

**Undergraduate Writing Program
Department of English & Comparative Literature
Columbia University**

WHAT IS UNIVERSITY WRITING?

Undergraduate Writing Program (UWP) Administrative Team:

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University Writing

University Writing is a one-semester seminar designed to facilitate students' entry into the intellectual life of the university by teaching them to become more capable and independent readers and writers of essays. The course emphasizes habits of mind and skills that foster rhetorical awareness, analysis, argument, revision, collaboration, meta-cognition, and research. Students read and discuss texts from a number of fields, complete regular informal reading and writing exercises, provide responses to colleagues, and devise a research-based writing project.

Approximately 2000 students take University Writing (UW) each academic year. Class sections are capped at fourteen students. Theme-based versions of UW are developed in partnership with faculty from interdisciplinary departments, centers, programs, and institutes at Columbia. UW will be offering the following themes in 2021-2022: Contemporary Essays; Race and Ethnicity; Gender and Sexuality; American Studies; Human Rights; Data and Society; Film & Performing Arts; Law & Justice; Medical Humanities. We also offer UW for International Students, designed to meet the needs of self-selected students who come from international academic cultures and are making the transition to American academic writing.

All incoming students in Columbia College, the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and the School of General Studies take UW. Sections are taught by graduate students from English and Comparative literature, the School of the Arts, PhD candidates across GSAS, UWP lecturers, and UWP directors.

The Essays: The first three essays build in complexity and length; the final requires students to substantively reframe and revise an earlier argument in an entirely new form.

Essay 1: Students analyze a single text. (~1500 words)

Essay 2: Students put multiple texts in conversation with one another. (~1800-2000 words)

Essay 3: Students make a researched argument using 8-10 sources. (~2400-3000 words)

Essay 4: Students write an op-ed for a publication with a wide audience. (~750 words)

WHAT PRINCIPLES INFORM THE UNIVERSITY WRITING CURRICULUM?

1. **Writing is a powerful mode of inquiry:** Writing does not only record pre-existing ideas. It helps us discover and reflect on our values, beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge.
2. **Reading and writing are related and mutually reinforcing activities:** Most capable readers are competent writers, and conversely, most accomplished writers are avid readers. By helping students become better readers, we also help them become better writers. Therefore, the course emphasizes reading as much as it does writing. Students use their close reading skills to generate ideas for their own essays, analyze their writing, and critique peers' drafts.
3. **Writing is rhetorical:** Writing does not occur in a vacuum. It always exists in some discursive context, and it must be evaluated in that context.
4. **Writing is a recursive process:** Writing does not usually occur in linear fashion, from idea to final product. It is a complex process incorporating a variety of activities: reading, note-taking, planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Our program aims to help students develop and refine writing processes that work for them.
5. **Writing is a practice for learning and teaching:** Writing is not something that occurs solely by inspiration. It is a process of active and conscious making that can be learned through repetition, error, and instruction. Writers learn to write by writing, so writing figures prominently in every class session, not merely as a topic of discussion but as a daily activity in class.
6. **The writer is responsible:** Effective writers are able to make independent judgments and decisions about their work. Developing writers must learn to assess the advice they are given by others and to take final responsibility for the choices they make in crafting their texts. They also follow conventions to incorporate sources and to distinguish their original thinking and research from those of their sources.
7. **The essay is a flexible genre that requires inquiry, argument, and reflection:** Writers work within genre conventions and traditions. Developing writers in educational settings benefit from situating their work within recognizable genres that bridge the worlds inside and outside of school. The essay provides teachers and students in first year writing courses with such a genre. The essay as a genre is one in which writers report (and sometimes recreate) their encounters with texts and phenomena in order to offer an argument that is new to them.

For more information on the Undergraduate Writing Program, the Writing Center, and University Writing, visit our homepage: <https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/uwp>

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