

SWS COURSES: Writing Across the Curriculum at GVSU

SUPPLEMENTAL WRITING SKILLS (SWS) VALUES

The ability to write effectively according to disciplinary or professional standards is part of being a productive member of any profession while writing effectively in a variety of rhetorical situations is the hallmark of a liberally educated person. The most effective way to help students achieve this goal is by providing a framework for courses that integrate writing with content. We value:

- a university community that shares responsibility for writing instruction;
- writing instruction that is integrated with course material regardless of discipline;
- writing instruction that occurs throughout the four years of undergraduate education;
- pedagogical approaches that are based in theory and research in composition, including (but not limited to) writing as a process and writing to learn approaches;
- the importance of practicing the conventions and forms of an academic discipline in order to learn them.

SWS COURSES AND REQUIREMENTS

In order to ensure that graduates can write effectively, we require that all students pass two Supplemental Writing Skills (SWS) courses. They are offered in every department. SWS course syllabi are routinely reviewed and approved by the University Writing Skills Committee. These courses have Writing 150 with a grade of C (not C-) or better as a prerequisite. They are designated SWS in each semester's course schedule. Please read the schedule carefully since not all sections of a multi-section course are necessarily SWS sections. Only those that are designated SWS result in SWS credit. Courses that have been approved by the University Writing Skills Committee to have an SWS designation are not merely courses that require written assignments; they adhere to specific guidelines.

- Students turn in a total of at least 3,000 words of writing during the term. Part of that total may be essay exams, but a substantial amount of it should consist of discipline specific writing such as finished essays, reports, or research papers or should involve writing-to-learn projects.
- At least four hours of class time are devoted to writing instruction. SWS courses are expected to teach writing, not just certify that writing has been done.
- For a three-credit course at least one third of the final grade is based upon the writing assignments.

- The instructor works with the students on revising drafts of their papers, rather than simply grading the finished piece of writing. Courses which merely require a term project, no matter how lengthy, which is due in its first and final draft at the end of the semester, will not be approved as SWS courses.
- SWS instructors are expected to attend SWS workshops when possible.
- SWS instructors should plan to use available forms of writing support, e.g. the GVSU Writing Center.

If you are asked to teach an SWS course, we expect you to have questions. The director of Writing Across the Curriculum, Lindsay Ellis, is prepared to assist and mentor you. His email is ellisl@gvsu.edu. The members of the University Writing Skills Committee are similarly eager to serve as mentors. Faculty can go to the SWS web site for current information, workshop dates, and helpful tips. The staff at GVSU's Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors are also available for further help.

SWS FAQ

What Should Be on my SWS Syllabus?

This standard paragraph which must be included in all SWS course syllabi:

This course is designated SWS. Completion of WRT 150 with a grade of C or better (not C-) is a prerequisite. SWS credit will not be given to a student who completes this course before completing the prerequisite. SWS courses adhere to certain guidelines. Students turn in a total of at least 3000 words of writing. Part of that total may be essay exams, but a substantial amount of it is made up of essays, reports, or research papers. The instructor works with the students on revising drafts of papers, rather than simply grading the finished piece of writing. At least four hours of class time will be devoted to writing instruction. At least one third of the final grade in the course is based on the writing assignments. Students must complete the course with a grade of "C" or better in order to receive SWS credit. Students may receive SWS credit for taking the course as Credit/No Credit provided the student passes the course with a "Credit" grade.

What Do I Do During Four Hours of Writing Instruction?

By writing instruction we do not mean grammar and punctuation drills. Nor do we mean lecture, which is the least effective method of writing instruction. Instead we suggest having students engage in any of the following activities: generating questions about the assignment, collaboratively discussing exemplar texts and making a list of their qualities, discussing or constructing evaluation criteria, analyzing sample papers, reading peers' papers or sharing drafts in small groups, and reviewing/critiquing peers' writing. Another strategy is to present drafts of your own writing and answer student questions about the features of the text, what the purpose of the text is and how each feature contributes to that purpose, your writing process and/or the process of professional publication.

How can the Fred Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors assist with my SWS class?

Walk-in centers on all three campuses are available for your students' use. Trained writing consultants can help your students at any stage of the process: brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing. The feedback provided is an especially good resource during the revision process. In addition to walk-ins, the Writing Center can send a consultant to introduce your class to the Center and its services or schedule a group of consultants to facilitate peer group responses to written drafts as SWS fellows. The director of the Fred Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors can offer consultation on assignment design and ways of providing feedback. Writing Center information for faculty can be found at < www.gvsu.edu/wc>

How do I teach an SWS course/writing online?

The Director of Writing Across the Curriculum, Lindsay Ellis, is happy to help you think through and design activities to teach writing online. Watch for emails from Dr. Stinnett about support for online writing instruction and feel free to reach out with any questions or concerns. Below are some helpful resources with excellent information about teaching writing online and just teaching writing in general.

The Global Society of Online Literacy Educators has helpful information at their website:

<https://www.glosole.org/>

This includes an emergency virtual class guide:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/145HdDEDnU4ZUipY1MmlzA5zS6QdqK9wES_r1y1Wpc/edit

The WAC (Writing Across the Curriculum) Clearinghouse also has helpful guides including:

Various writing guides: <https://wac.colostate.edu/resources/writing/guides/>

Various teaching guides: <https://wac.colostate.edu/resources/teaching/guides/>

Faculty tip sheets: <https://wac.colostate.edu/resources/teaching/tips/>

What Should I Know for Advising

Students are wise to find two SWS designated courses among the list of their other general education and major requirements. Only one SWS course can be transferred in from another institution, with approval by Dr. Ellis. Waiver requests are submitted online:

<https://www.gvsu.edu/sws/>

SWS CONTACTS

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