**Center for Writing Studies
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign**

**General Education Advanced Composition Courses
and Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools**

**Overview**

The [Center for Writing Studies](https://cws.illinois.edu/) (CWS) supports instructors across campus who teach writing-intensive courses that satisfy the university’s general education Advanced Composition requirement. Understandably, Advanced Composition instructors may have questions about how to reckon with students’ access to generative artificial intelligence (AI) applications such as ChatGPT. This brief document addresses the most pressing of these questions. It does so first by examining the Advanced Composition requirement’s curricular framework, and then by describing pedagogical choices suited to this framing. Given curricular and pedagogical norms for Advanced Composition courses, a course-focused discussion of generative AI follows. The document concludes by gesturing to other parties on campus that are sharing information about AI applications are likely to affect teaching and learning.

**Curriculum**

The Advanced Composition requirement, created by Senate faculty and overseen by faculty appointed to the General Education Board, recognizes that writing is integral to the research mission of the university. Researchers in all academic disciplines use writing extensively in the discovery and communication of new knowledge. Advanced Composition courses create opportunities for students at this research university to learn disciplinary ways of knowing and writing.

While approaches to teaching Advanced Composition vary, there are some constants:

* In 1991, two years after [establishing](https://uofi.app.box.com/s/fp5rwe43mlmkwddzc8hlv8aiygdeyvar) the Advanced Composition requirement, the Senate [stipulated](https://uofi.app.box.com/s/55rz9fc6ugaymrkbh9p7pexb1gzki719) that approved courses “must involve writing assignments that (a) demand analysis and synthesis of the subject matter of the course, or in the case of writing courses in the rhetoric and communication disciplines, application of the principles under study; (b) require substantial original composition (typically totaling at least 20 to 30 pages over the course of a semester); and (c) involve multiple drafts throughout the course of the semester.” The Senate directed that “[d]epartmental undertakings” in the realm of Advanced Composition “will be supported by the campus-wide Center for Writing Studies.”
* In 2020, the General Education Assembly on Learning Outcomes [identified](https://blogs.illinois.edu/view/8409/801124) learning outcomes for all Advanced Composition courses. Among the outcomes stated are these: A student who completes an Advanced Composition course will be able to “[l]ocate, gather, and evaluate data, primary sources, secondary sources, and other evidence by employing discipline-specific research methods,” will be able to “[a]nalyze and synthesize relevant information from multiple primary and secondary sources,” will be able to apply analysis and synthesis in the production of “a variety of written and/or multi-media compositions for specialist and/or non-specialist audiences,” and in doing so will “[e]ngage in writing and research as recursive processes, including drafting, review, revision, and reflection.”

Currently, [150 course offerings](https://courses.illinois.edu/gened/2023/fall/ACP) (some cross-listed) spanning all undergraduate degree-granting colleges and schools are approved by the General Education Board as satisfying the Advanced Composition requirement. Most approved courses are offered by departments in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, but several more colleges have a strong commitment to Advanced Composition in the disciplines: Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, Fine and Applied Arts, and Grainger Engineering.

**Pedagogy**

The curricular framework for Advanced Composition courses stresses that “writing and research” are “recursive processes.” Teaching writing in ways that highlight these processes brings visibility to the choices students make as they respond to writing prompts. This visibility affords instructors opportunities to provide students with constructive support when it is most likely to benefit what they are composing.

CWS faculty and graduate students are available to assist instructors with incorporating process-oriented pedagogy into discipline-focused Advanced Composition courses. They draw on decades of peer-reviewed research on effective practices in teaching [writing across the curriculum](https://wac.colostate.edu/). Some findings come from research on this campus in the NSF-funded [Writing Across Engineering and Science](https://publish.illinois.edu/waes/) program.

**Generative AI**

College instructors are concerned about how students will use generative AI applications to complete assigned coursework. Students have concerns about AI, too. In view of these concerns, CWS recommends that Advanced Composition instructions consider the following advice as they design and deliver their courses:

* Structure student writing so that various phases of the developmental process, from initial research to final submission, are visible to the instructor (and possibly peers, as well). Doing so maximizes opportunities for effective writing instruction, even if feedback at one or another phase is occasional or minimal. Further, share a rationale for teaching writing as a process with students. This rationale will be familiar to students who completed the general education Composition I requirement at Illinois ([RHET](https://english.illinois.edu/academics/undergraduate-studies/rhetoric-program), [CMN](http://catalog.illinois.edu/courses-of-instruction/cmn/), [ESL](https://linguistics.illinois.edu/languages/english-second-language)) or a course deemed equivalent by the [Illinois Articulation Initiative](https://itransfer.org/courses/gecc/communication.php). The same can be said for students who make use of the campus [Writers Workshop](https://writersworkshop.illinois.edu/), a unit of CWS.
* Decide whether students may incorporate generative AI applications into their writing processes. Explain this decision. Tie the explanation to the course’s curricular framework and its expected learning outcomes.
* If students are not to use generative AI applications, be clear with them about the consequences of doing so. If, for example, using generative AI applications is considered an academic integrity infraction, then explain how that is the case with reference to the university’s *Student Code* (see [Article 1, Part 4 – Academic Integrity Policy and Procedure](https://studentcode.illinois.edu/article1/part4/1-402/)). As always, confirm that course policies on academic integrity are aligned with departmental and college interpretations of university policies. Please note that early reviews of some commercial AI detection applications suggest that they are [not highly reliable](https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/06/02/turnitin-ai-cheating-detector-accuracy/), and may be [biased against non-native English writers](https://hai.stanford.edu/news/ai-detectors-biased-against-non-native-english-writers).
* Faculty researchers are already drawing on AI resources to conduct research and communicate research findings to disciplinary and general audiences. When updating Advanced Composition courses, instructors should consider how disciplinary research and writing practices continue to evolve as the adoption of AI-enhanced research and writing tools becomes widespread. Anticipating this future, many professional organizations and learned societies are wrestling with the disciplinary implications of AI technologies. See, for example, the efforts a [joint task force](https://aiandwriting.hcommons.org/) charged by the Modern Language Association and the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Also relevant is a [position statement](https://wacassociation.org/statement-on-ai-writing-tools-in-wac/) issued by the Association for Writing Across the Curriculum.

**Conclusion**

As AI technologies mature, contemplating the future of collegiate instruction must be a collective effort at Illinois. For its part, CWS is committed to revising this document about Advanced Composition instruction as developments warrant. For a broader perspective on how AI technologies are shaping (and being shaped by) collegiate instruction, see [information](https://citl.illinois.edu/citl-101/instructional-spaces-technologies/teaching-with-technology/chatgpt) and [news](https://citl.illinois.edu/about-citl/news) published by the Center for Innovation in Teaching. Also, some academic colleges at Illinois, notably the [Gies College of Business](https://answers.uillinois.edu/gies/128405) and the [College of Law](https://libguides.law.illinois.edu/c.php?g=1325943&p=9760532), have assembled AI-related resources for researchers, teachers, and students in their disciplinary domains. Finally, in due course, it is expected that the [University System](https://www.uillinois.edu/) will share important guidance for the acquisition and use of generative AI applications in research and teaching.

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