

First-Year Writing Assessment Report AY17-18

Summary

The Program in Writing and Rhetoric sought information to help learn if the Writing and Rhetoric I Stretch (A & B) structure and pedagogy are meeting the needs of students who come to Columbia less prepared than those entering directly into Writing and Rhetoric I. To that end, an assessment activity was developed to measure and compare student writing near the end of Stretch B and Writing and Rhetoric I to determine if the newly implemented Stretch program is helping students achieve appropriate standards. While students in Stretch B received, on average, slightly lower scores on all criteria assessed, the difference was relatively minimal. On average, students performed near a satisfactory level on all criteria.

A conversation that emerged among the review panel was the first-year writing program outcomes and “10 key concepts” balancing rhetorical analysis with students’ explicit writing abilities and ways to shape future assessments of student writing to better match the freedom of rhetorical choices that students are taught to use.

I. Program

Program in Writing and Rhetoric: Writing and Rhetoric I (WRI) and Writing and Rhetoric I Stretch A & B

II. Outcomes Assessed AY17-18

Writing and Rhetoric I Outcomes

- Define and explain key concepts in writing and rhetoric, and use those concepts to describe their own rhetorical goals and choices and those of other authors
- Recognize the affordances of a variety of genres, media, platforms, and technologies, and compose texts that take advantage of these affordances to meet their own rhetorical goals
- Identify, question, and extend the narratives and arguments in a wide range of texts, images, and other media
- Explain why conventions for structure, arrangement, paragraphing, and mechanics vary across contexts, and practice composing texts with conventions appropriate to those contexts

Universal Learning Outcomes Assessed

- Communication
- Critical and Analytical Thinking

III. Assessment

Method

To ensure a consistent prompt that was grounded in the course outcomes, an assignment was created to be administered during class in five sections of Writing and Rhetoric I and five sections of Stretch B (see Appendix A). Instructors were selected to administer the in-class writing and were asked to incentivize the assignment by making it 10% of students' final grades. A rubric with seven criteria and a scale of 1 to 5 (1= Significantly Lacking, 2= Needs Improvement, 3= Satisfactory, 4= Strong, 5= Excellent) was developed along with the assignment (see Appendix B), and a panel of three writing instructors was selected to evaluate the student work. A norming session and follow-up conversation were held. The writing of 62 WRI students and 43 Stretch B students was assessed.

Results

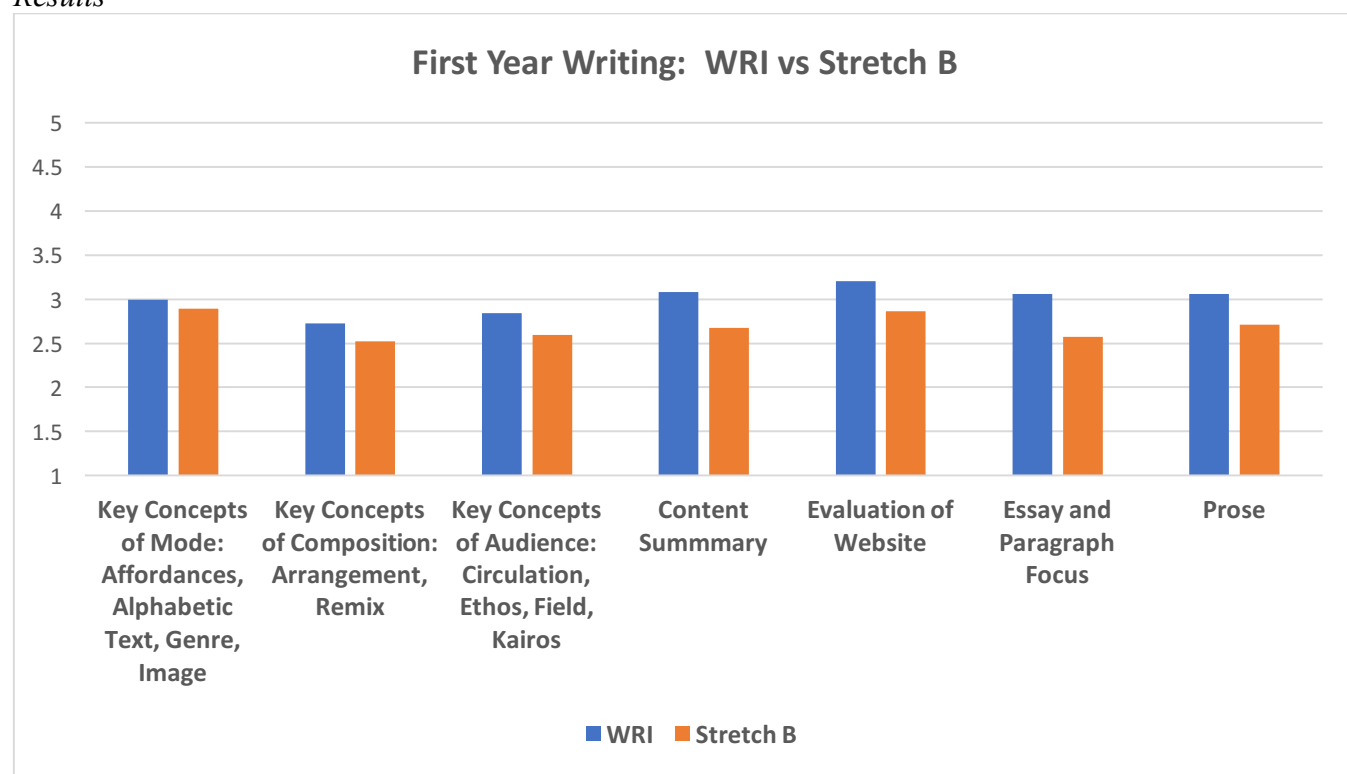


Figure 1. WRI and Stretch B, In-Class Essay Comparison, WRI N= 62, Stretch B N= 43

Outcomes and Criteria, Relative Ranking, Averaged Across WRI and Stretch B

1) Evaluation of Website	3.063
2) Key Concepts of Mode: Affordance, Alphabetic Text, Genre, Image	2.954
3) Content Summary	2.918
4) Prose	2.918
5) Essay and Paragraph Focus	2.863

6) Key Concepts of Audience: Circulation, Ethos, Field, Kairos	2.742
6) Key Concepts of Composition: Arrangement, Remix	2.640

Select Comments from Follow-up Conversation

On Student Writing

- “Ethos is one that people seem to have down. Field and genre usually fell to the back.”
- “There were some struggles with conclusions. On one, I wrote ‘finally, an end.’
- “I had some that were just one big paragraph. Timed writing was the challenge.”
- “I think often in WRII, the genre and form often comes up a lot more. I’m sure that there are teachers who are doing that, but the assignments in the course guide might not be doing as much to think about the affordances and the rhetoric of the traditional essay.”
- “I noticed some difficulty with field and genre, and then they’d look at majors and

On Determining How to Assess Student Work

- “Even with the planning of the essay, you could see students had planned but had run out of time.”
 - “This is not a type of writing that we do anymore, writing under conditions like this, timed writing.”
- “As a teacher giving it out, I felt like it didn’t match the spirit of the course. It took out their ability to choose and make their own decisions about form. It seems like some of the work may not be representative of what students were taught to do. It seems like the prompt itself was moving backward from the focus of the course.”
 - It would be helpful to have a self-reflective piece to go along with to learn about student processes.”

Additional Analysis

- A T-test statistical analysis that compared WRI and Stretch B showed no “significant statistical difference” between the composite scores, “Summarizes Content” scores, or “Essay and Paragraph Focus” scores.

Moving Forward

- As noted in the follow-up conversation detailed above, future assessment activities might draw from embedded assignments that allow students more freedom of choice in how they approach the writing prompt. The current challenges of doing so, however, that must be considered are
 - Current first-year writing program outcomes focus on rhetorical analysis as much as original composition
 - Finding an existing assignment, with a consistent prompt, across Stretch B and WRI, that focuses on the program outcomes

Appendix A. First-Year Writing Assessment Prompt

Purpose:

The purpose of this assignment is to see how fluent you are using the 10 key concepts. You will demonstrate your understanding of how the key concepts work together to communicate a message(s).

Prompt:

Use the 10 key concepts to write an analysis of the Columbia College website. To do this, you will want to, among other things,

- Read/View the Columbia College website.
- Briefly *summarize* the content and context of the Columbia College website. What is(are) its purpose(s)? What message(s) does it try to convey?
- *Use the 10 key concepts to analyze* how the website conveys its message(s).
- Make sure you are using specific examples from the website to develop your analysis.
- *Evaluate* how effectively the Columbia College website conveys its message(s).

Your essay should be organized with an introduction, body and conclusion.

Considerations:

Your essay will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Correct use of the 10 key concepts
- Accurate summary of content and context (purposes/messages)
- Thorough analysis of CC website applying the 10 key concepts; including use of examples
- Writing that demonstrates awareness of rhetorical situation: focused, organized, and unified

Appendix B. First-Year Writing Assessment Rubric

	Significantly Lacking (1)	Needs Improvement (2)	Satisfactory (3)	Strong (4)	Excellent (5)
1. Key concepts related to mode are thoughtfully considered: affordances, alphabetic text, genre, remix					
2. Key concepts related to composition are thoughtfully considered: arrangement, image					
3. Key concepts related to audience are thoughtfully considered: circulation, ethos, field, kairos					
4. Accurately and articulately summarizes content (purpose and message)					
5. Includes thoughtful evaluation of website's effectiveness					
6. Essay and paragraphs are focused and unified.					
7. Uses clear and effective prose.					