# English 110, 111/112, 113, & 120—Student Learning Outcome (SLO) Handbook

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Introduction—Defining the purpose of this handbook and the nature and purpose of the SLOs?

During the 2013/2014 academic year, the Core Writing Program launched new Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for the First Year Composition (FYC). This handbook serves to make the new SLOs user-friendly.

Background—How were the new SLOs created?

The impetus for revising the Core Writing Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) comes from a desire to improve our core writing courses for the undergraduate students and to ensure continuity across sections. We began by examining and articulating our program’s core values.

To achieve this goal, we held a series of meetings that included dozens of people who are deeply interested in what our students learn. We talked with TAs, lecturers, tenured and tenure-track faculty across disciplines, administrators, students, graduates, technical professionals, and local employers. Through these conversations we found out what they think writing, at its best, is – what makes it successful or good or useful in the workplace and in the classroom, in our personal lives and our communities. Not surprisingly, many said that good writing must adhere to grammatical standards and that it should be concise and thoughtfully organized.

But participants went much deeper, also saying that writers need to be versatile, sensitive to the changing demands of different audiences and situations; that writing is essential to personal development, community membership and citizenship. They said that writing is one of the essential ways in which we construct our identities and that, to do so successfully in the 21st century, we must understand how it functions in electronic media. Deeply entwined in all this were conversations about reading, research, synthesizing others’ ideas with our own, and the variety of cognitive tasks that go along with self-expression through language.

In addition to what we were hearing in these conversations, we wanted to acknowledge what our program is already good at: a genre-focused, rhetorical approach to teaching writing with an emphasis on student reflection. Finally, taking into account research by George Kuh and the National Survey on Student Engagement, we wanted to emphasize the importance of students being able to make connections between what they learn in our English 110–113 courses and their personal and professional goals.

With our focus-group conversations and these priorities in mind, we created a set of student learning outcomes to pilot in the 2012/13 academic year. During that year we collected data from instructors and students about how they understood and valued the SLOs. We used this assessment to guide us in our revision. Finally, the Core Writing Committee voted to approve these outcomes on August 7, 2013.

One of the most enjoyable and rewarding results of starting with the discovery and articulation of our values is that we’ve gotten to talk about what is most important to us as writing teachers with dozens of passionate and talented people. We hope – in fact we plan – that these conversations will continue as a regular part of our program assessment.

Key terms – What do the SLOs mean, and why are they worded this way?

This section takes the outcomes one at a time and explains the key terms of each in the context of our core writing program and the outcome creation process. As you read through this, you may be struck, as we have been, by just how many complex and intertwined ideas we work with and try to translate to students. Seeing them laid out in this way has served to remind us...
that we need to talk to one another. No single teacher can keep all these things in mind all the time, but by checking in with one another and with composition scholarship, we can make sure that we're always productively circulating them into our teaching.

Included below are the English 110–113 and 120 descriptions and SLOs along with explanations of their key terms.

**English 110, 111-112, & 113 Course Description**

In these courses, you will develop reading and writing skills that will help you with the writing you will do in your own fields of study and other personal and professional contexts. You will learn to analyze rhetorical situations in terms of audience, contexts, purpose, mediums, and technologies and apply this knowledge to your reading and writing. You will also gain understanding of how writing and other modes of communication (such as visual and audio elements) work together for rhetorical purposes.

You will learn to read complex nonfiction texts and to summarize, interpret, and draw inferences from them. You will conduct research using primary sources (e.g., observations, surveys, or interviews). And you will write in multiple genres, making rhetorical choices according to the purpose of the writing and your audience.

**English 120 Course Description**

English 120 emphasizes academic writing, research, and argumentation. You will design and research a project of your own and will summarize, synthesize, evaluate, and integrate secondary sources to support your own argument. You will also analyze the writing and research approaches (e.g., quantitative v. qualitative v. textual) of an academic discipline that is of interest to you.

You will build on the rhetorical approach introduced in English 110,111/112, or 113 by continuing to analyze rhetorical situations in terms of audience, contexts, purpose, mediums, and technologies and apply this knowledge to your reading and writing. You will also extend your understanding of how writing and other modes of communication (such as visual and audio elements) work together for rhetorical purposes.

**English 110–120 Student Learning Outcomes***

*Note that SLOs A-H are applicable to all FYC courses (110, 111-112, 113, & 120). SLOs I and J are applicable only to 120.

Throughout the semester, you will progress toward the following student learning outcomes:

**Rhetorical Situation and Genre**

A. analyze, compose, and reflect on arguments in a variety of genres, considering the strategies, claims, evidence, and various mediums and technologies that are appropriate to the rhetorical situation (*page 4*)

**Writing as a Social Act**

B. describe the social nature of composing, particularly the role of discourse communities at the local, national, and international level (*page 5*)
Writing as a Process

C. use multiple approaches for planning, researching, prewriting, composing, assessing, revising, editing, proofreading, collaborating, and incorporating feedback in order to make your compositions stronger in various mediums and using multiple technologies (page 6)

Grammar and Usage

D. improve your fluency in the dialect of Standardized Written American English at the level of the sentence, paragraph, and document (page 6)
E. analyze and describe the value of incorporating various languages, dialects, and registers in your own and others’ texts (page 7)

Reflection

F. evaluate your development as a writer over the course of the semester and describe how composing in multiple genres and mediums using various technologies can be applied in other contexts to advance your goals (page 8)

Research

G. use writing and research as a means of discovery to examine your personal beliefs in the context of multiple perspectives and to explore focused research questions through various mediums and technologies (page 8)
H. integrate others’ positions and perspectives into your writing ethically, appropriately, and effectively in various mediums and technologies (page 9)
I. compose a research-based academic argument in one of various mediums and technologies by identifying, analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing sources, which must include secondary sources (page 9)
J. analyze and describe the writing and research conventions of an academic field in order to understand the different ways of creating and communicating knowledge (page 10)

What do these terms mean

A. analyze, compose, and reflect on arguments in a variety of genres, considering the strategies, claims, evidence, and various mediums and technologies that are appropriate to the rhetorical situation

Arguments: This represents a shift in the 110-113 outcomes. In the past our program has encouraged 110-113 instructors not to focus on argument and/or persuasion, but here we’re emphasizing it as a necessary part of all college writing. Of course, we do not want every piece of writing for 110-113 to make an “academic” argument. Instead, the arguments should be fitting of the genre.

For example, a memoir argues (more or less explicitly) that a certain event can teach us something important about life and is therefore significant; a report relies on the underlying argument that its author has been thorough and objective and is therefore giving us reliable information; and a rhetorical analysis creates an argument through claims about a particular text’s audience, purpose, and strategies.

By using the word argument, we aim to help students make their writing matter to a particular audience and to prepare them for making more traditional academic arguments in other classes and disciplines.
Genres: Our program emphasizes genre as a concept students must be familiar with to be versatile writers. In our courses, we want students not only to learn the rhetorical moves used in a variety of genres, thereby expanding their writing repertoires, but also to learn to integrate genre into their reading and writing processes. As they read and write, we want them to ask questions like the following: What is this text, and what does its status as an editorial, or proposal, or blog give me in terms of expectations I bring or moves I should make? Ideally, students will come to see genres not as inflexible forms that dictate their writing processes but as flexible guidelines that can be followed, changed, or ignored, with each choice bringing certain consequences. Moreover, we want students to begin to see genres as generative – as helpful to the writing process by bringing reader expectations and common conventions to the foreground.

Strategies, claims, and evidence: Because many (even most) academic and professional rhetorical situations require writers to make and support claims, the outcomes emphasize the language of persuasive writing to steer instructors toward a common vocabulary and to ask students to grapple with these terms in their reflective writing.

Medium and technology: Here, “medium” means the physical context of texts written or read by students. When writing, students should consider the medium in which their audience will encounter their document. Will it be read as a hard copy, or on a screen, and how will this affect the reading experience? Will it be widely available or sent to a select few readers? If it’s an electronic text, could it find its way to unintended readers, and what might the effects be? When students read texts written by other people, they should consider the expectations they bring, as well as the decisions the author might have made, as a result of the medium in which it appears. How does medium affect tone, style, and document design? What assumptions does the reader bring to different media?

Related to medium is technology. What kinds of technologies are available and appropriate to particular rhetorical situations? We should remind students that technologies span from a pencil to a computer to an mp3. Asking students to think broadly and deeply about technologies prepares them for the multimodal composing they will likely do in all aspects of their writing lives.

Rhetorical situation: English department instructors told us one of the things they liked most about the previous set of outcomes was its clear focus on rhetorical situation, so we’ve tried to retain that here. Every piece of writing is successful according to the ways in which it responds to its audience, its purpose, and the larger context that surrounds it, so students should learn how these elements shape the texts they write and read. This is a key tenet of our Core Writing program that is fleshed out in all of the outcomes that follow.

While genres help to shape the choices writers make, so do rhetorical situations. Indeed genre is an integral part of any rhetorical situation, and students should learn the role both concepts play in the writing process.

B. describe the social nature of composing, particularly the role of discourse communities at the local, national, and international level

The social nature of writing: Language use does not occur in isolation. Indeed its very existence implies our intrinsic need to communicate with one another. Students should be able to use key terms like rhetorical situation and genre to describe the ways in which writing always responds to other writing and to the needs of certain audiences, while also seeking to accomplish real, social results such as belief, empathy, or action.
The role of discourse communities at the local, national, and international level:
Students should be able to describe how writing helps to articulate and accomplish the goals of
the communities they belong to and other communities as well. These might include local
communities based on shared interests, regional or national communities based on belief, or
international communities based on ethnicity. In addition, students should recognize that
discourse is defined by communities – that is, the communities we belong to, seek access to,
and wish to communicate with, influence the way we express ourselves and the things that we
value. Hopefully this recognition leads to others: that students’ own ways of being and
knowing are not inevitable or superior, but they are contingent on these discourse
communities; that language is “correct” to the extent that it achieves a speaker or writer’s
goals in a particular circumstance.

C. use multiple approaches for planning, researching, prewriting, composing, assessing,
revising, editing, proofreading, collaborating, and incorporating feedback in order to
make your compositions stronger in various mediums and using multiple technologies

Use multiple approaches for planning, researching, prewriting, composing, assessing,
revising, editing, proofreading: Part of our job as writing instructors is helping students find
their best writing processes. To do this we must name the steps of these processes, find out
what students are already doing at each stage, suggest ways that they might improve, and help
them become more aware of their existing and ideal processes through reflection. Students can
be particularly responsive to suggestions related to process because they (and we) all lead
busy, complicated lives in which completing all our tasks is a challenge. Manageable writing
processes and flexible attitudes go a long way toward working efficiently and meeting
deadlines.

Collaborating and incorporating feedback to make your compositions stronger: Building
on the statement in outcome B that writing is a social act, with this outcome students should be
led through, and be asked to reflect on, the pleasures and difficulties of collaborative writing,
including peer review and group projects. In addition, they should be able to discuss how
feedback from their instructor and peers figures into their revision process.

D. You will improve your fluency in the dialect of Standardized Written American English
at the level of the sentence, paragraph, and document

Characterize your improvement in the dialect of Standardized Written American English (SWAE): It is essential for students seeking acceptance into academic and professional
discourse communities to consistently and consciously use standardized forms of written
English and to understand the consequences of failing to do so. It is also essential that they
know that SWAE is one of many dialects of the English language, not inherently more logical or
better than other dialects. As university instructors, we have a duty to teach students about
this dialect, to call their attention to the ways in which they conform to or depart from
conventional uses of the dialect, and to give them the tools they need to comfortably wield
SWAE when rhetorically appropriate or necessary.

At the level of the sentence, paragraph and document: It is important to remember that
standardness is not just punctuation and correct spelling. Expectations for standardness
include sentence, paragraph, and document-level language features, such as word choice,
transition phrases, sentence structure, punctuation, organization, citation practices, signal
phrases, document design, etc.
For example, students should be able to employ topic, support and point sentences in their paragraphs, and to articulate the function of each. They should also be able to describe how body paragraphs differ from introductory or concluding paragraphs, and to write effectively in all three. Finally, they should also be able to format their documents according to the requirements of the rhetorical situation in which they are writing.

E. analyze and describe the value of incorporating various languages, dialects and registers in your own and others’ texts

**Languages, dialects and registers:** There is great debate about the definition of these terms, but linguists generally agree that dialects are rule-governed ways of using a language that are unique (either due to geography or social groups) in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Of course, what is considered a language vs. a dialect is highly political. As the saying goes, a language is a dialect with an army. Register refers to the habitual adaptation of language to fit specific social situations, for example using informal language with friends and family; formal language with doctors, insurance representatives, and professional contacts; and specialized language full of specific terms in academic disciplines, in the workplace, on the soccer field, and within other discourse communities that communicate for well-defined purposes.

Of course you might not assign texts that depart from SWAE, but students will be fluent in ways of speaking and writing that do depart from it. Using these fluencies in your teaching can be a powerful tool for helping students understand the language skills they already possess and how they might transfer the skills they learn in English 110–113 to other places. Many of our students are accustomed to seeing these non-standard fluencies as deficient, at least in regard to their schooling. But we can help show them that the languages, dialects and registers they employ are rhetorically savvy ways of communicating. In addition, we can show them that they **already possess the skills necessary to move between these ways of communicating**, which is exactly what we hope to teach them in our classes. They can transition into "academic" ways of knowing and communicating precisely because they are already practiced in the art of moving from one discourse community to another. As Juan Guerra says, they are already "trans-cultural citizens."

**Analyze and describe the value of difference:** In our courses, we should make sure students understand the linguistic diversity that surrounds them – and, perhaps more importantly, the value of linguistic diversity. In other words, although they will likely mostly encounter texts in SWAE, we also want instructors to expose students to texts with multiple languages, dialects, and registers so students can analyze the value of linguistic difference in the texts they read and write. And, as with everything else in the course, they should be able to articulate how those choices affect the text rhetorically. What impact does the linguistic difference have on the audience? On the text’s argument?

In addition to having the duty to teach students conventions of SWAE, we also have a duty to inform students that different discourse communities and rhetorical situations require different dialects, and that departing from expected norms entails certain risks and benefits. For example, an overly formal email to a friend might communicate a desire for distance, while an informal email to a professor or potential employer might communicate a lack of respect. Or, from a positive perspective, using a nonstandard dialect in particular kinds of writing for particular purposes can be an incredibly powerful rhetorical strategy.
F. evaluate your development as a writer over the course of the semester and describe how composing in multiple genres and mediums using various technologies can be applied in other contexts to advance your goals.

Evaluating your development as a writer over the course of the semester and describing how composing in multiple genres and mediums using various technologies can be applied in other contexts:

This speaks to our mission within the university curriculum and within society. Because Core Writing courses are the only required writing courses in the curriculum, we are expected to give our students the knowledge they need to write successfully in all university contexts. Similarly, because a college diploma signals to society that its recipient is a competent reader and communicator, and our courses are the ones most specifically geared toward teaching these skills, we are expected to give our students the knowledge they need to communicate successfully as professionals and citizens.

These are high, perhaps unrealistic, demands to be achieved in six to nine credit hours. But an important step toward transferring the skills learned in those credit hours to other classes, and to jobs and citizenship, is students’ own recognition that transfer is possible, even desirable. Two steps we’ve taken as a program toward encouraging this recognition are an approach to teaching based on genre, and an emphasis on genres students are likely to encounter as professionals and citizens. Another step is showing students that they already possess the knowledge and ability to move between discourse communities, and that their move into an academic community bears much in common with their moves from the discourse of family to the discourses of peers, from face-to-face discourse to online discourse. Yet another, essential step in getting students to recognize the desirability of transfer is requiring them to reflect throughout the semester on what parts of their past, present and future lives these reading and writing skills will be useful for.

Advancing your goals:

In a recent talk at UNM, George Kuh, a nationally recognized scholar on student engagement and success, noted that one of the single best predictors of college success is how well students are able to articulate their reasons for being in college and in particular classes, a trait he called “goal realization.” With this in mind, we want our students to reflect on the goals that they have as individuals and as members of communities. Further, we want them to understand that writing is a means not only for describing goals but for achieving them – that writing does real work in the real world. Writing helps individuals to get jobs, start businesses, and steer projects. It helps groups to discover their mission, get a grant, or change a law.

G. use writing and research as a means of discovery to examine your personal beliefs in the context of multiple perspectives and to explore focused research questions through various mediums and technologies.

Writing and research as a means of discovery:

In all of our focus groups, we asked people to talk about a time when a piece of their own writing was meaningful to them, and over and over they told stories about writing and the research that went into it as a means of discovering more about themselves and the world around them. This outcome reflects those values, and with it we hope to encourage students to explore their worlds in ways that are meaningful to them.

Examining personal beliefs in the context of multiple perspectives:

Similarly, writing instructors told us they want students to use research and writing to articulate and challenge their own views. To do this, students must approach writing with an open mind, writing from a
position of inquiry as opposed to determining a thesis from the beginning and writing to prove already-reached conclusions. We want students to see writing, and the research that informs it, as a process of asking and answering provocative questions. In this process, students should recognize (with help from instructors) the necessity of confronting multiple points of view on any topic, and of considering how their views color the ways they receive the views of others.

**Exploring focused research questions:** Creating research questions that are large enough to be significant yet focused enough to be explored in a 110–113 paper is a skill that takes time to develop. This outcome introduces the important term "research question" and emphasizes it as something students must create and then seek answers to. Inevitably, students engaged in this process will find that it is recursive rather than linear: research questions often evolve as researchers find new information and explore new avenues, so they must move back and forth between questions and answers. Students should be encouraged to talk about these things in class discussions and reflective writing assignments.

**H. integrate others’ positions and perspectives into your writing ethically, appropriately, and effectively in various mediums and technologies**

**Integrating others’ positions and perspectives:** One of the key moves of writing at the college level is the ability to take what we find in research and make it a part of our own writing. This should be done . . .

. . . **Ethically:** A writer’s presentation of other people’s views should be accurate enough that the source author would say, “Yes, that’s a fair representation of what I said.” In addition to quoting, paraphrasing and summarizing accurately, this also means being able to discern an author’s overall argument or intent, and to remain true to these things when using source material. Integrating sources ethically also means citing them, so that a reader always knows which ideas and words have come from someone other than the writer.

. . . ** Appropriately:** Citations should be consistent with a particular documentation system such as MLA or APA. They should also be done in a manner appropriate to the genre. For example, representing someone else’s words in a dialogue is common in memoir but less so in a report. Likewise, brochures often lack the space necessary for a formal bibliography but often employ footnotes.

. . . **Effectively:** Students should be encouraged to view the use of sources as a rhetorical act that strengthens their arguments and enhances authorial ethos. This involves the number and kinds of sources, as well as how they are handled in student texts. For example, does the student explain to readers why a quote is relevant to the argument being made? Would a student’s use of a source be more rhetorically effective if he mentioned the source’s profession or position? Are only the most salient points of the source text used, or is there extraneous material that does nothing for the student’s argument?

**I. compose a research-based academic argument in one of various mediums and technologies by identifying, analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing sources, which must include secondary sources**

Compose a research-based academic text in one of various mediums and technologies by identifying, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing sources. English 120 students must pose a research question, conduct research, and write a report or proposal based on their findings. In English 110–113, students are expected to conduct primary research such as interviews,
observations, and surveys. In English 120, they are expected to conduct secondary research through UNM’s libraries. In order to learn the basics of secondary research, all English 120 classes are required to attend at least one class session with a research librarian.

**Must include but is not limited to secondary sources.** While this project must incorporate secondary sources like books and scholarly journals, it might also include primary research sources if they are appropriate to the audience, purpose, and context. However, because English 110–113 courses often include research projects based on primary research, we expect that the secondary research will comprise the bulk of the students’ research project.

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**J. analyze and describe the writing and research conventions of an academic field in order to understand the different ways of creating and communicating knowledge**

**Analyze the writing and research conventions of an academic field.** Because 120 aims to help students develop a deeper understanding of the expectations for academic communication, students should examine examples of writing in a specific academic field and draw conclusions based on those examples about the kind of research methods and writing conventions valued in that field. As noted in the course description, this analysis will become a major writing assignment. However, it can also be addressed as a short writing assignment and/or through in-class activities.

The academic field on which students’ analysis should focus is purposefully unspecified. One option for this outcome is to choose a discipline with which you are familiar and ask students to analyze texts from that discipline. Another option is to ask students to locate and analyze sample texts written within their various intended majors. No instructor is expected to be able to teach the discursive conventions of every academic discipline. However, it is possible to help students ask questions about a text that will lead them to a better understanding of expectations for written communication in the academic disciplines that most interest them.

**Describe different ways of creating and communicating knowledge.** Each discipline uses different methods of creating knowledge and communicating it to their intended readers. What counts as a valid finding in the field of English literature will be very different from what counts as a valid finding in the field of biology, for example. A useful in-class exercise that would help students to work toward this outcome might be to compare a sample literary analysis to a sample scientific report. Both genres are valid in academic disciplines. However, the questions they ask, their methods for answering those questions, and the evidence they present are very different, as are their structure and design. Such an activity could ask students to consider how a belief in objectivity (or not) can radically influence both research and what counts as truth and knowledge within a discipline or field.