Establishing Learning Objectives:

Applications for Course Planning and Assessment

Developed from the work of the

Writing Across the Curriculum Writing Assessment Group

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Introduction

This booklet arises from the work of a small group of us who teach Junior Year Writing Program (JYWP) courses. The impetus for our work was the increased interest in assessment, both at the state level (e.g., Board of Higher Education pressure for "assessment of exiting students on college-level general education competencies") and on-campus, in the form of AQAD (Academic Quality and Development) program review requirements for departments. While the JYWP presently faces no mandate to develop uniform assessment procedures, we felt it would be productive, if only for our own teaching, to see if we could identify any common expectations for our JYWP courses.

Assessment assumes clarity about ends, in this case, those ends being learning objectives. So learning objectives were our starting point. Our belief was that being more conscious of our learning objectives and using those objectives to guide course planning and assessment would heighten the likelihood that students would achieve those objectives and that our courses would help them do so.

Our primary aim, then, was to articulate a set of objectives that would be useful for planning JYWP courses and for evaluating students in those courses. We see the ***Statement of Learning Objectives*** presented in this booklet as a complement to the Mission and Goals Statement for JYWP courses. We are mindful that the objectives and accompanying statement of ***Criteria for Assessment*** represent the consensus of a small group representing five departments. In that sense, they are both partial and provisional. Still, we hope they will serve as a constructive starting point for further discussion of learning objectives, curriculum and assessment aims.

Finally, we hope this booklet will also be a useful resource for faculty engaged in their own process of developing learning objectives and assessment criteria and applying them in specific instances, whether for course or program planning and assessment. We also hope others will find this process as productive as it has been for us. Working as a group and considering our values and materials across our different courses has helped each of us see our own courses anew and reflect critically on what we value most for student learning.

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Chapter 1

Getting Started:
Developing Common Objectives for Learning

The purpose of this chapter…

This chapter will introduce you to some common learning objectives that have been developed by a group of faculty who teach junior year writing program courses. You can use these common learning objectives to plan specific courses, achieve coherence across courses within a program, and assess learning within a course and across courses.

Questions addressed in this section…

How did this project **start**?
What **came out of this project**?
What are some **common goals and objectives** for Junior Year Writing Program courses?
How do these goals and objectives **differ from course to course**?

How did this project start?

In September 1999 small group of Junior Year Writing (JYWP) faculty came together to discuss whether they could identify any common expectations for JYWP courses. The primary aim of the group was to articulate a set of objectives that would help instructors plan JYWP courses and evaluate student work in these courses.

Over the course of the next year, the JYWP group proceeded inductively, developing their own statement of learning objectives by examining their course materials. That is, they collected and reviewed course syllabi, writing assignments – both major assignments and shorter ones – and samples of student writing from all their courses. As they looked through these materials, they found quite a range of types of assignments and kinds of writing. As they talked and tried to understand the materials from one another's courses, they also found commonalties in underlying values and specific objectives. Finding those commonalties, though, required careful listening, critical reflection, and compromise.

What came out of this project?

The outcome of the JYWP project is the *Statement of Learning Goals and Objectives* discussed on page 5. According to the group, there was another outcome:

> One of the unintended outcomes of this project was the project itself. Learning about each other's courses in some detail helped bring into relief what is sometimes so naturalized in our own courses and disciplines that we don't 'see' it, for example, assumptions about types of writing, audiences, and purposes for writing.

This handbook is the culmination of the initial work of this group. Additional suggestions for ways to define and use learning outcomes in your courses can be found on the JYWP website and in the Course-based Assessment handbook available from the Office of Academic Planning and Assessment.

What are some common goals and objectives for JYWP courses?

Assessment is most successful when the goals and objectives that guide the assessment are clearly worded and consistent with the purpose of the assessment. **Goals** describe broad learning outcomes and concepts (what you want students to learn). **Objectives** outline specific, observable behaviors that tell you students are learning. While different disciplines require different skills and competencies of their students, consistent goals and objectives within programs and across disciplines can help you make evaluation of student learning more effective and fair, particularly for "subjective" tasks such as evaluating student writing. With this in mind, the JYWP group has a *Statement of Learning Goals and Objectives* that it believes will be useful to inform instruction and drive evaluation in JYWP courses.

Statement of Learning Goals and Objectives for JYWP Courses

Mastery of Basic Composing Skills
   Most students enter your JYWP courses reasonably competent in these areas, but in some cases considerable review and reinforcement is needed. A few students will need intensive, individualized work to develop this mastery. Work on these skills can continue simultaneously with work on the more advanced composing and thinking skills that follow.

Basic composing skills include:
   - To compose coherent sentences and logically developed paragraphs
   - To draft, revise, and edit one's own writing as well as give useful feedback to others
   - To edit so that final drafts contain minimal, if any, grammatical errors
   - To cite secondary sources correctly using conventions appropriate to a given discipline

Proficiency in More Advanced Composing and Thinking Skills
   Most students enter your JYWP courses less competent in these areas and needing more focused instruction and practice. To complete your courses successfully, they will have attained competence although not necessarily the facility that comes with full mastery.

   - To evidence constructive thinking in one's writing; that is, to go beyond recall and restatement to re-organize information and make one's own sense of it. Constructive thinking includes being able to

     – represent accurately what one has read and to make sense of that reading through processes such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, interpretation, reflection, and problem-solving;

     – gather, select, and organize information and evidence from multiple sources with an eye to patterns, points of difference, and overlap; and

     – tolerate and work with ambiguity, indeterminacy, complexity.

   - To compose a focused, coherent text

     – that moves effectively between generalizations and details to achieve specific purposes. (The kinds of generalizations and detail used will depend on the purpose of the text, e.g., to re-explain complex concepts, to explain and evaluate, to develop an argument, to recommend a specific course of action.); and

     – that has a logical overall line of development.

- To be aware of rhetorical context, particularly within a given discipline or related profession, including being able to

  – write with the authority or *ethos* of a professional in a given discipline or profession;

  – write in at least one genre (in some cases more than one) valued in a discipline or related profession; and

  – be conscious of audience and be able to adapt one's writing – including language used – to accomplish a particular purpose with a particular audience.

How do these goals and objectives differ from course to course?

Common objectives for any program can only go so far. Different courses and disciplines require different standards and give varying weight to the importance of one learning behavior over another. While JYWP courses have the goal to improve writing and communication skills in upper level students, there are differences across these courses in:

- the weight given to certain goals and objectives,
- the kind of assignments posed; and
- specific teaching practices.

Examples of areas of difference follow, taken from the work of the JYWP faculty involved in the yearlong analysis of JYWP courses across the disciplines. You may find these examples helpful in thinking about your own goals and objectives and the importance you assign to each. It is important to keep in mind, however, that these examples are drawn from the findings of specific JYWP classes only. They are not used to generalize but to illustrate the different ways the common goals and objectives might play out within your own classroom. (For more detail regarding each course, see Appendix B.)

Attention to audience, specifically the relation of writer to audience.
Most JYWP courses focus on students as writers cultivating an audience or audiences. Students are asked to write to various audiences throughout the semester. These audiences differ across courses and departments. For example:

- In the Management, Chemistry and Physics classes, in particular, there is more focus on students learning to adapt their writing to various audiences.
- In the English literature class, the writer-audience relation for student essays is often not explicitly named, with the focus on cultivating students' awareness of themselves as an audience.

Particular ways of thinking and purposes for writing.
Critical thinking is often mentioned as a key skill for your undergraduates to acquire before graduation. Our review of JYWP courses yielded different interpretations of this term, with critical defined as either ***analytic and evaluative thinking*** or as ***something***

essential. While all courses reviewed valued *analytic* thinking, there were also distinct ways to name other ways of thinking within specific disciplines and courses such as "constructive" thinking, "reflective" thinking, and "strategic" thinking. This was also true for the value assigned to different purposes for writing:

- In English literature, for example, students are asked to formulate arguments about texts.
- In Physics, they are asked to comprehend and re-explain complex concepts.

Attention to career development.
Most JYWP courses touch on career development by asking students to write in one or more disciplinary context. Some courses, however, give more attention to this than others:

- Chemistry and Management focus more on career development in general than Physics, English literature, and English teaching.
- In Chemistry and Management, developing a resume is a course assignment.

Collaborative writing.
Collaborative writing is more valued in some disciplines than others. This is reflected in the focus it is given in JYWP courses across the departments. For instance:

- In the Management course, a collaborative writing project is one of the major assignments.
- In the English teaching course, collaborative writing for a research project is only an option but not required.

Attention to language.
Developing an awareness of the role of language and writing is an important goal in all JYWP courses. What differs are the ways in which this is accomplished in each course:

- In the English literature course, the emphasis is on an awareness of language as a plumb line to intuitive thinking about literature.
- In the Management course, there is a more focus on pragmatic thinking and instrumental use of language, as well as on understanding cross-cultural differences in communication.
- In the Physics course, language is valued as a means of qualitative thinking about what are often quantitative subjects.
- In the English teaching course, the focus is on students developing self-awareness of their own ways of using language and writing, and on understanding the link between literacy practices and culture.
- In the Chemistry course, language and writing are represented as conversation, as a way of carrying on the dynamic process of creating knowledge within the discipline.

Examining the differences described above can help you understand why certain objectives are emphasized in one field and assigned less importance in another. This allows you to re-consider

the weight you assign to the goals and objectives you have identified as important. Understanding areas of difference is a valuable assessment tool in identifying common objectives and applying common criteria for assessment. The value of assessing the extent to which students are meeting common goals in JYWP courses is clear within the mission and goals of the program. However, the individual articulation of the objectives and the methods through which they are assessed may, and often do, vary for each course. When you review these objectives , it is important to remember that the learning goals and objectives for student writing are very much context-specific. The next chapter looks at ways to apply these goals and objectives to your course planning.

Chapter 2

Using Goals and Objectives for Course Planning

The purpose of this chapter…

This chapter discusses how you might evaluate your own syllabus and decide whether and how you are addressing a given objective. Pages 11-15 illustrate how the objectives were articulated in the courses of the working group members.

Questions addressed in this section…

Why is it helpful to use **goals and objectives for course planning**?
How can you **use goals and objectives to help you plan** your course and syllabus?
What are some **examples** of applying goals and objectives in course planning?
What do some of these JYWP **assignments look like**?

Why is it helpful to use goals and objectives for course planning?

Using goals and objectives for course planning can help you achieve coherence across courses within a program. Just the activity of defining goals and objectives is a powerful way of forcing serious discussion of values within a program. Once established, a statement of goals and objectives serves to provide focus to a program. Certainly, it is useful to anyone new to a program, informing them of the program's goals and serving as a guide for course planning. A statement of goals is also useful as a document to return to periodically to review in light of perceived changes in curriculum, students, and/or faculty resources and priorities.

How can you use goals and objectives to help plan your course and syllabus?

The *Statement of Learning Goals and Objectives* outlined in Chapter 1 of this handbook represent learning behaviors that are appropriate and important for college juniors and seniors. These learning objectives can help you decide what particular kinds of thinking you want students to develop and then think through how one assignment can build on another. One important course planning consideration is sequencing assignments so that early ones prepare students for the demands of subsequent ones; for example, an evaluation assignment might build on a summary assignment:

- For *The Novel in Cultural Context*, short assignment 1, requiring close reading serves as a foundation for assignment 2, a reflective paper on a novel; assignment 3, a research exercise, prepares students for demands of assignment 4, a formal essay. (See page 11 and Appendix B.)

- In the Chemistry course, each assignment calls for increasingly complex kinds of constructive thinking: assignment 2 is a basic summary; assignment 3 calls for summary plus explanation to readers who are not scientists; assignment 4 assumes summary skills and calls for critiques as well; assignment 5, a review article of several scientific papers builds on all the previous assignments. (See page 14 and Appendix B.)

Decisions about sequencing can be informed by assessment that identifies areas where students are likely to have more difficulty or need more experience.

What are some JYWP examples of applying goals and objectives in course planning?

To assess how well a text meets a given criterion often requires that the reader have a good deal of knowledge of context, including specialized disciplinary knowledge. For example, sophisticated "constructive thinking" looks very different in a literary argument and a business plan. The following pages contain examples from actual JYWP course syllabi and assignments that are valuable as illustrations on how to articulate general objectives in specific courses.

English: The Novel In Cultural Context

JYWP Learning Objective	Course Assignment(s)	Articulation of Broad/General Objectives
To Use Constructive Thinking	Assignments 1 and 2	▪ Read literary texts with an eye to voice/form as well as content. ▪ Read self-consciously: observe your responses and ask what, in form or content, shapes them. ▪ Read to discover turning points, patterns, and ambiguities and thus develop an angle of interpretation of the work(s) not analyzed in print or class. ▪ In some cases, read critics, historians, philosophers, etc. and conceptually intertwine their insights/information with your own. Assignment 3 develops research and source-analysis skills. ▪ Choose fresh, precise, vivid language to name key patterns.
Compose a Focused Text	Assignment 4	▪ Set out to write an interpretative persuasive essay with an original thesis. ▪ Write an engaging, clear introduction that frames the thesis within some larger context (e.g., author, genre, issue) and gives an overview of the argument. ▪ Create a logic for the body of the paper whereby key points build on each other and are clearly linked to the thesis. ▪ Throughout, enfold and scrutinize textual quotes to develop claims. ▪ Conclude with reflection on implications related to the thesis and opening frame.
Attend to Rhetorical Context	All assignments involve this.	▪ Imagine readers who have read your text(s) but need memories refreshed/interest piqued. ▪ Find a middle ground, in a voice of your own, between highly colloquial speech/slang and the highly abstract or formal diction of critics. ▪ Cultivate a sense of yourself as audience for the literary work, who may or may not share common ground with the author's original audience; be aware of texts as entities shaped by their rhetorical contexts.

Physics: Writing in Physics

JYWP Learning Objective	Course Assignment(s)	Articulation of Broad/General Objectives
To Use Constructive Thinking	Assignments 1 and 3	▪ From previous courses or new reading you must find what characterizes a truly quantum-mechanical event. ▪ The concepts of non-locality and entanglement are strictly quantum; to explain these ideas at a qualitative level demands mastering several complex topics. ▪ Readings and discussion go beyond the texts of the course. You are expected to synthesize the views of several sources in your analyses.
Compose a Focused Text	Assignment 2 and 3	▪ Picking one aspect (an experimental or theoretical concept) of the many possible requires mastery of the subject and avoids the vagueness possible in treating only generalities. ▪ You are required to go beyond mathematical representation to a qualitative, verbal description. You must develop logical schemes that interpret the familiar math derivations. ▪ A proposal requires enough specifics to convince a granting agency that you know what you are doing.
Attend to Rhetorical Context	All assignments involve this.	▪ A newspaper story, a proposal, a *Physics Today* article, an historical essay or a biographical report require differing styles of writing. ▪ You must pay attention to the differing audiences and especially to the level of physics that each can comprehend easily. ▪ The language of the course is mostly non-mathematical, that is, you emphasize the verbal (and sometimes philosophic) interpretation of mathematics.

English: Writing and Teaching Writing

JYWP Learning Objective	Course Assignment(s)	Articulation of Broad/General Objectives
To Use Constructive Thinking	Assignments 1, 2, 3 and 4	■ Represent and interpret your own literacy from multiple perspectives. ■ Read writing theory and teaching scholarship and summarize, interpret, and assess it (e.g., comparing with others, considering validity and applications). ■ Research an issue, drawing on published scholarship and interviews or observations; analyze and organize that information to develop your own line of thinking.
Compose a Focused Text	Assignment 4	■ Develop your own line of thinking organized around a central thesis. ■ Integrate scholarship from multiple sources and use to develop your own ideas. ■ Recognize complexity.
Attend to Rhetorical Context	All assignments, especially 1 and 4	■ Write to various audiences including classmates, a generalized audience, and teacher-scholars. ■ Write in various genres including personal essay, fiction or poetry, and academic research essay. ■ Develop self-awareness of yourself as a writer and your writing voices.

Chemistry: Writing in Chemistry

JYWP Learning Objective	Course Assignment(s)	Articulation of Broad/General Objectives
To Use Constructive Thinking	Assignments 3, 4 and 5	- Critically evaluate the content of a scientific article in the original literature. - Rewrite an article concerning arsenic of well water in West Bengal in the original scientific literature, so as to be accessible to a more general readership. Requires use of analogies, metaphors, and models. - Use materials from multiple primary sources to synthesize a coherent account of the current state of a topic of interest.
Compose Focused Text	Assignments 2, 5, 6	- Write a summary of a scientific article. - Write an account of the status of a research topic by using the material in several primary sources. - Write a personal statement for application to graduate school. - These exercises require considerable attention to the selection of the material that is included. - Professional chemists value coherent, concise, unambiguous writing.
Attend to Rhetorical Context	All assignments involve this	- Write a progress report for an industrial sponsor. Tone and audience are stressed. - The summary and critique of scientific articles are written for a readership of peer scientists, as is the status report. - Write for a general readership about the science that underpins the understanding of arsenic poisoning in West Bengal. - The resume and job application letter are written for a particular audience, as is the personal statement in connect with graduate school application.

SOM: Management Communication

JYWP Learning Objective	Course Assignment(s)	Articulation of Broad/General Objectives
To Use Constructive Thinking	Assignments 2 and 7	- Write an essay reflecting your personal mission and goals. - Read articles about an issue in your major and summarize and analyze the arguments they put forward. Compare and assess the various viewpoints you observe. - Based on your readings, organize the views and information you've encountered, and develop your own position on the issue.
Compose a Focused Text	Assignment 10	- Read and analyze the international business case provided, and after conducting research and discussing the cross-cultural communication problems in the case, write a proposal to the case client presenting your findings and recommendations. - Offer your own unique approach to the case and integrate your research into your recommendations. - Be alert to cultural nuances in writing and delivering your proposal in your team briefing.
Attend to Rhetorical Context	All assignments, especially 6, 8, 9, 11, and 12	- Write to various audiences for various business purposes. - Develop awareness of how to negotiate business relationships through writing. - Develop an awareness of how analyzing audience, purpose, and context leads to appropriate writing strategies.

What do some of these JYWP assignments look like?

The materials in Appendix B of this handbook show, among other things, how assignments in some of the courses described in the previous section are designed to give students experience writing to various audiences and in various genres. The assignments for the Physics course are particularly illustrative, including such audiences as readers of the *New York Times*, physicists, and fellow students. In SOM Management Communication, students write for a variety of audiences and purposes and in various genres, including a complaint-adjustment letter, a collaboratively written report to a corporation advising on an issue of cross-cultural communication, and a self-appraisal memo. In all instances, these variations in kinds of assignments relate to specific writing and thinking priorities for students in each course and major. By reviewing these assignments, you will see how you can begin to apply the common objectives to your own syllabus and course assignments.

Chapter 3

The Basics of Assessment

The purpose of this chapter…

This chapter introduces you to the basics of assessment and helps you begin to think about using learning goals and objectives to evaluate teaching and learning in your classroom. Assessment is about improvement in teaching and learning and can help you identify areas of strength and areas that need revision in your courses and pedagogy.

Questions addressed in this section…

Why should you **assess**?
What is **assessment**?
What is **course-based assessment**?
Where can you go for **additional help**?

Why should you assess?

Across higher education there is a growing demand for systematic and thoughtful student learning assessment. In general, however, state legislators, state higher education boards, and administrators have been more enthusiastic about assessment than have academics. In part, faculty members' ambivalence towards assessment is fueled by their perceptions that much of what is done in the name of assessment is of little use to them in improving their own teaching, student learning, or the curriculum.

Indeed, until fairly recently, much of assessment has focused more on issues of external accountability than on developing assessment activities that directly improve educational practices. Among the reasons why the assessment effort has had little effect on the teaching-learning process is that faculty have not been adequately involved in identifying relevant assessment questions or in developing appropriate assessment methods that could indeed inform teaching and learning.

At UMass Amherst, this is beginning to change. Faculty members are already assessing in their classes and in their programs; as instructors, you are constantly looking at what worked well and what didn't, and using these observations and impressions to make changes for the next time. What formal assessment does is make these informal activities more systematic and more public.

Assessment also helps you respond to increasing interest in assessment at the state level. The University of Massachusetts President's Office is encouraging campuses to articulate means for assessing the skills of upper division students, with particular attention to writing and critical thinking skills. Establishing criteria for assessing student writing in JYWP courses allows you to both focus on improving student learning and to respond to internal and external calls for more explicit evaluation of that learning.

This section of the handbook begins with a definition of assessment, then goes on to describe the specific JYWP assessment criteria this group of faculty developed, and the methods of using these criteria for curricular and program improvement.

In this context, and understanding the importance of assessment, the intent in Chapters 3 and 4 is threefold:

1. To help you begin to think about the role of assessment in your own teaching.

2. To articulate ways that you might use common learning objectives and criteria to assess teaching and learning in your classroom.

3. To prompt further discussion of goals for student learning and writing in JYWP courses.

What is assessment?

The word "assessment" has taken on a variety of meanings within higher education. The term can refer to the process faculty use to grade student course assignments, to standardized testing imposed on institutions as part of increased pressure for external accountability, or for any activity designed to collect information on the success of a program, course, or university curriculum. These varied uses have, unfortunately, moved us away from a focus on the central role that assessment should play in educational institutions – the gathering of information to improve educational practices.

For the purposes of this handbook, **assessment** is defined as **the systematic collection and analysis of information to improve student learning**. Used this way, assessment asks us to think about and answer the following questions:

- What should students be learning and in what ways should they be growing?
- What are students actually learning and in what ways are they actually growing?
- What should you be doing to facilitate student learning and growth?

What is course-based assessment?

Course-based assessment refers to **methods of assessing student learning within the classroom environment**, using course goals, objectives and content to gauge the extent of the learning that is taking place. Course-based assessment links student performance to specific learning outcomes in order to provide useful feedback to the instructor and students about how successfully students are meeting specific outcomes.

At its most basic, the assessment process can be broken down into three parts:

1. establishing student learning goals and objectives for the course;
2. measuring whether these goals have been met; and
3. using the results to improve teaching and learning in the course.

You already go through these steps, at some level, whenever you develop a new course or consider revising an existing one. In formal assessment, these steps become more systematic and detailed to ensure clearly articulated links between what you want students to learn and your understanding of what they actually do learn. To get started:

- Take an inventory of your own classroom teaching goals to become more aware of what you want to accomplish in your courses.
- Identify what, if any, assessment methods (meaning, methods you use for gathering information on your students and their performance) you are currently using (e.g., tests, exams, etc.).

Course goals are sometimes vague and difficult to quantify. Specific objectives that outline what a student must do to demonstrate completion of course goals make it easier to observe whether or not these goals have been achieved. Incorporating classroom assessment into your teaching and curriculum design facilitates your ability to clearly demonstrate student learning from the beginning of the semester until the end of the course.

Where can you go for additional assistance?

For more information on assessment, see the Office for Academic Planning and Assessment's (OAPA) handbooks on Course-based Assessment and Assessment for Program Review and Improvement or contact an assessment specialist at the OAPA office in Room 237 Whitmore.

Chapter 4

Assessing Student Writing: Application for Curricular and Program Improvement

The purpose of this chapter…

This chapter offers ways to use common goals and objectives to improve teaching and learning in your classroom. It also looks at common criteria for assessing student writing and how to use these criteria to evaluate coursework.

Questions addressed in this section…

Why should **you assess writing**?
What are the steps to **effective writing assessment**?
What are the **JYWP Criteria for Assessment**?
How can you apply **common criteria to evaluate student writing**?

Why should you assess writing?

Writing assessment can offer information about the achievements of students and the effectiveness of teaching, and can have a positive impact on teaching, learning, curricular design and student attitudes. Writing assessment that is sensitive to the needs of both students and faculty and that is applied with an understanding of its purpose can:

- Award a grade
- Place students in appropriate courses
- Certify student proficiency in writing skills
- Encourage students to improve their facility with the written word
- Teach students to appreciate the power of writing and the responsibilities that go along with that power
    adapted from Yancey, K. (1994), *Writing Assessment: A Position Statement, University of Missouri.*

What are the steps to effective writing assessment?

Very simply, there are **four steps to assessment**:

1. Identify and articulate what students should learn in your class
2. Develop tools to measure the extent of student learning
3. Establish systems to compile and analyze the data you collect with these tools
4. Use the information gathered to improve/adapt curricula, pedagogy and goals

Following these steps in conjunction with the common learning objectives and criteria for assessment described in this handbook will help you more effectively evaluate your students' writing.

Assessing basic learning objectives such as composing skills can be accomplished in a variety of ways, from simply reading and correcting student papers to administering objective exams to test students' knowledge of grammar and word use. Assessing more complex objectives can take extra effort and planning. Embedding assessment into your course from the planning stages is one of the most effective ways to assess more complex learning objectives such as composing and thinking skills. By designing assignments that measure these objectives, you can build an increasing level of complexity and expectation into course assignments from the start of the semester. Using common criteria for your assessment can bring consistency and clarity to your evaluation. Some assignments will assess only one of the common criteria, other assignments may assess two or perhaps more. Developing this sequence as you plan out your course and write your syllabus will facilitate the assessment process as you begin to collect and analyze assessment data.

What are the JYWP Criteria for Assessment?

The *Criteria for Assessment* on the next page were developed from the *Statement of Learning Goals and Objectives* discussed earlier in this handbook. The main difference between the *Statement* and the *Criteria* is that the section on Constructive Thinking was revised to reflect the JYWP group's work reading samples of writing from their various courses. The group used the following assumptions to develop these criteria:

- Being more conscious of your learning objectives and using those objectives to guide instruction and evaluation will heighten the likelihood that students will achieve those objectives and that your courses will help them do so.

- Assessment criteria can be used to help clarify your expectations for students early in a course, provide formative feedback to them throughout a course to aid their learning, and provide end-of-semester summative evaluation. Assessment criteria can also be used by students for self and peer evaluations, both of which help develop meta-awareness and independence as writers and thinkers.

- The closer assessment is to actual learning contexts the more likely it is to reflect the complexity of the learning that takes place in specific contexts and the more likely it is to serve instruction and learning. That is to say the experience of this group led the members to favor locally developed assessment approaches over standardized approaches. The group was also inclined to favor course- and program-based approaches over school and multi-school approaches because of cost and the difficulty of linking large-scale assessments to instruction and learning.

Reading student work from members' courses helped reinforce for the group what they had learned in developing the learning objectives:

1. How assessment criteria are articulated is very much context-specific, often requiring a good deal of course or discipline-specific knowledge.

2. In spite of variations in context, some common criteria emerged and, with some contextual background, it was still possible to evaluate a variety of texts from different courses.

3. Not all criteria are used in every assignment, but over the course of a semester most criteria come into play. Nor do these criteria represent all objectives and criteria for each course but rather the ones that were common to all.

The goal of the JYWP group was to develop criteria that could be used to assess student writing in courses whose objectives and assignments are consistent with the *Statement of Learning Objectives.* These criteria follow on the next page.

Criteria for Assessment

I.   **Mastery of Basic Composing Skills:**

A. To compose coherent, stylistically effective sentences and logically developed paragraphs
B. To edit so that final drafts contain minimal, if any, grammatical errors
C. To draft and revise (i.e., consider changes in content, structure, and/or style; more than solely copy-editing
D. To cite secondary sources correctly

I.   **Proficiency in More Advanced Composing and Thinking Skills:**

A. To evidence constructive thinking

   i.   show an accurate understanding of the material and resources of an assignment through such processes as summary, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, interpretation, reflection, problem-solving
   ii. gather, select, and organize information/evidence from multiple sources with an eye to patterns, points of difference, and overlap
   iii. recognize and work with ambiguity and complexity
   iv. demonstrate an ability to create and pursue challenging problems/projects, and
   v.   represent complexity effectively for an intended audience.

B. To compose a focused, coherent text

   i.   that moves effectively between generalizations and details to achieve specific purposes, and
   ii. that has a logical and rhetorically effective overall line of development.

C. To be aware of rhetorical context, particularly within a given discipline or related professions, including being able to

   i.   write with the authority or tone of a professional in a given discipline or related profession,
   ii. write in at least one genre (in some cases more than one) valued in a disciple or related profession, following appropriate stylistic conventions, and
   iii. adapt one's writing—including language used—to accomplish a particular purpose with a particular audience.

How can we apply common criteria to evaluate student writing?

The common learning objectives outlined in Chapter 1 of this handbook do not represent the full set of objectives for any single course. However, they do represent learning behaviors that are appropriate and important for college juniors and seniors. Assessment criteria, such as the *Criteria for Assessment* described above, used to evaluate how well are students are meeting our learning objectives can help clarify our expectations for students early in a course, provide formative feedback to students throughout a course to aid in their learning, and provide an end-of-semester summative evaluation. Assessment criteria can also be used by students for self and peer evaluations, both of which help develop meta-awareness and independence as writers and thinkers. Specifically, in addition to course planning, as a JYWP instructor you may find the *Criteria for Assessment* useful in one or more of the following ways:

1. Clarify Course Expectations. In the course syllabus or early in the semester, you might give students these criteria, perhaps translated into language that fits your course and seems appropriate to your students. Doing so would be a way of clarifying course expectations and showing how the course expectations link to expectations in other JYWP courses. You might also hand out a sample of writing and ask students to evaluate it using the criteria. This activity would not only serve to acquaint students with the criteria; it would also help them develop their self-assessment skills.

2. Assignments. For specific assignments, you might present the specific criteria for evaluation as part of the assignment so that those criteria can guide students while they work on the assignment, as well as guide you when evaluating the students' writings. An example from *English 497, The Novel in Cultural Context* illustrates this technique:

<div align="center">

English 497
Close Reading Exercise

</div>

After reading the Stone pages in the packet and Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, make notes on TWO of the following three topics. Write approximately 4-6 sentences on each and include page numbers for your examples.

- Notice the narrator in *Oroonoko* and characterize her voice and her position in the story. Locate and briefly analyze one or two moments when she is in the foreground.

- Think about any passages, details, or features of the story that seem to reflect the history we've discussed. Locate one or two and describe in brief.

- Put this story side-by-side in your mind with *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Queen Zarah*. How would you begin to compare and/or contrast them, especially in relation to any of the themes we've raised (e.g. law; psychological or interior conflict; concern with truth, realism, or interpretation)? Make some notes on your initial thoughts, pointing to particular passages that exemplify your ideas.

3. **Effective Evaluation.** You can assess student writing from an holistic or an analytic perspective. You can use holistic evaluation to provide a qualitative response to student writing. An example of this type of assessment comes from an English course:

> For this essay, write an argument, thinking of that genre in its *broadest* sense as a text that takes an explicit position and develops that position through a series of points. It is a text that
>
> - aims to convince readers of a particular position on an issue (a matter open to debate) or aims to help readers see the complexity of an issue;
> - makes a central claim, develops it with reasons and support that are other than solely personal preference or taste, and uses a line of development that is not solely narrative;
> - is reasoned and respectful of alternative points of view; and
> - includes some reference to your background/experiences as they are relevant to your perspective.
>
> Make some reference to at least one of the readings discussed in class. They are part of the context for these essays. You may just use one as a jumping off place; you might cite one developing a point; you might respond directly to the position developed by one of them.

Here is an example of the instructor's qualitative response:

> *Dear Pat,*
>
> *You pose an interesting question in your opening paragraph: "What would America be like if the population consisted of entirely one race?" That would be worth speculating on to help convince readers of your central claim that diversity is a value for the nation overall.*
>
> *Your central claim is focused and clearly stated.*
>
> *The main limitation of your essay is in presenting reasons to support your central claim and in developing those reasons. Your point "By learning from others you grow individually" helps develop your position, but you need to do more than just say that: you need to "develop" that point with further elaboration, perhaps even an example or two. You might look at the essays by Sharon and Charles in our class publication to see how a couple of other writers develop their thoughts more fully. Drawing on the readings a bit more might also help you.*
>
> *Your tone is even-handed throughout. And, you've done a good job of conveying your respect for alternative points of view.*

I'd be happy to consult with you if it would help you understand how you might develop your positions more fully.

Another effective way to assess student writing using common assessment criteria is through use of a scoring rubric, either at the course or program level. Primary trait analysis allows for separate, analytic scoring of specified characteristics of a text such as composition, editing, revision, and referencing by using a rubric to assign levels of competency or points to each trait. A simple example follows:

	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Fair (2)	Poor (1)
Sentence Structure				
Spelling				
Grammar				
Referencing				

Primary trait analysis and scoring rubrics are currently used in some classrooms across campus, including several JYWP courses. For instance, as shown on the next page, SOM 310 Management Communications uses a scoring rubric for a written progress report assignment to assess student skill in tone, format, grammar, mechanics and editing:

SOM 310 Management Communication
Progress Report

Assignment: Using standard progress report format, write a concise memo to your instructor about
- Whom you have decided to interview and why
- Where they work and why this is relevant
- Whether or not you have conducted the interview
- What you have found out so far
- How far along you are in writing a summary report of the experience

The memo should inform your instructor of any problems you have encountered in the interview process, and should especially identify any problems that your instructor might be able to help you resolve. Finally, be sure to use progress report headings within the memo format. Total points: 5

Demonstrates appropriate tone and correct memo format. Specifies who you are interviewing, why they were selected for relevance to your major, where they work, whether you have held the interview, nay obstacles or problems you need help with, or any questions you might have about the summary report. (1)	Uses standard progress report headings within the memo format: e.g., Overview, Current Progress, and Steps Remaining sections. (2)	Clear, coherent, and correct and concise. Edited and proofread for grammar, syntax, mechanics and spelling. (2)
Total points: 5		

4. End-of-Semester Evaluation. The full list of *Statement of Learning Goals and Objectives* and *Criteria for Assessment* can be used to evaluate students' work over the semester and to assess their strengths and weaknesses. These objectives and criteria can also guide your comprehensive evaluation of a portfolio of student work or to determine a final evaluation for the students' work in the course.

These are some ways to use the learning objectives and common criteria for assessment in your JYWP course. Assessment criteria can also be used for program assessment. Departments can use these criteria to evaluate students' writing across the major. Examples of strategies for program assessment include:

- Using a common rubric to grade specific (and perhaps common) assignments in all JYWP courses or in capstone courses. The results of students' individual performances in the course could be aggregated to provide information on how students in the major, as a whole, are performing on the criteria.

- Asking a team of faculty members to collect and evaluate a random sample of students' essays, using the criteria as a framework for a common scoring rubric.

Appendix A of this handbook lists a variety of sources and resources where you can find out more about using learning objectives and criteria for course planning and assessment. Appendix B contains actual assignments from the courses of the JYWP faculty involved in this project. Staff in the UMass Office of Academic Planning and Assessment (OAPA) are also available to help you, and OAPA's Course-based Assessment and Program Review and Improvement handbooks contain detailed information on assessment methods and techniques.