OKLAHOMA CITY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Measurement of General Education Competencies
2005-2006

Competency

Students will write well-developed essays in standard American English which demonstrate unity, coherence, and organization.

Procedure

1. During the last two weeks of the Spring 2006 semester, the Department Chair for English and the Humanities collected a random sample of 678 essays written in ENGL 1113, ENGL 1213, and other selected General Education Courses promoting writing across the curriculum. 259 essays from ENGL 1113 originated from a random sampling of most ENGL 1113 courses, while 298 essays originated from a random sampling of most ENGL 1213 courses. 121 essays originated from other General Education courses, such as HUM/PHIL 2133, BUS 2033, ENGL 2123, ENGL 2433, HUM/PHIL 2173, HUM 2223, HUM 2243, HUM 2003, and PHIL 1013.

2. Collecting the essays, labeling them with numbers that identified course type, and placing them in folders for the evaluators to assess, the Chair for English and the Humanities supervised a two-hour training session for part-time and full-time faculty from OCCC . The participants thoroughly reviewed and discussed the General Education Writing Competency Rubric. Also, the participants evaluated two sample essays as a group in order to create a consistent and standardized pattern for evaluating student performance in standard American English, unity, coherence, and organization.

3. Each participant evaluated approximately 36 random essays from a variety of academic disciplines. Participants labeled the rubric with the number listed on the essay and provided their names on each student's performance evaluation. Also, they scored each section of the rubric and provided extensive comments on student performance in standard American English, unity, coherence, and organization. A week later, participants submitted the General Education Writing Competency Rubric results and the random essays to the Chair. Finally, the Chair tabulated the statistical and testimonial evidence for the competency in writing.

Results

1. According to the data, after evaluating 678 total essays, 445 students (or 65.6%) achieve competency in writing, while 233 (or 34.4%) do not. OCCC students nearly achieve the goal of 70% competency defined by the rubric.

2. However, if we review student scores in each section (standard American English, unity, coherence, and organization), then the data describes students achieving the competency in unity and organization. Students score higher in organization (73.3% passing) than unity (69.9% passing) and coherence (69.2% passing). 67.4% of the essays pass in the area of Standard American English.

3. In ENGL 1113, after evaluating 259 essays, 163 (or 62.9%) students achieve competency in writing, but 96 (or 37.1%) do not. ENGL 1113 students struggle in standard American English with 161 (or 62%) of the students passing. Coherence (65% passing) and unity (68.7% passing) depict higher percentages than Standard American English, while organization receives the highest rating (70.3%). Therefore, with regard to organization, students pass the 70% competency goal in ENGL 1113.

4. In ENGL 1213, after evaluating 298 essays, 197 (or 66.1%) students achieve competency in writing, but 101 (33.9%) do not. According to the statistics, ENGL 1213 students struggle in Standard American English (67.4% passing) ENGL 1213 students score at the following rate on other areas of focus: coherence (70.1% passing), unity (72.1% passing), and organization (75.2% passing). While students do not achieve the competency goal of 70% in standard American English, they pass in the other areas successfully.

5. In General Education courses other than ENGL 1113 or ENGL 1213, 85 students (or 70.2%) achieve competency in writing, but 36 (or 29.8%) do not. 95 students (or 78.5%) achieve competency in Standard American English. However, with regard to unity, students score the lowest at a passing rate of 81 students (or 66.9%). Finally, student essays in General Education courses (other than ENGL 1113 and 1213) achieve competency in three areas: standard American English (78.5%), organization (75.2%) and coherence (75.2%).

6. According to testimonial evidence, the evaluators, holding M.A. degrees with at least 18 graduate hours in English, provide extensive comments for each student essay.

- The comments for ENGL 1113 describe areas for student improvement. The most difficult area, of course, relates to Standard American English. Students struggle significantly with sentence fragments, spelling, and run-on sentences. Also, ENGL 1113 essays contain numerous comma splices, other comma errors, and verb-tense shifts.

Issues relating to development, details, and supporting evidence rank next as a limitation for ENGL 1113 students. Next, informal language, ineffective sentence patterns, and a general redundancy of language conclude the list of significant struggles. However, minor issues relate to developing an effective thesis, introduction, and conclusion, but most evaluator responses focus primarily on standard American English and paragraph development issues.

- The comments for ENGL 1213 describe areas for student improvement. Though the statistics do not suggest this result, ENGL 1213 students struggle less in standard American English than the following three areas: paragraph development, focus, and a dominant impression (or, what is known as a thesis). Next, evaluators report sentence fragment and comma splice errors, although subject-verb agreement, verb-tense shifts, run-on sentences, and misuse of commas occur less in ENGL 1213 than ENGL 1113. Finally, the evaluators record the fewest number of errors in sentence variety, informal language, and redundancy.

- The comments for 2000-level General Education courses (other than ENGL 1113 and ENGL 1213) describe areas for student improvement. Many evaluators report significant student limitations in developing a dominant impression (or, what is known as a thesis) and an effective conclusion. The next struggle, a general lack of developing effective paragraphs, rank above errors in spelling, verb-tense shifts, fragments, subject-verb agreement, and run-on sentences. Finally, mixed pairs (i.e. their/there or to, too, and two) commas splices, and inadequate or missing introductions rank last as a major issue in General Education courses. However, evaluators report Standard American English issues less often than student essays from ENGL 1113 and ENGL 1213.

Analysis of the Data

1. Standard American English

- Students in ENGL 1113 clearly struggle with basic writing skills in standard American English. The cause of this struggle, however, is difficult to pinpoint. First, ENGL 1113 generally focuses on competencies other than Standard American English, such as organization, development, and research skills. Next, teachers may not evaluate student writing before the revision process occurs. Third, the Compass exam, measuring students' abilities to locate errors instead of writing effectively in standard American English, may not represent an effective model to place students, especially since the exam clearly focuses on multiple-choice questions and not essay-driven models of evaluation. Or, students completing developmental writing courses and/or passing the Compass exam do not meet the minimum standard American English requirements established by the Initial Assessment Essay in ENGL 1113. (Currently, the Learning Skills and English faculty have not discussed or established the minimum standard requirements for a beginning ENGL 1113 student.)

- Though, at first glance, the research suggests basic writing errors in ENGL 1113, the statistics and testimonial evidence also predict that students improve these skills after completing multiple general education courses at OCCC. However, according to the data, ENGL 1213 students merely increase their scores by 5.4% and still remain below the 70% goal for acceptable scores in this area. Also, ENGL 1113 and 1213 writers may receive lower scores because the evaluators assessed the third essay in each course; if they assessed the final assessment essay, the results may or may not differ.

- Finally, students enrolled in General Education courses other than ENGL 1113 and 1213 successfully surpass the 70% goal and achieve the competency at a 78.5% rate, an increase of 16.5% from ENGL 1113 to other General Education courses. While 16.5% represents an astounding increase, this percentage may be inflated because the evaluators assessed essays primarily from courses taught by Business Writing and English and Humanities faculty, who may emphasize and integrate writing skills into course assignments. (Unfortunately, more essays from other academic disciplines were not obtained for this evaluation process.)

- In conclusion, though the overall passing rate in Standard American English is 67.4%, students gradually master basic writing skills through a progression of writing sequences (ENGL 1113 and 1213) and other General Education courses.

2. Unity

- Overall, students achieve competency in unity at a 69.9% rate. Once again, the data show a gradual improvement in unity from ENGL 1113 (68.7% passing) to ENGL 1213 (72.1% passing). Unlike the steady rise of competency in Standard American English, unity increases in ENGL 1213 but decreases to 66.9% in General Education courses at a negative rate of 5.2%.

- The testimonial evidence explains effectively the reasons for this decreased rate in General Education courses. Evidently, the evaluators overwhelmingly state that student papers in General Education courses sometimes lack a thesis statement, paragraphs supporting the thesis, clearly defined evidence or details supporting the paragraph's topic sentence, and focused paragraphs containing evidence relating to one (instead of two) topic idea or sub-claim. Therefore, skills in unity represent a major challenge for General Education courses.

3. Coherence

- Because coherence directly relates to standard American English, many essays struggling in standard American English also fail in coherence. In fact, if the evaluators judge the essays according to organization and unity, more students will meet the goal of 70% competency. Regardless, the student essays show significant weaknesses in developing a professional or academic voice.

- However, similar to standard American English, OCCC students score gradually higher as they progress through the writing sequences into a General Education course. In fact, ENGL 1213 and General Education students meet the 70% competency level in coherence. Compared to standard American English, the numbers and testimonial evidence suggest that progression does not occur in a single modular objective but in a re-emphasis on basic skills as students proceed to higher-level courses.

- Regardless of the optimistic data, students need to develop a professional or academic voice, improve skills related to formal language (unless the assignment's purpose requires some informal language, such as a narrative essay), decrease inflated and needless phrasing, and promote intelligent sentence variety.

4. Organization

- The majority of OCCC students understand how to organize an essay effectively. In fact, students meet the competency in organization at a 73.3% rate, and students in ENGL 1113 score higher on organization than the other areas. This data may suggest that English faculty successfully emphasize organization, and the students typically retain that information.

- However, many evaluators comment that student essays from General Education courses (other than ENGL 1113 and 1213) do not write effective introductions and conclusions, and many essays do not contain introductions or conclusions   Also, comments suggest that General Education courses do not focus on effective patterns of organization. Perhaps students in General Education courses rank at the same passing rate as ENGL 1213 (75.2% passing), but better organizational skills in introductions, conclusions, and effective organizational patterns might increase these percentages.

Recommendation

After the data is thoroughly reviewed, the English faculty will make recommendations during the Fall 2006 Semester.

Paraphrased Comments from Evaluators

- The rubric should contain more detailed descriptions and evaluate student essays based on a prescriptive numerical system instead of a pass/fail system.
- More essays should stem from courses in Social Sciences, Science, Math, Nursing, Business, etc.
- Though the Chair for English and Humanities provided clear instructions for the evaluation procedure and emphasized calibration, group assessment, and objectivity, some evaluators during the training session mentioned their inclination to evaluate essays subjectively instead of objectively.
- The General Education competency, currently focusing on standard American English, unity, coherence, and organization, should contain other areas of measurement, such as audience and purpose.
- To measure student work effectively, students participating in the assessment process should write essays with similar requirements, such as length. (Many ENGL 1113 essays, for example, contain narrative elements, while ENGL 1213 and other General Education essays focus specifically on argument, analysis, and other critical thinking skills.)

General Education Writing Competency Rubric

Evaluator's Name: _____ Essay Number: _____

After reading the essay, place a Y (passes the rubric section) or an N (does not pass the rubric section) in the right column next to the appropriate section. If the essay achieves a Y on at least 3 out of the 4 sections, then the essay meets the course competency for writing.

> Yes = Passes the rubric section
> No = Does not pass the rubric section

Rubric	Y or N
Standard American English	
Unity	
Coherence	
Organization	
Does the essay score a **Y** on at least 3 out of the 4 sections?	

Comments:

Standard American English: _____

_____

Unity: _____

_____

Coherence: _____

_____

Organization: _____

_____

What represents a minimum passing score?

Standard American English

- The essay displays less than 8 major errors in spelling, grammar, and/or word usage.
    - A major error represents the following: spelling, sentence fragments, run-ons, comma splices, pronoun case, dangling modifiers, subject-verb agreement, verb tense shifts, mixed pairs (i.e. their/there or to/too), and misplaced commas.
    - A minor error, which we will largely ignore for the purposes of this rubric, represents the following: parallelism, apostrophe, awkward sentences, adjective/adverb confusion, colons, semicolons, parentheses, abbreviations, dashes, hyphens, numbers, prepositions, article pronouns, and an overuse of the passive voice.

Unity

- The essay contains a specific thesis sentence or dominant impression
- Most paragraphs relate to the thesis sentence or dominant impression.
- Most paragraphs contain clear topic sentences—implicit or explicit.
- Most paragraphs contain adequate development, details, or evidence supporting the paragraphs.
- Most paragraphs stay focused on one subject.

Coherence

- Most sentences show signs of varying sentence patterns to engage the audience.
- Most sentences avoid redundant language, inflated and needless phrasing, a serious of long, complicated sentences, or a series of short, choppy sentences.
- Most sentences use effective transitions to link to the next sentence and/or to the next paragraph.

Organization

- The paper contains clearly defined paragraphs with at least an introduction, body, and conclusion.
- Most paragraphs display an organizational pattern that a reader clearly follows.
- The introduction reveals the topic effectively, even if it does not engage the reader.
- The conclusion completes the topic effectively, even if it does not engage the reader.

Statistics for General Education Writing Assessment

	General Education Assessment--Writing Competency							
	Conducted Spring 2007							
	English Comp I		English Comp II		Gen Ed Other		Total of Courses	
	(out of 259 essays)		(out of 298 essays)		(out of 121 essays)		(out of 678 essays)	
Passing	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Standard English	161	98	201	97	95	26	457	221
Percent	62%	37.80%	67.40%	32.60%	78.50%	21.50%	67.40%	32.60%
Unity	178	81	215	83	81	40	474	204
Percent	68.70%	31.30%	72.10%	27.90%	66.90%	33.10%	69.90%	30.10%
Coherence	169	90	209	89	91	30	469	209
Percent	65.30%	34.70%	70.10%	29.90%	75.20%	24.80%	69.20%	30.80%
Organization	182	77	224	74	91	30	497	181
Percent	70.30%	29.70%	75.20%	24.80%	75.20%	24.80%	73.30%	26.70%
Passing	163	96	197	101	85	36	445	233
Percent	62.90%	37.10%	66.10%	33.90%	70.20%	29.80%	65.60%	34.40%