The Sweetland Center for Writing’s Directed Self-Placement (DSP) for Writing:

Resources for Instructors

2021-2022

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sweetlandinfo@umich.edu

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What Is Directed Self-Placement?

Directed Self-Placement, or DSP, is the University of Michigan’s way of helping incoming students decide whether they are ready to enter their First-Year Writing Requirement (FYWR) course immediately, or whether they would benefit from first taking either WRITING 100, an ungraded transition to college writing course, or WRITING 120, a course for international and multilingual undergraduate students, both taught by experienced Sweetland faculty.

Incoming first-year students and transfer students who have not completed a Sweetland-approved First-Year Writing Requirement course at their previous college or university (except those in the LSA Honors Program and College of Engineering) are required to complete the DSP at least five business days before their scheduled orientation session. From the student perspective, the DSP process includes the following steps:

1. Proceed to the DSP for Writing website:
   https://www.lsa.umich.edu/sweetlanddsp/firstyear
2. Read the DSP instructions.
3. Read the DSP article and writing prompt.
4. Compose a 1000-1200 word response to the prompt.
5. Upload the response to the prompt on the DSP for Writing website.
6. Answer the DSP for Writing self-assessment questions.
7. Receive and discuss a writing placement recommendation with an advisor at orientation.
8. Discuss or work with the DSP response to the prompt in some way in the students’ first writing course.

Instructors are an integral part of the success of Directed Self-Placement at the University of Michigan, so it is important that all First-Year Writing Requirement (FYWR), Comprehensive Studies Program (CSP) and Sweetland instructors understand the DSP process.
In order to understand what DSP is, however, it is important to understand what DSP is not.

1. **DSP is not a placement test.**
   DSP is an alternative to the mandatory writing placement assessments used at many other colleges and universities, which typically rely on standardized test scores or timed impromptu essays. The University of Michigan believes that these kinds of assessments send students the wrong message about the expectations of college-level writing. Instead, the DSP process is designed to help students understand the kinds of thinking and writing that are valued at the University by asking them to engage in a more authentic college writing task. Students then assess their own readiness for college-level writing based on this experience.

2. **DSP does not place students into a writing course.**
   DSP helps students place themselves. The online DSP process generates a writing course recommendation based on students’ responses to the self-assessment questions they complete after submitting their response to the DSP prompt, and advisors discuss this recommendation with students during orientation. However, students are ultimately responsible for making their own decision about whether to begin with WRITING 120 or WRITING 100, or to enroll directly into a FYWR course.

3. **Students’ responses to the DSP prompt are not evaluated as part of the placement process.**
   The responses are made available to students’ FYWR, CSP 105, WRITING 100 and WRITING 120 instructors, who use them:
   a. to get a sense of students’ writing abilities
   b. as the basis for class activities and assignments
   c. as a way to help students reflect on how their writing has grown over the course of the semester.

   When students begin the DSP process, they are informed that their instructors will be reading their response to the DSP prompt. This is part of what motivates students to take the DSP process seriously, and they are often disappointed or frustrated if their instructor never discusses or makes use of their response to the DSP prompt in class.
Why Use Students’ Responses to the DSP Prompt in Class?

The DSP instructions that students receive make the following promise:

*Once you register for your first writing course, your instructor will read your response to the DSP prompt to familiarize him- or herself with your writing and to help you develop as a writer in college.*

For many students, this promise that their future instructor will read their work and provide some kind of feedback is what motivates them to put their best effort into their writing. Students sometimes feel disappointed or frustrated when they work hard on an essay and receive no indication from their instructor that their writing has been read.

In surveys conducted by Sweetland, students have expressed such reactions in comments like the following:

“I actually did outside research and wrote an informed paper, but not once has the essay been addressed since I’ve set foot on campus.”

“The essay I wrote was not brought up by my teacher so I do not even know if he read it or not.”

“I think if our teacher addressed the papers we had written and gave us feedback on those I would feel that they had been more worthwhile. My teacher never once mentioned this paper.”

“It was sort of annoying that I did the essay, but then did not really receive any feedback on it from my advisor or from my teacher. It was like I did it for nothing.”

“The research paper I was asked to do was not brought up at all by teacher in Eng. 125, and I thought it was misleading how the DSP Essay Instructions said they would be used by our teachers.”

As these quotes suggest, when the connection between assessment and instruction is not made, students see the DSP process as irrelevant or even disingenuous. It is therefore important that first-year writing instructors find ways to integrate students’ responses to the DSP prompt into their in-class activities, assignments, or conferences/office hours.
How to Access Your Students’ Responses to the DSP Prompt

1. Direct your browser to the following website:

2. If you are not already logged in to the University of Michigan system, log in using your umich username and password.

3. If it’s not already selected, choose the term you are teaching from the dropdown menu.

   After you select the term, the rosters for all of the CSP 105, WRITING 100, WRITING 120, and/or FYWR courses you are teaching during that term will appear. If you do not see your particular roster, contact your department’s Student Services staff to confirm that you are associated with the course in Wolverine Access (WA). If you are associated with the course in WA and still do not see your roster, email lsa.mis.advsupport@umich.edu for assistance.

4. To download a .zip file that contains all available responses to the DSP prompt for your course, click the “Zip Essays” button at the top right of the roster.
5. To download an individual student response, click the “View Essay” button to the left of that student’s name.

6. Your course roster may change frequently before classes start and during the first few weeks of the term. Revisit this site as often as necessary to find the most current compilation of responses to the DSP prompt for your course.

7. There may be students in your course who have not completed the DSP. All incoming first-year students and transfer students (except LSA Honors Program and College of Engineering students) who have not completed a Sweetland-approved First-Year Writing Requirement course at their previous college or university are required to complete the DSP.

Students who are required to complete the DSP and have not done so should be asked to complete it within the first week of classes by going to the DSP for Writing website at https://www.lsa.umich.edu/sweetlanddsp/firstyear. Students who do not complete the DSP may lose their place in their writing course. For further information about students who have not completed the DSP, see pages 27-28 of the FAQ in this packet.
Using Students’ Responses to the DSP Prompt in Class

Connecting assessment to instruction is one of the guiding principles of the University of Michigan’s Directed Self-Placement process. The following is just a sampling of the ways instructors from first-year writing courses have used the responses to the DSP prompt in their classes.

Diagnostic Uses

- Read the responses before classes begin to assess student learning needs and prioritize topics for individual and group instruction.
- Ask students to re-read their responses at the beginning of class and write a “self-diagnosis” of their strengths and needs as a writer, based upon their re-reading.

Goal Setting

- Have students develop a list of three specific writing-related goals, based on strengths and weaknesses identified in their response to the DSP prompt. Then have students free-write and/or discuss ways they intend to implement a plan to achieve these goals.

Engaging in the Writing Process

- Ask students to recall their experience of writing their response to the DSP prompt and write reflectively about it. Encourage use of concrete examples. Ask: “Based on this experience, how do you plan to approach writing assignments for this course and other courses?”
- Have the students list on the board problems they encountered as well as successes they experienced while writing their response to the DSP prompt. Discuss as a class.

Workshop/Peer Review Practice

- Have students read and comment on sample responses to the DSP prompt from volunteers in the class. Conduct a full-class discussion of the writing and lead a workshop to model expectations for peer review.
Office Hours or Conferencing

- Use the responses to the DSP prompt as a vehicle to schedule brief one-to-one conversations or office hours with students early in the term.
- Use the response to the DSP prompt as a point of departure to compare expectations, discuss goals for the semester, and examine students’ strengths and weaknesses as writers.

Teaching Audience Awareness

- Have students describe or write about the “imagined audience” for their response to the DSP prompt when teaching on rhetoric/audience. Have them revise the essays for different audiences, or discuss how they might go about doing so.

Evaluating Summarizing Skills

- Have students identify in their responses to the DSP prompt where they summarized arguments from the article. Ask: “How do you distinguish summary from analysis?”
- Ask students to read their summary sections aloud in pairs, and discuss how they might revise to be more comprehensive or appropriate.

Teaching Thesis and Evaluation

- In pairs, have students identify their thesis statements and work to refine them.
- Have students create a “reverse outline” of their response to the DSP prompt, listing their argument’s main points from each paragraph. Ask: “What might you change, add, subtract, or reorganize to better support your central argument?”

Teaching Nuance and Complexity

- Using the DSP Rubric, ask students to consider the implications of the category “Nuance & Complexity.” Discuss what it means to acknowledge other perspectives and to avoid sweeping generalizations, in the interest of making nuanced and complex assertions in academic writing.
Teaching Evidence and Quotation

- In groups, have students list the evidence used in the article to support its claims. Then ask students to look at their own response to the DSP prompt, alone or in pairs or groups, to identify the evidence they used in support of the assertions they made. Discuss the differences.
- Have students read their response to the DSP prompt and identify places where they integrated material from the article into their writing, distinguishing instances of direct quotation, paraphrase, and summary. Ask them to consider the effectiveness of each instance.

Gaining Experience with Rubrics

- Have students brainstorm a list of qualities of “good college writing.” Compare these to the DSP rubric and discuss in class.
- Use the DSP rubric to have students evaluate each other’s response to the DSP prompt. Then have them consider how to use this feedback for goal-setting.

Mid-Term or End-of-Term Assessment

- At the midpoint or end of the semester, ask students to self-assess their development by having them re-read their response to the DSP prompt and compare it to a recent course paper. Ask them to write about how their writing has changed.
- Have students revisit their response to the DSP prompt and write a letter to themselves, pointing out how they might approach the task differently, or describing improvements they’ve noticed, or issues that remain.
- Include the response to the DSP prompt in a portfolio of coursework, along with reflective pieces on their writing development from the response to the DSP prompt until now.
2021 Directed Self-Placement Prompt

“The Unsettled Semester” by Becky Supiano appears in The Chronicle of Higher Education, a weekly publication written by journalists who report on news about American colleges and universities.

For the sake of this essay, assume that Supiano seeks to persuade readers to do, think, feel, or believe something. That is, assume that the author wants to have an impact on the reader. From that point of view, write an essay of 1000-1200 words in which you analyze “The Unsettled Semester.” The audience for your essay is the instructor of your first-year writing course, who will read your essay before the start of the term. What you write will help them begin to understand how you read, how you organize and develop your ideas, and how you think about yourself as a writer.

To get started, think about answering some of the following questions:

1. What do you think is the author’s purpose (or purposes) in relating this narrative (or story) about one college student’s life during the pandemic? In other words, what does the author seek to persuade readers to do, think, feel, or believe?
2. What are the benefits and/or disadvantages of the author using a narrative (story) to develop her purpose(s)?
3. As you read “The Unsettled Semester,” do you find that the author appeals to your emotions, your reason, or both? How might those appeals relate to the author’s purpose(s)? Use specific details from the article (such as quotations) as evidence of how the author tries to appeal to the reader.
4. How effective is the essay at achieving its purpose(s)?

You may respond to as many or as few of these questions as you think you can develop well within the assigned word count.

After you have finished your essay, add a paragraph in which you reflect on your experience of writing it. You should describe your goal(s) for the essay, how you organized
your thoughts, how you appealed to your audience, and why you selected specific details from the article to discuss. Finally, what do you think you did best, and what (if anything) do you think could be improved?
2021 Directed Self-Placement Article

“The Unsettled Semester” by Becky Supiano
Published in The Chronicle of Higher Education, November 23, 2020
https://www-chronicle-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/article/the-unsettled-semester
Jessica Orozco has a system. At the start of a new semester, she prints out the syllabi for her courses. Then she combs through them, one by one, adding each assignment’s deadline to her Google Calendar. This semester, though, a few professors mentioned that their syllabi were still shifting, so she didn’t bother with any of that. Those deadlines and details, thought Orozco, a sophomore studying journalism at Ohio State University, were only going to change.
If this past spring semester was defined by the sudden shift to remote instruction, the theme of the fall has been sustained uncertainty. Sure, some students are back on campus. But the usual patterns of living and learning there are gone, and students know any new routines they create are subject to the trajectory of the pandemic and colleges’ changing policies.

For many students, “going to class” this fall might mean putting on a mask, applying some hand sanitizer, and walking into a lecture hall for one course; logging into Zoom for another; and working asynchronously with a professor and classmates they never see in a third. Things are weird for everyone, but not weird in the same way. There’s little sense of a shared college experience.

A cloud of change hangs over everything. Classes that are running in person could move online at any point, and at colleges that are asking students not to return after Thanksgiving, all of the courses will, eventually. Deadlines spelled out in the syllabus might be extended; assignments might be altered or nixed.
Jessica Orozco, a second-year student at Ohio State U., faced a mix of hybrid, online, and in-person classes this semester, until the university shifted to all-online instruction last week.

Orozco is a good student. In her family of six siblings, she’s the studious one. In high school, she was her class’s valedictorian. But being a good student isn’t simply about being book smart. It’s about developing and sticking with a set of habits: going to class and paying attention, taking good notes, studying instead of just reading, knowing when and how to ask for help. It’s about being organized, keeping a schedule, staying on top of classes.

But this unpredictable semester has broken Orozco’s good habits. Motivation is harder to summon. Attention is harder to sustain. Details are harder to keep track of. Orozco has had to lower her standards for herself. “Honestly, with this semester, I just say: Like, whatever,” she says. “I just do what I can.”
Like so many other students, she’s just trying to get through it.

When Orozco’s courses moved online last spring, she hated it. She missed the stimulation of being in the classroom, the connections with her classmates and professors. Those things, Orozco knew, enabled her to learn.

As the spring and especially summer went by, Orozco decided she wanted to head back to campus and take classes in person when the fall semester started, in late August, but she wondered how much time she’d actually get to spend in a classroom. She noticed other colleges’ moving all of their classes online. Soon enough, her schedule started to turn increasingly virtual. The international-studies course Orozco planned to take was moved from a hybrid format to an online one. Her Spanish course would be online, too, though that was her choice: Her mom had worried about the number of students in the in-person section. By the time classes began, three of Orozco’s five courses were online, and one was hybrid.

Only one course, “Crime and the News Media,” was set to meet fully in person. That meant adjusting to a bunch of new safety precautions. There were only around 40 students in the crime course, but they met in a large auditorium in Sullivant Hall, a building used mainly for dance and the arts. That allowed everyone to spread out, leaving more than six feet between students.

A large screen behind the professor, Felecia Jones Ross, displayed both her slides and the Zoom session she’d set up for anyone who was in quarantine or uncomfortable attending in person. Ross used a microphone so that everyone could hear her. When students had a question, though, they had to yell.

At first, pretty much everyone was in the auditorium. But as time passed, Orozco noticed, fewer and fewer students showed up there, and more and more were on Zoom.

That meant Ross had to adjust her teaching. She had to be careful to speak right into the mic so students at home could still hear her. That meant she couldn’t move around the stage — or make much eye contact with the dwindling number of students in the room. Some students, Ross knew, were in quarantine. Maybe, the professor thought, others simply felt more comfortable on Zoom. She noticed a big drop in in-person
attendance after Labor Day. Perhaps, she thought, some students had gone home for the break and didn’t come back to campus.

When Orozco went to class the following week, only one other student was in the room. That evening, Orozco saw a message from Ross on the course website. From here on out, it said, the class would shift to Zoom.

Her first reaction was shock. Then she thought about things from Ross’s point of view. Hardly anyone was coming to class anyhow. Why take a health risk to teach two students?

Orozco understood. Still, she was disappointed.

On Wednesdays, Orozco had a routine. She got up at 7:30, ate some breakfast in her single, a cinder-block room in a 13-floor dorm, and turned on the news. She did her makeup and put on a nice outfit. Other than taking her temperature and typing it into an app that also asks whether she has any Covid-19 symptoms, getting ready felt pretty normal.

By 8:45, she was out the door for a 15-minute walk through a pretty part of campus, on her way to the in-person session of “Writing and Editing for Media,” her hybrid course. Walking to class, she could tell there were fewer students around than usual.

Fridays, when the course met online, were another story. Orozco would roll out of bed shortly before the class began and log into Zoom. Since she hadn’t taken the time to get put together, Orozco would often leave her camera off. She’d multitask, getting ready while listening to the class. She wouldn’t leave her room until she ran out for lunch. She’d eat it back in her room, ahead of her remaining classes, which were also on Zoom.

Whenever Orozco logs into an online class, she tells herself that this time will be different. This time, she will focus. And she will, for a while. But she’ll hear noises outside her room. She’ll catch her mind
wandering. The professor might be boring. Sometimes the internet signal is weak. Before long, Orozco will realize that the lecture was going in one ear and out the other.

Sometimes, Orozco will look at her phone during an online class — and then catch herself. But her phone isn’t the only thing sapping her attention. Once, when Orozco was visiting her family for a long weekend, she accidentally left it in the dining room, where she had eaten lunch, before starting her class in another part of the house. Even though the phone was elsewhere, she found herself staring out the window, zoning out.

“I realized that it doesn’t matter how many devices I have around me to distract me — I’m still going to be distracted,” she says. “I think it’s just being on Zoom.”

Orozco feels disconnected. Her professors and classmates feel distant. She doesn’t feel as if she’s in class.

Before class began on Wednesdays, Orozco and her classmates would wipe down their desks and sanitize their hands. They wore masks. Stickers showed students where to sit, to maintain six feet of space between them, and some of the chairs had been removed.

Orozco would find herself thinking about her chair. It’s upholstered, so it’s hard to wipe down effectively. Maybe, she’d think, there are virus particles in the fabric. “What if the particles are seeping into my clothes?”

**Maybe, she’d think, there are virus particles in the fabric. “What if the particles are seeping into my clothes?”**

It was a distracting thought; Orozco couldn’t decide if it was a rational one. She has an anxiety disorder but has been doing a lot better since she started taking medication last year. Not sure whether to trust her own perspective, she asked some friends for their take on the chair thing. Most thought it was nothing to worry
about. Wiping down the chair should kill any virus particles. But one friend — who, Orozco notes, doesn’t have an anxiety-disorder diagnosis — said that she thought about it sometimes, too.

In the weeks leading up to the semester, as she learned the details of the campus-safety plans, Orozco had imagined that precautions would be in place for in-person classes, even though she wasn’t entirely sure what they would be. Plexiglass dividers separating students from the professor, and from one another, maybe?

Orozco took it upon herself to be careful. Sometimes she’d meet a friend for a socially distanced meal in the dining hall, if it wasn’t too crowded. Sometimes she’d go for a walk, or run an errand, or meet a friend in a photography course outside, to act as her subject. For the most part, though, she stayed in her dorm room.

It made her feel “paranoid,” she says, but as soon as she got back from her in-person classes, Orozco would change out of her carefully chosen clothes.

Attending class on campus presented its share of challenges and distractions for Orozco. So did her family, which was never far from her mind. She went home, to West Carrollton, outside of Dayton, Ohio, as often as she could, even if home never gave her a real break from her coursework.

Every Tuesday, Orozco went to the Jesse Owens North Recreation Center for her required weekly Covid-19 test. Every Thursday, she would wake up early, panicked about the email that would reveal her result.

Despite the stress of waiting for that email, taking the Covid tests gave Orozco some peace of mind before she spent long weekends with her family. She waited to leave campus until she knew she’d tested negative.

Orozco’s mother, Andrea, says she’d have wanted her to come home even if the tests were not available. The family is close-knit, and it was a stressful time to be living apart.
Still, Orozco’s mother worried about Covid. She’s an assistant manager at a Starbucks inside a grocery store, and many customers don’t wear masks or keep their distance. The local schools gave families a choice of in-person or online courses, and Orozco’s family opted to have her two younger brothers attend high school online. Her mother figured they’d end up doing so, one way or another, and starting online, at least, would be consistent.

In October, Orozco’s uncle tested positive for Covid. Although they live close by, Orozco’s parents weren’t able to help out as they would have done in a different kind of family emergency. There was nothing Orozco could do, either, but she worried about her uncle, her aunt, and her six cousins. The oldest, 17, was taking care of everyone.

Before the pandemic, trips home gave Orozco a change of pace, a chance to relax and stop thinking about her classes. But now, she found, her college and personal lives had blurred together.

In mid-October, Orozco noticed that her grade in international studies had dropped. She couldn’t figure out why until her professor, Ana Del Sarto, made a comment during the next class on Zoom. A bunch of students hadn’t turned in their last discussion post. That explained it.

The assignment had asked students: “How can we tackle environmental devastation? Answer the question with a general statement, and then make a list of actions,” both local and international. Orozco estimates it would have taken her five minutes to complete, 10 at the most. She just completely forgot about it.

Neglecting to do an assignment is out of character for Orozco. But none of her normal reminders were working. In another semester, she’d have written down the deadline in her calendar. She might have heard classmates talking about it. If the professor had reminded students about it in class, she would have been listening.

Instead, Orozco depended on the to-do list in the app for Ohio State’s learning-management system. The problem: That to-do list is auto-filled from information professors put into their course pages. If they don’t enter deadlines a certain way, then assignments don’t show up.
Del Sarto was understanding. She created a different assignment that students who’d forgotten about the discussion post could complete as a makeup. Orozco was able to restore her grade. Still, Orozco knew, she wasn’t acting like the Type A student she identifies as.

It’s not just deadlines that are slipping. Every week, Orozco has a quiz in her Spanish course. She’ll memorize the grammar she needs to know for each one. But afterward, she won’t remember any of it. That didn’t happen to her last year.

But everything is so different now. It’s hard to focus. It’s hard to interact with other students, to have even a simple class discussion. Wasn’t Zoom designed for conferences or something? Orozco wonders. It certainly wasn’t built for taking classes. “I just don’t think,” she says, “universities are meant to be online.”

The night before the first exam in her crime-and-the-media course, in early October, Orozco tried to set up Proctorio, the proctoring service she was supposed to use while taking it.

She couldn’t get it to work. After consulting Reddit and Quora, she figured out the problem: It wouldn’t run on an iPad.

Orozco doesn’t have a laptop. She got a free iPad and keyboard through Digital Flagship, an Ohio State program that gives all new undergraduates access to digital tools they can use throughout their education. For the most part, she’s been able to do everything on it that she needs for her courses. In rare cases when the iPad didn’t cut it, Orozco used to find a computer at the library.
A statue of William Oxley Thompson, an early-20th-century president of Ohio State, stands outside the campus library, with mask.

Orozco emailed Ross to explain the problem, and the professor replied with a workaround: She would watch her take the exam over Zoom.

To make that work, Orozco took the exam during Ross’s Zoom office hours. She pulled up the test on her iPad, and logged into Zoom on her phone, positioning it so Ross could see her iPad screen as well as her hands.

Orozco wasn’t going to cheat. Still, there was something uncomfortable about being watched.
Ross had tried to put her at ease, saying that she would be drinking her coffee and doing some grading, proctoring just as casually as she would in a physical classroom. But Orozco still felt nervous. It reminded her of how taking a test used to feel before she went on her anxiety medication.

It was the start of a stressful period for Orozco. The middle of October was crunch time in many of her classes. She is mentoring six first-year students through the scholarship program that covers her tuition, attempting to alleviate their struggles while navigating her own.

And school never let up. The academic calendar normally offers something like interval training. Students face periods of intense coursework — like midterms — and then they get a break. But in their efforts to reduce students’ travel to and from campus and to get them through the semester, colleges have changed the calendar. A good number, Ohio State among them, got rid of fall break this year.

Orozco felt its absence. With midterms behind her, she tried to take her mind off school, but largely found she couldn’t. The weather was nice, so she did spend some time hanging out with her friends outside while social distancing. They ended up complaining about their classes. At least, Orozco says, there’s some comfort to be had in venting.

But even that limited socializing is over now for Orozco. All along, Ohio State planned to send students home for the rest of the semester at Thanksgiving break. Then, a week before Thanksgiving, Franklin County, where the main campus is located, was moved to Alert Level 4, or purple, for Covid, meaning it had hit six out of seven indicators “that identify severe exposure and virus spread for at least two weeks.” The university moved in-person classes to remote instruction starting the next evening, and Orozco moved out of her dorm and headed home days earlier than planned.

Going remote shouldn’t be as chaotic this time as it was back in March, Orozco expects. Most of her courses are online anyhow. She’s already attended some of them from home.

As distracted as Orozco has been all semester, she knows it’ll be even harder to focus from here on out. Now she’ll be dialing into class from the sewing table in her sister’s bedroom, since her own lacks a desk.
She’s learned the hard way that it’s even more difficult to pay attention in class when she’s sitting on her bed.

Even after she gets through finals week, Orozco knows she won’t be done with remote classes. Ohio State will hold the first two weeks of the spring semester fully online. “I’m really hoping eventually, hopefully sooner rather than later, it will be in person — safely,” she says. “Just because I’m not learning as well as I could be.”

_A version of this article appeared in the December 11, 2020, issue._

_We welcome your thoughts and questions about this article. Please email the editors or submit a letter for publication._

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Beckie Supiano

Beckie Supiano writes about teaching, learning, and the human interactions that shape them. Follow her on Twitter _@becksup_, or drop her a line at _beckie.supiano@chronicle.com_.

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### DSP Essay Rubric

Note: This rubric is not used to score Directed Self-Placement essays for means of course placement, but was developed by Sweetland for research purposes. Instructors may wish to use it for diagnostic and instructional purposes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[WRITING 100 RANGE]</th>
<th>[FYWR* RANGE]</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>POOR</strong></td>
<td><strong>INADEQUATE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central Claim &amp; Fulfillment</strong></td>
<td>Central claim is missing, or present but abandoned or unconnected to rest of the essay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence &amp; Support (Respectability)</strong></td>
<td>Essay lacks evidence, justification, or logical reasoning to support claims.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Organization &amp; Explicitness</strong></td>
<td>Paragraphs and essay structure are disorganized, lack development and/or effective transitions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sentence Structure &amp; Mechanics</strong></td>
<td>Sentence structure or other mechanical errors significantly interfere with meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formality &amp; Objectivity</strong></td>
<td>Tone and diction are informal, inconsistent, or otherwise ineffective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nuance &amp; Complexity</strong></td>
<td>Fails to engage alternate perspectives and lacks nuance.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
DSP Questions

Questions for students most proficient in academic writing in English

1. During your last two years of high school, how often did you write academic essays longer than four pages?
   a. Never
   b. Once or twice
   c. Three or four times
   d. Five or more times

2. In the last two years, how often did you analyze/respond to texts like the article you just read?
   a. Never
   b. Once or twice
   c. Three or four times
   d. Five or more times

3. The article you just read made an argument and referred to research. In the last two years, how often did you respond in writing to texts like this?
   a. Never
   b. Once or twice
   c. Three or four times
   d. Five or more times

4. While you were completing this task, how much trouble did you have finding examples from the article to support your argument?
   a. None
   b. A little
   c. Some
   d. Quite a lot

5. After you selected quotes or ideas from the reading material, how prepared were you to integrate them into your own writing and argument?
   a. A little prepared
   b. Somewhat prepared
   c. Prepared
   d. Very prepared

6. While you were completing this task, how often did you go back and look over your writing to revise?
   a. Never
   b. Once or twice
   c. Three or four times
   d. Five or more times
7. Part of college writing involves peer feedback. How prepared are you to provide constructive feedback to your peers about their writing?
   a. A little prepared
   b. Somewhat prepared
   c. Prepared
   d. Very prepared

8. Which of the following statements do you think *best* represents academic writing?
   a. Writing that expresses a balanced stance and allows room for alternative views and voices
   b. Writing that offers a thesis and at least three supporting claims or examples in structured paragraphs
   c. Writing that expresses a definite stance and argues assertively

9. How would you rate your proficiency in academic writing?
   a. In need of more development, regardless of discipline or topic.
   b. Average or stronger in some disciplines or topics than others
   c. Very strong, regardless of discipline or topic.
Questions for students most proficient in academic writing in a language other than English

1. During your last two years of high school, how often did you write academic essays in English that were longer than four pages?
   a. Never
   b. Once or twice
   c. Three or four times
   d. Five or more times

2. In the last two years, how often did you analyze/respond to texts like the article you just read?
   a. Never
   b. Once or twice
   c. Three or four times
   d. Five or more times

3. The article you just read made an argument and referred to research. In the last two years, how often did you respond in writing to texts like this?
   a. Never
   b. Once or twice
   c. Three or four times
   d. Five or more times

4. While you were completing this task, how much trouble did you have finding examples from the article to support your argument?
   a. None
   b. A little
   c. Some
   d. Quite a lot

5. After you selected quotes or ideas from the reading material, how prepared were you to integrate them into your own writing and argument?
   a. A little prepared
   b. Somewhat prepared
   c. Prepared
   d. Very prepared

6. While you were completing this task, how often did you go back and look over your writing to revise?
   a. Never
   b. Once or twice
   c. Three or four times
   d. Five or more times
7. Part of college writing involves peer feedback. How prepared are you to provide constructive feedback to your peers about their writing?
   a. A little prepared
   b. Somewhat prepared
   c. Prepared
   d. Very prepared

8. How prepared are you to write in Standard English, including the appropriate forms of grammar, punctuation and sentence construction?
   a. A little prepared
   b. Somewhat prepared
   c. Prepared
   d. Very prepared

9. Which of the following statements do you think *best* represents academic writing?
   a. Writing that expresses a balanced stance and allows room for alternative views and voices
   b. Writing that offers a thesis and at least three supporting claims or examples in structured paragraphs
   c. Writing that expresses a definite stance and argues assertively

10. How would you rate your proficiency in academic writing in English?
    a. In need of more development, regardless of discipline or topic.
    b. Average or stronger in some disciplines or topics than others.
    c. Very strong, regardless of discipline or topic.
Frequently Asked Questions about DSP

What is the Directed Self-Placement (DSP) for Writing?

The DSP asks students to (1) read a substantive article of the kind they might be assigned in their first-year writing course, (2) write an evidence-based argument in response to a prompt, and (3) answer ten questions about their experiences as writers.

Who takes the DSP?

All LSA (except those in the Honors Program); Art & Design; Kinesiology; Music, Theatre, and Dance; Nursing; and Ross Business School first-year students, as well as transfer students who have not completed a Sweetland-approved First-Year Writing Requirement course at their previous college or university, are required to complete the DSP. Engineering students are not required to complete the DSP.

When should the DSP be completed?

Students should complete the DSP at least 5 business days before their Orientation date.

What are the goals of the DSP?

For Students:

- Writing the DSP essay gives students the experience of doing the kind of writing that will be expected of them at UM.
- Many students have told us that they had no idea what to expect when they made the transition into college level writing. DSP helps them notice gaps between the kind of writing they did in high school and the kind they will do in college.
- The DSP process gives students useful information about themselves as writers to help them decide which writing course to take first.
- Incoming students take placement tests in other subjects during the summer, and DSP sends the message that writing will also play a key role in their success as students.
For Instructors:

- As a First-Year Writing Requirement course instructor you can access your students’ essays before classes begin at https://webapps.lsa.umich.edu/SAA/UGStuAdv/App/Instr/ClassDSPEssays.aspx. The essays are intended to help you identify your students writing needs and plan for the coming semester.

- Students are told when they complete the DSP that their writing instructors will read the essays and incorporate them into coursework. Knowing there is a real audience for their writing helps motivate students to engage fully in the DSP process, and thereby increase the likelihood that they will enroll in the course that best fits their needs. Your first-year students will be thinking about you and your expectations before the semester even begins. Students are often eager for your feedback on their essays, whether oral, written, or given to the class as a whole regarding patterns you noticed, etc.

How are the DSP results used?

- Advisors use information from the DSP to help students select a first writing course that will best serve their needs.

- Essays written in response to the DSP prompt are available to each student’s first writing course instructor at https://webapps.lsa.umich.edu/SAA/UGStuAdv/App/Instr/ClassDSPEssays.aspx. The Sweetland Center for Writing expects instructors to read each essay to identify student needs and to incorporate the essays into the course. For ideas about how to use the DSP essays in your class, click here.

- The Sweetland Center for Writing uses the data gathered from the DSP to learn more about students’ strengths and weaknesses as writers and to improve writing instruction at UM.

What happens to students who do not complete the DSP?

- Students who do not complete the DSP before Orientation receive less guidance in selecting their first writing course when they register for courses, and are still required to complete the essay no later than the first week of classes.

- Students who do not complete the DSP may lose their place in their writing course.
Students who do not complete the DSP may be unable to complete required assignments in their first writing course that are based on the DSP essay.

How do I access my students’ DSP essays?

See page 5 of this packet for instructions on how to access your students’ essays.

How do I use the DSP essays in my course?

See pages 7-9 of this packet for suggestions on how to use the DSP essays in your course. The Sweetland Center for Writing has also compiled an extensive list of writing assignments, activities, and other ways that instructors have used the DSP essays in their courses at: lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/instructors/dsp-instructor-resources/using-dsp-essays-in-the-classroom.

What if the topic of the DSP article and essay is unrelated to the theme of my course?

First-year writing courses at UM vary tremendously in theme and disciplinary focus. Using instructor feedback, the Sweetland Center for Writing and the DSP Committee make every effort to select DSP articles and craft DSP prompts that will be relevant to a broad range of course themes. Many activities using the DSP essays will focus on broader issues of student writing, goal-setting, and self-assessment and need not reference the DSP article or theme at all. To become involved in shaping the next DSP, contact Sweetland at sweetlandinfo@umich.edu.

What if some of the students in my course didn’t write a DSP essay?

First-year students entering the College of Engineering or LSA Honors are not required to complete the DSP.

If you have any of these students in your writing course, they might not have essays to work with for in-class activities or revision or reflection exercises that you assign using students’ DSP essays. Rather than letting this become a reason not to use the DSP essays in class, instructors have found creative ways to include these students. For instance, you might:

- Design activities or assignments to be flexible, so that students can use other essays that they wrote in high school, or during their first semester at UM or another college or
Modify early course assignments for these students so that they have an opportunity to write an essay in response to this year’s DSP prompt—for example, you might ask these students to write the DSP essay rather than the assigned reading reflection that the rest of the class is working on for a particular week.

Students who are required to complete the DSP and have not done so should be asked to complete it within the first week of classes by going to Sweetland’s DSP for Writing website at https://www.lsa.umich.edu/sweetlanddsp/firstyear. Students who do not complete the DSP may lose their place in their writing course.

What if some of the students in my course wrote their DSP essays based on a previous year’s article and prompt?

The DSP article and essay prompt change from year to year, so if some of the students in your course are not first-year students, their DSP essays will be on a different topic than most of their classmates. However, this does not mean that you should avoid using the DSP essay in your course. Instructors have devised many ways to overcome this challenge:

- Design activities or assignments to be flexible, so that students are able to learn the writing strategies or principles you are targeting regardless of which DSP prompt they received as incoming students.
- Modify the activity or assignment so that students who responded to previous years’ DSP prompts have an opportunity to reflect on the how their writing has developed over a greater time span.
- Modify the activity or assignment so that students who responded to a previous year’s prompt have an opportunity to reflect on the differences and similarities between the kinds of writing required by their prompt and this year’s prompt.
- If necessary, give students the opportunity to read (or reread) this year’s DSP article, so that all students are familiar with the text to which most of their peers are responding.

What if some of my students have already worked with their DSP essays in previous writing courses?
Because some students decide to enroll in WRITING 100 or WRITING 120 before entering their First-Year Writing Requirement (FYWR) course, you might have students who have already used their DSP essays in some way in their previous course. Instructors have come up with several ways to make their DSP-related activities and assignments relevant for these students:

- Modify the activity or assignment for students who have already worked with their DSP essays so that they are pushed to reflect more deeply than their classmates who are revisiting their essays for the first time.
- If you are asking students to revise their DSP essays, urge these students to reread the DSP article and revise their DSP essays even more extensively so that they can see how their thinking and writing is continuing to grow and change.
- Design activities or assignments to be flexible, so that students can use other essays that they wrote in high school, or during their first semester at UM or another college or university.

What if I have a transfer student who has already met the First-Year Writing Requirement and completed the Transfer Student Directed Self-Placement?

Transfer students in LSA (except Honors); Art & Design; and Music, Theatre, & Dance who have completed a Sweetland-approved First-Year Writing Requirement course at their previous college or university were asked to complete the Transfer Student Directed Self-Placement for Writing to give them insight into the kind of writing expected of upper-division undergraduates at UM. Therefore, these students might not have essays to work with for in-class activities or revision or reflection exercises that you assign using students’ DSP essays. Rather than letting this become a reason not to use the DSP essays in class, instructors have found creative ways to include these students. For instance, you might:

- Design activities or assignments to be flexible, so that students can use other essays that they wrote in high school, or during their first semester at UM or another college or university.
- Modify early course assignments for these students so that they have an opportunity to write an essay in response to this year’s DSP prompt—for example, you might ask these students to write the DSP essay rather than the assigned reading reflection that the rest of
the class is working on for a particular week.

Who can I contact for more information?

- Please address questions, comments, or concerns to sweetlandinfo@umich.edu. You may also visit Sweetland’s DSP Instructor Resources webpage at lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/instructors/dsp-instructor-resources.