

# UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES, SCHOOLS OF ARCHITECTURE, EDUCATION, AND NURSING

## Definition of Writing Competency:

Competent Writers

1. Produce prose that is correct with regard to grammar, diction, spelling, and sentence structure.
2. Compose balanced arguments and support their claims— not only by articulating reasons and marshalling evidence, but also by anticipating the need to acknowledge and respond to significant counter-claims.
3. Frame introductions in their writing that quickly and reliably signal a document's purpose to readers.
4. Produce coherent and cohesive document subsections and paragraphs.
5. Manage and vary their syntax to produce effects ranging from extreme clarity to elegant complexity.

## Standards for Competency:

Portfolios of writing samples were evaluated on the basis of a four-point scale (4 =consistently, 1= seldom or never) for frequency of demonstrated competence in the areas of grammatically correct prose, balanced agreement, textual cohesion, and range of styles. Overall, a score of 1, 2, 3, or 4 is assigned to the portfolio (4 = strong competence, 1 = incompetent or occasional competence). Each portfolio received two readings, and the scores, if different, were averaged. If the first two readings differed by more than one point, the portfolio received a third reading to confirm consistency. See the following web site for the detailed scoring rubric:

<http://www.web.virginia.edu/iaas2/public/reports/subject/competencies/2002/collegetalscoringrubric.pdf>

## Description of Methodology Used to Gather Evidence of Writing Competency:

A panel of independent and trained faculty evaluators assessed a random sample of writing portfolios equal to 6% of the entire entering first-year class for fall 2001 with half the sample drawn in the fall and half in the spring semesters. The sample was drawn from student portfolios of work collected in courses used to satisfy the university's first writing requirement. Results of the portfolio analysis are reported every three years.

<b>Results for spring 2002 assessment:</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
4-Strong Competence:	44	29.1%
3-Reasonably Consistent Competence:	83	55.0%
2-Developing Competence:	23	15.2%
1-Incompetent or Occasional Competence:	1	0.7%

## Summary:

In their overall assessment, the evaluators characterized the portfolios as almost universally well written with regard to grammar and correctness. Of course, most UVa students are assumed to be grammatically competent when they matriculate. The primary goal of ENWR 105/106 and 110 is to introduce students to academic argument. Accordingly, evaluators tended to emphasize rigor of argument and scholarship over mere grammatical correctness. Not surprisingly, a rich body of research suggests that as writers become more familiar with their genre and subject matter, the perceived quality of their writing increases. The current portfolio assessment suggests that first-year students are still in the process of becoming familiar with the conventions of academic argument, as well as with the data and lines of reasoning that support arguments in the academic disciplines. This assessment of first-year writing suggests the benefits to students of continued writing feedback and increased exposure to the genres, conventions, and content of academic argument.