



Outcomes Assessment for the Communications Department

(Updated July 1999)

Submitted by Roberta Straight and Kate Massengale
Curriculum Coordinators of Communications

Program and courses to be assessed: The department is focusing upon its **writing program**, which consists of four composition courses—English 010, 100, 101, and 102. Specifically, we are assessing selected learning goals for English 100 and English 102, which serve as the exit courses for the developmental- and college-level components of the program.

Mission of the UNM-LA Writing Program:

We are committed to providing high quality instruction in writing skills for all our students. As appropriate for each level within its integrated four-course sequence, the writing program is dedicated to bringing students to effective college-level writing that reflects critical reading and critical thinking.

Goals for the Writing Program as a Whole: In order to meet our mission, we have the following goals:

- Provide a developmental writing program to get under-prepared students ready for college-level writing;
- Provide courses in our writing program which are transferable to and articulate with four year colleges and universities;
- Continue to improve our program through an ongoing process of assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation of our programs;
- Coordinate with other university service programs to provide services necessary to student success, including advisement, testing, placement, tutoring, and special assistance to disadvantaged students;
- Implement and evaluate use of computer technology in our developmental level program;
- Continue to provide opportunities for faculty development, including funding for conferences, participation on advisory boards, in-house training, courses in new technologies.
- Inform students of the skills we are working on specific to each course through the publication of our Guide to English Composition Student Handbook.

Student Learning Goals for the Writing Program as a Whole:

- Students will create writing with meaningful content, clearly discernible focus, organization, development, and coherence;
- Students will develop their ability to read, think, and write critically;
- Students will create writing that demonstrates the conventions of grammar, mechanics, and expression needed to communicate effectively;
- Students will incorporate an effective writing process that includes thinking, planning, drafting, and revising.



Student Learning Goals for English 100:

- Students will increase their vocabulary and reading comprehension capabilities to those of college-level freshmen.
- Students will learn a minimum of seven basic grammatical—mechanical—expression skills that the department has identified as essential for competent writing.
- Students will demonstrate competence in writing a basic essay.
- Students will demonstrate improvement in their ability to draft and revise basic essays.
- Students will develop their ability to read, think, and write critically.
- Students will learn to use basic computer word processing for drafting and revising essays.

Selected Assessment Goals for English 100

- Students will increase their vocabulary and reading comprehension capabilities to those of college-level freshmen.

Assessment Tool: We will be administering the TABE exam as a pre-test at the beginning of the semester and as a post-test at the end of English 100 with the goal that 75 % of all English 100 students pass with scores of 12.9 grade level or higher in both Vocabulary-Comprehension.

- Students will learn a minimum of four basic grammatical—mechanical—expression skills that the department has identified as essential for competent writing.

Definition of Skills – where needed:

Grammar:

Subject – Verb Agreement—acceptable= no more than 3 errors; moderately acceptable = 4 errors; non-acceptable = 5 or more errors.

Pronoun Consistency—Acceptable=no more than 3 errors; moderately acceptable=4 errors; non-acceptable =5 or more errors.

Punctuation:

Apostrophe usage—acceptable= no more than 3 errors; moderately acceptable = 4 errors; non-acceptable = 5 or more errors.

Expression:

Parallelism in words and phrases

- Students will develop their ability to read, think, and write critically.
This ability to think and write critically will be assessed at the sentence level. The ability to create sentences that move beyond simple and compound sentences and do not confuse the reader is an indication of critical thinking skills. The use of transitions demonstrates an understanding of connections.

Sentence variety—uses simple, compound and complex sentences (does not include evaluating sentence boundaries)

Sentence Sense—sentences communicate clearly without confusing reader (does not necessarily include evaluating sentence boundaries unless a lack confuses the reader).

Use of Transitions—within and between paragraphs.

Assessment Tool: We have developed a grid (sample attached) which we apply to the final exam at the end of the semester. Our goal is that 75% of all students taking the will demonstrate adequate or higher understanding of the skills. We will also track the weakest and strongest skills in these areas.

New This Spring: Assessment of Learning Goals for English 101- Expository Writing

- We met as a group last fall and reviewed our expectations for 101 learning goals but have not finalized a complete list.
- We established the goals we wished to assess:
 - Students will demonstrate competence in handling sentence boundaries.
 - Fragments* (exception for appropriate use of fragments)—Acceptable is 1 or none; Moderately Acceptable is 2-3; Non-acceptable is 4 or more.
 - Fused sentences*—Acceptable is 1 or none; Moderately Acceptable is 2; Non-acceptable is 3 or more.
 - Comma splices* –Acceptable is 1-3; Moderately Acceptable is 4; Non-acceptable is 5 or more. (This is still debatable among faculty and may change).
 - Students will develop their ability to read, think, and write critically
 - The above will be assessed at the paragraph level according to the following:
 - Effective use of generalities for topic sentences and conclusions:* (has a topic sentence and a mini-conclusion)
 - All sentences related to topic* (no irrelevancies)
 - Clear, logical order within paragraphs* (has a topic sentence and all sentences follow it logically)
 - Establishes supporting points tied to thesis statement*
 - Good use of explanation where needed*
 - Uses specifics to develop supporting points*
 - Uses recognizable development strategies* (example, definition, classification, process, etc.)

Assessment Tool

Final exams or portfolios will be assessed by using a grade grid and panel-graded at the end of the semester. See attached grid.



Student Learning Goals for English 102—Analytical and Argumentative Writing

- Students will be able to discern, select, differentiate, explain, and respond effectively to the main idea(s) in a reading selection.
- Students' writing demonstrates critical thinking
- Students will support their ideas and assertions with textual sources that are coherently integrated into their writing—without plagiarizing.
- Students will create well-edited essays that are clearly focused, well organized, fully developed, and coherent.
- Students demonstrate correctness in grammar and mechanics.

Selected Assessment Goals for English 102

- Students' writing demonstrates critical thinking (need to add definition here)
- Students will create well-edited essays that are clearly focused, well organized, fully developed, and coherent.

Assessment Method: Department-generated final essay exam with questions which require that students respond to assigned reading selections administered to all students in English 102. The exam is panel-assessed using an analytical matrix composed of the above criteria. See attached assessment grid. We use the same grid for classes in which the teacher has chosen to develop portfolios. We assessed both finals and portfolios this spring.

***Feedback regarding initial assessment goal and method**

[We previously chose to also assess goal one and used a grid modeled after Valencia's and an NCA model. We used that grid to assess our English 102 finals this spring. During and after the cross-grading session, we discovered that the grids were essentially useless in telling us anything about whether our students were achieving those levels of performance (see attached grid). The grid worked neither as a way of establishing a student's grade nor as a way of giving teachers meaningful information. The teachers felt that too many skills were covered, that skills overlapped too often, that the wording on the grid was too vague.]

***Response to feedback of initial assessment tool**

Therefore, we have decided to focus on the critical thinking and organizational aspect of our goal list. We have chosen to focus most of all upon organization and structure because it not only creates coherence and readability, it also demonstrates critical thinking, and the integration of this group of skills is highly sought after by employers. We are in the process of developing a new grid more responsive to our measurement needs.



Feedback Channels

English 100 – Process of Assessment and Feedback

- Individual instructors will administer the TABE pre and posttest and fill out an informational grid (see attached) and give it to the Curriculum Coordinator. The CC will collate the information on all grids from all teachers participating and return a gridded informational report back to the teachers. A follow-up discussion meeting will be scheduled.
- Individual instructors will track the skills evaluated by the module tests. They will fill out a grid and turn it into the Curriculum Coordinator. The CC will collate information, return it to the teachers, and schedule a discussion meeting.

English 102

- English 102 finals are usually cross-graded at the same time on the day of finals. Each individual teacher will fill out the new grid for evaluating the finals for assessment purposes. The grid will not be used to establish a grade as we are only assessing some of the skills expected from a 102 student's essay. Grading will be a separate act using a short form.
- The Curriculum Coordinator (or an assistant) will gather the information, collate it into meaningful form, and the CC will distribute the information to the teachers. A follow-up meeting may be scheduled to discuss new awarenesses or concerns regarding the success of our program.

Sample grid for teachers:

Tracking of English 100 Outcomes Assessment of Mechanical and grammatical Skills

Semester		Year		Instructor		
SKILL TEST	# earning 5 superior (A-range)	# earning 4 excellent (B-range)	# earning 3 adequate (C-range)	# earning 2 weak	# earning 1 unacceptable	# students taking test
Complex sentence mod						
S/V agr						
Pronoun ref/agr						
Comma usage						
Parallelism						

# of students in class	Percentage of class with 3 or above	Strengths - which skill gets the best response	Weaknesses- which skill gets worst response	Comments

Sample grid for feedback to teachers

CURRICULUM COORDINATOR'S FEEDBACK SHEET FOR ENGLISH 100 TEACHERS

Semester _____ Year _____

Instructors teaching IS-100 during assessment period:

Results of Assessment of Mechanical/Grammatical/Expression Module Testing

Skills	# of students assessed	Percentage of students with score of 5	% of students with score of 4	% of students with score of 3	% of students with score of 2	% of students with score of 1
Complex sentences						
S/V agr						
Pronoun ref/Agr						
Comma usage						
Parallelism						
Skill with highest % of success	S/V agr	Skill with lowest % of success	Pronoun agr			

Thoughts on why subject/verb agreement skill had such a high % of success—what is working that we want to continue doing?

Suggestions for improving pronoun agreement:

Bring suggestions to assessment feedback meeting on _____