

PROLOGUE

College readiness in English must be broadly defined as the reading, writing, and communications skills and knowledge that college students need to succeed in entry-level, general education college coursework. Additionally, for students to be “college ready” requires that they attain several overarching personal attributes that set the tone for successful learning. The essential attributes identified in this document include: active intellectual engagement, responsibility, perseverance, time management, self-reflection, independence, ability to work in a multicultural context, and strategies to locate and use support groups.

In short, the college readiness content definitions in this document reflect “*what to learn*,” while attributes reflect “*how to learn*.” Although the definitions and attributes are presented as separate and distinct areas, they should be considered interconnected, interdependent and necessary for students to be able to complete entry-level, general education college coursework covering reading, writing and communications.

Attributes

Students must realize that at the postsecondary level the learning process becomes more demanding and more complex and that the pace of post-secondary coursework is much more rapid than that of high school courses. Reading and writing assignments on more advanced topics must be completed within more condensed timeframes.

In preparation for college, students need to develop a framework that helps them meet more demanding expectations which can be met by acquiring and practicing the attributes noted above. Engaging high school students in a variety of increasingly complex reading and writing experiences that incorporate time and task management expectations provides a foundation for this profound change.

Students who enter college having acquired and practiced the essential attributes as part of their normal, ongoing behaviors are more likely to have personal confidence and a sense of belonging to a learning community. These are integral to success in learning and in effective academic participation in college. “College-ready” students challenge themselves to move forward into this new and rigorous environment, engaged, curious and expecting success.

Reading, Writing and Learning

Reading and writing abilities are inextricably linked, and both are critical to college success. The research is clear:

- students simply learn more if they write about what they read;
- students who read thoughtfully and critically are developing their writing abilities at the same time;
- and what students read broadens their ability to think and write about history, science, math, business, political science, literature, and so on separately or in relationship to each other.

As stated by the Wisconsin Reading Association, “Reading and writing are parallel processes in that both are purposeful, dependent on background knowledge and experiences, and focused on the construction of meaning”(2006).

Although reading instruction is often erroneously considered remedial, advanced and complex strategic reading is required for college work. Critical reading requires continuous instruction at every level. To this end, each content area teacher is, and must be, a teacher of reading, for acquiring knowledge of a content area requires learning and engaging with the specific reflective thought patterns, forms of inquiry, and modes of expression characteristic of that discipline.

College assignments invite students to think like members of specific disciplines. Therefore, to promote college readiness, all content area teachers need to provide multiple and varied opportunities for students to read, inquire, and respond across disciplines, genres, and purposes. Students must continually practice reading and responding to more complex and sophisticated situations in order to be ready for the demands of the college curriculum.

In college, very little of the reading is literature; rather, students read editorials, the essays of public intellectuals, serious issue-based essays, book-length discussions, literary nonfiction, and technical writing in the form of content-specific textbooks and other texts. In high school, these types of materials can introduce students to a wider literacy—one in which understanding the rhetoric of a newspaper editorial is as important as understanding the subtle nuances of a piece of classic literature if not more so.

College readiness activities in high school should take into account the basic differences between high school and college learning. One core difference is that while most high school readings are from textbooks, college readings are often primary sources. College reading tasks shift from a focus on comprehension and reading what is “on the lines,” to reading “between and beyond the lines”; this

advanced reading requires exploring and synthesizing related ideas and connecting them to prior knowledge and context; evaluating, critiquing, and challenging positions. It would be valuable for teachers in specific content areas to come to agreement on how relevant and essential reading strategies will be introduced and reinforced in the curriculum.

Teaching reading in every content area means teaching students the technical skills of text reading such as:

- skimming,
- questioning,
- reading for detail,
- differentiating between fact, opinion, and belief
- paraphrasing,
- summarizing,
- making connections,
- and evaluating.

Because writing occurs in a context rich with many voices, student writers must learn to listen responsibly to the voices of the authors they are reading; the voices of the teachers making assignments and commenting on papers; the voices of their peers, of the media, and of their home culture. No single type of writing, no single type of process, no single type of form can be applied successfully to all writing contexts. The goal of writing instruction, therefore, is not to provide prescriptive modes and formats, but rather to promote rhetorical awareness—the ability of writers to understand the various elements of the context in which they write—and to make choices in their writing based on their understanding.

Content area teachers need to provide multiple and varied opportunities for students to “write to learn” across disciplines, genres, and purposes. Writers must continually practice the repertoire of writing competencies and strategies in response to more complex and sophisticated situations in order to be ready for the demands of the college curriculum. Almost all the writing students do in college is expository and rhetorical.

Therefore, students need a wide variety of writing opportunities in every content area in order to:

- respond,
- summarize,
- analyze,

- synthesize,
- and evaluate.

While engaging in this wide variety of writing opportunities, students will need to develop a substantive and flexible set of skills and strategies to:

- find, create, and select relevant material;
- select effective organizing plans;
- choose precise words;
- compose concise, cohesive sentences and paragraphs;
- revise for readability and purpose;
- and edit for clarity and correctness.

As in the case of reading, content-area teachers should work together to determine the skills most useful for success in writing in each of the content areas.