WPA Statement on the Five Knowledge Domains of First-Year Composition (v4)

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Producing Contextually Situated Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Introduction

This document provides support for WPAs and composition instructors to develop contextually situated Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). Readers will find an ideal process for developing contextually situated SLOs; however, there are contextual situation realities that not only inform what your specific SLOs should be but also provide the affordances and constraints that will impact your process. Taking time to deeply understand your context before outlining your process will make for stronger contextualized SLOs in the long run. And, as institutional contexts change, you will want to revisit, (re)develop, and assess your SLOs as an interactive process.

Below is an idealized framework to develop your process for producing contextually situated SLOs that best suit your institutional conditions, including but not limited to faculty attitudes, perceptions, and training; institutional mission; state legislation; student population; writing ecologies; and support systems such as WAC/WID programs and writing centers.

Researching

Before drafting, read scholarship on the theories and pedagogical practices that inform the field, research your local context, and develop a detailed plan to ensure an inclusive process. Some research steps to consider:

- **Read Scholarship**: As part of this document, we include a variety of suggestions of texts you and your team might read in Domain Supporting Documents.
- **Collect Local Examples**: Find copies of the first-year composition SLOs for peer and local institutions. Think in terms of accreditation for peers and transfer for regional institutions. (Consider dual credit/dual enrollment programs in your region, if applicable to your context.) Not only will these examples provide ideas of what is going on locally in terms of content and pedagogy, they'll also model the genre and style of SLOs that are regularly used in your connected contexts.
- **Identify Requirements**: Collect, review, and analyze information and/or requirements based on your contextual considerations (see below). At minimum, identify content and

format requirements for the SLOs as well as other required procedures (e.g., assessment and accreditation requirements, shared governance processes, voting and approving bodies).
- **Outline Process**: After identifying any required processes in the department/unit, institution, and district/region, work with local stakeholders to identify any guidelines or best practices. Be sure to carefully identify the lists of and processes for (anonymous or not) collecting information and feedback from different groups of stakeholders. Try to acquire institutional commitment through resources like course buyouts, extra contracts, as well as food and materials for meetings.
- **Review Data**: Collect, review, and (cross-)analyze any assessment and/or student data from your own program(s). You might want to collect new data from students and instructors in your program and other stakeholders based on your contextual considerations (see below). Consider identifying individuals, groups, or offices that can help you pull and analyze data.

Drafting

We suggest that you keep authoring teams relatively small and incorporate diverse perspectives through robust inclusive feedback cycles. Once you start drafting material (see Possible Templates section), you might realize that you not only write and/or revise goals and SLOs, but you might also write/revise:

- course descriptions,
- suggestions or content for course curriculum and materials,
- assessment suggestions/plans/processes, and
- timelines and processes for revision.

Reviewing & Revising

You will want to get input from direct stakeholders like students, instructors, and administrators in the program. Do not be surprised by how many other people want to have input on the SLOs for required writing courses. Based on our experiences, taking the time to collect broad stakeholder feedback will later help with adoption and implementation. When collecting feedback be sure to provide participants with common language to use and explicit feedback and revision expectations. As you work with stakeholders, consider taking constituency acceptability votes above and beyond any required voting.

Contextual Considerations

There are many variables that impact both the content of as well as the process for developing SLOs. Below, we include a variety of possible contextual variables in hopes that they might prompt you to identify others unique to your context.

Institution & Program

The types of courses, programs, and institutions for and in which you are developing the SLOs will greatly impact content, format, and process.

- **Type of Institution**: Are you a two- or four-year institution of higher education? Are you a specialized institution? What transfer and articulation agreements does your institution have? How does your institution offer or articulate dual credit/dual enrollment credits?
- **Student Population**: What is your student population? How many students? What are their demographics? Where are your students from? Are they on-campus, commuter, or online students?
- **Catalog/Degree Requirements & Articulations**: What are the curricular requirements and offerings for your program? How many course options? What course levels? What are the course prefixes and numbers? What policies inform transfer and articulation?
- **Types of Campuses**: Are you producing SLOs for a traditional in-person campus? Online? International partner campus? If you have multiple campus offerings, do the SLOs need to be the same across campuses?
- **Types of Writing Programs**: Are you a traditional writing program focused on offering first-year composition classes? Do you offer developmental courses? Second Language Writing? Advanced-level writing? Writing Across the Curriculum? Writing Center?
- **Location of Program**: Where in the institutional organizational chart is your writing program located? An English department? An independent writing program or department? As part of a larger combined school or college?
- **Assessment & Accreditation Requirements**: Which accrediting body(ies) oversee your institutional accreditation? What requirements do they have for programmatic and course level SLOs? What assessment requirements?
- **Program & Institutional Histories**: Consider it a part of the research, review, and reflection process to identify relevant program and institutional histories that might provide insight to developing contextually situated SLOs.
- **Local Cultural Priorities**: Current administrators and other stakeholders, as well as strategic plans and policies, potentially influence your understanding of cultural considerations. Try to balance incorporating hyper-contextualized priorities (e.g., usually from a specific person in a precise time and space) with long-term institutional identity and goals.

Local Stakeholders/Guidelines

There are a number of people and policies that are interested and/or invested in writing program SLOs. At minimum, you may want to collect information from these groups; however, you might also include them as part of the process (e.g., either representatives on a smaller authoring team and/or groups with whom you hold meetings to discuss priorities, processes, and/or drafts).

- WPA/Rhet/Comp/Writing Studies Allies
- Instructors
- Students

- Any other WPs defined broadly (writing centers, WAC/WID, SLW/TESOL, etc.)
- Chain of command administrative positions
- Course placement individuals/units
- Campus assessment & accreditation individuals/units
- Campus administrative/student affairs research/data/analytics centers
- Advisors (esp. if revising course descriptions as well)
- Student Affairs/Success individuals/units
- Other institutional stakeholders (e.g., libraries staff, Honors programs, Educational Opportunity Programs, campus tutoring or student support centers)
- Local high school and/or community college writing/English administrators (i.e., transfer & dual credit considerations)
- Community stakeholders
- Legislative stakeholders
- Professional/workforce stakeholders
- Accrediting bodies

As you identify and engage with stakeholders, be sure to consider the material conditions of their ability to participate in producing, teaching, and assessing outcomes. For example, many writing programs are predominantly made up of contingent faculty with higher teaching/student loads and usually, especially in comparison to tenure track colleagues, lower salaries. If you consider this SLO production process in terms of its lifecycle, the unit and larger institution should be committed to providing resources for service, professional development, and assessment activities related to developing, implementing, assessing, and revising the SLOs and related curricular materials and policies.

Writing SLOs

Learning outcomes describe what students should know, be able to do, and or/value by the end of the course or program. Outcomes will focus on the knowledge students acquire, the skills they develop, and their emotional/affective development toward writing. Your learning outcomes should include the following features:

1. Aligned with university mission and goals, especially general education, if your program falls under the general education curriculum,

2. Specific, clear, and concise,

3. Observable and measurable,

4. Discrete,

5. Realistic and manageable, and

6. Use active verbs.

You can use the above features as a rubric to judge the accuracy of your learning outcomes. We recommend creating at least one SLO for each of the five knowledge domains for your first-year writing program. Upon review of the cross-category domains, you might create at least one SLO for any that you find relevant to your institutional and/or programmatic context.

Using Existing Cognitive Domain Frameworks to Develop SLOs

There are many cognitive domain frameworks that you can draw on to help develop your SLOs. Bloom's taxonomy is the most well-known hierarchical cognitive domain framework. While it has been revised in recent years, scholars in learning sciences and education now argue that Bloom's taxonomy no longer reflects current research on knowledge and cognition. Scholars have created other frameworks that reflect contemporary understanding of learning.

We do not advocate one framework over another, but we do encourage WPAs and their colleagues to consider the limitations and opportunities each framework offers in helping you empirically describe how and why your learning outcomes best fit the institution and the goals of the discipline. Below we provide a summary of each framework:

Bloom's Taxonomy

Education psychologist Benjamin Bloom published his taxonomy of learning in *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals* in 1956. He identified three learning domains: cognitive, psychomotor, and affective. The area most commonly used is the cognitive domain, described across six areas. The domain chart below reflects the 2001 revisions of Bloom's original taxonomy. It has been widely used for decades in crafting learning goals and outcomes; however, educational psychologists believe the taxonomy is too hierarchical and may not reflect contemporary theories on learning. Although acceptable to use, it's important that you consider the drawbacks of Bloom's taxonomy and how to address those in your outcome design.

Cognitive Domain

Levels	**Definition**	**Sample Verbs**
Remember	Retrieve, recall, or recognize relevant knowledge from long-term memory	cite, define, describe, identify, label, list, match, name, outline, quote, recall, report, reproduce, retrieve, show, state, tabulate, tell
Understanding	Demonstrate comprehension through one or more forms of explanation	arrange, articulate, associate, categorize, clarify, classify, compare, compute, conclude, contrast, defend, diagram, differentiate, discuss,

		distinguish, estimate, exemplify, explain
Applying	Use information or a skill in a new situation	apply, calculate, carry out, classify, complete, compute, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, examine, execute, experiment, generalize, illustrate, implement, infer, interpret
Analyzing	Break material into its constituent parts and determine how the parts relate to one another and/or to an overall structure or purpose	analyze, arrange, break down, categorize, classify, compare, connect, contrast, deconstruct, detect, diagram, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish
Evaluating	Make judgments based on criteria and standards	appraise, apprise, argue, assess, compare, conclude, consider, contrast, convince, criticize, critique, decide, determine, discriminate, evaluate, grade, judge, justify
Creating	Put elements together to form a new coherent or functional whole; reorganize elements into a new pattern or structure	arrange, assemble, build, collect, combine, compile, compose, constitute, construct, create, design, develop, devise, generate, write

Marzano and Kendall's New Taxonomy of Educational Objectives

This new taxonomy of educational objectives addresses some of the shortcomings of Bloom's Taxonomy, such as simplifying the nature of thought and its relationship to learning. Marzano and Kendall's educational objectives reflect an expansive view of cognition and learning.

Domain	**Domain Indicators Definitions**	**Sample Verbs**
Cognitive System		
	Retrieval Focuses on recalling and recognizing information	Identify, label, locate retrieve, list, name, state

	Integrating and symbolizing Involves understanding and interpreting information	Summarize, paraphrase, classify, categorize, generalize, diagram, chart
	Matching, classifying, analyzing errors, generalizing, and specifying: Centers on breaking down information into parts, and understanding the relationships between components	Outline, identify, organize, differentiate, dissect, break down, analyze
	Knowledge utilization: Utilization involves applying knowledge in practical and complex ways	Apply, implement, carry out, use, operate, evaluate, assess, critique
Metacognitive System		
	Specifying goals, process monitoring, monitoring clarity, and monitoring accuracy: Responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and regulating one's own learning and problem-solving strategies	Strategize, outline, organize, prepare, map out, track, observe, supervise
Self-System		
	Examining importance, examining efficacy, examining emotional response, and examining overall motivation: Involves setting goals, maintaining motivation, and reflecting on one's own learning processes and emotional responses	Drive, contemplate, introspect, invest, pledge, dedicate, devote

Wiggins and McTighe's Six Facets of Understanding

Developed by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, The Six Facets of Understanding framework helps teachers identify how students understand course content. They identify six non-hierarchical areas of understanding that teachers can teach for and evaluate.

Facet 1: Explanation	Students will be able to explain how things work, how components connect, and why events happen, often with supporting evidence.
Facet 2: Interpretation	Students will be able to articulate the meaning of something beyond face value: an event's cultural significance, a data point's indications, or a symbol's meaning. They can produce creative work that strikes a deep chord of recognition and resonance within a given cultural context.
Facet 3: Application	Students will have the ability to use knowledge effectively in new situations and diverse realistic contexts—to assemble the appropriate ideas, knowledge, and actions to address and solve a new problem.
Facet 4: Perspective	Students can see things from different points of view, articulate the other side of the case, see the big picture, recognize underlying assumptions, and take a critical stance.
Facet 5: Empathy	Students will be able to enter another person's feelings and worldview and can anticipate or imagine their thoughts, feelings, and actions.
Facet 6: Self-Knowledge	Students will be able to explain how their own patterns of thought and action affect their understanding. Students notice and question their own ways of seeing the world—and their own limitations and inexpertise.

Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes (SOLO)

Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes describes levels of progressively complex understanding through five categories. In other words, they describe a journey from an unknowing student to novice to expert. The first three levels of understanding help instructors learn how much their students know, for example. WPAs may arrange outcomes based on expected progressions of understanding across a sequence of courses, leading up to extended abstract as the final level of understanding about writing.

Learning Domain	Definition
1. Pre-structural	Students miss the point, don't understand, or don't know about a concept. Students think or say, “I need some help please.”
2. Uni-structural	Students understand one thing about a topic but not be able to go into more depth in the “why” and “how.” Here students think or say, “I need a reminder.”
3. Multi-structural	Students know several things about a topic but have trouble connecting them into a coherent system. Here students think or say, “I can usually do well on my own but I make mistakes along the way.”
4. Relational	Students identify how multiple ideas or systems work together. They begin to say, “I know this but I also know the how and why behind it.”
5. Extended abstract	Students connect concepts, facts, and/or ideas together and extrapolate other possibilities or new knowledge beyond the context of their initial learning. Note this would be similar to students understanding how to transfer their writing across new contexts. Here students think or say, “I can look at the results of the work and I know what to do for other contexts.”

Further Reading

Anderson, Lorin W., and David R. Krathwohl, eds. *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., 2001.

Beaufort, Anne. *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*. Utah State University Press, 2007.

Biggs, John, and Kevin F. Collis. *Evaluating the Quality of Learning: The SOLO Taxonomy (Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome)*. Academic Press, 1982.

Marzano, Robert J., and John S. Kendall. *The New Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. Corwin, 2006.

Wiggins, Grant, and Jay McTighe. *Understanding by Design*. Assn. for Supervision & Curriculum Development, 2005.