



A Report on the Assessment of Written Communication (AWC)

College of Health Sciences

Fall 2025-Spring 2026

Description of Assessment of Written Communication (AWC)

Each academic year, approximately 500 student writing artifacts are collected and assessed using a locally-developed writing rubric. This rubric was developed by faculty with expertise in teaching and assessing student writing and is assumed to have content-related validity (Banta & Palomba, 2015). Over a three-year period, each academic college at SHSU will participate in the Assessment of Written Communication (AWC) and submit artifacts for scoring. These student artifacts either come directly from courses within those colleges or from required capstone projects; therefore, the artifacts represent authentic student work (Banta & Palomba, 2015; Kuh et al., 2015).

The student data presented within this report reflect student performance regarding the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's Core Learning Objective of Communication Skills (THECB, 2018). The THECB (2018) defines Communication Skills as "effective development, interpretation, and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication." Data from this assessment may therefore be used to address the written communication element of the broader concept of Communication Skills. These data should be used in conjunction with other data to fully understand student knowledge and ability regarding this Core Learning Objective.

Methodology

A total of 220 artifacts from upper division courses in the College of Health Sciences were scored as part of this writing assessment by faculty and staff volunteers during a two-day in-person scoring session in June 2026 using a locally developed writing rubric. This rubric was divided into four separate domains: (1) Content Development; (2) Organization of Ideas; (3) Style & Correctness; and (4) Design & Conventions. A copy of this rubric is provided in the Appendix.

Each domain was scored individually on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 the highest. Each artifact was reviewed by two raters, with a third rater introduced when the scores were too far apart (i.e., 1 and 3, 2 and 4, or 1 and 4 for the same domain). The third rater would only score those domains that were not in agreement, although Rater 1 and Rater 2 scores were kept for analysis of domain averages and interrater reliability. The individual domain scores for each student writing artifact were then averaged together to provide a total average score for the artifact.

To support interpretation of results, a benchmark score of 2.50 was established for each rubric domain and the overall average score. Because rubric ratings range from 1 to 4, an average score of 2.50 indicates that students demonstrate the assessed writing characteristics at least at a developing-to-proficient level. Scores at or above 2.50 are considered to have met institutional expectations, while scores below 2.50 indicate an area needing improvement and additional attention.

Score Reliability

A one-way random-effects model was used to calculate the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) based on average measures to determine the level of interrater agreement for each domain of student writing, as well as the overall average scores (Fleiss, 2003; Shrout &

Fleiss, 1979). According to Cicchetti (1994), ICC agreement values below .40 indicate poor agreement, from .40 to .59 indicate fair agreement, from .60 to .74 indicate good agreement, and .75 and above indicate excellent agreement. The agreement values for all domains were fair to good. A complete breakdown of the ICC agreement values is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Breakdown of ICC Agreement by Domain Area for the College of Health Sciences

Domain Area	Intraclass Correlation for Average Measures
Content Development	.56
Organization of Ideas	.49
Style & Correctness	.46
Design & Conventions	.60
Overall Average	.60

Note. All ICC agreements were statistically significant at $p < .001$.

Further, over 90% of artifact domains required scores from only two raters. As previously mentioned, only domains with a two- or three-point difference required a third rater. See Table 2 for a full breakdown of score differences by domain.

Table 2

Percentage of Score Differences by Domain Area for the College of Health Sciences

Domain Area	Score Difference Between Rater 1 and Rater 2			
	0 points	1 point	2 points	3 points
Content Development	42.7%	51.4%	5.9%	0.0%
Organization of Ideas	50.9%	40.5%	7.7%	0.9%
Style & Correctness	48.2%	42.7%	8.2%	0.9%
Design & Conventions	40.0%	54.1%	5.5%	0.5%

Note. $n = 220$. Some domains may not total exactly 100% due to statistical rounding.

Results

Descriptive statistics of the average student score for each domain are provided, as well as the overall average, for the College of Health Sciences and its departments. Comparisons of previous data are also provided for the College and departments. The College of Health Sciences was previously evaluated in 2022-2023. A breakdown of college-level data is in Table 3, and a breakdown of department-level data is in Table 4. Please note that due to rubric revisions in 2025, the domain order changed slightly (e.g., Style was previously listed second but is now listed third). The previous scores in the tables below are appropriately aligned.

For reporting purposes, average scores were evaluated against an institutional benchmark of 2.50. Scores meeting or exceeding 2.50 indicate achievement of the expected level of performance for written communication, while scores below 2.50 suggest opportunities for

improvement. All departments met or exceeded the institutional benchmark of 2.50 for overall writing performance, although several departments had individual domain scores near the benchmark that may warrant continued monitoring.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Student Writing Performance for the College of Health Sciences

Domain Area	2022-2023 AWC Scores			2025-2026 AWC Scores		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Content Development	218	2.66	0.63	220	2.80	0.65
Organization of Ideas	218	2.62	0.62	220	2.82	0.62
Style & Correctness	218	2.60	0.57	220	2.79	0.62
Design & Conventions	218	2.51	0.62	220	2.69	0.70
Overall Average	218	2.60	0.51	220	2.78	0.55

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Student Writing Performance by Department for Health Sciences

Department	2022-2023 AWC Scores			2025-2026 AWC Scores		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Human Sciences						
Content Development	31	2.86	0.70	50	3.07	0.64
Organization of Ideas	31	2.63	0.73	50	2.92	0.63
Style & Correctness	31	2.71	0.62	50	2.82	0.66
Design & Conventions	31	2.58	0.70	50	2.71	0.58
Overall Average	31	2.69	0.61	50	2.88	0.56
Kinesiology						
Content Development	70	2.62	0.62	55	2.56	0.74
Organization of Ideas	70	2.58	0.66	55	2.73	0.68
Style & Correctness	70	2.48	0.59	55	2.51	0.69
Design & Conventions	70	2.37	0.57	55	2.36	0.63
Overall Average	70	2.51	0.51	55	2.54	0.60
Public Health						
Content Development	44	2.60	0.62	47	2.88	0.58
Organization of Ideas	44	2.51	0.61	47	2.94	0.62
Style & Correctness	44	2.50	0.57	47	2.90	0.51
Design & Conventions	44	2.30	0.65	47	2.55	0.71
Overall Average	44	2.48	0.52	47	2.82	0.51
School of Nursing						
Content Development	73	2.64	0.60	68	2.73	0.54
Organization of Ideas	73	2.72	0.55	68	2.76	0.56
Style & Correctness	73	2.72	0.49	68	2.90	0.55
Design & Conventions	73	2.75	0.52	68	3.04	0.70
Overall Average	73	2.71	0.44	68	2.86	0.49

Discussion

The College of Health Sciences demonstrated growth in written communication, with the overall average increasing from 2.60 to 2.78 and all domains exceeding the institutional benchmark. Improvements were observed across all areas of the rubric, indicating broad-based gains in students' ability to communicate effectively through writing. Human Sciences and the School of Nursing achieved the highest overall performance levels within the college, while Public Health demonstrated the largest improvement since the previous assessment cycle. These results suggest that students in several programs are strengthening their skills in developing, organizing, and presenting written information. Despite these encouraging gains, overall scores in Health Sciences remain somewhat lower than those observed in Arts and Media and Business Administration, indicating opportunities for continued growth. Design & Conventions remained the lowest-performing domain across the college, and Kinesiology showed relatively limited improvement compared to other departments. Future assessment and improvement efforts may benefit from increased attention to writing support, disciplinary writing expectations, and instruction related to professional documentation and citation practices. Continued sharing of effective instructional strategies from high-performing departments may also contribute to further gains across the college.

Recommendations for Improvement

The College of Health Sciences demonstrated growth across all domains while also presenting several opportunities for continued development.

1. **Prioritize improvement in Design & Conventions.** This domain remained the lowest performing area across the college. Additional instruction related to disciplinary documentation standards, citation practices, and professional formatting is recommended.
2. **Provide targeted support for lower-performing departments.** Kinesiology demonstrated limited improvement relative to other departments and may benefit from a review of writing-intensive assignments, student support resources, and opportunities for structured feedback.
3. **Leverage successful practices from high-performing departments.** Human Sciences, Public Health, and the School of Nursing demonstrated strong performance and improvement and may serve as models for effective writing instruction within the college.
4. **Increase opportunities for discipline-specific writing practice.** Additional writing assignments emphasizing evidence-based reasoning, professional communication, and healthcare documentation may help strengthen performance across all domains.
5. **Monitor progress toward proficiency levels above the institutional benchmark.** While all domains exceeded the benchmark of 2.50, continued efforts should focus on moving more departmental scores toward or above 3.00, indicating stronger and more consistent writing proficiency.

Collectively, the findings suggest that students are meeting institutional expectations for written communication and that ongoing efforts to integrate writing throughout the curriculum are contributing to measurable improvements in student performance. Continued attention to disciplinary writing conventions, targeted support for developing areas, and dissemination of effective instructional practices will help sustain and advance these gains in future assessment cycles.

References

- Banta, T. W., & Palomba, C. A. (2015). *Assessment essentials: Planning, implementing, and improving assessment in higher education* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
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- Kuh, G. D., Ikenberry, S. O., Jankowski, N. A., Cain, T. R., Ewell, P. T., Hutchings, P., & Kinzie, J. (2015). *Using evidence of student learning to improve higher education*. Jossey-Bass.
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- Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. (2018). *Texas core curriculum*. <https://reportcenter.highered.texas.gov/agency-publication/miscellaneous/elements-of-the-texas-core-curriculum/>

Appendix
Writing Assessment Rubric

Writing Assessment Rubric

This rubric asks you to identify features of the writing present in the sample. You should apply the numerical score based on degree of presence of the characteristic features. The writing features selected for the rubric are those most likely present in any disciplinary writing sample and represent a writing level expected of a senior-level college student.

Legend: 4 = features are most always present
 3 = features are often present
 2 = features are not often present
 1 = few features are present

CATEGORY

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Content Development <i>What ideas are presented and how fully they are developed. Features may include reasoning, evidence, detail, development, and research.</i>	• Assignment addresses the requirements of the prompt and demonstrates awareness of the intended audience • Central subject or argument is easily identified and supported with evidence, as appropriate • Reasoning is fully developed with logical examples, details, and evidence, as appropriate • Sources, when appropriate, are effectively integrated to support the argument • Assignment contains information that addresses counterarguments, biases, or reader's expectations, as appropriate
Organization of Ideas <i>How ideas are arranged and connected. Features may include the overall structure of ideas, thoughtful paragraphing, logical flow, and effective transitions.</i>	• Text is purposefully organized and sufficiently developed in a way that clarifies the purpose and argument • Arrangement of ideas (overall structure) is clear, logical, and appropriate to the assignment, allowing the reader to follow the progression of ideas easily • Paragraphs and sections are cohesive and logically connected, with transitions that guide readers • Sentence structure supports readability and effective flow of ideas
Style & Correctness <i>How language choices communicate to readers. Features may include tone, word choice, sentence structure, and errors.</i>	• Writing tone is appropriate for the audience, purpose, and context • Word choice is appropriate to the writing task and intended audience • Writing is clear, concise, and appropriate for audience • Grammar and mechanics support the reader's understanding without distracting errors
Design & Conventions <i>How the document is formatted and presented. Features may include document design and expected format and conventions for the genre.</i>	• Document is well-designed to ensure readability and navigation • Visual layout and design features are consistent throughout the document • Format follows assignment and genre requirements • In-text citations and reference documentation consistently follow required citation style