

Dear English 120/121 students,

The instructors who teach first-year writing at EMU (English 120 and 121) have developed a set of course “outcomes” that we use to guide our teaching in these courses. Now, we invite you to think about how you can work to meet these outcomes, what strategies seem especially useful to you as a writer and a student at this university, and how you might build upon the strategies that are emphasized in 120 and 121 when you move into other courses that ask you to write (regardless of what discipline those courses are in!)

First, a little background: those of us who teach in the first-year writing program see English 120 and 121 as courses that ask you to write and read (sometimes a lot!) and then to investigate—ie, research, study, or consider—issues connected to how you learn as a writer and reader at a university. In 120, this might mean that you reflect on what you’ve learned about writing in the past and do some research into how writing is assigned in various courses here at EMU, for example. In 121, this might mean that you investigate issues connected to EMU life and use a variety of research and writing tools—learning journals, interviews, observations, and so on—to complete these projects.

We see learning to write as a challenging, shifting enterprise—while you might learn a lot about writing in one course, and even though you undoubtedly know a lot about writing already since you’ve written for many years, it’s not a subject that you can take one course in and then be “done” with. Instead, as you continue through your education and encounter new kinds of writing, new demands on you as a writer, and new situations, you will have to reconsider what you know about writing and how it might best fit your task at hand. Of course, this will continue to happen throughout your life as you write for your career and personal life.

We’ve listed the outcomes, below, in ways that we hope make sense to you. Each of the writing strategies listed should be attained by any student who successfully (ie, C or higher) completes English 121.

Rhetorical Awareness

When we talk about “rhetorical awareness” in first-year writing, we mean the abilities you have as a writer to be aware of, and respond to, the many demands that face you as a writer each time you sit to write. You may have begun to ask yourself many questions without thinking much about it: who am I writing this for? What do they/what does s/he want to know, and why? What genre—essay, short story, poem—should I choose, and why?

By the end of 121, successful students should be able to:

- Understand what it means to write for an “audience” and be able to express how different audiences might have different expectations for your writing;
- Know how to choose various kinds of writing—ie, genres—that will best match the purpose for your writing and will best reach your audience;
- Choose topics, ideas, and genres that are both interesting to you as a writer *and* that meet the expectations of your audience;
- Understand how to make choices in the form—ie, the layout, arrangement, organization, and so on—and the content—ie, the subject—of your writing.

Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing

Perhaps you’ve heard the phrase “critical thinking” before—it’s one that is used a lot, by various people, to mean a variety of things. However, in the context of first-year writing, we think it’s important for you to be able to use writing and reading as *ways* of thinking and reflecting on your learning.

By the end of 121, successful students should be able to:

- Use writing and discussion (in-class, in the hallways, online, and so on) to both digest and interpret complex ideas;
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- Analyze how you as a writer, and how other writers (whether published or not) make choices about language and form as they write;
- Use writing to figure out how a complex text is “working,” and then be able to see how there might be multiple interpretations of the same text;
- Use a variety of research strategies (library-based research, field research, web research)
- Know how to incorporate significant research into your own writing;
- Express your ideas in relationship to the ideas of others.

Processes

As writing teachers, we think a lot about writing as a *process*. As we’ve grown as writers ourselves, and as we continue to work with students, we see how writing is not just an end product—ie, the written, final version you might turn in to an instructor—but also how writing is always a process. Sometimes that process is radically different, depending on the task at hand (we know we write emails differently than we write professional papers, for example).

By the end of 121, successful students should be able to:

- Use writing and perhaps other ways of communication, like talking, drawing, and thinking aloud, to develop your ideas;
- Understand how writing is a process, and that one piece of writing might take several drafts, some conversations with peers or your instructor, and several revisions before it is fully developed;
- Know what processes work best for you as a writer;
- Know when you might work best with others, whether in collaborating on a text or in brainstorming ideas;
- Be able to give others useful feedback about their writing.

Knowledge of Conventions

There are parts of writing—sometimes we like to refer to them as the surface-level concerns we might have—that have less to do with content or processes and more to do with the particular forms and formats that are sometimes expected. As a student, it is important that you know that underlying “rules” of writing—and that you’re aware of what resources you have to use when you don’t know those rules.

By the end of English 121, successful students should be able to:

- Understand how each genre has a different set of conventions (ie, loose rules) that it follows, and know how to use them;
- Use the conventions of a variety of dialects, and know when and where those are appropriate;
- Feel comfortable with standardized written English (the English of school) and know how to use it in writing;
- Recognize when you’ve used elements of writing incorrectly (for example, misplaced a comma, misspelled a word, or structured a piece of writing incorrectly for that genre) within a given register, and know how to find those mistakes and fix them;
- Use academic citation systems (MLA, APA, and so on) for documenting work, and know where to find resources that will help you with this.

Use of Technology

Technology has always been intertwined with writing, but now perhaps you notice that you use computers for more of your writing than you had in the past. As a researcher, computer technology provides you with an amazing wealth of resources to use.

By the end of 121, successful students should be able to:

- Know how to use computers for the drafting process;
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- Explain how on-line (ie, webpages, email, and so on) and off-line genres of writing are similar and different;
 - Know how to use computers to do research;
 - Find and critically assess sources available online.
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