

Office of General Education A218C Tel: 212.650.8066

# ENGL 210 ASSESSMENT REPORT

Report Compiled by Professor Missy Watson [mwatson2@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:mwatson2@ccny.cuny.edu)

**Table of Contents**

[GENERAL INFORMATION 2](#_TOC_250013)

[EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2](#_TOC_250012)

[ASSESSMENT METHODS 4](#_TOC_250011)

The Purpose and Audience of this Assessment 4

Information about the Course 4

Method of Sample Collection 5

Sample Collected 5

Participant Recruitment and Compensation 5

Rubrics Used for Scoring 5

Method of Scoring, Norming, and Recording Observations 6

Method of Analysis 7

[ASSESSMENT FINDINGS 7](#_TOC_250010)

[Writing Skills 7](#_TOC_250009)

[Observations on Students’ Theses 7](#_TOC_250008)

Observations on Students’ Structure and Organization 8

Observations on Students’ Evidence and Development 9

Observations on Students’ Mechanics and Style 10

[Critical Thinking Skills 11](#_TOC_250007)

Observations on Strengths in the Critical Thinking Demonstrated 11

Observations on Weaknesses in the Critical Thinking Demonstrated 11

[NOTABLE PATTERNS IN ENGLISH 210 STUDENT WRITING 12](#_TOC_250006)

[RECOMMENDATIONS 14](#_TOC_250005)

[At the Instructional Level (in the classroom) 14](#_TOC_250004)

At the Departmental and Institutional Levels 15

[APPENDIX A: Gen Ed Program Learning Outcomes 19](#_TOC_250003)

[APPENDIX B: Gen Ed Writing Rubric 20](#_TOC_250002)

[APPENDIX C: Gen Ed Critical Thinking Rubric 21](#_TOC_250001)

[APPENDIX D: Assessment Team’s Assessment Report 22](#_TOC_250000)

# GENERAL INFORMATION

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Date of Report: | July 5, 2015 |
| Course: | ENGL 210 |
| Date of Assessment: | June 2015 |
| Assessment Team  Members: | Ewa Barnes, Adjunct Instructor, English Department  Gina Marten-­‐Miller, Adjunct Instructor, English Department Nargiza Matyakubova, Adjunct Instructor, English Department Robert Ramos, Adjunct Instructor, English Department |
| Coordination / Oversight: | Barbara Gleason, Professor, English Department Ana Vasović, Director of General Education  Missy Watson, Assistant Professor, English Department |

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goal of this assessment was to evaluate the effectiveness of the General Education curriculum by assessing student writing within one of the City College Gen Ed courses, English 210. The assessment focuses on student learning in the areas of writing and critical thinking. A total of 56 student papers were assessed. The collection represents 30% (14 of the 47) ENGL 210 sections offered in the spring 2015 semester and 4% of all Spring 2015 ENGL 210 students (with approximately 25 students per class enrolled in 47 sections). While all four versions of English 210 were represented in this sample, they were not evenly distributed. The sections included are as follows:

* Samples from 5 sections of ENGL 21001 – Writing for the Humanities
* Samples from 1 section of ENGL 21002 – Writing for Social Sciences
* Samples from 6 sections of ENGL 21003 – Writing for the Sciences
* Samples from 2 sections of ENGL 21007 – Writing for Engineers

As noted by the Assessment Team in their written reports, the sample evaluated indicates a number of **strengths** in student writing. Most students are successful in

* Selecting relevant and original topics or issues to investigate;
* Researching a topic and drawing on a variety (and abundance) of sources to support their ideas;
* Crafting clear and researchable thesis statements, hypotheses, or central ideas;
* Explaining concepts and other background information on a given topic, as well as theirs and others’ ideas;
* Following guidelines for style and mechanics and composing clear and proofread prose (only in rare cases was the grammar in a given paper so underdeveloped that communication of ideas was significantly undermined).

The **most prominent concern** in student writing observed in this student sample

was in how students used sources. More specifically, students struggled with

* Representing/summarizing texts fully and accurately (likely a result of struggles with critically reading and comprehending complex texts).
* Introducing and contextualizing sources (including providing information about the text or author’s credibility);
* Synthesizing sources (the interweaving of various sources on a given topic to illustrate the relationship across perspectives);
* Analyzing sources (which often resulted in students relying too heavily on summary or on general overviews of a text rather than specific or nuanced points developed over the course of an author’s full argument);
* Developing the discussion of a given source to emphasize its connection to the student’s thesis, perspective, hypothesis, or central idea.
* Critically questioning a given source, author, claim, assumption, or rhetorical appeal;
* Using correct style and punctuation for in-­‐text and bibliographic citations.

Students, in general, **also struggled with**

* Crafting complicated and nuanced theses;
* Writing from a position of voice and authority;
* Engaging in critical analysis (and illustrating their own critical thinking);
* Developing ideas (so that they effectively relate to, support, and/or complicate thesis);
* Crafting introductions and conclusions;
* Varying sentence structure and using sophisticated vocabulary.

This assessment led the team to the following **recommendations** (see the section on “Recommendations” below for a more detailed explanation):

* + Instructors of English 210 are encouraged to continue fostering students’ strengths and to address the weaknesses outlined above. However, the two goals that instructors of English 210 should focus most on include developing students’ critical thinking and source-­‐use practices.
  + University and departmental administrators are encouraged to
    - Establish ongoing efforts to evaluate English 210 design and curriculum
    - Provide more support for adjunct instructors of English 210
    - Establish efforts to evaluate the General Education rubrics
    - Consider different (or additional) kinds of assessment practices in the

future

# ASSESSMENT METHODS

|  |
| --- |
| **The Purpose and Audience of this Assessment** |
| The goal of this assessment was to evaluate the effectiveness of the General Education (Gen Ed) curriculum by assessing student writing within one of the City  College Gen Ed courses, English 210. The assessment focuses on student learning in the areas of writing and critical thinking.  As the Director of General Education, Ana Vasović is charged with coordinating ongoing assessments of Gen Ed Curriculum, information that is reported to the Gen Ed Committee and the Middle States Commission in Higher Education in order to document the ongoing evaluations of student learning alongside curricular goals. Vasović, who has coordinated multiple Gen Ed assessments, invited Barbara Gleason and Missy Watson (both professors of Rhetoric and Composition in the English Department) to participate. Given that English 210 is resides in the English Department, the intended audiences and potential uses for this report are many. In addition to tracking student learning for Gen Ed and the Middle States, it is anticipated that this report will inform future assessments and curricular design (for Gen Ed and for the English Department) and may be used to aid professional development for adjuncts in the English Department. |
| **Information about the Course** |
| English 210 has four disciplinary variations:   1. English 21001 – Writing for the Humanities 2. English 21002 – Writing for Social Sciences 3. English 21004 – Writing for the Sciences 4. English 21007 – Writing for Engineers   English 210 serves two curricular functions. First, except for the departments of English, Art, and Music, all CCNY academic departments require particular variations of ENGL 210 for specific degree programs (majors). Second, ENGL 210 serves as a college-­‐wide Gen Ed composition requirement; that is, English 210 is a required composition course that students take after successfully completing English 110 or FIQWS (Freshman Inquiry Writing Seminar) at City College or having transferred in with an equivalent course.  English 210 was selected for this assessment for the purposes of highlighting student achievement evident within student writing produced in an intermediate undergraduate course. Three courses have been selected for Gen Ed assessment in hopes of showing progression throughout the undergraduate experience: 1) English 110 or FIQWS, courses taken early in the undergraduate degree; 2) English 210, a course that is ideally, though far from always, taken during the second year of the undergraduate degree; and Philosophy 102, a course taken later in the undergraduate degree. Further, as a composition course, 210 assignments lend |

|  |
| --- |
| themselves to assessing student writing and critical thinking, which are two of the  major outcomes of Gen Ed. |
| **Method of Sample Collection** |
| All instructors who taught ENGL 210 during the spring 2015 semester were  requested by email to submit (voluntarily) 4 samples of research-­‐driven assignments written by students (from each section of 210 they taught) to be used for this assessment. In an effort to ensure the sample selection was random, instructors were asked to provide samples from students who were listed as numbers 1, 4, 7, and 10 on their alphabetized course rosters. Instructors were also requested to submit their assignment prompts/descriptions and their syllabi. |
| **Sample Collected** |
| 9 instructors (who collectively taught 14 sections of 210) volunteered to provide  samples. A total of 56 student papers were collected and used for this assessment. The collection of student papers represents 30% (14 of the 47) ENGL 210 sections offered in the spring 2015 semester. While all four versions of English 210 were represented in this sample, they were not evenly distributed. The rundown of sections included are as follows:   * Samples from 5 sections were collected for 21001 – Writing for the Humanities * Samples from 1 section was collected for 21002 – Writing for Social Sciences * Samples from 6 sections were collected for 21003 – Writing for the Sciences * Samples from 2 sections were collected for 21007 – Writing for Engineers |
| **Participant Recruitment and Compensation** |
| All instructors who had indicated interest in providing samples for this assessment  were later invited to participate as readers and scorers in the assessment process. Four readers/scorers were selected on a first-­‐come, first-­‐served basis. Participants were paid the CUNY non-­‐teaching adjunct rate for the hours spent on this assessment. |
| **Rubrics Used for Scoring** |
| The initial goal was to assess students learning when it came to writing, critical thinking, and information literacy skills; however, only the first two of these  outcomes were considered in this assessment (see “Method of Scoring, Norming, and Recording Observations” below for the reasoning for this decision).  Accordingly, two rubrics (which are included below as Appendices B and C: the CCNY General Education Rubrics for Writing and for Critical Thinking) were used for this assessment. The General Education Rubrics were selected since the primary goal of this assessment was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Gen Ed curriculum and since these were the rubrics used in previous assessments. However, it is important to acknowledge that the writing rubric used here is a slightly modified version of the Gen Ed Rubric for Writing. Professor Watson previously modified this rubric for her own teaching purposes and the Assessment Coordinators agreed to use it for the |

|  |
| --- |
| current assessment.  As the rubrics show, there are four possible scores for each category: Beginning (1), Developing (2), Proficient (3), and Accomplished (4). The scale of 1-­‐4 on the rubrics reflects the ability range from the beginning level to the accomplished level. It is meant as a “college span” scale, and it is expected that students will be at the “accomplished” end of the scale by the time they graduate. |
| **Method of Scoring, Norming, and Recording Observations** |
| The 3 assessment coordinators and 4 readers/scorers met early in the process to  discuss our plans and goals of assessment, to review their interpretations of the rubrics, and to engage in an initial norming process. Prior to this first meeting, the 4 instructors serving as readers/scorers were given 3 samples of student writing\* (samples that were not part of the 56 samples) and asked to score them using 3 Gen Ed Rubrics (the two mentioned above as well as the Information Literacy Gen Ed Rubric). One of the coordinators also scored these three writing samples and led the group in a norming session and discussion for the purposes of better aligning the raters’ interpretation and application of the rubrics. At this initial meeting it was collectively decided that it would be problematic to use the third Gen Ed Rubric on Information Literacy since it is not possible to fully gauge students’ information literacy skills based on the writing samples alone (especially outcomes on the rubric regarding students’ abilities to search for and evaluate sources).  The 4 instructors were then each assigned 28 of the 56 samples\* to read and rate (so that each sample was scored by two instructors) before our second norming session. Instructors were permitted to score whole and half numbers (1, 1.5, 2, 2.5, 3, 3.5, 4) as well as to mark N/A for those outcomes not applicable for a given sample. The use of N/A was important given that English 210 courses vary in their disciplinary focus and so vary in the kinds of writing produced. The instructors were also asked to complete a form where they reported their general observations regarding trends in the student writing they reviewed (see Appendix D for the list of questions posed to instructors).  At the second (final) norming session, two instructors who read the same 28 papers paired up to norm their scores. To do so, they shared their scores with each other, discussed discrepancies (explaining why they chose the scores they did), and tried to come to a consensus over one shared score for each category on both rubrics. When differences in scores were irreconcilable, a third reader was asked to score the paper and a final third norming discussion ensued. The instructors were able to come to agreement over the scoring of all papers except one, which then was read by one of the coordinators and normed again with the two instructors. The normed scores were provided to the coordinators and an average score for each category in both rubrics was calculated. In this final meeting the group also engaged in a discussion about the trends observed in student writing as well as new perceptions gleaned about the teaching of writing. |

|  |
| --- |
| \*All student and instructor names were removed from all samples prior to  assessment. |
| **Method of Analysis** |
| In addition to providing the quantitative results of the averaged scores (alongside  the scores from last year’s assessment for comparative purposes), the current report is heavily based on the insights provided by the four instructors (in the reports they wrote and in the two group norming discussions). The observations of the assessment coordinators, furthermore, were also considered when determining and articulating the results discussed in this report.  To analyze the findings of this assessment, the author of this report, Professor Missy Watson, first repeatedly read through all of the instructors’ reports and all memos/communications from coordinators alongside her own participant observation notes. She proceeded to make note of emerging trends and salient topics and then grouped interconnected information together for comparative analysis. Categories and discussion points emerged, which are presented below. While the categories are mostly based on the questions posed in the assessment report completed by the assessment team (again, see Appendix D), the discussion within each category was determined during the analysis of the results, and, furthermore, additional topics of discussion were inserted as needed. When instructors’ reports are quoted, general and randomized names are referenced (i.e., “Instructor A”). |

# ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

## Writing Skills

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Writing – average scores \* | | | |
| Thesis | Structure and  Organization | Evidence and  Development | Mechanics and  Style |
| June 2014 | 2.8 | 2.8 | 2.7 | 2.5 |
| June 2015 | 2.67 | 2.5 | 2.38 | 2.83 |

### Observations on Students’ Theses

The average score for the category of “Thesis” suggests that students in English 210 courses are, more or less, achieving beyond the “**Developing**” stage and performing closer to the “**Proficient**” stage (which falls third in the four levels of achievement: Beginner, Developing, Proficient, Accomplished).

Students in this sample showed a variety of **strengths** in crafting and presenting

|  |
| --- |
| theses:   * In general, all papers demonstrated knowledge of how to form a thesis, hypothesis, or research question” (Instructor A). * Many thesis statements were effectively narrowed, specific, and explicitly stated, and when they were, the discussion emerging in the essay was likewise focused and well organized. * Some students were able to develop a clear purpose and an effective central idea within their essays without stating explicit thesis statements in the introduction sections. In some instances, the thesis was intentionally delayed or left implicit in order to serve specific rhetorical purposes.   Students in this sample showed the following **weaknesses** in crafting and presenting theses:   * Thesis statements were regularly too general or simplistic (i.e., not narrowed or debatable). * Theses were not often nuanced or sophisticated enough to be effectively examined, analyzed, or complicated.   -­‐-­‐“Students do not seem capable of creating a thesis/idea that can be  sustained for an essay that should be between 5-­‐9 pages” (Instructor B).  -­‐-­‐“Students shy away from complicating their ideas and [sometimes] take an easy route that sets up a broad paper” (Instructor B).   * In some cases, thesis statements were vague and essays sometimes had numerous and unrelated claims, making the central idea difficult to detect. |
| **Observations on Students’ Structure and Organization** |
| The average score for “**Structure and Organization**” suggests that students in English 210 courses are, more or less, directly between the “**Developing**” and “**Proficient**” stages (which fall second and third in the four levels of achievement: Beginner, Developing, Proficient, Accomplished).  Students in this sample showed a variety of **strengths** in structuring and organizing their writing:   * A majority of students’ structures were clear and their organizational schemes straightforward. * Overall, students demonstrated the ability to effectively set up and explain issues, communicate their own ideas, and transition ideas across several paragraphs. * Students seem to be aware of the basic communicative goals of academic introductions and conclusions.   Students in this sample showed the following **weaknesses** in structuring and organizing their writing:   * While structures were clear and straightforward, this might just be a result |

|  |
| --- |
| of the theses being straightforward or too simplistic. Stretching out more  complicated ideas/theses over multiple paragraphs proved challenging for students.   * In several cases, students’ headings and/or topic sentences indicated a certain focus, yet the student pursued another. Other times, students included irrelevant information that was either not mentioned in the thesis or that did not connect well enough to the thesis. Students also sometimes switch between topics without effectively transitioning. * While students seem to be aware of the functions of introductions and conclusions, most did not construct these parts of their essays thoroughly or effectively.   “Students who could not introduce their purpose clearly often struggled  to hold the essay together until the end. Without this foundation, the essay had weak progression and transitioning….Even some of the essays with strong introductions faltered at the conclusion. Many of them were too short to do justice for the essay or purpose” (Instructor B). |
| **Observations on Students’ Evidence and Development** |
| The average score for “**Evidence and Development**” suggests that students in English 210 courses are, more or less, at the “**Developing**” stage (which falls second in the four levels of achievement: Beginner, Developing, Proficient, Accomplished).  Students in this sample showed a variety of **strengths** in evidencing and developing their writing:   * A majority of students draw on a wealth of textual evidence from a variety of credible sources. Students typically include at least one scholarly article or book chapter in their research and also pull from other credible public sources (usually from documentaries, newspapers, and trade or professional magazines).   “Many papers have an extensive reference list, which shows students can collect information and locate sources that can be useful” (Instructor B).   * Some students effectively include visual and other quantitative evidence to support their writing, including images, graphs, charts, and results from their own studies conducted. * Some students effectively include personal, anecdotal, and other qualitative evidence to support their writing, including drawing on primary research (e.g., participant observation, surveys, and interviews). * Some students show great skill in selecting information to include in their essays and then connecting their evidence to their thesis.   “Essays that received a high score in this category tend to be more than just well-­‐researched; their authors also summarize and evaluate their evidence. In addition, they make [explicit] connections between the  evidence and their thesis statement/ central claim” (Instructor D). |

|  |
| --- |
| Students in this sample showed the following **weaknesses** in evidencing and  developing their writing:   * While the amount and type of evidence seemed adequate, most students were not effective in *developing* evidence and ideas. This proved to be one of the biggest weaknesses observable in the sample. Evidence was rarely fully analyzed or situated in order to effectively connect to the topic, purpose, or claim. Further, the evidence was rarely developed in a way that advanced, complicated, or evolved their thesis or central idea.   -­‐-­‐“Not all ideas were fully developed, or if developed, information did not flow smoothly…Students [did not regularly] finalize their thoughts before abruptly switching to the next claim. Students [did not regularly] emphasize the relevance or significance of the claim and/or evidence they integrated” (Instructor C).  -­‐-­‐“Most of the papers relied on extensive summaries to complete the assignment. Students would refer to a source and simply provide an overview of what happened. It was rare to see direct quoting or a properly done paraphrase/interpretation of the source being used” (Instructor B). |
| **Observations on Students’ Mechanics and Style** |
| The average score for “**Mechanics and Style**” suggests that students in English 210 courses are, more or less, at the “**Proficient**” stage (which falls third in the four levels of achievement: Beginner, Developing, Proficient, Accomplished).  Students in this sample showed various **strengths** in this category, including a strong ability to clearly state their ideas without mechanics or style disrupting the communicative purposes students sought.  “In general, student writing is clear, even if there are minor problems in  grammar and punctuation. Some essays include more significant problems in grammar and usage but the student is nonetheless able to communicate their ideas in a way that the reader can understand. The stronger essays follow the standards of academic English and thus the tone and style is appropriate for the audience” (Instructor D).  Students in this sample showed some **weaknesses** in their mechanics and styles, including a lack of sophisticated vocabulary and sentence structure and problematic style and punctuation when integrating sources. Some student writing indicated an early development with the English language, and in these cases meaning was occasionally compromised due to grammatical, diction, and syntactical errors. |

## Critical Thinking Skills

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Critical Thinking– average scores \* | | | | |
| Explanation  of issues | Evidence | Context &  Assumptions | Student's  Position | Conclusions |
| June 2014 | 3 | 2.7 | 2.4 | 3 | 2.6 |
| June 2015 | 2.73 | 2.46 | 2.19 | 2.21 | 2.06 |

|  |
| --- |
| **Observations on Strengths in the Critical Thinking Demonstrated** |
| Students scored highest on the first category in the Gen Ed Rubric for Critical Thinking, “**Explanation of Issues.**” In this category, students’ scores averaged near “**Proficient**” (which falls third in the four levels of achievement: Beginner, Developing, Proficient, Accomplished). As indicated in the Gen Ed Rubric for Critical Thinking, this means that the “Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated, described, and clarified so that understanding is not seriously impeded by omissions.” As explained by instructors,   * “Students tend to articulate the complexities of an issue using both their own words and citations from scholarly sources” (Instructor D) and “Some students became very creative while explaining their ideas” (Instructor C). * “Students in 210 classes have shown that they are curious about the “bigger picture” in their classes….decide to write essays involving ideas that are thought provoking…[and] are thinking outside of the box” (Instructor B).   Students also showed strengths in selecting and using “**Evidence**,” scoring on average between “**Developing**” and “**Proficient**.” Of interest, as Instructor C notes,   * “Some writers effectively synthesized information, considered counterclaims which completely contradicted their ideas yet managed to refute them with good reasoning and evidence. Students also developed valuable solutions to problems as a result of careful consideration of [background information]” (Instructor C). |
| **Observations on Weaknesses in the Critical Thinking Demonstrated** |
| Students in this sample scored, on average, as “**Developing**” (the second of four stages) when it came to three of the categories in the Critical Thinking rubric: 1) addressing the “**Influence of Context and Assumptions**”; 2) creating a “**Position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis)**”; and 3) discussing “**Conclusions and related outcomes (implications and consequences)**.” |

### “Influence of Context and Assumptions”

* While students typically discuss contextual factors and background information, the actual *influence* of context and assumptions on a given issue/topic are rarely analyzed or even considered.

“Viewpoints of experts are often taken and presented as fact. Students

assume that if a given piece of information is published, then it must be true and therefore need not be questioned….In their essays, many students present a given issue from one perspective, without questioning their own or anyone else’s assumptions” (Instructor D).

### “Student’s position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis)”

* While many students are able to *state* their position on a given topic, they rarely emphasize how their positions connect to, build from, extend, or counter other points of view. Students, furthermore, are able to *name* various positions but fall short when it comes to interrogating the viewpoints of experts or to challenging their own or others’ assumptions.

-­‐-­‐“This reflects an awareness on the student’s part to be open minded to

the ideas of others; however, students often gloss over the complexities a viewpoint may have” (Instructor B).

-­‐-­‐“While students seem confident in expressing their position on a given

issue, they have a hard time acknowledging different sides of an issue. Or, if they do acknowledge opposing viewpoints, they quickly dismiss them without truly wrestling with their opponents” (Instructor D).

### “Conclusions and related outcomes (implications and consequences)”

* While conclusions often included related outcomes, many were oversimplified and did not account for various positions, highlight the complexities, or address implications.

-­‐-­‐“In many cases, the conclusion appeared to be a wrap [up] or summary, although more useful than the standard topic-­‐by-­‐topic summary that one tends to see at the beginning of the semester” (Instructor A).

-­‐-­‐“A majority of the essays suffered from a conclusion that came out of nowhere or offered little insight into the purpose of the paper. Several essays offered solutions that were too simple and ignored the complexities of the real world. Concerns also come from some students throwing in last minute ideas that were not previously mentioned, forgetting relevant information already discussed, and throwing in a new perspective that was never established” (Instructor B).

# NOTABLE PATTERNS IN ENGLISH 210 STUDENT WRITING

### Notable Strengths in Student Writing

As noted by the Assessment Team in their written reports, the sample evaluated indicates a number of strengths in student writing. Most students are successful in

* Selecting relevant and original topics or issues to investigate;
* Researching a topic and drawing on a variety (and abundance) of sources to support their ideas;
* Crafting clear and researchable thesis statements, hypotheses, or central ideas;
* Explaining concepts and other background information on a given topic, as well as theirs and others’ ideas;
* Following guidelines for style and mechanics and composing clear and proofread prose (It was rare when a student’s ideas were undermined by his/her written language).

### Most Notable Weakness in Student Writing

The most prominent concern in student writing observed in this student sample

was in how students used sources. More specifically, students struggled with

* Representing/summarizing texts fully and accurately (likely a result of struggles with critically reading and comprehending complex texts).
* Introducing and contextualizing sources (including providing information about the text or author’s credibility);
* Synthesizing sources (the interweaving of various sources on a given topic to illustrate the relationship across perspectives);
* Analyzing sources (which often resulted in students relying too heavily on summary or on general overviews of a text rather than specific or nuanced points developed over the course of an author’s full argument);
* Developing the discussion of a given source to emphasize its connection to the student’s thesis, perspective, hypothesis, or central idea.
* Critically questioning a given source, author, claim, assumption, or rhetorical appeal;
* Using correct style and punctuation for in-­‐text and bibliographic citations.

### Other Weaknesses in Student Writing

Students, in general, also struggled with

* Crafting complicated and nuanced theses;
* Writing from a position of voice and authority;
* Engaging in critical analysis (and illustrating their own critical thinking);
* Developing ideas (so that they effectively relate to, support, and/or complicate thesis);
* Crafting introductions and conclusions;
* Varying sentence structure and using sophisticated vocabulary.

### The Decrease in Averaged Scores from 2014 to 2015

In addition to discussing the qualitative trends observed by the Assessment

Coordinators and Team in student learning as revealed through this assessment, it is important to acknowledge that the average scores for all categories (in both rubrics) indicate a decrease in student learning in comparison to the scores from last year’s assessment. However, these scores should not be interpreted in that way.

It is difficult to determine precisely the cause of this decrease in scores for various reasons. First, only 4% of enrolled ENGL 210 students are represented in this sample. Further, the change in scores may simply be a result of the assessment team’s efforts to norm interpretations of the rubrics and to norm instructors’ actual scoring based on those rubrics. Finally, since there were slight changes made in this year’s assessment to both the rubrics and the scoring process used last year, it may not be productive to use this assessment as means to argue that student achievement has gone down.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## At the Instructional Level (in the classroom)

In general, instructors of English 210 are encouraged to continue fostering students’ strengths and to address the weaknesses outlined above. Emphasized here are two of the more crucial goals that instructors of English 210 should pursue.

### Developing students’ critical thinking

Students need help with critically reading and analyzing texts and then with extending and demonstrating their critical thinking in their writing. They struggle, for instance, with comprehending and critically analyzing complex texts, questioning and wrestling with different points of view, uncovering their own and others’ assumptions, considering how context influences various positions on a given issue, and articulating how their conclusions connect to or impact larger real-­‐ world issues. Our team of assessment coordinators and instructors/evaluators agree that the Gen Ed Critical Thinking Rubric should be provided to ENGL 210 instructors and used to develop curricula and design lessons and assignments.

.

### Develop students’ source use practices

ENGL 210 students struggle significantly when it comes to effectively and correctly

integrating sources into their writing.

Strategies for improving student source use include the following:

* Require shared texts in students’ research writing (so that the instructor can gauge student comprehension and representation of the text and support them as needed);
* Require fewer sources for any given essay (so that students have the space to work more thoroughly and critically with select texts);
* Attend carefully to scaffolding shorter assignments and lessons so that students get ample practice with
* locating and critically evaluating sources,
* reading, annotating, paraphrasing, quoting, and summarizing sources,
* critically analyzing sources (including for their rhetorical contexts and

authors’ assumptions),

|  |
| --- |
| * synthesizing multiple sources, * using summary, analysis, and synthesis of sources to support *and*   *complicate* students’ theses, hypotheses, or central ideas, and   * using standard style and mechanics for in-­‐text and biographical citations; * Avail more opportunities for drafting (and for offering students your feedback on early and later drafts). |
| **At the Departmental and Institutional Levels** |
| **Establish Ongoing Efforts to Evaluate English 210 Design and Curriculum** It was apparent to the Assessment Team that English 210 would benefit from additional administrative oversight when it comes to setting shared curricular requirements. While each of the variations for English 210 have their own specific goals and will thus differ in their content and assignments, shared guidelines on desired course outcomes would help ensure that all students achieve certain  learning goals no matter what version of 210 they take. For instance, there could be shared requirements when it comes to the following: the learning to be fostered (e.g., critical thinking, effective source use, argumentation, rhetorical awareness and adaptability), the length of writing assignments; and the amount and types of sources required for research writing. The shared outcomes established, moreover, could build on and extend the learning goals set for English 110 and FIQWS.  Other potential issues to investigate include the following:   * Consider requiring students to take English 210 prior to or soon after earning junior status. Students will benefit most if taking English 210 prior to entering upper division-­‐courses, and English 210 instructors will benefit if not having to assess and meet the needs of freshmen through seniors. * Consider offering a more general and non-­‐discipline-­‐specific English 210 course for students with undecided majors or students looking for a more general course that could prepare them for many approaches to academic researched writing. * Consider designating certain sections of English 210 for specific majors (i.e., English 21003 – Writing for Sciences for Sophie Davis Students). * Consider working with administrators and faculty across the disciplines to learn about the sorts of writing that are required in students’ majors and how English 210 can account for that information. * Consider assigning in-­‐class writing tutors to work with teachers and students in English 210 courses. At City College and at other institutions, sections of writing courses are sometimes assigned designated writing tutors (who have background in writing and the discipline) to provide additional one-­‐on-­‐one support for students in that section.   **Provide More Support for Adjunct Instructors of English 210**  In Spring 2015, there were 37 adjunct instructors in the English Department who |

taught English 210. Providing additional support for adjunct instructors will aid in aligning curriculum, gathering teaching materials, improving teaching, and building community.

* Collect and make available syllabi and course materials for English 210 instructors to use and adapt;
* Collect and make available writing samples from English 210 students for instructors to reference (and for 210 students to use as models);
* Provide opportunities for productive interchange where adjuncts can share experiences, materials, and strategies for overcoming shared obstacles.
* Provide opportunities for professional development where adjuncts can come to terms with how to interpret and achieve various curricular goals. **Potential topics for professional development include the following**:
* Developing students’ source uses
* Developing students’ critical thinking
* Using the Gen Ed rubrics when designing curriculum
* Understanding the ideal shared curricular goals across English 210

variations

* Understanding the connections between English 110/FIQWS and English 210
* Developing and scaffolding writing assignments
* Norming assessment practices
* Consider hiring a college assistant to assist full-­‐time faculty coordinator(s)of ENGL 210 courses in the activities listed above.

### Establish Efforts to Evaluate the General Education Rubrics

In the 2014 assessment report of English 210, it was suggested that the assignments required in English 210—which varied significantly across sections—should be adjusted to better align with the General Education Rubrics:

“There was an inconsistency in the requirements of the assignments [assigned across 210 sections] that may skew the results negatively. Some instructors assigned proposals, book reviews, and case studies for their finals. These assignments didn’t lend themselves well to the Gen Ed Writing rubrics demonstrating a need, perhaps, for standardizing the assignments.”

The Assessment Coordinators and Team agree with this suggestion from last year and would like to add that the Gen Ed Rubrics could likewise benefit from adjusting based on what Gen Ed classes, like English 210, are attempting to accomplish. In other words, we believe the top-­‐down vision articulated in the Gen Ed Rubrics could be enhanced with the bottom-­‐up expertise of professionals teaching in the disciplines.

Thus, the Assessment Team unanimously agreed that the General Education Rubrics would benefit from being evaluated and revised (or, at the very least, that there be different rubrics designed for assessments such as this one so that the rubrics are more appropriate given the sample collected). During the assessment process,

instructors and coordinators observed that the Gen Ed Rubrics were effective in articulating broad learning goals for City College students and in aiding the Assessment Team in guiding and norming their assessment. However, there were a number of concerns expressed regarding the rubrics.

* The Information Literacy Rubric, while useful for setting teaching goals for instructors, outline some outcomes that cannot be accurately assessed through student writing alone. As mentioned previously, the Assessment Team decided to abandon the use of this rubric since (among other things) they felt it was not possible to account for students’ abilities to search for and evaluate sources just by reading one of their essays.
* While the Writing rubric seems particularly useful for assessing persuasive and humanities-­‐based writing, this rubric proved insufficient for assessing the kinds of student writing occurring across the disciplines. In English 21007 (Writing for Engineers) for example, students are tasked with more descriptive and informative researched essays, which would not include the kind of thesis that this rubric describes. Instead, it may include a purpose statement, hypothesis, or simply an introduction of the issue guiding the essay. Other essays across the curriculum, depending on the rhetorical purpose and intended audience, furthermore, might have a delayed or implicit thesis, and so assessing students based on whether they state their thesis explicitly or early on is problematic.
* The Critical Thinking Rubric proved to be the strongest and most useful rubric for this assessment, and the Assessment Team agreed that it served as a better rubric overall for assessing student writing than did the Writing Rubric. Some team members observed that the preference for the Critical Thinking Rubric might be because it focuses on students’ ideas and critical thinking in writing rather than the mechanics or standardization of writing, which team members felt was the focus in the Writing Rubric. This is an important distinction to account for when developing rubrics for Gen Ed or in the English Department: When correctness is privileged over rhetorical purpose and effectiveness, both instructors and students begin privileging the mechanical and quantifiable aspects of writing, rather than the ideas and critical thinking demonstrated. For instance, when we emphasize thesis statements over rhetorical purpose, topic sentences over logical progression and rhetorical appeal, and amounts of evidence *used* over the quality of evidence *use* (i.e., careful integration and thorough development of source use), then students’ writing and their communicative capabilities will consequently suffer.
* There was significant overlap between the Writing and Critical Thinking Rubric and these two rubrics could possibly be combined as one rubric (either just for future assessments or for larger applications).

**Consider Different (or Additional) Kinds of Assessment Practices in the Future** The Assessment Team had a number of recommendations for how assessments could be conducted differently in the future:

* Consider a portfolio model (where several papers by the same student, completed at different points over the semester, are collected and assessed).
* Consider a longitudinal model (where the writing of a set group of students are collected and assessed over the course of their undergraduate coursework).
* In the case of assessing specifically English 210, consider
* Collecting more samples from more sections (English 21002 and 21007, for instance, weren’t represented well in this sample).
* Bundling student papers from the same course together and including the assignment prompt in that bundle.
* Including information on the style guides students were following (papers across English 210 variations, for instance, vary in their use of MLA, APA, Chicago, etc., and so it would help to know what style students attempted to follow).
* Designing different rubrics based on the different variations of 210 (since many writing goals of certain variations of 210 are either not applicable or not representative in the current rubrics, as discussed above).

# APPENDIX A: Gen Ed Program Learning Outcomes

### General Education Program Learning Outcomes

**Proficiencies**

**Writing and Communication Skills**

The student will be able to:

* formulate a clear thesis
* provide coherent, unified and effective organization of a paper
* develop abundant details and examples that provide evidence in support of sound logic
* use standard diction, grammar and mechanics of English

### Critical Thinking skills (adapted from AACU Critical Thinking VALUE rubric)

The student will be able to:

* clearly frame an issue or problem and consider it critically
* select, use, and evaluate information to investigate a claim or point of view
* analyze his or her and others’ assumptions and evaluate relevance of contexts when presenting a position
* present a position taking into account its complexities and limits as well as others points of view
* develop logical conclusions based on evaluation of evidence

### Information literacy skills

The student will be able to:

* demonstrate a clear understanding of information needs and ability to search efficiently
* effectively evaluate information sources
* articulate credibility of sources
* use information ethically

# APPENDIX B: Gen Ed Writing Rubric

**The City College of New York**

General Education Rubrics

WRITING

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Beginning (1) | Developing (2) | Proficient (3) | Accomplished (4) |
| **1. Thesis and**  **Topic Sentences** | -Responds to the assigned topic but lacks a  coherent thesis  -Body paragraphs lack topic sentences, or topic sentences either fail to address or only partially  address the assignment | -Has a coherent thesis, but the thesis is either  too vague or too self-evident to be effectively developed  -Body paragraphs have topic sentences, but  they may be too general or too specific to be effective  -Some but not all topic sentences develop  thesis | -Has a thesis with sufficient focus and clarity  to be effectively developed  -All body paragraphs have effective topic sentences that serve to develop thesis | -Has a strong explicit thesis, which may take  into account competing point(s) of view  -All body paragraphs have effective topic sentences that serve to develop complexity of  thesis |
| **2. Structure and**  **Organization** | -Lacks a coherent introduction  -Progression of thought within paragraphs is  unclear or illogical  -Progression of thought from paragraph to paragraph is unclear or illogical  -Lacks a coherent conclusion | -Has a coherent introduction but needs greater focus to set up the thesis  -Progression of thought within paragraphs is clear and logical, but progression of thought from paragraph to paragraph is not  -Has a coherent conclusion, but needs greater focus | -Has a sufficiently focused introduction that effectively sets up the thesis  -Progression of thought both within and between paragraphs is sufficiently clear and logical  -Has a sufficiently clear and focused conclusion | -Has a clear, focused, and compelling introduction that effectively sets up the thesis  -Progression of thought both within and between paragraphs is clear and logical  -Has a clear, focused, and compelling  conclusion |
| **3. Evidence**  **and Development** | -Has little supporting evidence or evidence is  too general  -Has major omissions of essential evidence  -Makes limited use of specific examples  -Connections between evidence and assigned topic are minimal or missing  -Engages in little to no analysis and relies too  heavily on summary | -Has supporting evidence but not enough to  effectively develop thesis  -Has some omissions of essential evidence  -Some paragraphs do not provide specific  examples that develop thesis  -Makes connections between evidence and thesis, but connections are not consistent  throughout  -Engages in some analysis but relies mostly on summary | -Has sufficient supporting evidence to  effectively develop thesis  -Has no omissions of essential evidence  -All body paragraphs sufficiently provide  specific examples that develop thesis  -Makes sufficient connections between evidence and thesis throughout  -Engages sufficiently in analysis and provides summary when appropriate | -Has effective supporting evidence and  considers counter-evidence to demonstrate a broad understanding of the topic  -Has no omissions of essential evidence  -All body paragraphs effectively provide specific examples that develop thesis  -Makes effective connections between  evidence and thesis throughout  -Engages effectively in analysis and provides summary when appropriate |
| **4. Mechanics and Style** | -The writing is unfocused and unclear at the sentence level  -The tone and style is not appropriate for the  genre and audience  -There are major problems in grammar, punctuation, and usage, many of which  undermine the communication of ideas  -The paper appears to be a first draft | -The writing is focused and clear at the sentence level but not at the paragraph level  -The tone and style is mostly appropriate for  the genre and audience  -There are significant problems in grammar, punctuation, and usage, but they do not  significantly undermine the communication of ideas  -The paper appears to have not been proofread | -The writing is focused and clear at both the sentence level and the paragraph level  -The tone and style is sufficiently appropriate  for the genre and audience  -There may be minor problems in grammar, punctuation, and usage, but they do not  undermine the communication of ideas  -The paper appears to have been proofread | -The writing is focused and clear at both the sentence level and the paragraph level  -The tone and style is effective and appropriate  for the genre and audience  -There are almost no errors in grammar, punctuation, and usage  -The paper appears to have been proofread |

Developed from UC Davis Writing Program rubric, located at <http://writing.ucdavis.edu/programs-and-services/the-workshop-program/faculty-handouts>

# APPENDIX C: Gen Ed Critical Thinking Rubric

**The City College of New York** General Education Rubrics CRITICAL THINKING

**Definition**: Critical thinking is a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion. (*for more information, please contact value@aacu.org)*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Begning (1) | Developing (2) | Proficient (3) | Accomplished (4) |
| **1. Explanation of issues** | Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated without clarification or description. | Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated but description leaves some terms undefined, ambiguities unexplored,  boundaries undetermined, and/or backgrounds unknown. | Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated, described, and clarified so that understanding is not seriously impeded by  omissions. | Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated clearly and described comprehensively, delivering all relevant information necessary for full understanding. |
| **vidence**  *Selecting and using information to investigate a point of view or conclusion* | Information is taken from source(s)  without any interpretation/evaluation. Viewpoints of experts are taken as fact, without question. | Information is taken from source(s) with  some interpretation/evaluation, but not enough to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis.  Viewpoints of experts are taken as mostly fact, with little questioning. | Information is taken from source(s) with enough  interpretation/evaluation to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis.  Viewpoints of experts are subject to  questioning. | Information is taken from source(s) with enough  interpretation/evaluation to develop a comprehensive analysis or synthesis.  Viewpoints of experts are questioned thoroughly. |
| **3. Influence of context**  **and assumptions** | Shows an emerging awareness of  present assumptions (sometimes labels assertions as assumptions). Begins to identify some contexts when presenting a position. | Questions some assumptions. Identifies  several relevant contexts when presenting a position. May be more aware of others' assumptions than one's own (or vice versa). | Identifies own and others' assumptions and  several relevant contexts when presenting a position. | Thoroughly (systematically and methodically)  analyzes own and others' assumptions and carefully evaluates the relevance of contexts when presenting a position. |
| **4. Student's position (perspective,**  **thesis/hypothesis)** | Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is stated, but is  simplistic and obvious. | Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) acknowledges different  sides of an issue. | Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) takes into account the  complexities of an issue.  Others' points of view are acknowledged within position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis). | Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is imaginative, taking into account the complexities of  an issue.  Limits of position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) are acknowledged.  Others' points of view are synthesized within position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis). |
| **5. Conclusions and related outcomes**  **(implications and consequences)** | Conclusion is inconsistently tied to some of the information discussed;  related outcomes (consequences and implications) are oversimplified. | Conclusion is logically tied to information (because information is chosen to fit the  desired conclusion); some related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly. | Conclusion is logically tied to a range of information, including opposing viewpoints;  related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly. | Conclusions and related outcomes (consequences and implications) are logical and reflect student’s  informed evaluation and ability to place evidence and perspectives discussed in priority order. |

# APPENDIX D: Assessment Team’s Assessment Report



Office of General Education A218C Tel: 212.650.8066

ENGL 210 ASSESSMENT REPORT

### WRITING SKILLS

Please comment on:

|  |
| --- |
| Thesis strengths and weaknesses: |
| Structure and organization strengths and weaknesses: |
| Evidence and Development strengths and weaknesses: |
| Mechanics and Style strengths and weaknesses: |
| Other Comments: |

### CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Please comment on (in regards to the rubric categories):

|  |
| --- |
| Strengths: |
| Weaknesses/Concerns: |
| Other comments: |

### Comments on Your Evaluation Experiences & Observations

|  |
| --- |
| Do you notice any patterns (e.g., common strengths or common weaknesses) in the samples of student writing that you have evaluated? |
| Have you discovered that you have any questions about ENGL 210 courses and instruction as a result of your participation in this assessment project? |
| Did you find the Writing Rubric to be a useful instrument for evaluating these samples of ENGL 210 student writing? Yes? No? Please elaborate on your response. |
| Did you find the Critical Thinking rubric to be a useful instrument for evaluating these samples of ENGL 210 student writing? Yes? No? Please elaborate on your response. |

|  |
| --- |
| Recommendations |
| 1. Do you have any recommendations for developing future programmatic writing assessments for ENGL 210 courses? |
| 2. Do you have any recommendations for future faculty workshops/discussions about writing |

|  |
| --- |
| curricula in our ENGL 210 courses? |
| 3. Would you modify your own ENGL 210 syllabus in any way as a result of anything you have learned as an evaluator of ENGL 210 samples of student writing? |
| 4. Please provide suggestions on what can be done on instructional, departmental and/or institutional level to improve student writing and critical thinking skills in ENGL 210 courses. |
| 5. Please add here any additional comments that you may have. |