

Humanities Assessment
HUMN 210, “Classics in Literature”
Spring 2014

What was assessed:

HUMN 210 is assessed here because it is an option in both the General Education Core Requirements and in the Humanities major. It is a survey course that satisfies List 1 requirements in the GEGR area of Humanities and Fine Arts. One objective in this GEGR “Sub-Breadth Area” is that “Students should be able to describe and analyze specific examples of common themes in literature, such as death, love, pride, self identity.” In addition, SLO number 3 for students in Humanities courses (especially majors) is that they should “write clear and effective English in a variety of rhetorical contexts.” These objectives are very similar, and so this assessment focuses on the development of writing skills of 45 students enrolled in HUMN 210-01 for spring quarter 2014.

Assessment procedures:

The development of writing skills are reflected in three papers required of each student, two out-of-class papers and one in-class at the mid-term. The three papers account for 55% of the course grade, with weight increasing slightly over the quarter; reading comprehension accounts for 45% of the final grade. Students choose the reading assignments on which they write and from among 2-7 analytical topics listed for each assignment. There are 18 reading assignments, and at least one student from each discussion group (nine members) is asked to submit a paper for each reading assignment. The purposes are to maximize student interest in their topics and to maintain a steadyflow of papers.

Each paper is graded with four general criteria:

1. The clarity and thoughtfulness of an analytical thesis beginning in the first paragraph. (Does the paper offer a critical perspective? Does it preempt a reader asking – So what?)
2. Development – Are there examples and quotations; does the paper preempt a reader asking – What do you mean by that?
3. Organization – Is there an apparent sequence to the sentences and paragraphs, and are contrary views and examples adequately anticipated?
4. Editorial correctness – Does the paper follow the prescribed format, sentence punctuation, spelling, and academic decorum.

These four criteria are described in standardized detail at the beginning of the course, and these details are then illustrated with examples from student writing each time papers are returned (almost every class meeting). The students are told repeatedly that these four criteria are given equal weight (25%) in the two out-of-class papers but that editorial correctness would matter less (10% maximum) in the in-class analysis (i.e., the mid-term).

Students are also told that the second out-of-class paper would be graded with greater rigor in all areas, justifying thereby increased weighting (4%) in the final grade.

It is assumed that increased weighting and classroom explanations of student examples will lead to better writing and higher grades.

Results:

Although a majority of students improved, many did not. Only 34 students submitted all three papers, eight students submitted two papers (one besides the in-class mid-term), two students submitted only the in-class mid-term, and one student is not counted here because of a plagerism.

Because out-of-class writing and in-class writing require different skills, the clearest growth or decline of writing can be seen in a comparison of the grades earned on the two out-of-class papers submitted by 34 students. The following is a list of those grades (our standard four point scale) and the growth or decline of those grades:

<u>Student</u>	<u>First paper</u>	<u>Second paper</u>	<u>Growth</u>	<u>Decline</u>
1	3.4	3.8	0.4	
2	4.0	3.4		0.6
3	3.3	3.8	0.5	
4	3.8	3.3		0.5
5	3.4	3.5	0.1	
6	3.6	2.8		0.8
7	4.0	4.0	0.0	
8	1.9	1.7		0.2
9	2.6	2.8	0.2	
10	3.9	4.0	0.1	
11	2.6	3.7	1.1	
12	3.3	3.0		0.3
13	3.7	3.7	0.0	
14	2.4	2.4	0.0	
15	1.5	2.7	1.2	
16	3.0	3.3	0.3	
17	3.7	3.8	0.1	
18	3.6	3.7	0.1	
19	3.8	3.8	0.0	
20	3.5	4.0	0.5	
21	3.6	2.6		1.0
22	3.8	3.7		0.1
23	3.8	3.8	0.0	
24	3.1	3.0		0.1
25	1.8	2.6	0.8	
26	3.7	2.7		1.0
27	2.9	2.8		0.1
28	3.8	3.6		0.2
29	2.3	2.6	0.3	
30	3.4	3.5	0.1	
31	3.5	3.8	0.3	
32	3.5	2.6		0.9
33	3.5	3.7	0.2	
34	2.6	2.0		0.6

Of the eight students who submitted only two papers, five submitted their out-of-class papers before the mid-term, and all five earned better grades on their mid-terms:

<u>Student</u>	<u>Early paper</u>	<u>Mid-Term</u>	<u>Growth</u>	<u>Decline</u>
1	1.8	2.8	1.0	
2	2.7	3.4	0.7	
3	2.6	2.8	0.2	
4	2.9	3.7	0.8	
5	3.6	3.9	0.3	

Of the eight students who submitted only two papers, three submitted their out-of-class papers after the mid-term, and all three earned lower grades on their mid-terms:

<u>Student</u>	<u>Mid-term</u>	<u>Later paper</u>	<u>Growth</u>	<u>Decline</u>
1	2.5	3.9	1.4	
2	2.0	2.7	0.7	
3	1.6	1.9	0.3	

Interpretation of results:

There was general improvement of student writing. Of the eight students who submitted only two papers, all eight earned better grades on their second papers, and their gains were more significant on average than the gains of students who submitted all three papers. The reasons for these gains varied. Those who submitted out-of-class

papers only after the mid-term may have worried about their weak mid-term grade (according to the testimony of one) and/or worried about the effect of no grade for out-of-class writing due before the mid-term (according to the testimony of another).

All the reasons that five did well on their mid-terms but neglected to submit later papers cannot be known, but all had good test scores, and the one who had the highest grades went out of her way to say she had too much to do and wanted to focus on the reading, other courses, and work rather than write another out-of-class paper. This response illustrates the high employment rates of the students enrolled at Eastern and the many obligations our students need to prioritize (especially non-traditional students).

Of the 34 students who submitted both out-of-class papers, 16 earned higher grades on their second paper, five earned the same grade, and 13 earned lower grades.

These are disappointing results and are probably due mostly to the haste with which many students wrote their last out-of-class papers. Although at least one student from each discussion group is asked to submit a paper for each reading assignment, this rule was not rigidly enforced. The instructor simply reminded students that too few papers were being submitted. That is to say, groups were allowed to have two members submit papers on some reading assignments to make up for assignments with no papers. Students took advantage of this allowance to defer their writing.

As a consequence, twenty-one papers were submitted on the last two days of class, and three more during finals week (with a penalty of 0.5). Eleven of the thirteen papers that earned lower grades were submitted on the last day of class or during finals week. Students face many requirements in different courses at the end of each quarter, and the best writing requires a student's undivided attention. Thus, the decline of writing skills in thirteen papers may be attributed in large part to the procrastination of the students. However, any decline, regardless of the reason, is a disappointment

Recommended improvements:

In general, the student writing improved but could have improved more. The three students who submitted only one late paper after the mid-term appear to have been most focused on rescuing their grades and show the highest gains. Also, a total of 24 students showed improvement. It would seem, therefore, that most students understood and could implement the writing criteria if they had time and discipline.

The instructor has an obligation to incentivize student discipline and to monitor student progress. A practical remedy in this case for student procrastination is to require students to sign up for writing on specific reading assignments by the beginning of the second week of instruction. Each student should have a maximum of choice within the constraints of the discussion group but should also be monitored individually for due dates. Deferrals and changes in the reading assignments chosen should be limited to personal emergencies.