

Faculty “Common Understandings” for W1 Courses

(In effect as of the 2026-27 academic year.)

Writing is a crucial component of a liberal arts education, and Colby’s Writing Across the Curriculum initiative supports a vibrant culture of writing. First-year writing (W1) courses fulfill our writing requirement and introduce students to the kind of college-level writing, analysis, research, and reading abilities they will need throughout their college careers. W1 courses are offered through different departments and have unique themes, but all W1s are united by a set of faculty-generated “common understandings.”

Accordingly, faculty must ensure that their W1 courses adhere to these 10 “Common Understandings”:

1. Faculty will provide regular, in-class, direct instruction in writing on relevant topics related to things like drafting, research, style, genre, and revision techniques, as appropriate for the course.
2. Students will write on a weekly basis in some fashion--typically, this includes formative and/or informal writing, such as free writing, drafting, journaling, responding to other students’ work etc.
3. Over the course of the semester--typically across three to four major writing projects--students are expected to complete a total of approximately 5,000 words of revised, graded writing.¹

Note: Writing formatively and informally (as per #2) as a spark, scaffold, and beginning is an important part of W1 courses. However, students should also gain experience with iterative processes of revising, researching, re-thinking, incorporating feedback, developing arguments etc. in service of longer, revised, summative writing projects.

4. Faculty should scaffold writing assignments to ensure students have the opportunity to develop major projects in stages. This should include a project draft, but might also include items such as project proposals, outlines, annotated bibliographies, research plans, portfolios etc.
5. For all major assignments, W1 faculty will provide rubrics or guidelines for how they will assess students’ writing along with assignment guidelines or prompts. (Faculty may also, when appropriate, decide to co-create rubrics with students.)
6. For each major writing assignment, students will receive feedback in writing and/or in an individual conference with the W1 professor.

Note: If the course has a Writing Fellow (WF), an embedded peer writing tutor, students are encouraged to meet with the WF in addition to receiving feedback from the professor.

7. Faculty will provide specific guidelines for how and when generative AI tools are and/or are not acceptable in their W1 courses. These guidelines should explain the pedagogical reasoning for and consequences of failing to adhere to them.

Note: Putting specific AI-related guidelines on each assignment guide/prompt is strongly recommended and helpful to students. See also: Farnham Writers’ Center AI Guidelines.

8. Faculty will introduce and incorporate relevant sections of a writers’ handbook (e.g., *Pocket Style Manual*) or its online equivalent (e.g., Purdue OWL, Excelsior OWL, MLA.org etc.), as a reference for students.

¹ W1 courses may also use alternative assessment protocols, such as contract grading or portfolio grading.

9. Faculty will teach students about the ethics and processes of academic citation practices, including giving credit to ideas and words learned from others and correct use of a course-appropriate style for citing sources (e.g., MLA, APA, Chicago etc.). (See also [Academic Integrity | Colby College](#))
10. On a regular, but not annual, basis, W1 professors will be asked to submit student papers for the purpose of faculty development and designing the best possible assistance for W1 faculty, including workshops and Writers' Center supports. All submissions will be kept confidential, anonymized, and read in the aggregate.