

FAQ: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FIRST-STAGE WRITING PORTFOLIO for CSP FACULTY

Q. Why do students have to turn in a writing portfolio?

A. All degree-seeking students at Oxy have a Two-Stage Writing Proficiency requirement. Beginning this academic year (2019-2020), we are using a writing portfolio to assess the First-Stage Writing requirement. The First-Stage should be completed before advancing to the Second-Stage requirement in the major. The portfolio system of assessment is designed to assess writing students actually do in their CSP courses, and it gives students a chance to reflect on their own writing and writing process (which is key in scholarship on fair and equitable writing assessment practices).

Q. When is the portfolio due?

A. Portfolios are due on March 1 by 5:00 p.m. No exceptions. If a student does not submit the portfolio on time or does not include all of the required materials, they will automatically receive an assessment determination of “Not Completed” and will be required to take WRD 201: The Art of Essay Writing.

Q. What do students submit in their portfolio?

A. Students will need to submit three papers: two essays from fall and one from spring (an early paper before the 3/1 deadline). They will also need to include a Reflective Introduction Essay (RIE) written for the portfolio. See the complete Portfolio Guidelines (at <https://www.oxy.edu/academics/writing-program-requirements>) for more information about the criteria for the three CSP essays and the RIE.

Q. How long does the portfolio need to be?

A. The total word count for all of the docs in the portfolio is 4,000 – 5,000 words. This total word count includes the Reflective Introduction Essay (RIE), which on its own must be at least 750 words. This means students are submitting relatively short papers from their CSP courses – faculty may want to keep this in mind as they design writing assignments (perhaps consider assigning a range of essay lengths so students have options).

Q. How will students decide which essays to include in their portfolio? What will my role be in this process?

A. In the Portfolio Guide, we suggest that students talk to their CSP instructor if they have questions about which essays to submit in their portfolio. As the students’ main writing instructor in their first year, you can offer guidance on which essays reflect their most effective writing and which essays best meet the portfolio criteria. Your primary role in the process is to provide students with a strong foundation in writing so they can meet the requirements of the portfolio submission. As a CSP instructor, you may do so by providing writing assignments, instruction in writing, and feedback on the writing students submit in your courses. Additionally, students must receive passing grades in both CSP seminars in their first year in order to complete the First-Stage Writing requirement.

Q. Will the materials in the portfolio show my name as instructor and my CSP course number?

A. No, students are asked to remove all identifying information from the essays they upload. However, since CSP courses are themed and often very specific to a faculty member’s area of expertise, it is conceivable that an essay submitted may suggest a particular CSP course – but the Portfolio Assessment Committee reading the essays will certainly not be looking back at Course Counts to try to match up essays with CSP courses (we won’t have time for that!).

Q. How do students turn in their portfolio? Do I have access to see their uploaded portfolio?

A. Students will upload their essays electronically to a designated Moodle site. The Moodle site will appear in the student’s list of Moodle courses as: **First-Stage Writing Portfolio**. CSP faculty will not have access to see any student’s portfolio (unless you are part of the Portfolio Assessment Committee).

Q. What if students have trouble uploading their documents to Moodle? Am I supposed to help them with this?

A. We have designed this Moodle site to make it easy for students to upload their four documents (the RIE and three CSP essays). If students tell you they are having difficulty uploading their documents, please ask them to visit the ITS helpdesk on the main floor of the Academic Commons or the Core Program office on the first floor of Johnson Hall. CSP faculty are not responsible for helping students upload their portfolio materials to Moodle.

Q. Does this new portfolio assessment process mean I have to teach my CSP differently than I have done in the past?

A. Potentially, yes. Although the basic writing requirements for the CSP courses are the same as they’ve been the past few years (see the CSP Faculty Handbook), it will be important for CSP faculty to design assignments with the portfolio criteria in mind: especially,

assigning at least one thesis-driven essay (required for fall CSP and strongly recommended for spring) and for spring CSP instructors, assigning at least one formal essay which you have graded by Feb. 15th (as students will have to submit an early paper from their spring CSP course – and we want to be sure they’ve HAD an essay assigned and returned with feedback before they submit their portfolio before the March 1 deadline).

Q. The portfolio requires that students submit at least two essays that demonstrate the use of scholarly sources. Does this mean I have to assign a research essay if I’m teaching a fall CSP seminar?

A. No, not necessarily. As part of the evaluation of a student’s writing proficiency, we want to ensure that they are able to engage in a scholarly or academic conversation using evidence from sources. Even if faculty do not assign a research assignment in the fall CSP, it is assumed that all faculty are assigning scholarly or academic sources of some kind as course readings, which students will be asked to draw upon in their essays (to help them support and develop their ideas and respond to the assignment tasks).

Q. Do I need to have actual assignment prompts or handouts for students to consult when writing their essays?

A. Yes. In the Reflective Introduction Essay students have to write as part of their portfolio submission, they are required to summarize the assignment for the essays they are submitting. It will be very helpful for students to have an assignment in writing that they can use to reflect on the writing they produced in your CSP. Also, one of the requirements of the CSP courses as outlined in the CSP Faculty Handbook specifies that students should receive all assignment prompts in writing.

Q. Do I have to teach a reflective essay so the student is prepared to write the Reflective Introduction Essay for the portfolio?

A. No. The type of reflective essay students will write for the portfolio has very specific requirements (as outlined in the Portfolio Guide). Students do not need to have prior experience writing a reflective essay in order to produce an effective Reflective Introduction Essay for the portfolio.

Q. Can students add or replace an essay that they or I think is stronger after the portfolio due date?

A. No. Because we need to read all of the portfolios (at least twice) before advising week in spring semester (in advance of course registration for the following academic year), we cannot leave the Moodle system open for students to add or replace essays. What students submit by 5:00 p.m. on March 1st is what will be read and assessed.

Q. What is the assessment process for the portfolio? Who will read it?

A. Each portfolio will be read by at least two faculty members of the Portfolio Assessment Committee as we look for evidence of writing proficiency (see the Assessment Rubric in the Portfolio Guidelines). The essays students submit in the portfolio will not be graded or assessed individually; we will be reading clean copies of the essays (papers with instructor comments or grades will not be accepted) and assessing the portfolio as a whole. Split decisions resting between Completed and Not Completed will be adjudicated by a third reader.

Q. What happens if students don’t “pass” the portfolio assessment? Do I have to tell students their results?

A. We don’t think of the portfolio assessment as a “pass” vs. “fail.” Instead, we believe that ALL student writers have more to learn. If readings of a student’s portfolio result in a final assessment of Completed, the student will have fulfilled the First-Stage Writing Proficiency requirement. Should a student’s portfolio receive a final assessment of Not Completed, the student will need to take WRD 201: The Art of Essay Writing in their sophomore year. Students will receive notification of the final assessment of their portfolio by the first day of advising week in spring semester, and CSP faculty do not have any involvement in giving students their assessment results.

Q. Can students bring the essays they are thinking of submitting in the portfolio to the Writing Center for help?

A. Yes, absolutely. Students can revise their essays right up until the deadline for submitting them in the Portfolio Moodle site. The Writing Center will also offer a couple of informational workshops before the portfolio deadline to walk students through the submission guidelines and answer their questions (and CSP faculty will be informed of the dates of these workshops so you can pass this info along to the students in your sections).

Q. I have more questions!

A. As we shift to this new assessment module, we will all have many questions! Feel free to reach out to the Core Program – Ron, Ed, and Patty – or to Julie as Writing Programs Director.