

# What Makes a Course “Writing Intensive”?

## General Guidelines

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Guidelines for WI courses at different institutions are strikingly similar; most include at least some of the following elements or something like them.

1. *Class size or instructor/student ratio.* Most guidelines insist that WI classes include no more than 15 to 25 students. In programs with larger classes, teaching assistants may be provided to reduce the instructor’s workload.
2. *Who teaches?* Many guidelines insist that WI courses be faculty taught rather than taught by teaching assistants (Indiana, Missouri, Michigan).
3. *Required number of papers or words.* Some guidelines indicate a total of, say, 5,000 words, which may include some combination of formal and informal writing, in-class and out-of-class writing, drafts, and journals, though guidelines may specify the number of formal papers (minimum of four at Indiana) or, like Missouri, that “2,000 words should be in polished papers.”
4. *Revision.* Some guidelines specify how many papers should go through a complete revision process. Guidelines may indicate that drafts may be read by the instructor, peers, and teaching assistants or readers. Some guidelines make clear that feedback and revision must involve more than pointing out and correcting surface errors.
5. *How writing will affect final grade.* Guidelines may stipulate or recommend that grades on written work make up a certain percentage of the course grade. This is a point sometimes not easily negotiated in WI courses taught by disciplinary faculty. A total of 70% of the grade devoted to writing would be good; 20% is probably too low. At Indiana, students wishing to take a course for WI credit sign up for an adjoining course number and

receive S (satisfactory) or F (fail) for the writing component of the course, which instructors are free to separate from the rest of the course.

6. *Types of assignments.* Guidelines may require or recommend that writing be spread throughout the course in a sequence of related assignments rather than concentrated in a large term paper. Guidelines may specify that a certain number of papers engage students in particular tasks, e.g., summary, analysis, integration of sources. Departments or individual instructors may be asked to generate assignments that discuss ethical issues of the discipline, or expose students to a disciplinary problem to be solved, or to a question on which experts disagree.
7. *Assignment-related instruction and evaluation of papers.* Guidelines may suggest, require, or provide teaching techniques demonstrated in workshops, for example, collaborative work, directed lessons on research techniques, checklists for feedback on drafts, and minimal marking.
8. *Support services.* Guidelines may suggest or require that instructors make use of available consultation with the WAC staff, or that their students use the tutoring services in the campus writing center.

*Writing Across the Curriculum: A Guide to Developing Programs.* Ed. Susan H. McLeod and Margot Soven. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992. Pp. 52-62.