

ESL 098, Writing 098, or Writing 150: Which Course is Right for You?

A Guide to Placing Yourself in the First-year Course that is Right for You

Every undergraduate student at Grand Valley State University must complete several required writing courses for a bachelor's degree. This is for all students, regardless of their field of study. Grand Valley does not use a placement test to determine which course students should begin with; rather, GVSU asks students to choose for themselves which course is most appropriate for their individual background, preparation, and goals.

The GVSU Writing Program

The aim of Grand Valley's writing program is to help students succeed in their college courses and ultimately graduate as fluent, confident, and versatile writers. Students will write, both formally and informally, in the majority of their college classes. All students are required to fulfill Writing 150 (first-year composition), and two Supplemental Writing Skills (SWS) classes.

Your decision centers around whether you should start with the required WRT 150 course in your first (or second) semester at GVSU, OR begin with an easier course that will help prepare you for WRT 150 — either WRT 098 or ESL 098. The choice is entirely up to you, but please know that your advisor is happy to help you make that choice.

You should think carefully about which class is right for you. Some students are prepared to meet the goals of first-year composition in a single term, while others need two terms or more of practice and instruction before they are ready to move on. In any case, to pass WRT 150 you must demonstrate a variety of abilities:

- Read and discuss challenging material
- Summarize and analyze what you've read
- Conduct library research

- Participate in writing workshops and conferences
- Establish and maintain a single focus or thesis
- Develop ideas with details and examples
- Use transitions and other devices to guide readers
- Cite and integrate ideas and information
- Use style, tone, and sentence structure for strategic effect
- Format and edit your writing

In Which Course Should I Enroll?

A key part of your educational goal at Grand Valley is to develop the communication skills needed in your future career. The first step in reaching this goal is to select the first-year writing course that best fits your needs and abilities.

- I read newspapers and magazines in English regularly.
- I can converse quickly and easily in English (important for WRT 150 group work).
- I read books in English for my own enjoyment.
- I wrote several English-language essays per year in high school.
- I have used computers to write and revise essays.
- My TOEFL score was above 85 (or my IELTS score was 7.0 or higher).
- I consider myself a good reader and writer, in English.
- I am comfortable with the rules of grammar and punctuation, in English.

If you agree with many of the statements above, you are probably ready for WRT 150. If you don't think you are ready or for any reason wish to gain more practice at your basic writing skills, you should enroll in WRT 098 or ESL 098.

Generally speaking, you are well-prepared for WRT 150 if you have done quite a bit of English-language reading and writing in your secondary school. WRT 098 or ESL 098, on the other hand, will help you build confidence, give you an opportunity to brush up on your basic writing skills, and prepare you to do well in WRT 150.

If you are ready to begin with WRT 150, you can take it in either the fall or the winter semester. If you choose to begin with WRT 098 or ESL 098, we suggest that you take it in the fall semester and enroll in WRT 150 for the winter.

What are the Benefits of Selecting ESL 098 or WRT 098 Instead of Starting with WRT 150?

Since you will still need to take WRT 150, even if you select one of the two “098” options, you may wonder why students select the lower-level courses. It might help to know that several hundred Grand Valley students who graduated from Michigan secondary schools select the “098” level each year. They do so for a number of reasons, including:

- Concern about their Grade Point Average (GPA), since more difficult courses tend to lower one’s GPA
- WRT 150 is a challenging course, with average grades ranging from C+ to B-
- The “098”-level courses proceed more slowly and better adapt to skill levels, whereas WRT 150 expects solid writing skills from the beginning, and builds on them
- The primary purpose of the “098” courses is to prepare students for success in WRT 150 (and later writing assignments at the university)

Avoiding the Stigma of a Lower-level Course

We recognize that many students perceive the 0-level courses as something of which to be embarrassed. Even if they are the most appropriate course for academic success, they may be seen as something to avoid because of the appearance of being an inferior student. It might help to know that hundreds of highly qualified GVSU students choose these courses each year, and it is the right choice for them and their Grade Point Averages. It also has proven to be a good choice for their happiness and success at Grand Valley State University.

English as a Second Language (ESL) 098

This course focuses on university-level academic writing and is designed for students whose native language is other than English. This course will help you succeed in WRT 150 and the rest of the writing assignments you will encounter in all of the Grand Valley courses. A great deal of time will be spent on paragraph level writing, as well as organization

of academic essays and research papers. Most individuals taking the class will be international students or students who went to secondary school in the U.S. but whose native language is not English. Credits earned for this course do not count toward the number of credits required for graduation. Four credits

Writing 098

This course is designed primarily for native speakers of English or those with advanced fluency in English. In WRT 098, you will focus on writing in specific ways to reach specific audiences. You will write often to develop comfort and fluency as a writer. You will work on mastering the conventions of standard written English — spelling, grammar, punctuation, and usage.

In WRT 098 you will read essays written by professionals and other students. In a typical class, you will write five or six short essays — about two to three pages each. You may cite some of the essays you read or people you have interviewed, but generally you will not write research-based essays. The purpose of WRT 098 is to give you the confidence, organization, and command necessary to write the research-based essays demanded in WRT 150 and beyond. There will be a lot of support and additional help from student tutors in this class. Credits earned for this course do not count toward the number of credits required for graduation. Four credits

Writing 150

WRT 150 is a four-credit class focusing on academic writing, with a special emphasis on research-based writing. Instructors assume that students can summarize and analyze a variety of published material. They also assume that students have experience with narrative, descriptive, and persuasive writing. Students typically write five four-to-six page essays, at least two of which involve research. Students must earn a “C” or better in WRT 150 to satisfy the first-year writing requirement. Four credits

Half of all WRT 150 class meetings take place in a computer classroom. Each computer is connected to the library, the Internet, and electronic mail. WRT 150 instructors assume that students have a basic familiarity with computers and word processors.

The WRT 150 Portfolio: A portfolio is simply a collection of work. Many professionals use portfolios to show other people what they are capable of producing. In WRT 150, the majority of your final grade will be based on a portfolio of three finished pieces of writing that will represent your capabilities as a writer by the end of the term. You will choose the three essays from your semester’s work. Each portfolio is read

and evaluated by at least two WRT 150 teachers. As faculty members, they represent the academic audience for which you'll be writing in college. You will need to create papers that capture and hold the attention of college-educated readers, that present focused and supported ideas that challenge the intellect of such readers, and that conform to the general conventions of academic writing. Basing final grades on the judgment of more than one teacher is the most reliable way to evaluate student performance. You will get more details about the grading system on the first day of class.

Making the Right Choice

It's important that you take the choice about first-year writing seriously. The expectations in WRT 150 are high. Your teachers will assume that you have read this information and that you are ready to begin research with outside sources right away. A good number of students begin with WRT 098 and it is very common to hear that this is a valuable class and great preparation for WRT 150. So make your first choice as a Grand Valley student an informed and responsible choice. The decision is yours.

Still Not Sure?

Talk with an advisor during orientation or call the Department of Writing. They will be happy to talk with you, look at your writing if you like, and help you to choose the course that is best for you.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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