Sam Houston State University
Office of Assessment
Academic Affairs

A Report on the Assessment of Written Communication (AWC)

College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Fall 2024-Spring 2025

Description of Assessment of Written Communication (AWC)

Each academic year, approximately 500 student writing artifacts are collected and assessed using a locally-developed writing rubric. This rubric was developed by faculty with expertise in teaching and assessing student writing and is assumed to have content related validity (Banta & Palomba, 2015). Over a three-year period, each academic college at SHSU will participate in the Assessment of Written Communication (AWC) and submit artifacts for scoring. These student artifacts either come directly from courses within those colleges or from required capstone projects; therefore, the artifacts represent authentic student work (Banta & Palomba, 2015; Kuh et al., 2015).

The student data presented within this report reflect student performance regarding the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's Core Learning Objective of Communication Skills (THECB, 2025). The THECB (2025) defines Communication Skills as "effective development, interpretation, and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication." Data from this assessment may therefore be used to address the written communication element of the broader concept of Communication Skills. These data should be used in conjunction with other data to fully understand student knowledge and ability regarding this Core Learning Objective.

Methodology

A total of 247 artifacts from upper division courses in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences were scored as part of this writing assessment by faculty and staff volunteers during a two-day in-person scoring session in June 2025 using a recently revised locally developed writing rubric.This rubric was divided into four separate domains: (1) Content Development; (2) Organization of Ideas; (3) Style & Correctness; and (4) Design & Conventions. A copy of this rubric is provided in the Appendix.

Each domain was scored individually from 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest. Each artifact was reviewed by two raters, with a third rater introduced when the scores were too far out of agreement (i.e., a score of 1 and 3, 2 and 4, or 1 and 4 for the same domain). The third rater would only score those domains that were not in agreement, and the two closest scores would be kept. The individual domain scores for each student writing artifact were then averaged together to provide a total average score for the artifact.

Score Reliability

A one-way random-effects model was used to calculate the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) based on average measures to determine the level of inter-rater agreement for each domain of student writing, as well as the overall average scores (Fleiss, 2003; Shrout & Fleiss, 1979). According to Cicchetti (1994), ICC agreement values below .40 are to be interpreted as demonstrating poor agreement, from .40 to .59 as demonstrating fair agreement, .60 to .74 as demonstrating good agreement, and .75 and above as demonstrating excellent agreement. The agreement values for all domains were excellent, except for Content Development and Style & Correctness, which were in good agreement. A complete breakdown of the ICC agreement values can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Breakdown of ICC Agreement by Domain Area for the College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Domain Area	Intraclass Correlation for Average Measures
Content Development	.74
Organization of Ideas	.76
Style & Correctness	.73
Design & Conventions	.77
Overall Average	.85

Note. All ICC agreements were significant at $p < .001$.

Results

Descriptive statistics are provided of the average student score for each domain, as well as the overall average, for the College of Humanities and Social Sciences and its departments. Comparisons of previous data are also provided for the College and departments. The College of Humanities and Social Sciences was previously evaluated in 2022-2023. CHSS will remain on this new schedule and return to a three-year evaluation cycle. A breakdown of college-level data can be found in Table 2, and a breakdown of department-level data can be found in Table 3. Please note that due to the rubric revisions, the order of domains changed slightly (e.g., Style was previously listed second, but now it is listed third). The previous scores in the tables below are appropriately aligned.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Student Writing Performance for the College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Domain Area	2022-2023 AWC Scores			2024-2025 AWC Scores		
	n	*M*	*SD*	n	*M*	*SD*
Content Development	211	2.72	0.72	247	2.74	0.66
Organization of Ideas	211	2.69	0.68	247	2.68	0.66
Style & Correctness	211	2.76	0.65	247	2.70	0.66
Design & Conventions	211	2.67	0.60	247	2.70	0.73
Overall Average	211	2.71	0.57	247	2.71	0.58

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Student Writing Performance by Department for Humanities and Social Sciences

Department	2022-2023 AWC Scores			2024-2025 AWC Scores		
	n	*M*	*SD*	n	*M*	*SD*
Communication Studies						
Content Development	47	2.77	0.65	62	2.79	0.66
Organization of Ideas	47	2.72	0.66	62	2.65	0.67
Style & Correctness	47	2.80	0.57	62	2.67	0.71
Design & Conventions	47	2.70	0.49	62	2.67	0.79
Overall Average	47	2.75	0.48	62	2.69	0.62
English						
Content Development	25	3.22	0.63	26	2.58	0.72
Organization of Ideas	25	2.90	0.61	26	2.58	0.64
Style & Correctness	25	3.10	0.66	26	2.81	0.78
Design & Conventions	25	2.86	0.45	26	2.83	0.76
Overall Average	25	3.02	0.49	26	2.70	0.62
History						
Content Development	11	3.14	0.64	32	2.70	0.67
Organization of Ideas	11	3.00	0.89	32	2.67	0.64
Style & Correctness	11	3.00	0.87	32	2.83	0.78
Design & Conventions	11	3.09	0.54	32	2.73	0.76
Overall Average	11	3.06	0.67	32	2.73	0.63
Integrated Studies						
Content Development	-	-	-	12	3.25	0.66
Organization of Ideas	-	-	-	12	3.13	0.74
Style & Correctness	-	-	-	12	3.21	0.58
Design & Conventions	-	-	-	12	2.88	0.48
Overall Average	-	-	-	12	3.11	0.50
Political Science						
Content Development	27	2.54	0.75	20	2.60	0.60
Organization of Ideas	27	2.46	0.63	20	2.50	0.49
Style & Correctness	27	2.46	0.71	20	2.58	0.37
Design & Conventions	27	2.46	0.65	20	2.28	0.50
Overall Average	27	2.48	0.62	20	2.49	0.40
Psychology & Philosophy						
Content Development	43	2.67	0.77	59	2.68	0.63
Organization of Ideas	43	2.74	0.65	59	2.66	0.67
Style & Correctness	43	2.77	0.64	59	2.64	0.53
Design & Conventions	43	2.76	0.58	59	2.76	0.72
Overall Average	43	2.74	0.57	59	2.68	0.53

	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Sociology						
Content Development	58	2.52	0.64	18	2.92	0.79
Organization of Ideas	58	2.57	0.69	18	2.94	0.70
Style & Correctness	58	2.66	0.59	18	2.69	0.64
Design & Conventions	58	2.53	0.67	18	2.89	0.78
Overall Average	58	2.57	0.54	18	2.86	0.63
World Languages & Cultures						
Content Development	-	-	-	18	2.67	0.45
Organization of Ideas	-	-	-	18	2.72	0.57
Style & Correctness	-	-	-	18	2.44	0.68
Design & Conventions	-	-	-	18	2.56	0.64
Overall Average	-	-	-	18	2.60	0.50

Note. Artifacts were not received in 2022-2023 by the Integrated Studies BS program and the Department of World Languages & Cultures.

References

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Cicchetti, D. V. (1994). Guidelines, criteria, and rules of thumb for evaluating normed and standardized assessment instruments in psychology. *Psychological Assessment*, *6*, 284-290. https://doi.org/10.1037/1040-3590.6.4.284

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Appendix

Writing Assessment Rubric

Writing Assessment Rubric

This rubric asks you to identify features of the writing present in the sample. You should *apply the numerical score based on degree of presence* of the characteristic features. The writing features selected for the rubric are those most likely present in any disciplinary writing sample and represent a writing level expected of a senior-level college student.

Legend: 4 = features are most always present
            3 = features are often present
            2 = features are not often present
            1 = few features are present

CATEGORY	CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES
Content Development *The writer's depth of sophistication in thoughts and ideas.* Features may include reasoning, evidence, detail, development, and research appropriate to the field and genre.	• Assignment follows the instructions provided by the instructor for the overall purpose and intended audience • Central subject or argument of the assignment is easily identified, clearly emphasized, consistent with the evidence, and intriguing, as appropriate • Reasoning is fully developed throughout the assignment with logical examples, details, and evidence where and as appropriate • Sources, when appropriate, are effectively integrated to support the argument • Assignment contains information that addresses counterarguments, biases, or reader's expectations, as appropriate
Organization of Ideas *How the writer shows coherence and readability in the order of thoughts and ideas.* Features may include the overall structure of ideas, thoughtful paragraphing, logical flow, and effective transitions.	• Text is purposefully organized and substantially developed in a way that clarifies the argument and enhances style • Arrangement of ideas (overall structure) is clear, logical, and compelling as appropriate to the assignment, allowing the reader to move through the text easily • Internal structure is cohesive and coherent; text flows and ideas are clearly and logically connected • Sentence structure varies according to the content, purpose, and audience (flow) • Sentences are consistently clear and logical (transitions)
Style & Correctness *The choices the writer makes for specific audiences.* Features may include tone, word choice, sentence structure, and errors.	• Writing tone suits the audience and enhances the assignment's purpose • Word choice is appropriate to the writing task and intended audience • Writing is accurate, concise, and appropriate for audience • Grammar and mechanics support the reader's understanding without distracting errors
Design & Conventions *How the writer chooses to present the information on the page.* Features may include document design and appropriate and expected format and conventions for the genre.	• Writing is well-designed on the page to ensure readability • Visual layout and design features are consistent throughout the document • Format is appropriate as defined by the assignment and expected genre conventions (e.g., Does a report look like a report?) • Sources, when appropriate, are cited correctly according to documentation guidelines (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.)