

# **The Clear Writing Requirement**

## **A Student's Survival Guide**

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This guide answers students' frequently asked questions about Marlboro College's Clear Writing Requirement. This guide does not cover all the possible circumstances students may encounter as they work to complete the Clear Writing Requirement. For complete information or to ask questions not answered here, consult the Marlboro College Handbook or speak with a writing instructor. More information, including details on Marlboro's current writing courses, can be found on the website.

## Why does Marlboro have a Clear Writing Requirement?

A Marlboro education requires you to think independently and communicate clearly. Regardless of what discipline you choose for your Plan, you will have to produce a written component that presents your ideas and research in clear, well-argued prose. At Marlboro, both before and during Plan, you will be expected to write a lot, often wrestling with new and complex ideas in your papers.

The Clear Writing Requirement exists in order to help you develop your writing skills and bring them to Plan level. The writing classes and the portfolio are not merely academic hurdles for you to clear as soon as possible; they are an integral part of your college education.

The Clear Writing program consists of a series of steps. When you first arrive at Marlboro, your writing will be evaluated, and you will develop your current skills through instruction and practice. When you submit a portfolio at the end of your first or second semester, your writing will be re-evaluated by the faculty, who will then determine if you are approaching the level of sophistication needed to succeed on Plan.

You have three semesters to meet the Clear Writing Requirement. Even after you pass, however, you are not "done" with writing. Marlboro asks its students to work on their writing each semester, continually developing their skills to match their increasing intellectual sophistication.

## Who runs the Clear Writing program and the Clear Writing Requirement?

The English Committee manages the Clear Writing program and oversees the Clear Writing Requirement. The English Committee is composed of all the writing instructors, along with four other faculty members, one from each area of the curriculum. Members of the Committee read placement exams and

portfolios, and make policies for the Clear Writing program.

The Writing Requirement is not the special province of a "writing department." While there are specialized writing instructors, everyone who teaches at Marlboro is committed to helping you develop your writing skills and produce a well-written Plan.

## What Happens First?

One of the first things you will do when you arrive at Marlboro is meet with the writing instructors for the Preliminary Writing Workshop. The writing teachers will walk you through the Clear Writing Requirement, give you a packet of information (including this document!) and guide you in your first writing exercise at Marlboro.

In the days after the Preliminary Writing Workshop, you should talk to your academic advisor, your peer advisors, and the writing teachers about how you want to meet the Clear Writing Requirement. Usually, the first thing you have to decide is what kind of writing course you want to take in your first semester.

## What classes can I take?

### *Writing Seminars*

Writing Seminars are courses designed for students who need to work intensively on their reading and writing skills in order to meet the Requirement. While there is a direct focus on writing in Writing Seminars, the courses are not in any way "remedial." All Writing Seminars focus on a theme or a subject; they are designed to be interesting challenging courses in their own right. In fact, many students who have already passed the Writing Requirement still take them.

### *Designated Writing Courses (DWC)*

Designated Writing Courses are regular courses taught by all members of the faculty in a variety of disciplines -- there are DWCs in the

But what, in fact, have I been speaking about so far? What has been the object of my inquiry? And what did I intend to describe?  
-Michel Foucault

sciences, arts, social sciences, and humanities. In a DWC, you will write at least 20 pages during the semester, usually in the form of several short papers. The instructors of these courses will be available to help you with any weaknesses in your writing. Unlike Writing Seminars, however, DWCs do not include discussions of writing and do not generally provide consistent focus on revision and development of individual papers.

### *Writing Across the Disciplines*

Writing Across the Disciplines (WAD) is a 4-credit writing course linked to specific other courses in the curriculum, usually Designated Writing Courses. Students in WAD draw the content of their writing from the "linked" courses; in WAD itself, students work intensively on composition and revision. For planning purposes, Writing Across the Disciplines is comparable to a Writing Seminar. WAD is not offered every semester.

### **What must I do to meet the Requirement?**

*If you come to Marlboro as a freshman or sophomore. . .*

Incoming freshmen and sophomores are required to submit a writing portfolio by the end of their second semester at Marlboro. The portfolio consists of 20 pages of expository writing assigned in a Marlboro class. (For a detailed description of the portfolio, see **What, exactly, do I submit?** below.)

You are encouraged to submit a writing portfolio at the end of your first semester. If you pass, you have fulfilled the Clear Writing Requirement and do not need to submit again. If you do not pass, you will have more information about your writing skills and a good idea of what to do in your second semester. Perhaps, at the end of your first semester, you will be very close to passing but not quite there -- or perhaps you will still have work to do. Submitting a portfolio can give you this information; so, even if you don't pass, submitting in the first semester can

be a very helpful step in fulfilling the Clear Writing Requirement.

*If you are a transfer junior or senior. . .*

If you transfer to Marlboro as a junior or senior, you follow the same basic program as all other students: you have three semesters to fulfill the Clear Writing Requirement. However, unlike freshmen and sophomores, you are required to submit a **portfolio at the end of your first semester** since, unlike freshmen and sophomores, you are already on Plan.

Even though transfer juniors and seniors can still get up to three semesters to pass the Requirement, if you reach Senior 2 status and still have not met the Clear Writing Requirement, you will not be permitted to work further on your Plan until you pass.

### **What, exactly, do I submit?**

It is very important to submit a portfolio that complies with the following guidelines, since any that does not will be disqualified. If your portfolio is "disqualified," it is not read by the English Committee or other members of the faculty. Obviously, this means that a disqualified portfolio has no chance of passing.

### Content

- All papers submitted must be non-fiction, and all must have been written for Marlboro classes or tutorials.
- If a paper has not yet been graded or marked by a Marlboro instructor, its submission must be certified by the instructor's signature. (This is to validate the paper, to assure the English Committee that it is actually an essay written for an assignment in a Marlboro class.)
- At least one essay must be 1,250 words or longer
- At least one essay must incorporate research. Research papers should show substantial consultation of at least three different sources (not including the primary text[s]); they should also exhibit

**More matter and less art.  
- William Shakespeare**

standard bibliographical form: e.g., either footnotes or parenthetical references, depending on the discipline, and a bibliography or list of works cited.

### *Notes on the research paper*

When preparing your research paper, keep in mind that, like the other pieces in your portfolio, it should be an essay with a thesis statement, argument and structure. It is easy to get buried in research and produce a paper that merely regurgitates or consolidates all the different sources you consulted. However, the portfolio readers want to see your ability to go *beyond* research, to take the ideas of others and then use those to support your own argument. You should use research as background, support, even a starting place, but your paper should not repeat or rely on what has already been said. Marlboro's writing classes usually focus on research, but you might also consult Wayne Booth's *The Craft of Research* (in the bookstore and the library) for advice on how to compile research while still structuring an essay that is based on your ideas.

To help you master all the technicalities of documentation, Marlboro has compiled a style guide: [Handling Sources](#).

Turn to *Handling Sources* first when you have questions about documentation. It is written by Marlboro faculty members and is geared specifically toward helping Marlboro students with their papers and Plans. *Handling Sources* is based on *The Chicago Manual of Style* and is easy to access on campus: it's online, in the bookstore, in the library. If you have a question that is not covered by *Handling Sources*, try *The Chicago Manual of Style* or Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*.

### Page Requirements

- The portfolio must contain at least 4,000 words of text. Pages of endnotes, bibliographies, or charts are not counted toward the total number of pages

submitted. Pages must average at least 250 words each; hence, the entire submission must be at least 4,000 words.

- You may submit one 4,000 word paper or several essays. At least one of the essays submitted must exceed 1,250 words in length.
- If you are submitting a portfolio for the second or third time, at least 10 pages must be new. In other words, you must submit at least 10 pages that you have written during the current semester. You may submit up to 10 pages written in a previous semester, but be careful in doing so. It does not make much sense to submit 10 pages that have already failed to meet the Requirement. Finally, be sure that any papers you submit from a previous semester show substantial revision, revision that goes beyond a simple correction of typographical errors or punctuation.

### Format

- All submissions must be placed in a folder (not an envelope). The front of the folder must clearly display the following information:
  - *Your full name*
  - *Your home address*
  - *Your advisor's name*
  - *Your class standing (e.g., first semester freshman)*
  - *Number of the submission (e.g., first submission to the English Committee)*
- All submissions must be printed in an appropriate typeface (Times Roman or Courier will do) with a fresh ribbon (ink-cartridge, etc.), double-spaced on 8 1/2" x 11" paper with 1" margins.
- Each essay should be stapled in the upper left-hand corner and the pages numbered. The title page of each essay must display:
  - *The paper's title*
  - *Your name*
  - *The course's title*

The art of writing is the art of applying the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair.  
-Mary Heaton Vorse

- *The course instructor's name*
  - *The date the paper was submitted to the instructor*
  - *The date (or dates) it was revised and resubmitted*
  - *A brief description of the assignment*
- At the end of the semester, you will receive a copy of the Writing Requirement Checklist, which will help you assemble your portfolio correctly. Attached to the checklist is a sheet on which you must list information regarding each paper -- title, dates of submission, number of pages. Be sure that the information you write on the checklist is the same as that on each paper's title page.
  - Printed papers that have been neatly corrected in ink may be submitted, but it's always better to revise and reprint. Hasty corrections give the paper a "last-minute" air.
  - If the submitted essay is reprinted or rewritten, *you must clip it to the original, graded essay*. The portfolio readers want to see your professor's comments; they want to see how you respond to feedback and how you develop your papers through revision. Make sure instructors sign the cover page of any essay they have not seen, commented upon, or graded. This allows the portfolio readers to see that the paper is authentic, that it was written for an actual Marlboro class.

Some have relied on what they knew;  
 Others on simply being true.  
 What worked for them might work for you.  
 - Robert Frost

### What happens once I submit my portfolio?

Your portfolio will be read by members of the English Committee and other members of the faculty. Since your writing should be able to stand on its own and make sense to an intelligent reader in any field, the instructor for whose class you wrote the paper will *not* read your portfolio. At least two readers must agree on their assessment of your portfolio: if the first

two readers differ, a third reader will serve as arbiter.

### How will readers evaluate my portfolio?

If your portfolio meets all the guidelines listed above, two faculty members will read it and fill out a "Portfolio Review Sheet," a score-sheet. Your readers will give your portfolio a score from 1 to 4. Your score will be based on four criteria:

#### Concept

Concept addresses the strength and clarity of the paper overall. Is the paper's topic clearly laid out? Have you introduced the reader to the questions about that topic that the paper is trying to answer? Are your answers to those questions clear? Is the main argument of the paper worth making, or does it seem simplistic? (That is, are you arguing that the sky is blue or that water is wet?)

#### Analysis

Analysis addresses how well you've developed and supported your paper. Does the paper make the reader feel that you really know your topic and your sources? Have you followed your analysis of the topic as far as it could go, or have you left your reader saying, "Well, that's true, but what about this?" Have you shown your readers how you arrived at your position, or have you simply told them? Are your assertions backed up with references (in the form of quotations, paraphrases, or summaries) to your sources? When you quote a source, do you interpret the quotation -- or do you leave it sitting there, hoping it will speak for itself? Portfolio readers will also ask how well you've structured your paper. Does your paper follow a clear and logical progression from idea to idea? Does your paper address all the ideas you bring up in its introduction? Does your paper conclude, or does it just stop?

## Style

Style addresses how the paper sounds. Does the paper's introduction really introduce the paper, or does it just spin its wheels? Do parts of the paper strike the reader as superfluous, as "dead wood"? Does the paper often rely on the passive voice? Does the paper use the right words at the right time, or does it seem "thesaurusized"? Does the paper seem wordy, or is its tone overly weighty, to the readers?

## Nuts and Bolts

The "nuts and bolts" of writing address how well the paper is presented and documented, how it looks and reads. Does the paper exhibit consistent grammatical or mechanical mistakes (e.g., sentence fragments, clumsy syntax, shifts in tense, incorrect punctuation or spelling)? Are your readers stopped by sentences they either don't understand or have to spend time figuring out? Are your sources clearly and accurately documented in both the footnotes and bibliography? Does the paper make the reader feel that you are paying attention to details, or that you've rushed to print without reading the paper yourself?

### **What do the different scores mean?**

When you get your portfolio back, it will have a number score, ranging from 1 to 4.

#### *If your final score is a 1*

You need to work intensively on your writing. Both the original papers and the revised papers show serious inability to communicate clearly in writing. The level of discourse is lowered by repeated sentence-level errors and the organization is very weak.

#### *If your final score is a 1.5*

You need to continue working seriously on your writing. The original papers show severe sentence-level and organizational problems,

although the revised papers show some improvement.

#### *If your final score is a 2*

Your writing is consistently weak, but the basic problems are addressed in revisions, and the number of problems diminishes as the semester progresses. You have made progress during the semester, but you still need to work closely with a writing instructor.

#### *If your final score is a 2.5*

Your writing is almost to passing level. Your level of discourse is adequate for simple topics and your research is competent. Your original papers, however, still suggest that you are reliant on help from an instructor.

#### *If your final score is a 3*

You have passed the Clear Writing Requirement. The general level of discourse is

adequate, and technical mistakes are relatively few. While you still have work to do, you can produce acceptable freshman/sophomore-level writing. Freshman/sophomore writing, however, is a long way from acceptable senior writing; you need to continue working with your advisor and professors to improve your writing skills for Plan.

#### *If your final score is a 3.5*

Your writing is approaching Plan level. You tackle sophisticated topics successfully, incorporate research into your writing without awkwardness, and present a solid argument.

#### *If your final score is a 4*

You have reached Plan-level writing. Your papers contain few technical errors, true strength and clarity of thought, good organization, and a readable style, appropriate to the discipline in which you are writing.

### **What happens if I submit a portfolio and it does not pass?**

Now it is the challenger's turn to reply  
to this verbal bombardment.  
- Aristophanes

For all students except transfer juniors and seniors the submission in the first semester is optional. If you submit a portfolio and you do not pass, talk with your advisor about which courses you should take to improve your writing and take those courses in the following semester.

All students who have not yet passed the Writing Requirement must submit a portfolio at the end of their second semester. If you do not pass at the end of your second semester, there is again no "penalty," unless you have failed to take writing courses in each of your first two semesters -- but you should talk with your advisor and seriously consider what to do in the third semester, since you only have one more try to pass the Writing Requirement.

If your portfolio fails at the end of your second semester, you will be discontinued only if you have not taken writing courses (either a Writing Seminar or a DWC) in each of your first two semesters. If you submit at the end of your third semester and do not pass, you will be discontinued.

### **What happens if I do not submit a portfolio or if my portfolio is disqualified?**

If you have not submitted a portfolio by the end of your second semester, or if you submit a portfolio at the end of your second semester and it is disqualified, you will be discontinued.

If you do not pass at the end of your second semester, and then you do not submit in the third semester, or if you submit a portfolio in your third semester and it is disqualified, you will be discontinued.

Transfer juniors and seniors who do not submit a portfolio at the end of their first semester will be subject to discontinuance.

### **What happens if I am discontinued for not meeting the Requirement?**

If you become subject to English Discontinuance, you will be asked to leave Marlboro for a period of three months and work on your writing elsewhere. English

Discontinuance is not necessarily the end of your Marlboro career. The Clear Writing Requirement is *not* designed to send students home; it is designed to make sure they have the skills they need to stay.

If you are discontinued, you must spend three months working on your writing and then submit 10 pages of writing to the English Committee. If these 10 pages are of "pass" quality, then you must take an on-campus writing exam (to make sure that the writing you submit is yours). After that, you resume study as a Marlboro student and submit a regular 20-page portfolio at the end of the semester. Under no circumstances can you re-use the 10 reinstatement pages for your 20-page portfolio.

You have up to 2 years to submit these 10 pages. After that, you will have moved from English Discontinuance to dismissal from Marlboro College. If you are dismissed, you will have to reapply to the school if you want to return.

### **Who can help?**

There are many people at Marlboro who can help you through the Writing Requirement. Your faculty advisor, the Director of Academic Advising, and the Director of Academic Support Services can provide support, advice, and information. Most importantly, the writing instructors themselves can meet with you to explain all the details of writing classes, portfolios, submissions, scores, and extensions.

Marlboro employs a number of student writing tutors to provide you with extra help in your writing classes and on your writing portfolio. Student tutors have been trained by the writing instructors and can assist you with every step of the writing process, from brainstorming and outlining to final polishing. Additionally, student tutors generally have fewer restrictions on their time; they can meet with you when your professors can't: on evenings, weekends, and more than once or twice a week. A schedule of tutor hours is always posted on the door of the **Writer's Block** in the library.

If you would like more information about the Clear Writing Requirement, past writing courses at Marlboro, or the writing instructors, visit the Clear Writing link on Marlboro's website.