

University of Portland Writing-Embedded Core Course Info.

For Instructors of ENG 112 and PHL 150 (6/2007; rev. 4/2013)

The two Writing-Embedded Core Courses at the University of Portland are English 112 (Introduction to Literature) and Philosophy 150 (Introductory Philosophy).

What follows are:

- I. materials defining **what constitutes a Writing-Embedded Course** in UP's Core Curriculum,
- II. a listing of our **agreed-upon, shared terminology to be used in all classes** for speaking about major topics in the teaching of writing, and our **agreed-upon hierarchy of writing issues** to be addressed in Writing-Embedded Classes,
- III. information about **how each of the Writing-Embedded classes teach writing**—so that all instructors in these classes may see how writing is being taught in the other class, be able to tell their students what to expect in the other class, and be aware of similarities and differences in the classes' approaches to teaching writing.

I. WHAT CONSTITUTES A WRITING-EMBEDDED COURSE

[All WE Core courses require the same writing handbook, *The Pocket Wadsworth Handbook, 5th edition*, eds. Kirsznner & Mandell.]

Writing-embedded courses at the University of Portland—PHL 150 and ENG 112—provide a distinctive sequence of core writing experiences. PHL 150 and ENG 112 involve students with a sequence of multiple informal practice opportunities preceding the formal, graded essay exam or the complete-process formal, graded argument paper, typically using citation skills for one source. Students practice in-class and out-of-class argument in these two courses; ideally, future upper-division classes in students' majors will provide informal writing and thinking tasks that will lead them to the challenge of researching and writing multiple-source arguments in a longer, cited paper format. (Until Spring 2013, this final task was formerly served by a third WE course, Theology 205). Each course covers a sequence of informal thinking and writing tasks, practiced before the formal ones (e.g. the complete process paper uses argument, analysis, and writing skills practiced in previous shorter, informal in-class and take-home writing tasks).

Writing-Embedded courses share the following learning objectives:

- 1) understanding writing as a series of thinking and writing tasks
 - practice writing as a process composed of several steps, such as prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and peer review
 - evaluate, analyze, and synthesize appropriate primary and secondary sources
 - write for a specific audience, occasion, and purpose
- 2) advancing an argument
 - write a clear thesis statement
 - develop and present a logical argument to support a thesis
 - establish the validity of an argument with adequate and appropriate evidence and citations
- 3) organizing a coherent composition
 - connect the parts and ideas of a composition in clear and logical ways
 - introduce, develop, and conclude a main idea or ideas and the related arguments
 - apply the conventions of standard usage

General Characteristics of Writing-Embedded Courses

Writing-embedded courses have the following features:

- Argument-based writing (including research and/or analysis tasks)
- At least one paper using the complete writing process, with an emphasis on revision through formal feedback and analysis
- A total of 20-25 pages of graded writing (including informal writing assignments)
- A sequence of multiple formal and informal writing tasks—all of which constitute at least 50% of the course grade

II. WRITING-EMBEDDED CORE CLASSES' SHARED TERMINOLOGY & HIERARCHY OF TARGETED WRITING ISSUES

The Core Course Conveners and Department Chairs for writing-embedded classes developed this framework for teaching writing and this terminology, to be shared by all professors of writing-embedded courses.

For effective writing instruction, we want our students to hear the same descriptors from us and notice the same emphases. This congruence of terminology helps students understand their professors' common goals for writing instruction and enables them to see that we are working together to achieve them.

We teach our embedded element of writing by focusing on these key issues, described by this terminology, in this hierarchical order:

HIGHER-ORDER, CENTRAL CONCERNS

- **Purpose & Audience:** determining and keeping in mind the specific reason and desired outcome for the paper; analyzing the paper's readers and determining their special needs
- **Thesis & Argument:** crafting a clear, precisely worded statement asserting the paper's controlling idea that also predicts the content of the paper; supporting the thesis's assertions with specific evidence
- **Organization:** ordering the parts of the paper's argument in the most logical, most powerful manner

LOWER-ORDER, RELATED CONCERNS

- **Style & Mechanics:** learning effective sentence structure and standard grammar, usage, and punctuation
- **Introductions & Conclusions:** how to use introductory material to explain into what context, what "encoding framework," the reader should place the paper's thesis; ending a paper effectively

III. HOW EACH OF THE WRITING-EMBEDDED CLASSES TEACH WRITING

On the following pages you will find responses from English 112 and Philosophy 150 faculty to the following questions about their teaching of writing in their classes:

-What are your department's shared expectations of the purposes of the paper in your discipline? What does the department do to help students advance the argument in their papers?

-What sorts of writing assignments do you give (length, type), and what terminology do you use to describe each type?

-What grading criteria do you give to students?

Teaching Practices in Core Course ENGLISH 112

Elements of an Effective English Argument Paper

- **Introduction:** An introductory section that provides the reader with the context for the argument and why the discussion matters. The introduction should seek to engage and connect with a reader. It should contain a thesis to give the reader a sense of the paper's purpose and direction.
- **Thesis:** An assertion about the meaning of the text that serves as the organizing principle of the paper. The thesis asserts something that could potentially change what a reader knows, understands, or thinks about the text. The thesis is a summation of the paper's argument though not the argument in its entirety (otherwise, why need the whole paper?). The paper should address a question about a text, rather than simply make an observation.
- **Organization:** The structural logic of the paper that makes its ideas accessible to the reader. The paper should be divided clearly into paragraphs, each containing a topic sentence that encapsulates the claim that paragraph is making. That claim is then supported through concrete evidence and analysis of that evidence. Each paragraph should be linked clearly to the ones before and after it by way of transitional phrases. The paragraphs should develop the thesis, so that early paragraphs give the most basic point, and the following ones build upon that.
- **Evidence:** Support for the thesis in the form of quotations from or allusions to the text. The paper must demonstrate through analysis how the evidence connects to the assertion. Quotations should not stand alone; the most effective way to use them is to embed them into the paper's sentences.
- **Style:** Writing that clearly and precisely expresses the paper's ideas. It should be vigorous and fresh writing that takes chances and avoids clichés. The writer should stretch to find the most effective stylistic means to express the ideas of the paper.
- **Mechanics:** Clear adherence to the conventions of grammar and mechanical correctness as set out in the University handbook, *The Pocket Wadsworth Handbook, 5th Edition*.
- **Conclusion:** A concluding section (usually a paragraph) that both ties up the paper and also further stimulates the reader. The conclusion should include a differently-worded restatement of the paper's main idea, but should not constitute mere rehash of the paper. Instead, it should pursue the implications of the paper's argument (answer the "so what?" question), suggest ways of complicating the argument, or propose ongoing questions about the topic.

Categories & Kinds of Assignments in ENG 112 (Compiled from each professor's practice: not all types of assignments are used by all English professors.)

UNGRADED

(For credit, required, are recorded as pass/fail.)

Quick-writes in class, usually in response to a prompt. These are to generate ideas for discussion.

Short responses to a prompt, mini-arguments that the students compose outside of class.

- to practice using evidence from the text to support an assertion about the text (one single-spaced page per class meeting, responding to 2-3 prompts)
- to stimulate critical thinking before they come to class
- to keep them up with the reading

Parts of longer papers: introductory paragraphs, theses—written at home.

Thesis statements for graded papers: submitted by e-mail by a deadline, responded to by e-mail by professor, often revised by the students while writing the paper and re-submitted.

Reflection papers to accompany a formal graded paper, describing the process of writing and evaluating the paper.

GRADED

Essay exams (2-3): mid-term and final, or by genre—fiction, poetry, drama. Graded primarily for the quality of the idea expressed, the use of textual evidence to support assertions, and the ability to answer the question, though poor command of written English can have a detrimental effect on the student's grade.

Short, close-reading writing exercises, each section on a particular element of the genre of literary text being studied (poetry, short story, etc.).

Responses papers/Microthemes, written at home, warm-ups for longer paper, often trying out arguments that may appear in longer paper (graded on a 1-5 scale); or, more generally, microthemes that are simple non-thesis driven responses to prompts.

Two-to-three shorter argument papers (2-3, 3-4, 4-5 pages—exact mix varies with professor).

- Some professors provide questions/prompts about texts not read in class; others offer model approaches, with students generating their own topics.
- All professors require students to make an assertion about a literary text or texts and use supporting evidence from the text to support their argument.
- Some professors require a mandatory revision of graded final draft; some sections specify due dates for parts of the paper (topic, thesis, first drafts, etc.), some require multiple drafts (subject to peer review) leading up to the final draft .
- Graded for the quality of the assertion, the handling and presentation of the textual evidence, and for correct usage of standard English.

One longer argument paper (5-8 pages—varies with professor).

- Students derive their own question to be answered, though professors will assist in the process.
- Several professors require a full draft be taken to the Writing Center, where a WA engages student in improving on areas of weakness in earlier papers.
- Some sections require a mandatory revision of graded final draft; some sections specify due dates for parts of the paper (topic, thesis, first drafts, etc.), some require multiple drafts (subject to peer review) leading up to the final draft.
- Graded for the quality of the assertion, the handling and presentation of the textual evidence, and for correct usage of standard English.

English Department Grading Standards

A: The A paper is excellent. It expresses a significant idea in a superior manner. Its thesis is clear, consistent and well-argued, and the evidence, well-analyzed, strongly supports the thesis. The organization is logical, and the writing is inventive, precise and grammatically sound. From its compelling introduction to its provocative conclusion, the paper fully considers and engages the reader in the expression of its argument.

B: The B paper is good. It expresses a sound idea in a functional manner. Its thesis is generally relevant, clear, and well-supported, though evidence and analysis of that evidence may be lacking in places. The paper is logically organized, although it may lack coherence in structure. Stylistically and mechanically, the writing is sound but may contain some minor distractions or errors.

C: The C paper is fair. It expresses a merely adequate idea in an ordinary manner. Its thesis is vague or undeveloped, and it frequently contains lapses in reason or support. Often the expression of the idea is weak because the writer has not completely thought through the argument, and the paper's structure, which is typically confused and lacking clear transitions, reflects this weakness. The writing may contain major grammatical and stylistic problems.

D: The D paper is poor. It expresses an unclear point in a weak manner. It may fail to address the assignment. Its thesis is extremely vague, unclear, or illogical; it suffers from major problems in organization, and its evidence, if present, does not clearly connect to the thesis. The writing is error-ridden and demonstrates little consciousness of audience.

F: The F paper is unintelligible. It contains no point or its point is plagiarized.

Teaching Practices in Core Course PHILOSOPHY 150

**What are the Philosophy Department's shared expectations of the purposes of the paper in our discipline?
What do we do to help students advance the argument in their papers?**

1. We teach the writing of argumentative papers. By this we mean papers that advance an argument and counterarguments for a particular thesis. Most of the work of the paper is concentrated on coming up with a convincing case for the thesis.
 - a. We expect students to write a clear introductory paragraph in which students state their thesis succinctly in a form such as "In this paper I will argue that...". The introductory paragraph should provide a roadmap to the rest of the paper and should be devoid of extraneous material of any kind, including unnecessary background material (e.g. "Descartes was born in France during the enlightenment") or inappropriate literary flourishes (e.g. "Humanity has pondered this question for many centuries."). By a road map to the paper we mean a summary of what will be discussed in the paper.
 - b. We expect students to define any terms necessary to advance their argument. For example, if they are going to argue that it is not possible to prove God's existence, they might want to say what they mean by "prove."
 - c. We expect them to support their argument using reasoning and evidence (usually textual evidence).
 - d. We expect students to entertain an opposing argument, objections, or a counter argument. This varies by instructor. By entertaining an opposing argument we mean developing the argument of a person who would argue the opposite view from that argued in the paper. By entertaining an objection we mean laying out an objection someone might make to the student's argument. By entertaining a counterargument we mean constructing an argument against the argument the student has made. For example, if the student argued that the death penalty is morally objectionable because it disproportionately punishes minorities, then in the counterargument the

student would argue that the death penalty does not disproportionately punish minorities or that this point is irrelevant or can be fixed.

- e. We expect students to respond to the counterarguments, objections, or opposing arguments. They must take account of the point of the counterargument, objection or opposing argument and address the problems this poses to their argument. They need to show how these problems are not serious or they are still correct rather than simply dismissing them.
 - f. We expect students to write conclusions in which they introduce no new material. A few of us allow students to incorporate the response to the counterargument, objection or opposing arguments in the conclusion, but most of us stick to the view that no new material of any kind should be introduced in the conclusion. The conclusion should be a recapitulation of the paper. In the introduction the student says where the paper is going. In the conclusion the student states where the paper has been. Students should state what they believe they have established in the paper and generally tie the paper together.
 - g. Quotations: In philosophy we do not use any one particular style manual. Students can use whatever standard citation style they want to as long as they are consistent through the paper.
2. We help students in various ways depending on the instructor. Some instructors ease students into the full papers by requiring parts of the paper be turned in for feedback and then rewritten and incorporated into a fuller paper with the other parts. Other instructors prefer students to take a stab at writing the full paper at the outset and then give feedback for rewrites of that full paper. Some instructors use in-class peer review of papers as well. Some instructors brainstorm with students to get them started writing their papers.

What sort of writing assignments are given in PHL 150 (length, type) and what terminology do you use to describe each.

1. Every instructor uses the argumentative paper. Some require longer such papers than others. Some of us look for 4-5 page papers. Others require fewer but longer papers of approximately 8 pages (assuming 250 words per page). Every instructor has at least one paper that students are able to rewrite. Some of us allow students to rewrite all or most papers.
2. Additional writing assignments vary by instructor and include reflection papers, essay exams, take-home essay exams, quick writes, and journal entries.
3. We have standard terminology for the argumentative papers. We do not know if we use standard terminology for other kinds of writing. We see our duty to the core as teaching the writing of argumentative papers. Other kinds of writing may contribute to this goal, but are not focused on it.

What grading criteria do you give to students?

We do not have a common set of grading criteria. Some of us use very different grading systems. For example, some grade on a point system. A paper is worth a total of 100 points. These are divided into 5 criteria: demonstrating an understanding of the reading, defining terms, giving a compelling argument, entertaining a counterargument and responding to it, appropriate intro, conclusion, grammar, spelling, punctuation. Others give a set of criteria such as conceptual coherence, originality, factual competence, grammar and then assign an A or B etc based on an overall assessment of how well the paper achieved these.

Nonetheless, we seem to be on the same page with respect to grading. We all generally agree on what a good paper looks like even though we reach that assessment by different means.
