

Outcomes for First-Year Writing

The NJIT First-Year Writing Program is designed to address seven specific learning outcomes. The first four of these are adapted from the recommendations of the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA), a national association of college and university faculty working with and for writing programs across the nation. The final three outcomes— writing in digital environments, oral presentation skills, and information literacy— parallel university-wide learning goals.

I. Rhetorical Knowledge

Rhetorical knowledge is the ability to analyze contexts and audiences and then to act on that analysis in comprehending and creating texts. Rhetorical knowledge is the basis of composing. Writers develop rhetorical knowledge by negotiating purpose, audience, context, and conventions as they compose a variety of texts for different situations.

II. Critical Thinking, Reading, and Composing

Critical thinking is the ability to analyze, synthesize, interpret, and evaluate ideas, information, situations, and texts. When writers think critically about the materials they use--whether print texts, photographs, data sets, videos, or other materials--they separate assertion from evidence, evaluate sources and evidence, recognize and evaluate underlying assumptions, read across texts for connections and patterns, identify and evaluate chains of reasoning, and compose appropriately qualified and developed claims and generalizations. These practices are foundational for advanced academic writing.

III. Processes

Writers use multiple strategies, composing processes, to conceptualize, develop, and finalize projects. Composing processes are seldom linear: a writer may research a topic before drafting, then conduct additional research while revising or after consulting a colleague. Composing processes are also flexible: successful writers can adapt their composing processes to different contexts and occasions.

IV. Knowledge of Conventions

Conventions are the formal rules and informal guidelines that define genres, and in so doing, shape readers' and writers' perceptions of correctness or appropriateness. Most obviously, conventions govern such things as mechanics, usage, spelling, and citation practices. But they also influence content, style, organization, graphics, and document design.

Conventions arise from a history of use and facilitate reading by invoking common expectations between writers and readers. These expectations are not universal; they

vary by genre (conventions for lab notebooks and discussion-board exchanges differ), by discipline (conventional moves in literature reviews in Psychology differ from those in English), and by occasion (meeting minutes and executive summaries use different registers). A writer's grasp of conventions in one context does not mean a firm grasp in another. Successful writers understand, analyze, and negotiate conventions for purpose, audience, and genre, understanding that genres evolve in response to changes in material conditions and composing technologies and attending carefully to emergent conventions.

V. Writing in Digital Environments

Today, one must constantly adapt to emerging technologies, but these technologies still possess rhetorical dimensions and are often themselves valuable composition tools. Successful writers understand the relationships among rhetorical situations and digital environments, and they are comfortable using such environments in all parts of the writing process.

VI. Effective Oral Presentation Skills

In both one's academic and professional career, it is important to feel comfortable speaking in front of an audience. A piece of writing is not the same as its oral delivery, and it is important to understand the advantages and constraints of both communication methods.

VII. Information Literacy Skills

Information literacy is the ability to know when information is needed, to locate it efficiently regardless of its location, format or medium, to evaluate its relevance, authoritativeness, and validity, to use it to build new knowledge, and to communicate that knowledge.