



Rappahannock Community College 2019-22 Report on Written Communication

What does Written Communication mean at RCC?

Written Communication is the ability to develop, convey, and exchange ideas in writing, as appropriate to a given context and audience.

RCC Degree graduates will express themselves effectively in a variety of written forms.

How are RCC degree graduates expected to use Written Communication skills?

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) are defined to guide the instruction of Written Communication skills.

RCC degree graduates will:

- a. understand and interpret complex materials;
- b. assimilate, organize, develop, and present an idea formally and informally;
- c. use standard English;
- d. recognize the role of culture in communication.

How are RCC students doing?

RCC General Education Assessment

In Spring 2020 and Spring 2021, the *RCC General Education Assessment* was not administered as the college testing centers were closed during the COVID 19 pandemic. In Spring 2022, testing resumed. A sample of 33-degree graduates took the assessment that included five Written Communication items. All items were multiple choice. The correct response rates were 30% to 73%. The lowest score was on a question about primary sources which assessed SLO b: RCC degree graduates will assimilate, organize, develop, and present an idea formally and informally. Forty-six percent (46%) of student respondents answered the grammar item correctly, but 39% selected a run-on sentence. The correct results of the assessment of the other SLOs were:

- SLO a: RCC degree graduates will understand and interpret complex materials – 52%.
- SLO b: RCC degree graduates will assimilate, organize, develop, and present an idea formally and informally -- 55%.
- SLO d: RCC degree graduates will recognize the role of culture in communication -- 73%.

Common Course Assessment

Throughout the pandemic years 2019-20 and 2020-21, common course assessments continued in all courses. The results of those years and 2021-22 will be summarized here.

English

English 111 is the required English course in all RCC degree programs. All communication SLOs are assessed throughout the course. The ENG 111 Textual Analysis Essay assesses students' understanding of and ability to analyze a text's rhetorical context, including purpose, audience, and rhetorical strategies. It addresses Communication learning outcomes a, b, and c. The benchmark for success is at least 80% of students will

earn a grade of C (70%) or higher on the profile essay. On the most recent assessment in Fall 2021, the benchmark was not met. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the students passed with a grade of C or higher. The average score was 78.14 with a high score of 93 and a low score of 56. The analysis of the grading rubric for this assignment includes categories that focus specifically on the skills of rhetorical analysis. Together these criteria comprise 40% of students' final score. For students who did not pass the assignment, scores were especially low in these categories. Comments on the rubrics indicate that these students lacked comprehension of the rhetorical elements of a text. In order to seek improvement in this area, instructors will focus on the elements of rhetoric and the skills of textual analysis throughout the ENG 111 curriculum. Students will practice textual analysis regularly in lower-stakes assignments leading up to the major essay.

All of the Communication SLOs a-f are also assessed in the ENG 111 Civic Engagement Essay, which serves as one of RCC's Civic Engagement assessment tools and as the ENG 111 post-test. The essay is scored using a common rubric with 6 criteria, worth 4 points each: Civic Engagement, Introduction/Thesis Support, Rhetorical Effectiveness, Grammar, and Format. The success benchmark is at least 75% of students will earn a grade of C (70%) or higher on the profile essay. Results in Fall 2021 show that the benchmark was met. Eighteen out of 34 total sections of ENG 111 reported grades for this assignment. Of these sections, the average score was 18.83 out of 24 points. Across the 18 sections of ENG 111, 119 out of 134 students passed with a grade of 70% or higher (88% pass rate). The average score was 18 out of 24 (75%). Analysis of the rubrics show that students continue to perform very well overall on the Civic Engagement essay, with an even higher pass rate than last year. However, a closer look at the scores in each criterion show that students performed lowest in the categories of Support for Thesis (avg. 2.5 out of 4), Rhetorical Effectiveness (avg. 2.87 out of 4) and Format (avg. 2.67 out of 4).

Recommendations for improvement include providing additional instruction on rhetorical effectiveness, with a focus on the skills of recognizing, analyzing, providing support for a thesis, and formatting conventions.

Psychology

SLOs a, b, c. are assessed in PSY 200. Students are required to complete a research paper (lecture) or mini-research (online) using APA style and including scholarly sources. The success benchmark is a grade of 70% or better. In Fall 2021 the results were:

- PSY 200 Online Classes (3)--38% of students (45) who submitted the paper earned a grade of 70% or better.
- PSY 200 In-class (1 class)--90% of students (11) who submitted the assignment earned a grade of 70% or better.

In Spring 2022, the results were:

- PSY 200 Online Classes (4)--43% of students (37) who submitted the paper earned a grade of 70% or better.

Analysis shows that students are having difficulty with (a) understanding and interpreting complex materials. Students have difficulty reading the scholarly articles, interpreting the information, and then incorporating the information into their paper. Students are also still having difficulty with presenting ideas formally. More instruction is recommended on the importance of and how to cite references. The ability to assimilate, organize, develop, and present an idea formally is a high-level skill that requires much practice in addition to instruction. Students will benefit from increased coordination between courses across the curriculum teaching and assessing the same skills.

In PSY 230, students are required to participate in a debate (assessing SLOs a, b, d, and e) on the death penalty/mandatory minimum sentences for juveniles. The students are also required to prepare and present a PowerPoint for assignment content in chapter 8 of the textbook. The benchmark is grade of 70% or better on each assignment.

The results of the debate assignment were:

- Fall 2021, 100% of students (15 students, 1 class) received a grade of 70% or better.
- Spring 2022, 100% of students (3 students, 1 class) received a grade of 70% or better.

The results of the presentation assignment were:

- Fall 2021, 100% of students (16 students, 1 class) received a grade of 70%.
- Spring 2022, 100% of students (3 students, 1 class) received a grade of 70%.

Students enjoy the assignments and tend to passionately present their views. However, students often resort to opinion and struggle with how to support their views with scholarly sources, even though the lecture includes information on scholarly sources they may use and they are provided examples of other sources they may use to support their views. Students require more instruction on how to support ideas with references and how to assimilate, organize, develop, and present an idea formally gained from scholarly sources. Instructors should model this skill before students present and provide video examples. In 2022-23, students will be required to provide a written summary of their individual views with sources in an attempt to increase student understanding of and practice with including references for their views.

Biology

Written Communication was assessed in Biology classes via at least one formal lab report required in each laboratory science course with standard grading rubrics. The benchmark of success is greater than 80% of students passing written lab report assessments with scores of 70% or higher. Results from 20 sections of Biology show the benchmark was not met in 2021-22 as 137 students met the benchmark and 43 students did not for a 76.1% success rate. Library research skills need improvement. Also, students need to gain better understanding about the importance of correct citation format.

It is recommended that instructors provide formative feedback and reiterate proper use of language in written research assignments, group projects, and oral discussions, using more than one assignment or opportunity for rough draft revisions. Instructors should also provide students with resources on how to research and collect information to support and communicate their ideas, including library resources, proper APA citation, technology skills, videos, and/or a presentation by the RCC librarian.

History

In HIS 121 students use an adaptive-release study guide to assist them in understanding the history text materials. These materials include: primary sources, maps, and charts. This addresses SLO 1.a. The benchmark of success was that HIS 121 students require 30% fewer questions to reach a grade of 100% at the end of the semester compared to the beginning of the semester. In the 2021-2022 academic year, 132 students required 5,696 questions to reach a grade of 100% during the first week of the semester. By the last week, 95 students required 2,472 questions to reach a grade of 100%. The mean number of questions answered in the first week is 46.67 and the last week is 28.43 (39% less). The benchmark was met. The adaptive release study guide improved student understanding of the course materials and will continue to be used.

RCC Graduating Student Survey

Students' confidence in their written communication is measured each spring on the *RCC Graduating Student Survey*. This survey is administered to all Spring graduates. Students are asked to rate their ability when they entered RCC and now that they are graduating. Two items assess their written communication confidence. In Spring 2022, there were 202 responses. They were:

- “To convey ideas in writing for a specific audience using grammatically correct English.” Thirty-six percent (36%) marked excellent when they entered and 60% when they graduated. Thirteen percent (13%) marked “fair” or “poor” at entry but 3% at graduation.
- “To organize, develop, and present ideas in a prescribed written format.” Thirty-four percent (34%) marked excellent when they entered and 58% when they graduated. Fifteen percent (15%) marked “fair” or “poor” at entry but 3% at graduation.

How are assessment results used?

The English faculty takes the lead in teaching and assessing written communication, but all RCC faculty are responsible for supporting written communication skills. Faculty in all disciplines meet regularly, discuss the assessment results, and look for improved success of students. Individual discipline results are given above. The entire Arts and Sciences for Transfer Degree faculty meet and review all general education assessments. The Arts and Sciences faculty review of 2022 communication assessments lead to the following analysis and recommendation:

- According to the General Education assessment, students continue to struggle with identifying primary versus secondary sources. Only 30% of students answered this question correctly. This may be due to differences among the disciplines and definitions of primary/secondary sources. Recommendation: The English and History departments will create formative assessments on primary and secondary sources to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching practices on this topic.