



Rappahannock Community College 2018-19 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 2019, a sample of 120 degree graduates took an *RCC General Education Assessment* that included five Written Communication items. All items were multiple choice. The correct response rates were 31% to 64%. 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-five percent of student respondents answered the grammar item correctly, but 43% 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. -- 63%
- SLO d: RCC degree graduates will recognize the role of culture in communication. -- 64%

Common Course Assessment

English 111 is the required English course in all RCC degree programs. SLOS a-c are assessed throughout the course. Most students also take English 112, which has a final research essay that requires students to demonstrate competency of SLOs a-c. The success on the essay benchmark is that 80% of students will earn at least a grade of C (70% or higher). In 2018-19, the rate of success was slightly more than 60%, far below the benchmark of 80%. Furthermore, nearly 28% received a failing grade with nearly half of these receiving no credit (0%) due to either plagiarism or no submission. While the reasons students fail to submit a final paper or submit a plagiarized paper are not documented, there is anecdotal evidence to support the view that students become overwhelmed at the end of the semester when many final papers and exams are due. This can lead to extreme measures, such as resorting to plagiarism or just not turning in a paper altogether.

SLO d is assessed in English 111 when students are assigned to read several arguments about the issue of immigration and respond to the texts by weighing the merits of each argument and taking a stand. The success benchmark for this assignment is that 80% of students will earn at least a grade of C (70% or higher) on this assignment. In 2018-19, 90% of English 111 students scored a C with 50% of the students scoring an A or B.

In all science classes, students must use written communication to report lab results and make other presentations. In biology, student discussion boards, written summaries, and application of core concepts continue to improve with each unit module as the semester progresses on to the end of the semester. Weekly 'informal' lab reports helped students address major concepts, such as osmosis, respiratory physiology, and acid-base balance. Instructor feedback and remediation allowed the students to address items that need correction and reach the benchmarks for success in their final reports.

In psychology, students are required to complete a four-page research paper using APA style and including at least four scholarly sources. This assesses SLOs a, b, and c. The success benchmark is a grade of 70% or better. In Fall 2018, 75% of psychology students received a grade of at least 70% on the assignment, and in Spring 2019, 70% of students received a grade of at least 70% on the assignment. Examination of the papers for the year indicate that students are not demonstrating proficiency in understanding and interpreting complex materials, as well as organizing, developing, and presenting an idea formally. Particularly difficult for the students is using reference materials to develop and present an idea.

RCC Graduating Student Survey

Students' confidence in their written communication is measured each spring on the *RCC Graduating Student Survey*. Students are asked to rate their ability when they entered RCC and now that they are graduating. Two items assess their written communication confidence. When asked to rate their ability "To convey ideas in writing for a specific audience using grammatically correct English," 43% marked excellent when they entered and 69% when they graduated. Eleven percent marked "fair" or "poor" at entry but none at graduation. On the ability "To organize, develop, and present ideas in a prescribed written format," 42% marked excellent when they entered and 70% when they graduated. Thirteen percent marked "fair" or "poor" at entry but 1% 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. The entire Arts and Sciences for Transfer Degree faculty meet and review all general education assessments. Some 2018-19 recommendations for improvement were:

- English 112 instructors will begin the research paper process earlier in the semester so that the assignment is completed in many steps throughout the semester.
- English instructors will provide more intentional and frequent instruction on what constitutes plagiarism, how to avoid it, and what the consequences can be.
- Provide a grammar handbook to all English students and full-time faculty.
- Continue requiring English 111 (as well as students in other English classes) to read, synthesize, evaluate, and respond to arguments on a specific issue. Selecting a topic that is current, such as immigration, seems to increase student engagement and improve writing.
- English faculty will discuss ways to improve and standardize the popular "peer review" process for giving and receiving feedback on essay drafts, and create assessment instruments that will provide student feedback on their satisfaction with the process and provide data on improvement in student writing based on peer reviews.
- Biology instructors will reiterate proper use of language in written research assignments, group projects, and oral discussions.

- Biology instructors will continue to provide students with resources on how to research and collect information to support and communicate their ideas, including library resources, proper APA citation, or a classroom presentation by the RCC librarian.
- Psychology instructors will include more opportunity and instruction for students to formulate a position, develop the position, and present the idea formally.