



# WRITTEN COMMUNICATION RUBRIC

Based upon the AAC&U Written Communication VALUE rubric: <http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/written-communication>



## About the VALUE Rubrics

The AAC&U VALUE rubrics were developed by teams of faculty experts representing colleges and universities across the United States through a process that examined many existing campus rubrics and related documents for each learning outcome and incorporated additional feedback from faculty. The rubrics articulate fundamental criteria for each learning outcome, with performance descriptors demonstrating progressively more sophisticated levels of attainment. The rubrics are intended for institutional-level use in evaluating and discussing student learning, not for grading. The utility of the VALUE rubrics is to position learning at all undergraduate levels within a basic framework of expectations such that the evidence of learning can be shared nationally through a common dialog and understanding of student success.

In developing an assessment plan for the Core, the THECB strongly encouraged institutions to use "externally informed benchmarks"<sup>1</sup> in the assessment of the Core. As such, UHD has committed to using the VALUE rubrics as part of its assessment plan for the Core.

## Definition

The THECB defines communication as the effective development, interpretation, and expression of ideas through written, oral, aural, and visual communication. UHD has elected to concentrate on written communication as a separate communication element and has adopted the AAC&U interpretation of written communication as an expanded definition: Written communication is the development and expression of ideas in writing. Written communication involves learning to work in many genres and styles. It can involve working with various writing technologies and mixing texts, data, and images. Written communication abilities develop through iterative experiences across the curriculum.

## Framing Language

This writing rubric is designed for use in a wide variety of educational institutions. The clearest finding to emerge from decades of research on writing assessment is that the best writing assessments are locally determined and sensitive to local context and mission. Users of this rubric should, in the end, consider making adaptations and additions that clearly link the language of the rubric to individual campus contexts.

This rubric focuses assessment on how specific written work samples or collections of work respond to specific contexts. The central question guiding the rubric is "How well does writing respond to the needs of the audience(s) for the work?" In focusing on this question, the rubric does not attend to other aspects of writing that are equally important: issues of the writing process, writing strategies, writers' fluency with different modes of textual production or publication, or writer's growing engagement with writing and disciplinarity through the process of writing.

Evaluators using this rubric must have information about the assignments or purposes for writing guiding writers' work. Also recommended are reflective work samples of collections of work that address such questions as: What decisions did the writer make about audience, purpose, and genre as s/he compiled the work in the portfolio? How are those choices evident in the writing – in the content, organization and structure, reasoning, evidence, mechanical and surface conventions, and citational systems used in the writing? This will give evaluators a clear sense of how writers understand the assignment to take into consideration as they evaluate.

The first section of this rubric addresses the context and purpose of writing. A work sample or collection of work can convey the context and purpose for the writing tasks it showcases by including the writing assignments associated with work samples. But writers may also convey the context and purpose of their writing within the texts. It is important for faculty and institutions to include directions for students about how they should represent their writing contexts and purposes.

Faculty interested in the research on writing assessment that has guided our work here can consult the National Council of Teachers of English/Council of Writing Program Administrators' White Paper on Writing Assessment (2008; [www.wpacouncil.org/whitepaper](http://www.wpacouncil.org/whitepaper)) and the Conference on College Composition and Communication's Writing Assessment: A Position Statement (2008; [www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/123784.htm](http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/123784.htm))

## Glossary

The definitions that follow were developed to clarify terms and concepts used in this rubric only.

- Content development: The ways in which the text explores and represents its topic in relation to its audience and purpose.
- Context of and purpose for writing: The context of writing is the situation surrounding a text: who is reading it? who is writing it? under what circumstances will the text be shared or circulated? what social or political factors might affect how the text is composed or interpreted? The purpose of writing is the writer's intended effect on an audience. Writers might want to persuade or inform; they might want to report or summarize information; they might want to work through complexity or confusion; they might want to argue with other writers or connect with other writers; they might want to convey urgency or amuse; they might write for themselves, an assignment, or to remember.
- Disciplinary conventions: Formal and informal rules that constitute what is generally seen as appropriate within different academic fields, e.g., introductory strategies, use of passive voice or first-person point of view, expectations for thesis or hypothesis, expectations for kinds of evidence and support that are appropriate to the task at hand, use of primary and secondary sources to provide evidence and support arguments and to document critical perspectives on the topic. Writers will incorporate sources according to disciplinary and genre conventions, according to the writer's purpose for the text. Through the increasingly sophisticated use of sources, writers develop an ability to differentiate between their own ideas and the ideas of others, credit and build upon work already accomplished in the field or issue they are addressing, and provide meaningful examples to readers.
- Evidence: Source material that is used to extend, in purposeful ways, writers' ideas in a text.
- Genre conventions: Formal and informal rules for particular kinds of texts and/or media that guide formatting, organization, and stylistic choices, e.g., lab reports, academic papers, poetry, webpages, or personal essays.
- Sources: Texts (written, oral, behavioral, visual, or other) that writers draw on as they work for a variety of purposes -- to extend, argue with, develop, define, or shape their ideas, for example.

<sup>1</sup> THECB Assessment of the Core Guidelines: <http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=417252EA-B240-62F7-9F6A1A125C83BE08> (Retrieved 10/6/2014).



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**Definition:** Written communication skills include effective development, interpretation, and expression of ideas through writing. Courses in this category focus on developing ideas and expressing them clearly, considering the effect of the message, fostering understanding, and building the skills needed to communicate persuasively. Courses involve the command of written communication skills that enable people to exchange messages appropriate to the subject, occasion, and audience.

Foundation Component Areas Where Communication is Taught: All Foundational Component Areas

	<i>Mastery (Senior Level)</i> Point-value: 4	<i>Proficient (Junior Level)</i> Point-value: 3	<i>Developing (Sophomore Level)</i> Point-value: 2	<i>Basic (Freshman Level)</i> Point-value: 1	<i>Skill is evident, but performance falls below Freshman Level<sup>2</sup></i> Point-value: 0	<i>No Evidence:</i> <i>Assignment may not elicit the skill or student failed to articulate.</i>
<b>Context of and Purpose for Writing</b> <i>Includes considerations of audience, purpose, and circumstances surrounding the writing task(s).</i>	Demonstrates a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose that is responsive to the assigned task(s) and focuses on all elements of the work.	Demonstrates adequate consideration of context, audience, and purpose and a clear focus on the assigned task(s) (e.g., the task aligns with audience, purpose, and context).	Demonstrates awareness of context, audience, purpose, and the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., begins to show awareness of audience's perceptions and assumptions).	Demonstrates minimal attention to context, audience, purpose, and the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., expectation of instructor or self as audience).	Style and/or content are inappropriate for the context, audience, purpose, and/or assigned task.	
<b>Content Development</b>	Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to illustrate mastery of the subject. Development of control flows logically throughout the work.	Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to explore ideas. To a large extent, control flows logically.	Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop and explore ideas through most of the work.	Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop simple ideas in some parts of the work.	Content is inappropriate, irrelevant, or fails to develop even simple ideas.	
<b>Genre and Disciplinary Conventions</b> <i>Formal and informal rules are inherent in the expectations for writing in particular forms and/or academic fields (please see glossary).</i>	Demonstrates detailed attention to and successfully executes a wide range of conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s), including organization, content, presentation, formatting, and stylistic choices.	Demonstrates consistent use of important conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s), including organization, content, presentation, and stylistic choices.	Follows expectations appropriate to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s) for basic organization, content, and presentation.	Attempts to use a consistent system for basic organization and presentation.	Adherence to genre or disciplinary conventions is not evident.	
<b>Sources and Evidence</b>	Demonstrates skillful use of high-quality, credible, relevant sources to develop ideas appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing.	Demonstrates consistent use of credible, relevant sources to support ideas situated within the discipline and genre of the writing.	Demonstrates an attempt to use credible and/or relevant sources to support ideas appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing.	Demonstrates an attempt to use sources to support ideas in the writing.	Provides confusing supporting information or no information that supports the purpose/content of the writing.	
<b>Control of Syntax and Mechanics</b>	Uses language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency and is virtually error-free.	Uses straightforward language that generally conveys meaning to readers with few errors.	Uses language that generally conveys meaning to readers with clarity, although writing may include some errors.	Uses language that sometimes impedes meaning because of errors in usage.	Meaning cannot be deduced due to structural and grammatical errors.	

<sup>2</sup> Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample that does not meet Basic (Freshman Level) performance. Evaluators are encouraged to check the "No Evidence" if the rubric dimension is not evident in the work. For example, a student who uses supporting materials that confuse the message or are offensive or unrelated would receive a zero on Supporting Material. By contrast, there are no supporting materials; the "No Evidence" category would be selected. There is simply no evidence of whether or not the student knows how to use supporting materials.