

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

A Guide to Placing Yourself in the Appropriate Writing Course

Writing at Grand Valley

To earn a bachelor's degree, every undergraduate student at GVSU — regardless of major — must fulfill the Basic Writing Skills Requirement by passing Writing 150 (Strategies in Writing) with a grade of C (not C-) or better. The aim of this requirement is to help students succeed in their college courses and ultimately graduate as fluent, confident, and versatile writers.

What does it take to earn a grade of C or better in WRT 150?

In order to pass WRT 150, students must demonstrate a variety of abilities, including the following:

- Read and discuss challenging material
- Summarize and analyze challenging reading material
- Conduct library research
- Establish and maintain a single focus or thesis
- Develop ideas with details and examples
- Properly integrate and cite ideas from published sources in their own writing (i.e. avoid plagiarism)
- Use grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure accurately and effectively
- Format and edit their writing following conventional expectations
- Actively participate in writing workshops and conferences

How do I know if I'm ready to take WRT 150?

Some students are prepared to meet the goals of WRT 150 in their first semester, while others need a semester or more of practice and instruction before they are ready to pass WRT 150. This depends on students' individual backgrounds, education, and goals.

Grand Valley asks students to decide which writing course they take during their first semester. As an English as a Second Language (ESL) writer, you have two choices:

- (1) Take ESL 098 in your first semester
(then take WRT 150 in a later term)

OR

- (2) Take WRT 150 immediately, in your first semester

Here's an overview of the two courses that explains their differences:

English as a Second Language 098: ESL Composition (3 credits)

This is a writing course designed specifically for ESL students — that is, students with native languages other than English — who have learned English as a second or additional language. ESL 098 focuses on familiarizing students with American English expectations for “good” writing at the university level, and helps them develop skills to meet these expectations.

Students will learn strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing their English writing for academic audiences. This course is taught by a faculty member with expertise in ESL writing, so instruction is designed to address the distinctive needs of ESL writers. Because class size is limited, students will get considerable individualized attention, in addition to weekly (hour-long) tutorial assistance from the Writing Center.

Writing 150: Strategies in Writing (4 credits)

WRT 150 is a 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 4-to-6 page essays, at least two of which involve research. Half of all class meetings take place in a computer classroom. WRT 150 instructors assume that students have a basic familiarity with computers and word processors. Students must earn a grade of C (not C-) or better in WRT 150 to satisfy Grand Valley's basic writing skills requirement.

Which course should I begin with — ESL 098 or WRT 150?

The best way to decide which course to start with is to reflect on your background and experiences with reading and writing in English. The chart below presents two sets of statements describing different experiences with English reading and writing. Read the statements in each column to determine which set best matches your own background, experiences, and perceptions, and then enroll in the writing course recommended in that column.

A GUIDE TO CHOOSING THE RIGHT COURSE

If you can answer “yes” to most statements below...

- I have not written many academic papers in English
- I have not had instruction in writing academic English essays
- I have some difficulty reading academic texts in English
- I rarely read books in English for pleasure
- My score on the WRITING section of TOEFL iBT was less than or equal to 22
- My score on the READING section of TOEFL iBT was less than or equal to 21
- I find writing in English to be difficult
- I am not sure how to include others’ ideas in my writing
- I have not used computers to write essays in English



TAKE ESL 098

If you can answer “yes” to most statements below...

- I have written many academic essays in English
- I have had instruction in writing academic essays in English
- I regularly read newspapers and magazines in English
- I read books — in English — for my own enjoyment
- My score on the WRITING section of TOEFL iBT was equal to or greater than 23
- My score on the READING section of TOEFL iBT was equal to or greater than 22
- I consider myself to be a good reader and writer in English
- I know how to properly cite quotations in my own writing
- I have used computers to write and revise essays in English



TAKE WRT 150

What are the benefits of taking ESL 098 before taking WRT 150?

- ESL 098 does not assume that you already know how to conduct library research in English (WRT 150 does)
- ESL 098 does not assume that you know how to establish a focus in your English essays (WRT 150 does)
- ESL 098 is taken by other ESL students, who also are working on improving their English writing
- ESL 098 is taught by an ESL expert, who understands the difficulties ESL students have with writing
- ESL 098 gives you additional time to develop your writing in English
- ESL 098 affords you regular, weekly, one-hour tutorials at the Writing Center (all other Grand Valley students are given only 30-minute tutorials, and they are not guaranteed weekly appointments)

You should make this decision carefully. You don’t want to get in over your head in your very first college course. The expectations of WRT 150 are high, and your teacher will assume that you have read this brochure and are ready to write academic essays in English and begin research with published sources right away.

For More Information

Still not sure? Talk with an advisor during orientation or contact a College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) academic advisor at (616) 331-8585 or online at <http://www.gvsu.edu/clasadvising/>. They will be happy to help you enroll in the course that is best for you.