

**University of California, Irvine**

**2011 Assessment of  
Summer Writing 39C at UCI**

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## **Introduction**

This report presents the findings from the 2011 Assessment of Summer Writing 39C at UCI. A random selection of 90 Summer Writing 39C papers written in fulfillment of the lower-division writing requirement were collected in Summer 2011 and assessed to determine the quality of student writing achieved through completion of the lower-division writing requirement at UCI. Differences as a function of instructional method as well as student characteristics were examined.

## **Key Findings**

The review of Summer Writing 39C writing products in fulfillment of the lower-division writing requirement found the quality of student writing to be different as a function of instructional method. Students who fulfilled the lower-division writing requirement through a face 2 face versus online course format produced significantly stronger papers overall. As a whole, students papers were found to be strongest in their writing skills related to the language and style conventions category. The review of student writing products found that nearly all students are able to demonstrate some evidence of writing achievement expected upon completion of the lower-division writing requirement.

Summer Writing 39C face to face papers achieved the highest assessment scores in all 12 writing traits contained within the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric, with significant differences observed in 4 of the writing traits, source/evidence: credibility and/or relevance, source/evidence: integration, paragraphs, and structure and order. Students who report speaking only English achieved lower scores than their non-English-only counterparts in 11 of the 12 of the writing traits contained in the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric. The Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric was found to have moderate overall reliability.

Overall, the results from this project suggest that there exist significant differences in demonstrate writing gains as a function of instructional method worthy of further investigation and study.

## **Assessment Design**

In 2011, the Campus Writing Coordinator sought to assess student writing produced in Summer Writing 39C courses. The 2011 Summer Writing 39C Assessment effort sought to build upon the efforts of the previous Lower-Division Writing Assessment efforts to refine and solidify the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric, collect information about the quality of student writing produced through the completion of the lower division writing requirement via a Summer Writing 39C course, and determine whether student's first language impacts the quality of student writing. With these goals in mind, this project sought to address the following questions:

- **Writing Rubric:** Does the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric capture the shared writing expectations resulting from completion of the lower-division writing requirement? Is the rubric a reliable instrument?
- **Student Writing Skills:** What is the quality of student writing produced through completion of the lower-division writing requirement via a Summer Writing 39C course? Are there differences in the observed quality of student writing as a function of the instructional method (online versus face to face)?
- **Student Background and Writing:** To what extent does the quality of student writing vary as a result of the student's language background?

## **The Lower Division Writing Rubric**

In response to the findings and recommendations from the 2010 Lower-Division Writing Assessment, modifications were made to the rubric's quality labels. The four levels of quality, (1)

insufficient, (2) some, (3) satisfactory, and (4) proficient, as well as the descriptors for each of the rubric's twelve writing traits are presented below.

Table 1: Lower Division Writing Assessment Rubric

	<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>4 Proficient</b>	<b>3 Satisfactory</b>	<b>2 Some</b>	<b>1 Insufficient</b>
<b>Rhetorical Knowledge</b>	Focus	High degree of focus is evident throughout	Generally good focus	Weak or inconsistent focus	No clear focus
	Thesis	Clearly significant, sophisticated, and/or nuanced thesis	Generally significant, sophisticated and/or nuanced thesis	Somewhat significant, sophisticated, and/or nuanced, but flawed	Insignificant, simplistic, and/or incoherent thesis
	Expertise on Topic	Illustrates expert knowledge throughout (positions him/herself as expert)	Generally good grasp of topic, sometimes expert	Intermittent or inconsistent familiarity with topic	Limited or no familiarity with topic
	Rhetorical Awareness (genre/audience)	Consistently shows understanding of essay (genre) conventions and academic (audience) expectations	Generally shows good rhetorical awareness of genre and audience	Inconsistent rhetorical awareness of genre and audience	Little or no rhetorical awareness of essay (genre) and academic (audience) expectations
<b>Development, Evidence, Sources, and Research</b>	Critical Thinking: Development of Ideas	Critical thinking is consistently evident throughout the development of the essay; multiple points of view have clearly been considered	Some evidence of critical thinking is evident in the development of the essay; multiple points of view are considered	Inconsistent demonstration of critical thought in the development of the essay; multiple points of view not clearly evident	Little or no critical thought; development of essay is based on opinion or basic summary; may recapitulate the work of others without qualification
	Sources/Evidence: Credibility and/or Relevance	Sources/evidence used are credible and/or relevant	Sources/evidence used are generally credible and/or relevant	Sources/evidence used are intermittently credible and/or relevant	Sources and evidence chosen are not credible for genre/audience or relevant to subject
	Sources/Evidence: Integration	Effectively introduces and situates source material	Introduces and situates most of the source material	Sporadically introduces some source material	Fails to introduce source material
<b>Structure, Organization</b>	Paragraphs	Paragraphs have a unitary purpose, internal coherence and organization	Paragraphs sometimes have internal coherence and organization	Paragraphs inconsistently demonstrate internal coherence and organization	Paragraphs do not demonstrate internal coherence and organization
	Structure, Order	Organization enhances the development of ideas and is effective	Ordering of paragraphs is generally logical and generally supports the development of ideas	Ordering of paragraphs is somewhat logical, but may also be formulaic or sporadic in helping to develop ideas	Lacking organization; ordering of paragraphs does not help develop ideas
<b>Language &amp; Style Conventions</b>	Language: Correctness	Error-free, idiomatically correct prose that conveys meaning clearly	Generally error-free, -idiomatic prose that usually conveys meaning clearly	Errors and non-idiomatic sentence constructions intermittently impede meaning	Errors and non-idiomatic sentence constructions impede meaning
	Language: Eloquence	Tone, style, and word choice is credible and enhances the reading experience.	Tone, style, and word choice is generally credible and adds to the reading experience	Tone, style, and word choice are sometimes detracting and inconsistently add to the reading experience	Tone, style, and word choice detract from readability
	Documentation	Documentation style is evident and appropriate	Documentation style is generally evident and appropriate	Documentation style is inconsistently evident and/or inappropriate	Documentation style is absent or inappropriate

A random selection of 90 papers produced in Summer Writing 39C courses were collected in Summer 2011 – Writing 39C online (45), Writing 39C face to face (45). A total of 4 papers were later removed from the analysis as they were produced by either transfer students or non-UCI students.

Nine readers, all with significant writing instruction experience and a strong commitment to better understanding the quality of student writing produced through completion of UCI's lower-division writing requirement, assessed a random sample of papers from the lower division writing courses. Seven of the readers, Emily Brauer, Chieh Chieng, Kat Eason, Loren Eason, Alberto Gullaba, Dan Matlock, and Matt Seybold, have served as instructors with the Composition Program. An eighth reader, Abraham Romney, has served as an instructor with both the FIP and Composition Programs. The ninth reader, Susan Morse, has served as an instructor with the Humanities Core Program.

In preparation for the Assessment of Summer Writing 39C products, on September 8 and 9, 2011, the Campus Writing Coordinator in conjunction with Lynda Haas, Composition Course Director, reviewed papers produced in Summer Writing 39C courses and selected 10 papers reflecting a range of writing quality based on the rubric's twelve writing traits to be used in the training of the assessment readers.

On September 8, 2011, the first morning of the assessment, Lynda Haas led a group discussion of the projects' goals and the lessons learned from the previous lower-division writing assessment efforts. Following this discussion, the readers reviewed the assessment rubric and assessed 3 sample papers. The assessment readers then had a lengthy discussion about the quality scores assigned to each of the sample papers in order to achieve consensus on the elements within the papers which demonstrated evidence of achievement of the twelve writing categories contained within the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric.

After the training session on the morning of September 8, 2011, readers were divided into 3 reading teams, with all members of a given team reading the same set of papers. All papers were read by three readers, with each individual reader assigning a score for each writing trait contained within the rubric. As papers were scored, Natalie Schonfeld monitored and tabulated the results. In order to strengthen inter-rater reliability, for any paper where the difference between the overall scores assigned by the readers was greater than 5, one of the readers was asked to re-read the paper in question to confirm the score they initially assigned to the paper in question.

Table 2 displays the reliability coefficients for the 12 individual writing traits and the overall assessment scores by course and for all the lower-division writing products assessed for this project.

Table 2: Alpha Reliability Coefficient Values by Writing Trait and Overall Assessment Score

	Writing Trait	Summer Writing 39C Online (n=44)	Summer Writing 39C Face to Face (n=42)	ALL (n=86) <sup>1</sup>
Rhetorical Knowledge	Focus	-.210	-.013	-.127
	Thesis	.489	.245	.375
	Expertise on topic	.461	.098	.332
	Rhetorical Awareness (genre/audience)	.397	.434	.412
Sources/ Evidence	Critical Thinking: Development of Ideas	.412	.417	.419
	Source/Evidence: Credibility and/or Relevance	.393	.539	.481
	Source/Evidence: Integration	.665	.479	.625
Structure, Organization	Paragraphs	.215	.497	.407
	Structure, Order	.216	.306	.313
Language & Style Conventions	Language: Correctness	.356	.471	.421
	Language: Eloquence	.356	.412	.363
	Documentation	.565	.628	.600
<b>OVERALL SCORE</b>		.553	.520	.554

The overall reliability coefficients for the lower-division writing products and for each of the courses suggest that the rubric has low to moderate overall reliability and that refinement is needed in order to strengthen inter-rater reliability. In reviewing the reliability coefficients by course, the findings suggest that the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric is similarly reliable in its ability to capture the writing quality of Summer Writing 39C papers. When reviewing the reliability coefficients across courses, the values suggest that the rubric is most reliable in its ability to capture writing quality associated with the sources/evidence category and least reliable in its ability to capture writing quality associated with the rhetorical knowledge category.

<sup>1</sup> Though 90 papers were collected and reviewed for this project, 4 of the papers were removed from the analysis as they were produced by transfer students and/or non-UCI students.

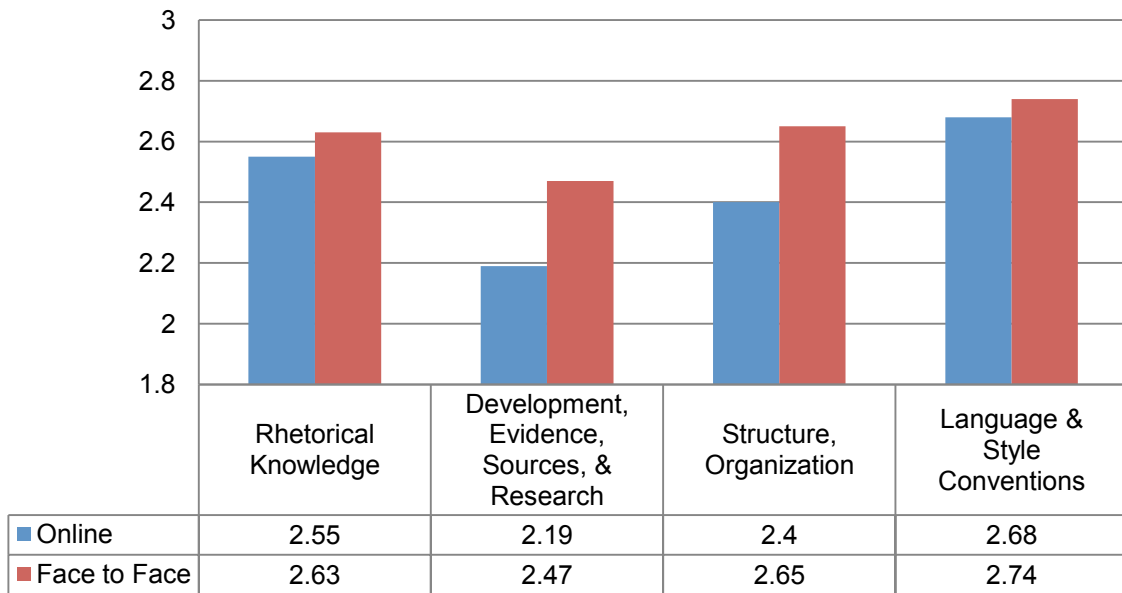
At the conclusion of the Assessment of Summer Writing 39C effort, all readers were asked to provide feedback about this assessment experience and the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric. Much of the discussion concerned the use of evidence and sources, with many of the readers suggesting the need for the rubric to acknowledge the distinction between integrating and situating sources. In addition, a suggestion was made to have one of the evidence/sources categories capture understanding and interpretation of sources as a number of the papers appeared to have misunderstood or misused sources as a result of their lack of understanding of the source material.

In discussing possible revisions to the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric, the readers suggested expanding the sources/ evidence category to include reading comprehension and to distinguish between integrating and situating sources.

**Student Writing Skills**

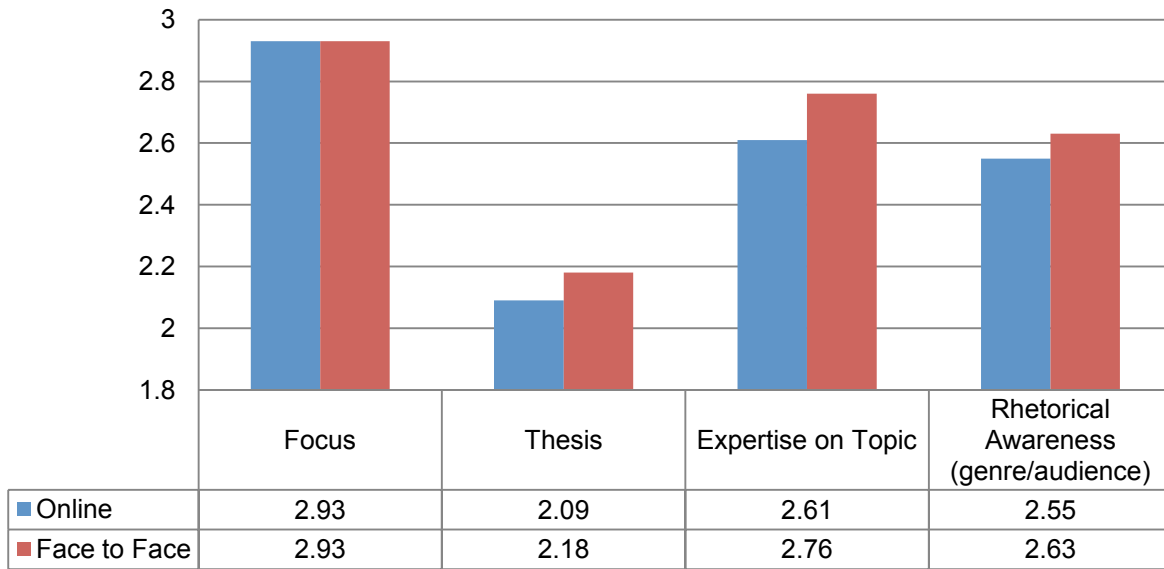
The Summer Writing 39C quality results, as defined by the 4 overarching categories contained within the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric, are presented in Graph 1.

Graph 1: Summer Writing 39C Assessment Results



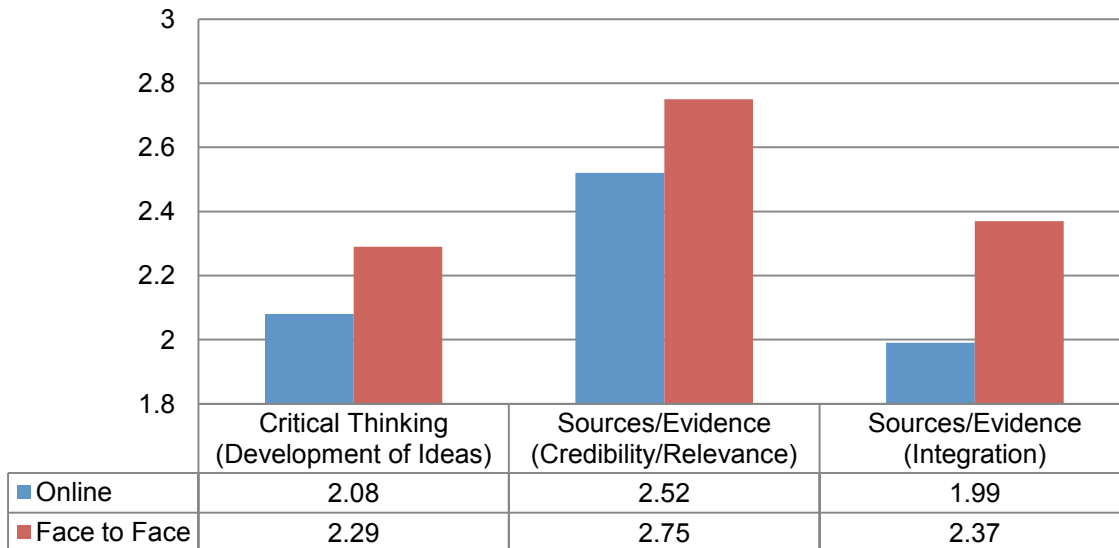
In reviewing the assessment results, the Summer Writing 39C Face to Face papers emerged as strongest in all four categories contained within the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric. As these four categories represent 12 distinct writing traits, Graphs 2 through 5 detail the individual writing traits contained within the four categories to allow for a more thorough analysis of differences in writing quality as a function of instructional method.

Graph 2: Rhetorical Knowledge Category Results



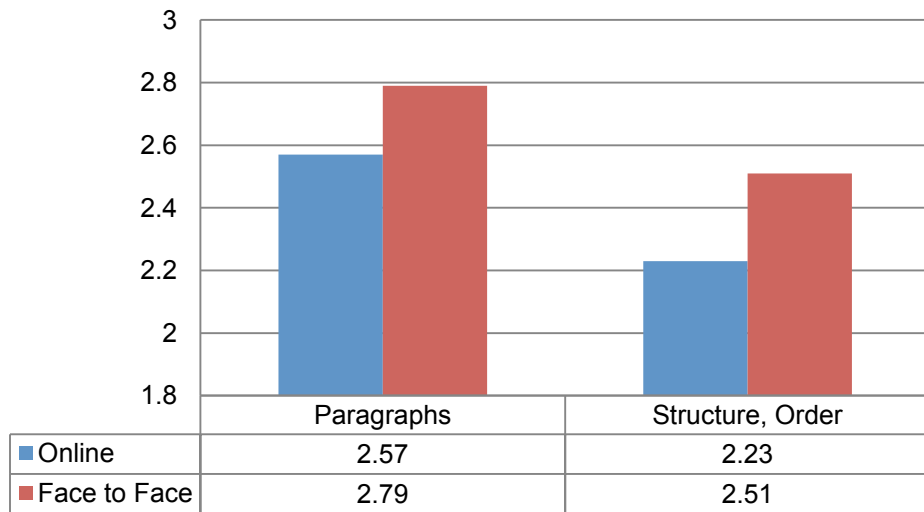
As displayed in Graph 2, the Summer Writing 39C Face to Face papers were strongest in three of the four rhetorical knowledge writing traits, with all papers, regardless of instructional method, demonstrating the same level of achievement in the focus writing trait.

Graph 3: Development, Evidence, Sources & Research Category Results



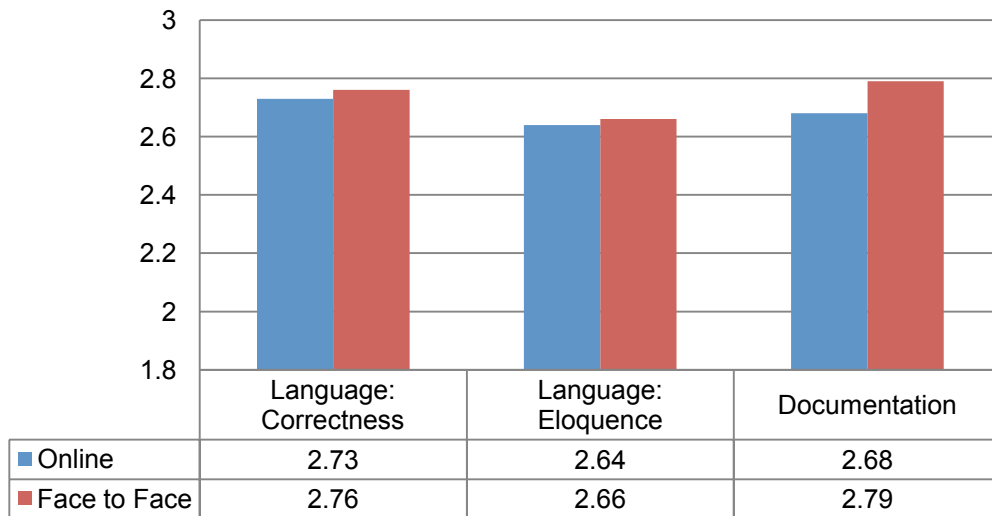
The results displayed in Graph 3 found the Writing 39C Face to Face papers to be strongest in all three writing traits contained in the development, evidence, sources and research category.

Graph 4: Structure and Organization Category Results



The Writing 39C Face to Face papers were found to be strongest in the two writing traits contained in the structure, organization category as displayed in Graph 4. As was the case with the other lower-division writing products assessed this year and in previous years, all papers, regardless of instructional method were stronger in the paragraph writing trait than in the structure, order writing trait.

Graph 5: Language and Style Conventions Category Results



The Writing 39C Face to Face papers were found to be strongest in all three writing traits contained in the language and style conventions category as presented in Graph 5. As was the case with the other lower-division writing products assessed this year, all papers were stronger in the language correctness trait than in the language eloquence trait.



The assessment results displayed in Graphs 1 through 5 found the Writing 39C Face to Face papers to be stronger than the Writing 39C Online papers in all four categories. Overall, all papers regardless of instructional method.

Because one of the goals of this project was to better understand the quality of student writing in Summer Writing 39C courses as a function of instructional method, an ANOVA was performed to determine if the observed differences in writing quality were statistically significant. The level of significance selected for this analysis was  $p < .05$ . The results, presented in Table 3, show that there are significant differences in the overall quality of student writing as a function of instructional method. Further, there exist significant differences in writing quality associated with four writing traits, source/evidence: credibility and/or relevance, source/evidence: integration, and both of the writing traits within the structure and organization category, paragraphs, and structure and order. Both overall, and for the four traits mentioned above, Summer Writing 39C Face to Face papers were significantly stronger in their ability to demonstrate writing achievement. These results suggest that there are significant differences in students' ability to demonstrate achievement of the writing expectations captured by the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric as a function of instructional method. Further investigation into these differences is worthy of discussion and study by the Lower-Division Writing Committee.

Table 3: Comparison of Mean Assessment Scores by Lower-Division Writing Trajectory

	CATEGORY	Summer Writing 39C Online (n=44)	Summer Writing 39C Face to Face (n=42)
Rhetorical Knowledge	Focus	2.93	2.93
	Thesis	2.09	2.18
	Expertise on topic	2.61	2.76
	Rhetorical Awareness (genre/audience)	2.55	2.64
Sources/Evidence	Critical Thinking: Development of Ideas	2.08	2.29
	Sources/Evidence: Credibility and/or Relevance *	2.52	2.75
	Sources/Evidence: Integration**	1.99	2.37
Structure & Organization	Paragraphs**	2.57	2.79
	Structure, Order**	2.23	2.51
Language & Conventions	Language: Correctness	2.73	2.76
	Language: Eloquence	2.64	2.66
	Documentation	2.68	2.79
<b>OVERALL SCORE*</b>		29.63	31.43

\*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

In Tables 4A-D, the distribution of assessment scores assigned to each paper by the readers is displayed.

Table 4A: Rhetorical Knowledge Category Score Distribution

Quality Scores by Trait	Focus	Thesis	Expertise on topic	Rhetorical Awareness
<b>Online</b> (44 papers, 132 reads)				
Insufficient (1-1.99)		14 (32%)	3 (7%)	2 (5%)
Some (2-2.99)	17 (39%)	25 (57%)	28 (64%)	31 (70%)
Satisfactory (3-3.99)	27 (61%)	5 (11%)	13 (30%)	11 (25%)
Proficient (4)				
<b>Face to Face</b> (42 papers, 126 reads)				
Insufficient (1-1.99)		9 (21%)		
Some (2-2.99)	19 (45%)	32 (76%)	25 (60%)	25 (60%)
Satisfactory (3-3.99)	23 (55%)	1 (2%)	17 (40%)	17 (40%)
Proficient (4)				

Table 4B: Development, Evidence, Sources, and Research Category Score Distribution

Quality Scores by Trait	Critical Thinking: Development of Ideas	Sources/ Evidence: Credibility and/or Relevance	Sources/ Evidence: Integration
<b>Online</b> (44 papers, 132 reads)			
Insufficient (1-1.99)	16 (36%)	3 (7%)	15 (34%)
Some (2-2.99)	25 (57%)	30 (68%)	26 (59%)
Satisfactory (3-3.99)	3 (7%)	11 (25%)	3 (7%)
Proficient (4)			
<b>Face to Face</b> (42 papers, 126 reads)			
Insufficient (1-1.99)	6 (14%)	1 (2%)	5 (12%)
Some (2-2.99)	29 (69%)	24 (57%)	31 (74%)
Satisfactory (3-3.99)	7 (17%)	16 (38%)	5 (12%)
Proficient (4)		1 (2%)	1 (2%)

Table 4C: Structure and Organization Category Score Distribution

Quality Scores by Trait	Paragraphs	Structure, Order
<b>Online</b> (44 papers, 132 reads)		
Insufficient (1-1.99)		11 (25%)
Some (2-2.99)	35 (80%)	31 (70%)
Satisfactory (3-3.99)	9 (20%)	2 (5%)
Proficient (4)		
<b>Face to Face</b> (42 papers, 126 reads)		
Insufficient (1-1.99)	1 (2%)	2 (5%)
Some (2-2.99)	19 (45%)	31 (74%)
Satisfactory (3-3.99)	22 (52%)	8 (19%)
Proficient (4)		1 (2%)

Table 4D: Language and Style Conventions Category Score Distribution

Quality Scores by Trait	Language: Correctness	Language: Eloquence	Documentation
<b>Online</b> (44 papers, 132 reads)			
Insufficient (1-1.99)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	2 (5%)
Some (2-2.99)	24 (55%)	31 (70%)	25 (57%)
Satisfactory (3-3.99)	19 (43%)	12 (27%)	16 (36%)
Proficient (4)			1 (2%)
<b>Face to Face</b> (42 papers, 126 reads)			
Insufficient (1-1.99)	2 (5%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
Some (2-2.99)	20 (48%)	25 (60%)	25 (60%)
Satisfactory (3-3.99)	20 (48%)	16 (38%)	14 (33%)
Proficient (4)			2 (5%)

Overall, these findings suggest that over 95% of students are able to demonstrate some or better evidence of achievement of the writing traits contained within the lower-division writing assessment rubric, with approximately 8% of students being able to demonstrate satisfactory evidence of achievement of the writing traits contained within the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric. Based on the assessment results, all Summer Writing 39C papers, regardless of instructional method, were strongest in the language and style conventions category. Statistically significant differences were observed both in the overall assessment score and in the scores for 4 of the 12 writing traits contained in the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric. In light of the significant differences in students' ability to demonstrate achievement of the writing expectations captured by the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric as a function of instructional method, further investigation into these differences is worthy of discussion and study.

**Student Background and Writing**

In order to better understand the writing quality in the sample of Summer Writing 39C papers assessed for this project, data was collected about students' language background. Table 5 shows that nearly 70% of the papers assessed for this project were produced by students who grew up in households where either only another language or both English and another language were spoken.

Table 5: Language Background by Lower Division Writing Course

Language Status	Summer Writing 39C Online (n=44)	Summer Writing 39C Face to Face (n=42)	ALL (n=86)
English Only	17 (39%)	10 (24%)	27 (31%)
English & Another Language/Another Language Only	27 (62%)	32 (76%)	59 (69%)

An analysis of variance, the results of which are displayed in Table 6, was performed to determine if there were significant differences in writing quality as a result of language background on each of the twelve individual writing categories and the overall writing assessment scores. The level of significance selected for this analysis was  $p < .05$ . No significant differences emerged in writing quality as a function of students' language background. In fact, in contrast to previous lower-division assessment results, students from non-English only households achieved slightly higher writing quality scores than their English-only counterparts.

Table 6: Mean Writing Assessment Values as a Function of Language Status

	CATEGORY	English Only	English & Another/ Another Only
Rhetorical Knowledge	Focus	2.96	2.91
	Thesis	2.06	2.18
	Expertise on topic	2.65	2.70
	Rhetorical Awareness (genre/audience)	2.53	2.62
Sources/ Evidence	Critical Thinking: Development of Ideas	2.07	2.23
	Sources/Evidence: Credibility and/or Relevance	2.54	2.67
	Sources/Evidence: Integration	2.06	2.23
Structure & Organization	Paragraphs	2.60	2.71
	Structure, Order	2.32	2.39
Language & Style Conventions	Language: Correctness	2.73	2.75
	Language: Eloquence	2.60	2.67
	Documentation	2.64	2.78
<b>TOTAL</b>		29.79	30.84

\*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The 2011 Summer Writing 39C Assessment was designed with three goals in mind: (1) to assess the degree to which the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric captured shared writing expectations across Summer Writing 39C courses, (2) to assess the quality of student writing produced through different instructional methods, and (3) to determine whether students' language background impacts the quality of student writing.

The Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric, modified in response to the findings and recommendations of previous Lower-Division Writing Assessment efforts, proved to be a somewhat useful tool for assessing the quality of writing produced in Summer Writing 39C courses. In reviewing the reliability coefficients, the rubric proved to be most reliable in capturing the writing quality associated with the sources and evidence category and least reliable in capturing writing quality associated with the rhetorical knowledge category. The rubric was found to be moderately reliable with Summer Writing 39C products; modifications will further strengthen its ability to effectively capture the quality of student writing. The readers noted that further refinement related to those writing traits concerned with the use of evidence and sources, specifically noting the distinctions between integrating and situating sources, and the need for one

of these traits to capture the students' understanding and accurate interpretation of sources, would serve to further strengthen the rubric. The variability in reliability coefficients suggests that rubric modifications here may prove helpful to further understanding student writing skills.

The review of student writing products found that nearly all students are able to demonstrate some evidence of achievement of the writing expected upon completion of the lower division writing requirement. Statistically significant differences emerged in overall writing quality as a function of instructional method with papers produced in Summer Writing 39C Face to Face courses achieving higher scores in 11 of the 12 writing traits contained within the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric. Significant differences were found in 4 of the writing traits with Summer Writing 39C Face to Face papers demonstrating a higher level of achievement in the source/evidence: credibility and/or relevance, source/evidence: integration, paragraphs, and structure and order writing traits. Overall, all papers produced in Summer Writing 39C courses were strongest in the language and style conventions category. These results suggest that there are differences in writing gains as a function of instructional method worthy of further investigation.

Finally, writing quality differed, though not significantly, as a result of students' language background. Overall, papers produced by students who grew up in households speaking only English achieved slightly lower assessment scores on eleven of the twelve writing traits contained within the Lower Division Writing Assessment Rubric. These results are surprising, in that they are not consistent with the results from other Lower-Division Writing Assessment projects and counter to what we would expect.

In light of these findings, the following recommendations emerge:

The Lower Division Writing Assessment Rubric proved to be a moderately valuable tool for assessing Summer Writing 39C products. Refinements to the rubric that serve to further clarify the sources and evidence category will help to strengthen the rubric's overall effectiveness in capturing writing quality produced in fulfillment of the lower division writing requirement.

Statistically significant differences in writing quality emerged as a function of instructional method. Students who completed the lower-division writing requirement through a Summer Writing 39C online course were less successful in their ability to demonstrate achievement of the writing traits contained in the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric. Further investigation into the impacts of instructional methods on student writing ability is needed.

There are differences in the quality of writing produced by students as a result of their language background. This project found that students who grew up in households speaking either only another language or both English and another language achieved slightly higher writing quality scores. Though this finding is not statistically significant, because it both goes counter to our assumptions and is inconsistent with previous Lower-Division Writing Assessment findings, it is interesting. In light of the fact that nearly half of our students come from multiple language backgrounds, it is recommended that writing quality as a function of students' language background continue to be monitored in future writing assessment projects.