

Writing Plan
Department of Psychology
Wheaton College
Norton, MA

The Department of Psychology affirms its commitment to the systematic and thoughtful facilitating of good writing, both in general and in regard to the specific requirements of the field of psychology.

The Department's writing plan has a double focus. It is directed, first of all, to the faculty itself. Whatever their own interests and skills in writing may be, members of the Department are unlikely to possess any formal education in writing beyond what they happened to pick up in their own undergraduate course work; rarer still will be training in the teaching of writing. Thus foundational to the Department's plan is the fostering among its own members of a deeper understanding of the reading and writing processes--the two are intimately related--and of ways of conveying such understanding to their students. Toward these ends, the following principles are put forward:

1. An explicit commitment to good writing and the teaching of it will be expected of all members of the department. Such a commitment will be included among the criteria for selecting new members of the faculty.
2. A member of the Department will be designated its Writing Coordinator, one of whose responsibilities will be the judicious accumulation and accessible housing of a library of books and articles on reading and writing. Psychology is peculiarly positioned to contribute to an understanding of these fundamental processes, and there is correspondingly a substantial research literature on them. Members of the department will be encouraged to become familiar with and make use of these resources, especially as aids in diagnosing reading and writing problems and working toward their solution.
3. The Department will periodically review its writing program and consider new ways to advance it. Resource persons from the college writing program, among others, may be invited to serve as consultants for these reviews.

The second focus of the Department's writing plan is naturally on student reading and writing. Although the Department does not currently have a writing-intensive requirement, each faculty member will be encouraged to offer one course a year that is to some degree writing intensive. Such offerings would require various types of writing over the course of the semester, and feedback on the writing would be regularly provided; some class time would also be given over to the discussion of writing, perhaps in conjunction with relevant course content (e.g., metaphor's role in human cognition).

Given that being a good reader is a prerequisite to being a good writer, reading will also receive explicit attention. Department members will be encouraged to assign readings that, beyond representing the required content, are models of good writing and are written at a level that is appropriately challenging. Discussion, along with examples, of how to read and mark such texts and, in the process, to abstract out their essential content may be appropriate from time to

time. Regular assignments designed to ensure that students keep up with the reading and properly understand it will likely be appropriate. The specific skills associated with reading and writing--in general and in psychology in particular--are outlined in Appendix A. Appendix B offers a sampling of publications that faculty members should find helpful.

Appendix A: Specific Reading, Writing, and Communication Skills According to Course Level

The courses we offer are understood to have goals beyond the acquisition of course-specific content. These broader goals, which are often achieved and evaluated through various kinds of reading and writing, may include the following:

- skillful reading in accord with the demands of the text
- analytical, critical, and creative thinking
- clear and engagingly written communication
- effective oral communication
- ability to work collaboratively in groups
- information literacy, including skill in finding and evaluating Internet resources
- sensitivity to and understanding of ethical issues in psychological research and practice
- quantitative reasoning and its appropriate application
- acquisition of intellectual tools and knowledge that are transferable to everyday life

To achieve these general goals, along with more specific ones, we identify here various kinds of reading, writing, and communication skills that we judge to be appropriate to 200- and 300-level courses.

A. Kinds of reading and writing assignments at the 200 level:

Courses at the 200 level serve as a gateway to the major but are also taken by students with other concentrations. Assignments that will help both groups to develop appropriate reading and communication skills include the following:

- writing abstracts of assigned readings
- writing brief papers in response to readings or presentations (e.g., films)
- carrying out brief literature reviews
- writing book reviews
- writing short essays on assigned topics
- writing formal papers, of varying lengths, that provide experience in using secondary sources and APA citation style
- engaging in collaborative writing and peer editing
- preparing brief laboratory reports
- carrying out and reporting on systematic field observations

In our required research-methods course, PSY 202, the various assignments are designed to develop the following skills in reading and writing:

- extracting accurate information from primary sources
- understanding the basic structure of quantitative research papers
- developing discipline-related library search skills
- writing sections of an APA-formatted research paper
- writing informal essays designed to encourage critical thinking in psychology
- responding to the technical literatures in written and oral forms
- evaluating sources in terms of their authoritativeness and value
- becoming knowledgeable about diverse methodologies
- revising and redrafting written work
- communicating in varied formats and settings (both oral and written)

B. Kinds of writing in 300-level courses

Assignments in 300-level courses will serve to develop further the skills fostered at the 200 level. Students in these more advanced courses may expect to gain experience in

- preparing 10- to 20-page APA-style literature-review papers
- preparing 10- to 20-page APA-style research reports
- writing reaction essays
- writing definition essays
- preparing and submitting multiple drafts
- critically analyzing and integrating evidence from primary sources
- editing their peers' writing
- making classroom presentations
- using PowerPoint

Appendix B: Some Suggested Resources for the Facilitating of Reading and Writing

Larson, Reed (1988). Flow and writing. In M. Csikszentmihalyi & I. S. Csikszentmihalyi (Eds.), *Optimal experience: Psychological studies of flow in consciousness* (pp. 150-171). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marton, F., Hounsell, D., and Entwistle, N. (Eds.). (1984). *The experience of learning*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.

Perry, Susan K. (1999). *Writing in flow: Keys to enhanced creativity*. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books.

Phelps, Louise Wetherbee. Rhythm and pattern in a composing life. In Tom Waldrep (Ed.), *Writers on writing* (pp. 241-257). New York: Random House.

van Manen, Max (1990). *Researching lived experience; Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Albany: State University of New York Press,

Williams, James D. (2003). *Preparing to teach writing: Research, theory, and practice*.
Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

last modified: Jan. 25, 2008