

## Writing Across the Curriculum at GVSU SWS Courses

### GVSU values

- A university community that shares responsibility for writing instruction;
- Writing instruction that is integrated with course material regardless of discipline;
- Writing instruction that occurs throughout the four years of undergraduate education;
- Pedagogical approaches that are based in theory and research in composition, including (but not limited to) writing as a process and writing to learn approaches;
- The importance of practicing the conventions and forms of an academic discipline in order to learn them.

The ability to write effectively in a variety of rhetorical situations is the hallmark of a liberally educated person. The most effective way to help students achieve this goal is by providing a framework for courses that integrate writing with content.

### Supplemental Writing Skills (SWS) Courses

In order to ensure that graduates can write effectively, we require that all students pass two Supplemental Writing Skills (SWS) courses. They are offered in every department. SWS course syllabi are routinely reviewed and approved by the University Writing Skills Committee. These courses have Writing 150 with a grade of C (not C-) or better as a prerequisite. They are designated SWS in each semester's course schedule. Please read the schedule carefully since **not all sections of a multi-section course are necessarily SWS sections**. Only those that are designated SWS result in SWS credit. Courses that have been approved by the University Writing Skills Committee to have an SWS designation are not merely courses that require written assignments; they adhere to certain guidelines.

- Students turn in a total of at least 3,000 words of writing during the term. Part of that total may be essay exams, but a substantial amount of it is made up of finished essays or reports or research papers.
- SWS courses are expected to teach writing, not just certify that writing has been done.
- The instructor works with the students on revising drafts of their papers, rather than simply grading the finished piece of writing. Courses which merely require a term project, no matter how lengthy, which is due in its first and final draft at the end of the semester, will not be approved as SWS courses.
- At least four hours of class time are devoted to writing instruction.
- For a three-credit course at least one third of the final grade is based upon the writing assignments.
- SWS instructors are expected to attend SWS workshops when possible.
- SWS instructors should plan to use available forms of writing support, e.g. the [GVSU Writing Center](#).

If you are asked to teach an SWS course, we expect you to have questions. The director of Writing Across the Curriculum, Lindsay Ellis, is prepared to assist and mentor you. Her email is [ellisl@gvsu.edu](mailto:ellisl@gvsu.edu). The members of the University Writing Skills Committee are similarly eager to serve as mentors. Faculty can go to the SWS web site for current information, workshop

dates, and helpful tips. The staff at GVSU's Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors are also available for further help. Below are brief answers to some frequently asked questions:

### **What Should Be on my SWS Syllabus?**

This standard paragraph which must be included in all SWS course syllabi:

This course is designated SWS. Completion of WRT 150 with a grade of C or better (not C-) is a prerequisite. SWS credit will not be given to a student who completes this course before completing the prerequisite. SWS courses adhere to certain guidelines. Students turn in a total of at least 3000 words of writing. Part of that total may be essay exams, but a substantial amount of it is made up of essays, reports, or research papers. The instructor works with the students on revising drafts of papers, rather than simply grading the finished piece of writing. At least four hours of class time will be devoted to writing instruction. At least one third of the final grade in the course is based on the writing assignments. Students must complete the course with a grade of "C" or better in order to receive SWS credit.

### **What Do I Do During Four Hours of Writing Instruction?**

By writing instruction we do not mean grammar and punctuation drills. Nor do we mean lecture, which is the *least* effective method of writing instruction. Instead we suggest having students engage in any of the following activities: generating questions about the assignment, collaboratively making a list of the qualities of an exemplar text, discussing or constructing evaluation criteria, analyzing sample papers, reading peers' papers or sharing drafts in small groups, and reviewing/critiquing peers' writing. Another strategy is to present drafts of your own writing and answer student questions about your writing process and/or the process of professional publication.

### **How can the Fred Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors assist with my SWS class?**

Walk-in centers on all three campuses are available for your students' use. Trained writing consultants can help your students at any stage of the process: brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing. The feedback provided is an especially good resource during the revision process. In addition to walk-ins, the Writing Center can send a consultant to introduce your class to the Center and its services or schedule a group of consultants to facilitate peer group responses to written drafts as SWS fellows. The director of the Fred Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors can offer consultation on assignment design and ways of providing feedback. Writing Center information for faculty can be found at <[www.gvsu.edu/wc](http://www.gvsu.edu/wc)>.

### **What Should I Know for Advising**

Students are wise to find two SWS designated courses among the list of their other general education and major requirements. Only one SWS course can be transferred in from another institution, with approval by Dr. Ellis. Waiver requests are submitted online:

<https://www.gvsu.edu/sws/>

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