

CRITICAL READING AND WRITING Annual Report

Creating Relevance Using Assessment Results

May 2016



Faculty and employers complain “students can’t write.” Assessment helps us ask “why?” What process will provide actionable evidence to inform our pedagogy, thereby improving student competence?

Writing faculty report their discipline views writing as a “process,” rather than an assessable “product.” Writing faculty emphasize that assessment should occur over the course of the writers’ development. The current general education curriculum does not provide an opportunity to examine longitudinal development of writing (e.g., portfolio assessment).

Assessment of writing at JMU occurs in two places: 1) a university-level assessment utilizing Assessment Day sample pre-to-post comparisons, and 2) course-embedded assessments within the WRTC 103 course.

Cluster One 2015 - 2016 Writing Student Learning Objectives

Demonstrate an awareness of rhetorical knowledge, which may include the ability to analyze and act on understandings of audiences, purposes, and contexts in creating and comprehending texts.

Employ critical thinking, which includes the ability through reading, research and writing, to analyze a situation or text and make thoughtful decisions based on that analysis.

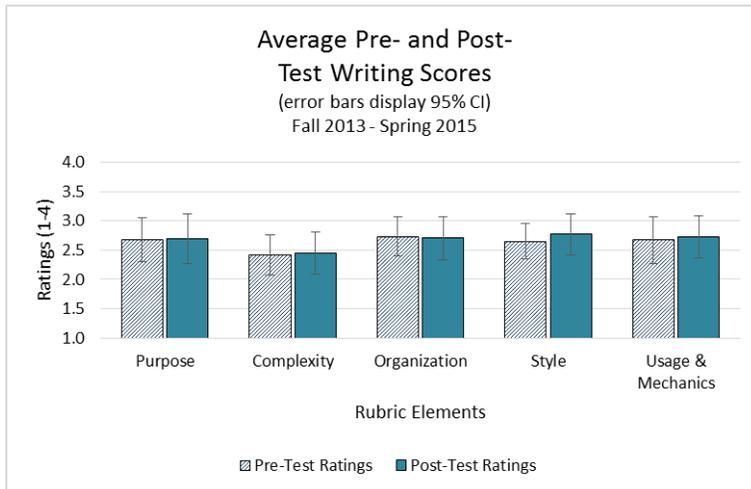
Employ writing processes.

Demonstrate an awareness of conventions, the formal and informal guidelines that define what is considered to be correct and appropriate in a variety of texts.

Compose in multiple environments using traditional and digital communication tools.

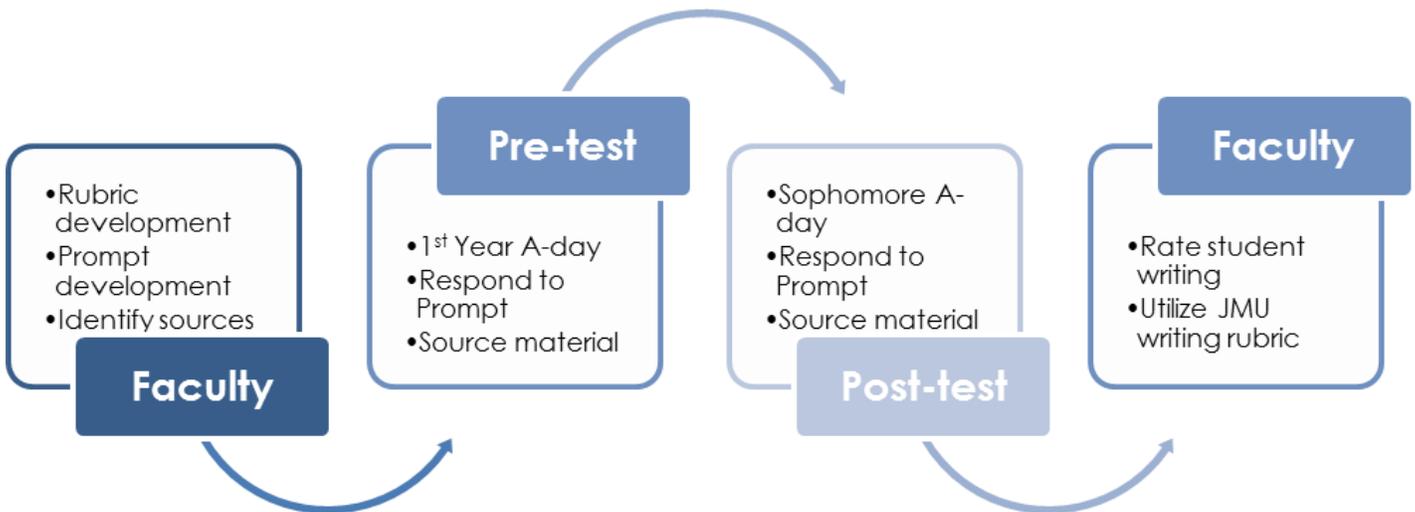
According to the JMU Strategic Plan Performance Measures, under the heading “Measures of Academic Quality,” Item 6a, “All clusters can demonstrate student learning as part of the general education curriculum.”

What is the functionality of university-level writing assessment?

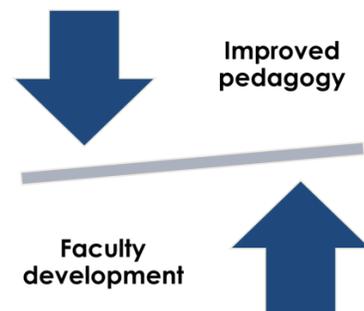


For the past several years, writing has been assessed at the university level via a writing prompt administered during Assessment Day (A-Day). A random sample of students are selected to participate in writing assessment during both their first- (pre-test) and sophomore (post-test) years. Students write a letter to The Breeze on the topic of adult privilege, utilizing a variety of source materials. Using a writing rubric developed by faculty from across JMU, faculty volunteers evaluate the students' writing. JMU writing traits are indicated in the graph to the left. The JMU Writing Rubric may be found on the Center for Assessment and Research Studies (CARS) website.

University-Level Writing Assessment Process

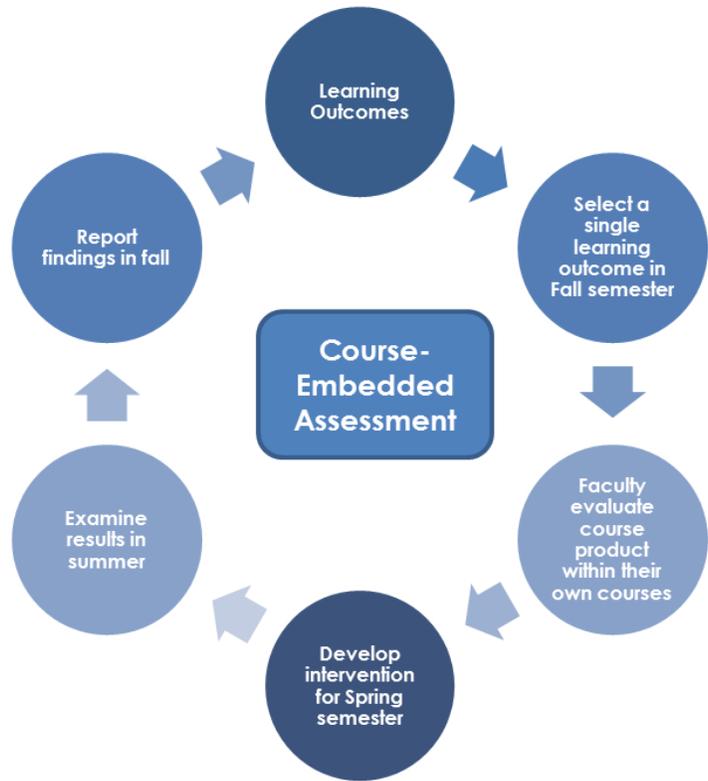


Results from university-level assessment are difficult to apply to pedagogy. University-level assessment results aid in identifying “what” (i.e., traits) not “how” to improve student learning. Multiple factors are at play – students take the test in a low-stakes context, results do not feel relevant, and it is difficult to disseminate the findings in a way that is meaningful. However, the assessment writing process allows an opportunity for faculty to develop their diagnostic skills – they are better able to identify strengths and weaknesses, and to provide focused feedback.



WRTC103 Course-Embedded Writing Assessment Process

Writing faculty are committed to development of students' writing competency. Over time at JMU, assessment rubrics have changed from holistic to trait and back again. Directors of composition have examined numerous assessment strategies and have arrived at a focus on student learning objectives via a backwards course design approach. During summer 2016, the composition committee will participate in CARS' Assessment Fellows, for purposes of developing their new assessment plan. In Fall 2016, this committee will lead WRTC 103 faculty through the process highlighted in the graph at right.



2015-2016 Enrollment Figures

3,054 students received JMU WRTC 103 credit in 2015-2016.

1,226 students received test or transfer credit for WRTC 103.

289 continuing students have not met the WRTC 103 requirement.

99.6% WRTC 103 seats filled in 2015-2016.

77.8% WRTC 103H seats filled in 2015-2016.

Course	Seats Available	Students Enrolled	Number of Sections	Class Size	% Students taught by FT Faculty	% Students taught by PT Faculty
Fall 2015						
WRTC 103	1534	1527	73	18-22	35	65
WRTC 103H	18	18	1	18	100	0
WRTC 103OE	36	33	2	18	100	0
Spring 2016						
WRTC 103	1531	1527	71	18-22	44	56
WRTC 103H	18	10	1	18	100	0
WRTC 103OE	54	48	3	18	0	100
WRTC Total Seat Contribution to General Education						
WRTC 103/H	3101					
Backlog (continuing students not meeting the requirement)= 289						

We congratulate the WRTC program for its commitment to JMU General Education and Cluster One. Careful management of seats available has ensured that there are no wasted resources in the WRTC 103 course. Given that so few students take the honors version of the course in the spring, the department may be encouraged to only offer WRTC 103H in the fall semester. One concern is that part-time faculty and graduate students are teaching more students the basic writing course than full-time faculty. Conversation with The Graduate School and the College of Arts and Letters about the training and hiring practices of composition instructors should continue.

Coming Soon

Summer 2016

- The First-Year Composition Assessment Committee will participate in Assessment Fellows, week 2.

Fall 2016

- The assessment plan developed during Assessment Fellows will be implemented in WRTC 103 courses.
- The WRIT3 Cluster One writing assessment will be administered to first-year students

Spring 2017

- Cluster one will conduct a writing rating session of the 2015-2017 cohort of students' essays.