

# Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing

*Developed by*  
**Council of Writing Program Administrators  
National Council of Teachers of English  
National Writing Project**

## Executive Summary

The concept of “college readiness” is increasingly important in discussions about students’ preparation for postsecondary education.

This Framework describes the rhetorical and twenty-first-century skills as well as habits of mind and experiences that are critical for college success. Based in current research in writing and writing pedagogy, the Framework was written and reviewed by two- and four-year college and high school writing faculty nationwide and is endorsed by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project.

**Habits of mind** refers to ways of approaching learning that are both intellectual and practical and that will support students’ success in a variety of fields and disciplines. The Framework identifies eight habits of mind essential for success in college writing:

- Curiosity – the desire to know more about the world.
- Openness – the willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking in the world.
- Engagement – a sense of investment and involvement in learning.
- Creativity – the ability to use novel approaches for generating, investigating, and representing ideas.
- Persistence – the ability to sustain interest in and attention to short- and long-term projects.
- Responsibility – the ability to take ownership of one’s actions and understand the consequences of those actions for oneself and others.
- Flexibility – the ability to adapt to situations, expectations, or demands.
- Metacognition – the ability to reflect on one’s own thinking as well as on the individual and cultural processes used to structure knowledge.

The Framework then explains how teachers can foster these habits of mind through **writing, reading, and critical analysis** experiences. These experiences aim to develop students’

- Rhetorical knowledge – the ability to analyze and act on understandings of audiences, purposes, and contexts in creating and comprehending texts;
- Critical thinking – the ability to analyze a situation or text and make thoughtful decisions based on that analysis, through writing, reading, and research;
- Writing processes – multiple strategies to approach and undertake writing and research;
- Knowledge of conventions – the formal and informal guidelines that define what is considered to be correct and appropriate, or incorrect and inappropriate, in a piece of writing; and
- Ability to compose in multiple environments – from traditional pen and paper to electronic technologies.

## Introduction

The ability to write well is basic to student success in college and beyond. Students can become better writers when they have multiple opportunities to write in classes across the curriculum throughout their education—from elementary school through university.

Students' abilities to enroll in credit-bearing, college-level courses are increasingly associated with the idea of "college readiness." This document, written and reviewed by two- and four-year college and high school writing teachers nationwide, describes **habits of mind and experiences with writing, reading, and critical analysis** that serve as foundations for writing in college-level, credit-bearing courses. Students who come to college writing with these habits of mind and these experiences will be well positioned to meet the writing challenges in the full spectrum of academic courses and later in their careers.

This document takes as a central premise that teaching writing and learning to write are central to education and to the development of a literate citizenry. Writing development takes place over time as students encounter different contexts, tasks, audiences, and purposes.

## Audience for the Framework

The primary audience for this Framework is instructors who teach writing and include writing in their classes at all levels and in all subjects. Additionally, because writing is of concern for those inside and outside education, audiences beyond the classroom—including parents, policymakers, employers, and the general public—also can use this document.

## Context for the Framework

To describe the habits of mind and experiences that are central to success in college and beyond, this document uses language and ideas from research in academic fields such as composition and rhetoric, writing across the curriculum, and English education that focus on the development of writing, reading, and analysis abilities inside and outside of school. This Framework is also informed by statements from national organizations representing English language arts and writing instruction, K–college, including the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), and the National Writing Project (NWP). This Framework thus seeks to connect expectations across educational levels and institutions.

Because this Framework is concerned primarily with foundations for college-level, credit-bearing writing courses, it is based on outcomes included in the CWPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year

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Composition. Adopted (or adapted) by hundreds of two- and four-year institutions nationwide, the CWPA Outcomes Statement was developed by postsecondary writing instructors and scholars. (More information about the CWPA Outcomes Statement can be found at <http://wpacouncil.org/positions/outcomes.html>.) The Outcomes Statement expresses what students should know and be able to do at the end of a first-year composition or writing course, a common general education requirement at most two- and four-year institutions. This Framework identifies the habits of mind and the kinds of writing experiences that will best prepare students for success as they enter courses in which they will work to achieve those outcomes.

The responsibility for preparing students for college writing is shared by teachers, schools, students, and families. This document emphasizes what teachers and schools can do to foster and reinforce the habits of mind and experiences described on the following pages. At its essence, the Framework suggests that writing activities and assignments should be designed with genuine purposes and audiences in mind (from teachers and other students to community groups, local or national officials, commercial interests, students' friends and relatives, and other potential readers) in order to foster flexibility and rhetorical versatility. Standardized writing curricula or assessment instruments that emphasize formulaic writing for nonauthentic audiences will not reinforce the habits of mind and the experiences necessary for success as students encounter the writing demands of postsecondary education.

## Habits of Mind

Habits of mind—ways of approaching learning that are both intellectual and practical—are crucial for all college-level learners. Beyond knowing particular facts or completing mandatory readings, students who develop these habits of mind approach learning from an active stance. These habits help students succeed in a variety of fields and disciplines. They are cultivated both inside and outside school. Teachers can do much to develop activities and assignments that foster the kind of thinking that lies behind these habits and prepare students for the learning they will experience in college and beyond. These habits include:

**Curiosity** – the desire to know more about the world.

Curiosity is fostered when writers are encouraged to

- use inquiry as a process to develop questions relevant for authentic audiences within a variety of disciplines;
- seek relevant authoritative information and recognize the meaning and value of that information;
- conduct research using methods for investigating questions appropriate to the discipline; and
- communicate their findings in writing to multiple audiences inside and outside school using discipline-appropriate conventions.

**Openness** – the willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking in the world.

Openness is fostered when writers are encouraged to

- examine their own perspectives to find connections with the perspectives of others;
- practice different ways of gathering, investigating, developing, and presenting information; and
- listen to and reflect on the ideas and responses of others—both peers and instructors—to their writing.

**Engagement** – a sense of investment and involvement in learning.

Engagement is fostered when writers are encouraged to

- make connections between their own ideas and those of others;
- find meanings new to them or build on existing meanings as a result of new connections; and
- act upon the new knowledge that they have discovered.

**Creativity** – the ability to use novel approaches for generating, investigating, and representing ideas.

Creativity is fostered when writers are encouraged to

- take risks by exploring questions, topics, and ideas that are new to them;

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- use methods that are new to them to investigate questions, topics, and ideas;
- represent what they have learned in a variety of ways; and
- evaluate the effects or consequences of their creative choices.

**Persistence** – the ability to sustain interest in and attention to short- and long-term projects.

Persistence is fostered when writers are encouraged to

- commit to exploring, in writing, a topic, idea, or demanding task;
- grapple with challenging ideas, texts, processes, or projects;
- follow through, over time, to complete tasks, processes, or projects; and
- consistently take advantage of in-class (peer and instructor responses) and out-of-class (writing or learning center support) opportunities to improve and refine their work.

**Responsibility** – the ability to take ownership of one’s actions and understand the consequences of those actions for oneself and others.

Responsibility is fostered when writers are encouraged to

- recognize their own role in learning;
- act on the understanding that learning is shared among the writer and others—students, instructors, and the institution, as well as those engaged in the questions and/or fields in which the writer is interested; and
- engage and incorporate the ideas of others, giving credit to those ideas by using appropriate attribution.

**Flexibility** – the ability to adapt to situations, expectations, or demands.

Flexibility is fostered when writers are encouraged to

- approach writing assignments in multiple ways, depending on the task and the writer’s purpose and audience;
- recognize that conventions (such as formal and informal rules of content, organization, style, evidence, citation, mechanics, usage, register, and dialect) are dependent on discipline and context; and
- reflect on the choices they make in light of context, purpose, and audience.

**Metacognition** – the ability to reflect on one’s own thinking as well as on the individual and cultural processes and systems used to structure knowledge.

Metacognition is fostered when writers are encouraged to

- examine processes they use to think and write in a variety of disciplines and contexts;
- reflect on the texts that they have produced in a variety of contexts;
- connect choices they have made in texts to audiences and purposes for which texts are intended; and
- use what they learn from reflections on one writing project to improve writing on subsequent projects.

## Experiences with Writing, Reading, and Critical Analysis

Particular writing, reading, and critical analysis experiences contribute to habits of mind that are crucial to success in college. These experiences include the following:

### Developing Rhetorical Knowledge

*Rhetorical knowledge* is the ability to analyze and act on understandings of audiences, purposes, and contexts in creating and comprehending texts.

Rhetorical knowledge is the basis of good writing. By developing rhetorical knowledge, writers can adapt to different purposes, audiences, and contexts. Study of and practice with basic rhetorical concepts such as purpose, audience, context, and conventions are important as writers learn to compose a variety of texts for different disciplines and purposes. For example, a writer might draft one version of a text with one audience in mind, then revise the text to meet the needs and expectations of a different audience.

Teachers can help writers develop rhetorical knowledge by providing opportunities and guidance for students to

- learn and practice key rhetorical concepts such as audience, purpose, context, and genre through writing and analysis of a variety of types of texts (nonfiction, informational, imaginative, printed, visual, spatial, auditory, and otherwise);
- write and analyze a variety of types of texts to identify
  - the audiences and purposes for which they are intended,
  - the key choices of content, organization, evidence, and language use made by their author(s),
  - the relationships among these key choices and the ways that the text(s) appeal or speak to different audiences;
- write for different audiences, purposes, and contexts;
- write for real audiences and purposes, and analyze a writer's choices in light of those audiences and purposes; and
- contribute, through writing, their own ideas and opinions about a topic to an ongoing conversation.

### Developing Critical Thinking Through Writing, Reading, and Research

*Critical thinking* is the ability to analyze a situation or text and make thoughtful decisions based on that analysis.

Writers use critical writing and reading to develop and represent the processes and products of their critical thinking. For example, writers may be asked to write about familiar or unfamiliar texts, examining assumptions about the texts held by different audiences. Through critical writing and reading, writers think through ideas, problems, and issues; identify and challenge assumptions; and explore multiple ways of understanding. This is important in college as writers are asked to move past obvious or surface-level interpretations and use writing to make sense of and respond to written, visual, verbal, and other texts that they encounter.

Teachers can help writers develop critical thinking by providing opportunities and guidance for students to

- read texts from multiple points of view (e.g., sympathetic to a writer's position and critical of it) and in ways that are appropriate to the academic discipline or other contexts where the texts are being used;
- write about texts for multiple purposes including (but not limited to) interpretation, synthesis, response, summary, critique, and analysis;
- craft written responses to texts that put the writer's ideas in conversation with those in a text in ways that are appropriate to the academic discipline or context;
- create multiple kinds of texts to extend and synthesize their thinking (e.g., analytic essays, scripts, brochures, short stories, graphic narratives);
- evaluate sources for credibility, bias, quality of evidence, and quality of reasoning;
- conduct primary and secondary research using a variety of print and nonprint sources;
- write texts for various audiences and purposes that are informed by research (e.g., to support ideas or positions, to illustrate alternative perspectives, to provide additional contexts); and
- generate questions to guide research.



### Developing Flexible Writing Processes

*Writing processes* are the multiple strategies writers use to approach and undertake writing and research.

Writing processes are not linear. Successful writers use different processes that vary over time and depend on the particular task. For example, a writer may research a topic before drafting, then after receiving feedback conduct additional research as part of revising. Writers learn to move back and forth through different stages of writing, adapting those stages to the situation. This ability to employ flexible writing processes is important as students encounter different types of writing tasks that require them to work through the various stages independently to produce final, polished texts.

Teachers can help writers develop flexible processes by having students

- practice all aspects of writing processes including invention, research, drafting, sharing with others, revising in response to reviews, and editing;
- generate ideas and texts using a variety of processes and situate those ideas within different academic disciplines and contexts;
- incorporate evidence and ideas from written, visual, graphic, verbal, and other kinds of texts;
- use feedback to revise texts to make them appropriate for the academic discipline or context for which the writing is intended;
- work with others in various stages of writing; and
- reflect on how different writing tasks and elements of the writing process contribute to their development as a writer.

## Developing Knowledge of Conventions

*Conventions* are the formal rules and informal guidelines that define what is considered to be correct (or appropriate) and incorrect (or inappropriate) in a piece of writing. Conventions include the surface features of a text such as mechanics, spelling, and attribution of sources, as well as more global concerns such as content, tone, style, organization, and evidence. Conventions arise from a history of use and reflect the collected wisdom of the relevant readers and writers about the most effective ways of communicating in that area.

Conventions facilitate reading by making material easier to comprehend and creating common expectations between writer and reader. As multimodal texts become more prevalent, teachers will also need to attend to the evolving conventions of these new forms, developing appropriate conventions with new students and colleagues.

Correct use of conventions is defined within specific contexts and genres. For example, a novice's grasp of a disciplinary documentation style is different from that of an advanced student's, and a writer's grasp of conventions in one context (such as a lab report for a chemistry class) does not mean a firm grasp in another (such as an analytical essay for a history course). The ability to understand, analyze, and make decisions about using conventions appropriate for the purpose, audience, and genre is important in writing.

Teachers can help writers develop knowledge of conventions by providing opportunities and guidance for students to

- write, read, and analyze a variety of texts from various disciplines and perspectives in order to
  - investigate the logic and implications of different conventions,
  - practice different conventions and analyze expectations for and effects on different audiences,
  - practice editing and proofreading one's own writing and explore the implications of editing choices,
  - explore the concept of intellectual property (i.e., ownership of ideas) as it is used in different disciplines and contexts, and
  - identify differences between errors and intentional variations from expected conventions;
- read and analyze print and multimodal texts composed in various styles, tones, and levels of formality;
- use resources (such as print and online writing handbooks), with guidance, to edit drafts;
- practice various approaches to the documentation and attribution of sources; and
- examine the underlying logic in commonly used citation systems (e.g., MLA and APA).

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### Composing in Multiple Environments

*Composing in multiple environments* refers to the ability to create writing using everything from traditional pen and paper to electronic technologies.

All forms of writing involve technologies, whether pen and paper, word processor, video recorder, or webpage. Research attests to the extensive writing that students produce electronically; composing in or outside of school, students and instructors can build on these experiences. As electronic technologies continue to spread and evolve, writers (and teachers) need to be thoughtful, effective users who are able to adapt to changing electronic environments. For example, a writer might be asked to write a traditional essay, compose a webpage or video, and design a print brochure all based on similar information.

While many students have opportunities to practice composing in electronic environments, explicit and intentional instruction focusing on the use and implications of writing and reading using electronic technologies will contribute to students' abilities to use them effectively.

Teachers can help writers develop as thoughtful, effective users of electronic technologies by providing opportunities and guidance for students to

- use a variety of electronic technologies intentionally to compose;
- analyze print and electronic texts to determine how technologies affect reading and writing processes;
- select, evaluate, and use information and ideas from electronic sources responsibly in their own documents (whether by citation, hotlink, commentary, or other means);
- use technology strategically and with a clear purpose that enhances the writing for the audience;
- analyze situations where print and electronic texts are used, examining why and how people have chosen to compose using different technologies; and
- analyze electronic texts (their own and others') to explore and develop criteria for assessing the texts.