

PIG Report on Grammar, Structure, and Style Writing Workshops for RWPD 170
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What was the outcome of the project and how did it align with original goals?

We have found that, since the school closures that began in spring 2020, student writers in RWPD 170 come to the course with quite different writing needs than they have in the past. More and more, the textbooks we have relied on to aid writing-instruction, published before the pandemic, are unable to address our current students' needs. Students often feel condescended to by standard grammar and structure handbooks; they feel overwhelmed by the amount of information in style handbooks; and they have difficulty committing to the use of online resources.

The goal of our project, then, was to respond to this by creating a series of handouts and accompanying workshops on grammar, style, and structure that would respond to our students' needs while also communicating with them in language that we ourselves use in the classroom. As the title of our project suggests, the handouts and workshops are divided into three general categories: those that address grammar, those that address structure, and those that address style. In all, 25 handouts and exercises were created. Prof. Chopra used these immediately as they were developed in her spring 2023 section of RWPD 170, and both Prof. Chopra and Prof. Stoberock are using them in their current fall 2023 RWPD 170 sections.

The handouts and accompanying workshops that we developed in fulfillment of the PIG align well with our original goals. As far as possible, the handouts are clear, specific, and detailed enough that students are able to understand and use them without getting entangled in the generally unhelpful-to-them minutiae of rules for writing. Students appreciate the clarity with which grammar, structure, and style concepts are explained and also appreciate that the exercises are rigorous without being intimidating (and sometimes, to their surprise, even fun). Students can feel their progress immediately. Prof. Chopra's spring semester students responded to them with enthusiasm, and by the end of the semester she was able to see the large steps forward they had taken in college-level writing. Further, these workshops and exercises also are easily adjustable so that as the needs of the students in further sections of RWPD 170 emerge (as they are doing this semester), they can be tailored for each new cohort.

What sense do you have at this point that your project has enhanced student learning and what will you be looking at in the future to know whether the project was successful?

Already, we can see the success of the work that we have done. Most handouts are short and specific and can be integrated into a class on a daily basis without taking over the larger class goals. They allow students to practice new writing skills immediately. They give students a vocabulary with which to diagnose their work. And they help students understand the aims of their writing and the component parts of the analytical essay in a holistic way.

As our teaching in RWPD 170 continues, we continue to develop more exercises and adjust existing ones. For example, this semester Prof. Stoberock has added to the exercise on writing emails so that it ends with a requirement that students email their RWPD 170 professor before the next class. Prof. Chopra has adjusted the exercise on the thesis to pose questions that require students to read and think more carefully about the excerpts provided. As we continue to teach within the RWPD 170 program, we will find the project successful if the material generated continues to be adjustable to meet the changing needs of each new cohort of 170 students.

What were the limitations or failings of this project, and how, in retrospect, might they have been better addressed or remedied?

One of the great strengths of the project was, particularly for Prof. Chopra, being able to test out the workshops immediately with students in her spring section. She was able to determine quickly whether adjustments to exercises were necessary, and able to note exercises that might be created in the future. But there is a limitation to this immediate use, too, in that it is only now that the handouts and workshops have been created that we can step back and look at them with a sense of the project as a whole. We have recognized that while our material is strong in addressing the formal aspects of writing, reading well, and—consequently—thinking well are essential to writing well, and our work is less strong in addressing the latter two. We are in the process of working to develop reading exercises that can be integrated into our RWPD 170 class plans.

How do you envision sharing the results of your work with other colleagues at Whitman (or elsewhere)?

Because the workshops we created were designed for students in RWPD 170 (that is, generally speaking, students in their first semester at Whitman), we envision them being most useful for other RWPD 170 instructors. We plan to make them available on our RWPD 170 Google Drive. We think, though, that because GENS 175 instructors likewise work with first-semester students, and because there is, necessarily, an overlap between students enrolled in RWPD 170 and students enrolled in GENS 175, that they will be useful for instructors of that course as well. To that end, we will be sharing our work during a Tuesday afternoon GENS 175 meeting. During

that meeting, we will suggest ways of adapting the exercises to the specific needs that instructors have identified. We are still discussing whether it is appropriate to make our materials available on the GENS 175 Canvas site, and will speak with Lauren Osborne, Director of the First-Year Seminars, about whether it would be helpful to post them there as well.