

**GUIDE FOR THE
WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM
FACULTY SENATE COMMITTEE**

The Writing Across the Curriculum Program is supported by the Office of the Provost.



Writing Across the Curriculum

George Mason University

This guide offers faculty who sit on the Faculty Senate’s Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Committee a sense of the philosophy and goals that guide George Mason University’s WAC Program. We hope that it will also help to answer the common questions faculty may have and offer specific guidelines for participation on the WAC Committee and in fostering Mason’s “culture of writing.”

If you have any further questions, please contact Thomas Polk, Acting Director of the Writing Across the Curriculum Program, at tpolk2@gmu.edu.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

• The WAC Committee Charge	3
○ Committee Composition	
○ Committee Charge	
○ Meeting Logistics	
• Roles and Responsibilities of WAC Committee Members	5
○ Advocating for Writing	
• Roles and Responsibilities of the WAC Program Staff	6
○ Program Director	
○ Program Staff	
• WAC Committee Activities	7
○ Reviewing/Approving “Writing Intensive” Courses	
• Writing-Intensive Course Criteria	
• WI Course Approval Process	
• Voting on WI Courses	
○ Writing “Intensive” Versus “Writing Rich”	
• Description of the Writing Across the Curriculum Program	10
○ Program Mission and Goals	
○ Statement of National WAC Principles and Standards	
○ Local Goals for Student Writers	
○ WAC’s Institutional Location	
• Key Terms in WAC (adapted from Appalachian State University)	12

The Writing Across the Curriculum Committee Charge

Committee Composition

One elected representative from each of the academic units offering undergraduate degrees, the Director of the WAC Program who is an ex-officio member with no vote or possibility to chair the Committee.

Official Committee Charge

To advise and work closely with the University Coordinator of Writing Across the Curriculum on current and projected activities and events, and to assist departments in the identification and definition of writing-intensive courses in their curricula.

To:

- A. Articulate and refine the requirements for the course designated to fulfill the WI requirement in every undergraduate degree across the university with the purpose of establishing homogeneous WI criteria;
- B. Assist colleges, schools and institutes in the identification of existing or new courses that degree programs propose to meet the WI requirement in their curricula;
- C. Review regularly the courses' WI-syllabi to determine compliance with the WI requirement;
- D. Suggest ways to meet the WI requirement for faculty teaching the WI designated courses; and
- E. Assist with activities and events related to writing across the curriculum.

Membership

Representatives from each of Mason's colleges are recruited or self-identified during the summer months. Members are confirmed at the first Faculty Senate meeting of the new academic year.

Meeting Logistics

Meeting Schedule

The WAC Committee meets 4 to 8 times annually. Members will be contacted via email to establish the meeting schedule for the academic year. We do ask that members respond quickly so that WAC Program staff can confirm times/dates of meetings for each semester and schedule the necessary rooms.

Meeting Agendas

The week before the meeting, the WAC Committee Chair will send an email to all members of the Committee to share topics of discussion and to request additional agenda items. Syllabi or other materials that require discussion or a vote will be circulated via email prior to the meeting. We ask members to bring a tablet/laptop with them to the meeting to access these documents. It is helpful for members to read materials ahead of time in order to expedite discussions and voting.

Meeting Structure

During meetings, we follow loose parliamentary procedure. All votes (e.g. approval of WI courses or amendment of the WI course criteria) require a quorum.

The Committee meetings are run by the Chair of the Committee, who is responsible for moving the Committee through the agenda and soliciting votes on syllabi or other actions.

Generally, meetings begin with the introductions of attendees and a short discussion of writing-related matters. The agenda then moves to the most pressing topic for discussion, which is generally the approval of WI courses. Any other speakers or discussions are scheduled for the end of the meeting.

Past speakers have included Associate Provost for Graduate Education, Cody Edwards; Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education, Bethany Usher; and others.

Roles and Responsibilities of WAC Committee Members

Committee Member Responsibilities

- We ask that all members make a good faith effort to attend all meetings.
- Please let the Chair of the WAC Committee and the WAC Director know when/if you cannot attend a regularly scheduled meeting.
 - If you cannot attend a meeting that will entail the review of a WI course proposal, please review any WI course syllabi in advance of the meeting and submit your feedback to the WAC director via email so that your voice may be included in the discussion of the course.
- Please help us share information about events and initiatives related to writing and WI courses at Mason by forwarding email and/or communicating with your departmental colleagues about committee decisions and discussions.
- Any Committee Member who would like to suggest an agenda item may send it to the Committee Chair and WAC Director so that these ideas may be included on the agenda of the next meeting.

Advocating for Writing

Part of being a representative on the WAC Committee means being an advocate for writing in your college and across the university's programs, departments, and sites of instruction. We ask that you come to WAC Committee meetings prepared to discuss what's going on with writing in your school or college, and consider what you might bring back to your faculty members from our meetings.

Roles and Responsibilities of WAC Program Staff

From the Faculty Senate WAC Committee Charge: “The Director of the WAC Program . . . is an ex-officio member with no vote or possibility to chair the Committee.”

The WAC Program Director:

- Consults with faculty and departments who are proposing new or changing existing WI courses in the majors.
- Collects and distributes course proposal materials for all WI courses that will undergo Committee review.
- Provides the Committee’s feedback to faculty and departments, requesting changes if necessary or continuing to workshop syllabi to meet the WI Course Criteria.
- May lead working groups of Committee Members on small-scale projects.
- Coordinates the collection of WI Course Syllabi and other instructional artifacts to review and evaluate WI Courses.

The WAC Program staff will:

- Assist Committee Members in finding meeting times that allow the most Committee Members to meet consistently during the semester.
- Support the Committee in developing meeting agenda and Committee priorities.
- Reserve meeting rooms and provide technological support for meetings.
- Provide access to materials for consideration.
- Circulate communications (agenda, supplemental materials, and meeting minutes) as necessary.
- Keep a Master List of all approved WI Courses in coordination with the Office of the Registrar, the Mason Core Committee, and the Provost’s Office.
- Make the WI Course Criteria available to the Mason community at large.

WAC Committee Activities

What does the WAC Committee do? This section offers a general overview of the Committee's typical activities and processes.

Reviewing/Approving WI Courses

The WAC Committee oversees the "writing intensive course" approval process, ensuring that all proposed courses meet the requirements for the "WI" designation, as well as encouraging a strong culture of writing in the disciplines.

Each college has a representative on the WAC Committee, which ensures that all departments are represented in the decision-making process. The Committee's many consultants are experts in teaching writing and faculty development. They do not have voting power but offer vital perspective and insights into the design of courses and assignments.

Requirements for Writing-Intensive Courses

Section size is limited to 35.

However, the WAC Committee strongly encourages departments to set enrollments at 25 or lower. Lower student enrollments enable both instructors and students to meet WI goals successfully.

Faculty will devote significant time to instruction on writing in the course and on how to complete assignments successfully.

Detailed written assignments with explicit learning goals and evaluative criteria are strongly encouraged as part of this instruction. Expectations should be communicated for all types of writing, including writing in digital spaces, as appropriate to the assignment. For example, expectations for a blog or discussion post may vary depending on the purpose for the assignment and the discipline, and these distinctions and expectations should be made explicit.

Students are required to revise at least one substantive assignment in the course based on instructor feedback.

In courses in which students complete multiple short assignments of a similar nature (e.g., mathematical proofs) revision need not be required. However, instructor feedback should still be given so that students have the opportunity to improve. If the only assignment in the course is not due until the end of the course, it should be divided into sequenced sections that receive feedback and can be revised.

Students will receive instructor feedback on their writing.

Feedback should focus on how meaning is made in the discipline, including organizational strategies, written forms and conventions, appropriate evidence and source use, etc. The types of writing and the grade value assigned to them will vary according to the discipline and the assignment. *Note:* While peer feedback can also be a valuable part of the process, it does not replace instructor expertise.

All of the writing assignments in the course should count substantially toward students' final grades in the course. To this end, students should be asked to write a minimum of 3500 words, divided among two or more assignments.

Writing that specifically addresses and is graded on how well students address the content, intended audience, and rhetorical purposes can count towards the minimum word requirement.

WI Courses must be offered and taken in the major.

Departments are encouraged to develop WI Courses within the major as part of the core curriculum offered. In rare circumstances, a new and/or developing program may need to seek a temporary arrangement with a different department or unit to provide WI course credit to students. In this case, please contact the Director of the WAC Program to discuss the application and approval process.

WI Course Approval Process

All WI courses must be approved by the Faculty Senate's WAC Committee. Instructors are asked to work closely with the appointed departmental committee and/or representatives to be sure they are designing a course that truly fulfills the needs of students. The Director of the WAC Program is available for consultation at any time.

Anyone proposing a new course must do so through CourseLeaf, the University's curriculum management system. The applications asks departments to discuss how the course will satisfy the WI criteria and requires them to submit a sample course syllabus and other supporting documentation for the Committee to consider.

The WAC Director will review submitted materials and suggest possible revisions in advance of the WAC Committee's review and discussion of the course. Following any necessary revisions, the course will be discussed at the next scheduled WAC Committee meeting.

The Program encourages those submitting WI courses to contact the WAC Director well in advance of the desired approval date, as meeting schedules can vary dramatically from semester to semester.

Voting on WI Courses

A quorum of voting members must vote on each WI course. As such, it is important that Committee Members review any WI course syllabi needing approval in advance of regularly scheduled WAC meetings, so that the syllabi may be discussed in depth during the committee meeting.

Voting on WI syllabi entails indicating whether Committee Members require further revisions, approve, or provisionally approve (with minor revisions) the WI course syllabi submitted.

Should a syllabus be returned to a faculty proposer for further revision, the Committee must be prepared to offer feedback on the syllabus and to review the revisions once returned to the Committee for consideration.

Writing-Intensive Courses Versus “Writing Rich” Courses

Many faculty include writing assignments in their courses; however, not all courses that meet the requirements above have gone through the WI approval process with the Senate Committee. It is important that Senators communicate that in order for students to receive credit for completing their “WI” requirement, they must take the approved WI course or courses for their major. You can direct students or faculty to the Mason Course Catalog (see: <https://catalog.gmu.edu/mason-core/#wi>), which maintains a list of WI courses.

Description of the Writing Across the Curriculum Program

The Mason WAC Program was started in 1993 by Dr. Christopher Thais and Dr. Stanley Zoltek when the first WI Courses were approved by the Faculty Senate. Mason's WAC Program has been recognized as an international model for writing in the disciplines.

WAC Mission and Goals

Central to our Program's mission is the belief that students think more critically and creatively, engage more deeply in their learning, and are better able to transfer what they have learned from course to course when they are given frequent opportunities to write across the university curriculum. The WAC Program supports the goals laid out in the new Strategic Plan by focusing on writing as a pedagogical tool that enables students to develop critical, analytical, and innovative thinking to address complex social issues, and on faculty development in support of excellence in teaching.

Our Program draws on the concept of the "vertical" curriculum: in the designated composition classes (English 101 and English 302), students are asked to reflect on how writing is a form of problem solving in the different communities and disciplines to which they belong. The Writing Intensive course, a course situated in the majors, introduces students more specifically to the writing and problem-solving methods in their chosen fields.

Mason's WAC Program is guided by the *Statement of WAC Principles and Practices*, approved by the International Network of WAC Programs (INWAC) in February 2014 and the Executive Committee of College Composition and Communications in December 2014. The Statement can be found at: <http://wac.colostate.edu/principles/statement.pdf>.

Our local principles:

- Writing is an important tool for learning and discovery as well as for conveying what has been learned and discovered.
- Students gain proficiency as writers when they have frequent opportunities to write in courses across the curriculum, addressing a range of audiences and practicing the genres typical of their majors and the workplaces they will enter.
- Faculty across the curriculum share responsibility for helping students learn the conventions and rhetorical practices of their disciplines.
- Students benefit from having opportunities to revise based on meaningful feedback from their teachers; that is, feedback that teaches and provides direction rather than focusing solely on error.
- Writing instruction must be continuous throughout students' undergraduate education.

Our Program's focus on writing as a critical, analytic, and imaginative pedagogical tool that enables students to address complex social issues (and on the faculty development necessary to support excellence in teaching) forwards Mason's Mission Statement and Strategic Plan.

The most visible components of WAC at Mason are:

- the WI requirement in the major (apart of the Mason Core requirements);

- the Mason WAC Committee appointed by the Faculty Senate, which approves all WI Courses;
- the Advanced Composition requirement (English 302).

Please note: Writing Across the Curriculum does not administer English 101 or English 302. The WAC Program does not oversee the Writing Center. WAC is a Provost's Office initiative that facilitates upper-level writing-intensive courses and supports faculty development in teaching writing in the disciplines.

Professional Development: Consulting, Workshops, and Online Resources for Faculty

Good teaching practices are reinforced through faculty development workshops, departmental assessment workshops, consultation with faculty and departments, and collaboration with other teaching-focused units across the university, including the Mason Core, Stearns, OSCAR (the Students as Scholars Initiative), the University Libraries, and the University Writing Center (which provides vital support for student writers).

Additionally, the WAC website (wac.gmu.edu) and *The Writing Campus* newsletter celebrate and support faculty efforts in teaching with writing. The WAC blog, also named *The Writing Campus*, provides reflections and resources for teaching writing (thewritingcampus.com). Our Facebook page, *The Writing Campus: Blog of the George Mason WAC Program*, provides timely articles and tips on teaching and writing.

Disciplinary Goals for Student Writers

While the learning and writing outcomes expected of students are always particular to courses and majors, most writing-intensive course(s) share the following goals for students in the major:

- To analyze and synthesize course content using methods appropriate to the major;
- To make reasoned, well organized arguments with introductions, thesis statements, supporting evidence, and conclusions appropriate to the major;
- To use credible evidence, to include, as applicable, data from credible primary and/or secondary sources, integrated and documented accurately according to styles preferred in the major;
- To employ a range of appropriate technologies to support their researching, reading, writing, and thinking, with particular attention to the ways that advanced students and professionals locate, analyze, organize, and share information;
- To employ rhetorical strategies suited to the purpose(s) and audience(s) for the writing, to include appropriate vocabulary, voice, tone, and level of formality;
- To produce writing that employs the organizational techniques, formats, and genres (print and/or digital) typical in the major and/or workplace;
- To produce writing that demonstrates proficiency in Standard Edited American English, including correct grammar/syntax, sentence structure, word choice, and punctuation.

WAC's Institutional Location

WAC is currently affiliated with the Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning. The current Acting Director, Thomas Polk, reports to Dr. Shelley Reid, Director of the Stearns Center.

Our offices are physically located in Innovation Hall.

Key Terms in WAC

Below are a variety of terms you may hear during the course of WAC Committee meetings. This glossary was developed from the WAC Program at Appalachian State University. (<http://wac.appstate.edu/writing-disciplines/wac-glossary-terms>)

WAC, or WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM is a writing instruction program that pervades the entire college curriculum where interdisciplinary approaches use writing to learn and to communicate in general education as well as major courses of study.

WID, or WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES refers to the writing done in a student's chosen field of study.

A **GENRE** is a mode of discourse suitable for a specific purpose or field. Each academic discipline has its own manner of expression, vocabulary, formats, and habits of thought so that anyone intending to communicate in that field must be familiar with and be able to join in its expression. Michael Carter of North Carolina State says in "Ways of Knowing, Doing, and Writing in the Disciplines,"

Miller, Bazerman, and Russell ... define genre as social action, ways of doing and writing by which individual linguistic acts on the microlevel constitute social formations on the macrolevel.... [T]hey establish the concept of genre set as a collection of related genres [and] use the genre set to indicate the role that related genres play in constituting complex social formations. (393)

(See **METAGENRE** below.)

INFORMATION LITERACY: Information literate students can recognize an information need, find, select, locate and evaluate the information they need, and incorporate what they discover competently and responsibly in any field. Information literate students should be able to demonstrate competencies in formulating research questions and in their ability to use information.

METAGENRE is defined by Michael Carter of NC State as "a higher category, a genre of genres." He adds, "[A] metagenre indicates a structure of similar ways of doing that point to similar ways of writing and knowing" (393). Carter's four metagenres (or ways of doing) are

- (1) **Problem Solving** (defining a problem and creating a solution such as in business, marketing and management plans, project reports or proposals, and technical and feasibility reports);
- (2) **Empirical Inquiry** (drawing conclusions based on investigation of empirical data as in laboratory or research reports, research proposals, scientific articles and presentations);
- (3) **Research from Sources** (data from secondary sources intrinsic to a discipline such as History or English); and
- (4) **Performance** (knowing as doing, performance and its artifacts such as drawings, sculptures, paintings, films, news stories and editorials, websites, Power Point presentations, technical reports, theatre and dance exhibitions).

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS is the term for the adaptation of one skill set in a particular context to a different context. The “soft” transfers entail contexts that are similar, while the “hard” transfers depend on deliberate abstraction from one context to another. An example of a soft transfer would occur when a student new to History creates a References page in APA format, using the skills previously learned for creating a Works Cited page in MLA format; a hard transfer occurs when a student uses the skills learned when writing a literacy narrative to write a historiography essay.

A **VERTICAL CURRICULUM** refers to a coordinated and progressive laddering of skills where early attempts build to emerging or advanced mastery toward expert and professional mastery.

In a Vertical Curricular Model, students take multiple writing courses during the years of their undergraduate experience with increasing introduction to and specialization in their chosen fields.

- **English 101** is a freshman-level course that explores expository writing, research, and critical thinking.
- **English 302, Advanced Composition**, builds on the general college-level writing skills and strategies students have acquired in earlier courses. It prepares them to do advanced-level analysis and writing specifically within their major field and their possible future workplaces.
- **Writing Intensive**, which is at least one upper-division course in each major, has been designated as fulfilling the university’s Mason Core “writing intensive” (WI) requirement. These courses are meant to instruct students on writing in the major and are taught by disciplinary faculty.