trying.

Students do well if they appreciate what college is—and what it is not. They must understand academic expectations and the realities of college life, including the need to apply themselves and work hard. College is a process of learning, not a series of obligatory hurdles towards a degree. The students who appreciate the need to persevere and think independently are in the best position to succeed.

English Standards

*= Items with an asterisk are those expected of students who plan to major in these fields of study (English, comparative literature, writing).

I. Reading & Comprehension

A. Successful students employ reading skills and strategies to understand literature. They:

- A.1. engage in an analytic process to enhance comprehension and create personal meaning when reading text. This includes the ability to annotate, question, agree or disagree, summarize, critique and formulate a personal response.
- A.2. make supported inferences and draw conclusions based on textual features, seeking such evidence in text, format, language use, expository structures and arguments used.
- A.3. use reading skills and strategies to understand a variety of types of literature, such as epic pieces (for instance, the *Iliad*) and lyric poems, as well as narrative novels and philosophical pieces.
- A.4. understand plot and character development in literature, including character motive, causes for actions and the credibility of events.
- A.5.* identify basic beliefs, perspectives and philosophical assumptions underlying an author's work. This includes identifying points of view, attitudes and the values conveyed by specific use of language.
- A.6.* exercise a variety of strategies to understand the origins and meanings of new words, including analysis of word roots and the determination of word derivations.

- A.7.* recognize and comprehend narrative terminology and techniques, such as author versus narrator, stated versus implied author and historical versus present-day reader.

B. Successful students use reading skills and strategies to understand informational texts. They:

- B.1. understand instructions for software, job descriptions, college applications, historical documents, government publications, newspapers and textbooks.
- B.2. use monitoring and self-correction, as well as reading aloud, as means to ensure comprehension.
- B.3. understand vocabulary and content, including subject-area terminology; connotative and denotative meanings; and idiomatic meanings.
- B.4. exercise a variety of strategies to understand the origins and meanings of new words, including recognition of cognates and contextual clues.

C. Successful students are able to understand the defining characteristics of texts and to recognize a variety of literary forms and genres. They:

- C.1. comprehend the salient characteristics of major types and genres of texts, such as novels, short stories, horror stories, science fiction, biographies, autobiographies, poems and plays.
- C.2. understand the formal constraints of different types of texts and can distinguish between, for example, a Shakespearean sonnet and a poem written in free verse.
- C.3. are able to discuss with understanding the effects of an

author's style and use of literary devices to influence the reader and evoke emotions. This includes devices such as imagery, characterization, choice of narrator, use of sound, formal and informal language, allusions, symbols, irony, voice, flashbacks, foreshadowing, time and sequence and mood.

- C.4. are able to identify archetypes, such as universal destruction, journeys and tests and banishment, which appear across a variety of types of literature, including American literature, world literature, myths, propaganda and religious texts.
- C.5. are able to discuss with understanding themes such as initiation, love and duty, heroism and death and rebirth that appear across a variety of literary works and genres.
- C.6. use aesthetic qualities of style, such as diction or mood, as a basis to evaluate literature that contains ambiguities, subtleties or contradictions.

D. Successful students are familiar with a range of world literature. They:

- D.1. demonstrate familiarity with major literary periods of English and American literature and their characteristic forms, subjects and authors.
- D.2. demonstrate familiarity with authors from literary traditions beyond the English-speaking world.
- D.3. demonstrate familiarity with major works of literature produced by American and British authors.

E. Successful students are able to discuss with understanding the relationships between literature and its historical and social contexts. They:

- E.1. know major historical events that may be encountered in literature.
- E.2. demonstrate familiarity with the concept that historical, social and economic contexts influence form, style and point of view; and that social influences affect an author's descriptions of character, plot and setting.
- E.3. demonstrate familiarity with the concept of the relativity of all historical perspectives, including their own.
- E.4. are able to discuss with understanding the relationships between literature and politics, including the political assumptions underlying an author's work and the impact of literature on political movements and events.





F. Successful students are able to read and interpret visual images, including charts and graphs. They:

- F.1. identify the primary elements of the types of charts, graphs and visual media that occur most commonly in texts.
- F.2. interpret accurately the content of charts, graphs and visual media that occur in texts.

II. Writing

A. Successful students apply basic grammar conventions in an effort to write clearly. They:

- A.1. identify and use correctly and consistently parts of speech, including nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, adjectives and interjections.
- A.2. use subject-verb agreement and verb tense consistently and correctly.

- A.3. demonstrate consistent, correct and appropriate pronoun agreement and the use of different types of clauses and phrases, including adverb clauses, adjective clauses and adverb phrases.

B. Successful students know conventions of punctuation and capitalization. They:

- B.1. use commas with nonrestrictive clauses and contrasting expressions.
- B.2. use ellipses, colons, hyphens, semi-colons, apostrophes and quotation marks correctly.
- B.3. capitalize sentences and proper nouns correctly.
- B.4. consistently avoid run-on sentences and sentence fragments.

C. Successful students know conventions of spelling. They:

- C.1. use a dictionary and other resources to spell new, unfamiliar or difficult words.
- C.2. differentiate between commonly confused terms, such as “its” and “it’s” or “affect” and “effect.”
- C.3. know how to use the spell-checker and grammar check function in word processing software while understanding the limitations of relying upon these tools.

D. Successful students use writing conventions to write clearly and coherently. They:

- D.1. know and use several pre-writing strategies, including developing a focus; determining the purpose; planning a sequence of ideas; using structured overviews; and creating outlines.
- D.2. use paragraph structure in writing as manifested by the ability to construct coherent paragraphs and arrange paragraphs in logical order.
- D.3. use a variety of sentence structures appropriately in writing, including compound, complex, compound-complex, parallel, repetitive and analogous sentence structures.
- D.4. present ideas to achieve overall coherence and logical flow in writing and use appropriate techniques such as transitions and repetition to maximize cohesion.
- D.5. use words correctly; use words that mean what the writer intends to say; and use a varied vocabulary.
- D.6.* demonstrate development of a controlled yet unique style and voice in writing where appropriate.

- D.7.* use a style manual, such as the Modern Language Association (MLA) or the American Psychological Association (APA) to apply writing conventions and to create documentation formats in a manner consistent with the manual.

E. Successful students use writing to communicate ideas, concepts, emotions and descriptions to the reader. They:

- E.1. know the difference between a topic and a thesis.
- E.2. articulate a position through a thesis statement and advance it using evidence, examples and counterarguments that are relevant to the audience or issue at hand.
- E.3. use a variety of methods to develop arguments, including compare-contrast reasoning; logical arguments (inductive-deductive); and alternation between general and specific (e.g., connections between public knowledge and personal observation and experience).
- E.4. write to persuade the reader by anticipating and addressing counterarguments, by using rhetorical devices and by developing an accurate and expressive style of communication that moves beyond mechanics to add flair and elegance to writing.
- E.5. use a variety of strategies to adapt writing for different audiences and purposes, such as including appropriate content and using appropriate language, style, tone and structure.
- E.6. distinguish between formal and informal styles, for example, between academic essays and personal memos.

- E.7. use appropriate strategies and formats to write personal and business correspondence, including appropriate organizational patterns, formal language and tone.
- E.8.* use appropriate strategies to write expository essays that employ supporting evidence; use information from primary and secondary sources; incorporate charts, graphs, tables and illustrations where appropriate; anticipate and address readers' biases and expectations; and explain technical terms and notations.
- E.9.* use strategies to write fictional, autobiographical, and biographical narratives that include a well-developed point of view and literary elements; present events in logical sequence; convey a unifying theme or tone; use concrete and sensory language; and pace action.

F. Successful students both use and prioritize a variety of strategies to revise and edit written work to achieve maximum improvement in the time available. They:

- F.1. employ basic editing skills proficiently to identify obvious mechanical errors, clarify and improve the structure of the piece and sharpen language and meaning.
- F.2. review ideas and structure in substantive ways to improve depth of information and logic of organization.
- F.3. reassess appropriateness of writing in light of genre, purpose and audience.
- F.4. use feedback from others to revise written work.

III. Research Skills

A. Successful students understand and use research methodologies. They:

- A.1. formulate research questions, refine topics, develop a plan for research and organize what is known about the topic.
- A.2. use research to support and develop their own opinions, as opposed to simply restating existing information or opinions.
- A.3. identify claims in their writing that require outside support or verification.
- A.4.* identify through research the major concerns and debates in a given community or field of inquiry and address these in their writing.

B. Successful students know how to find a variety of sources and use them properly. They:

- B.1. collect information to develop a topic and support a thesis.
- B.2. understand the difference between primary and secondary sources.
- B.3. use a variety of print or electronic primary and secondary sources including books, magazines, newspapers, journals, periodicals and the Internet.
- B.4. understand the concept of plagiarism and how (or why) to avoid it and understand rules for paraphrasing, summarizing and quoting, as well as conventions for incorporating information from Internet-based sources in particular.
- B.5. evaluate sources of information located on the Internet in particular to ascertain their credibility, origin, potential bias, and overall quality.
- B.6. select relevant sources when writing research papers and appropriately include



information from such sources; logically introduce and incorporate quotations; synthesize information in a logical sequence; identify different perspectives; identify complexities and discrepancies in information; and offer support for conclusions.

- B.7.* evaluate sources critically, discerning the quality of the materials and qualifying the strength of the evidence and arguments, as well as determining credibility, identifying bias and perspective of the author and using prior knowledge of the source.

IV. Critical Thinking Skills

A. Successful students demonstrate connective intelligence. They:

- A.1. are able to discuss with understanding how personal experiences and values affect reading comprehension and interpretation.

- A.2.* demonstrate an ability to make connections between the component parts of a text and the larger theoretical structures, including presupposition, audience, purpose, writer's credibility or ethos, types of evidence or material being used and style.

B. Successful students demonstrate the ability to think independently. They:

- B.1. are comfortable formulating and expressing their own ideas.
- B.2. support their arguments with logic and evidence relevant to their audience and that explicates their position as fully as possible.
- B.3. understand fully the scope of their arguments and the claims underlying them.
- B.4. reflect on and assess the strengths and weaknesses of their ideas and the expression of those ideas.