

University of California, Irvine

**2012 Assessment of
Summer Writing 39C at UCI**

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Introduction

This report presents the findings from the 2012 Assessment of Summer Writing 39C products at UCI. A random selection of 40 Writing 39C papers written in fulfillment of the lower-division writing requirement were collected in Summer 2012 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 very similar across instructional method. 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.

No meaningful differences were observed in writing quality as a function of instructional method. In reviewing writing quality as a result of language background, a statistically significant difference emerged in the language eloquence category. Students who report speaking only English achieved higher scores than their non-English-only counterparts in 8 of the 12 writing traits contained in the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric. With the exception of the language eloquence trait, no meaningful differences were observed in writing quality as a result of students' language background. The Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric was found to have moderate overall reliability.

Overall, the results from this project suggest that students are able to demonstrate comparable writing gains across instructional methods.

Assessment Design

In 2012, the Campus Writing Coordinator sought to continue assessing student writing produced in Summer Writing 39C courses. The 2012 Summer Writing 39C Assessment Effort sought to build upon the efforts of previous years to assess the quality of student writing produced through the completion of the lower-division writing requirement via a Summer Writing 39C course, and determine the impacts, if any, of instructional method and students' language background on 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 writing skills and quality expected upon 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? Is the quality of student writing different as a function of instructional method (Online versus Face to Face)?

- Student Background and Writing: To what extent does student writing quality vary as a result of the student’s language background?

The Lower Division Writing Rubric

The Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric, presented below, is comprised of twelve writing traits, each with four levels of quality.

Table 1: Lower Division Writing Assessment Rubric

	WRITING TRAIT	4 Proficient	3 Satisfactory	2 Some	1 Insufficient
Rhetorical Knowledge	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
Development, Evidence, Sources, and Research	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
Structure, Organization	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
Language & Style Conventions	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

Six 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 40 papers produced in Summer 2012 Writing 39C courses– Writing 39C online (20), Writing 39C face to face (20). Three of the readers, Alberto Gullaba, Elizabeth Martin, and Dan Matlock, have served as instructors with UCI's Composition Program. A fourth reader, Susan Schober, has been an instructor with UCI's Composition Program and currently serves as a Writing Specialist at UCI's Writing Center. A fifth reader, Brad Queen, is a recently hired lecturer with UCI's English Department. The sixth reader, Susan Morse, has served as an instructor with the Humanities Core Program. Four of these readers have participated in previous writing assessment efforts at UCI.

On September 13, 2012, the first morning of the assessment, Jonathan Alexander led a group discussion of the projects' goals and the lessons learned from previous lower-division writing assessment efforts. Following this discussion, the readers reviewed the assessment rubric and assessed 3 sample papers. The 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 13, 2012, readers were divided into 2 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.

Table 2 displays the reliability coefficients for the 12 individual writing traits and the overall assessment scores by course and for all the Summer Writing 39C products assessed for this project.

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

	WRITING TRAIT	Writing 39C Face to Face (n=20)	Writing 39C Online (n=20)	ALL (n=40)
Rhetorical Knowledge	Focus	.075	.095	.098
	Thesis	.182	.583	.396
	Expertise on topic	.419	.212	.358
	Rhetorical Awareness (genre/ audience)	.345	.638	.466
Sources/ Evidence	Critical Thinking: Development of Ideas	.372	.044	.245
	Source/ Evidence: Credibility and/or Relevance	.479	.810	.684
	Source/ Evidence: Integration	.429	.490	.462
Structure, Organization	Paragraphs	.342	.271	.324
	Structure, Order	.247	.318	.265
Language & Style Conventions	Language: Correctness	.747	.639	.676
	Language: Eloquence	.726	.776	.756
	Documentation	.688	.573	.632
OVERALL SCORE		.598	.675	.634

The overall reliability coefficients for the Summer Writing 39C products and as a function of instructional method suggest that the rubric has low to moderate overall reliability and that refinement is needed in order to strengthen inter-rater reliability. Specifically, the focus, critical thinking, and structure/order traits have low inter-rater reliability. In contrast the three writing traits contained within the language and style conventions have high inter-rater reliability. In reviewing the alpha-reliability coefficients by instructional method, 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, regardless of instructional method. In addition, the reliability scores suggest that the rubric is most reliable in its ability to capture writing quality associated with the language and style conventions category and least reliable in its ability to capture writing quality associated with the rhetorical knowledge category. These results may

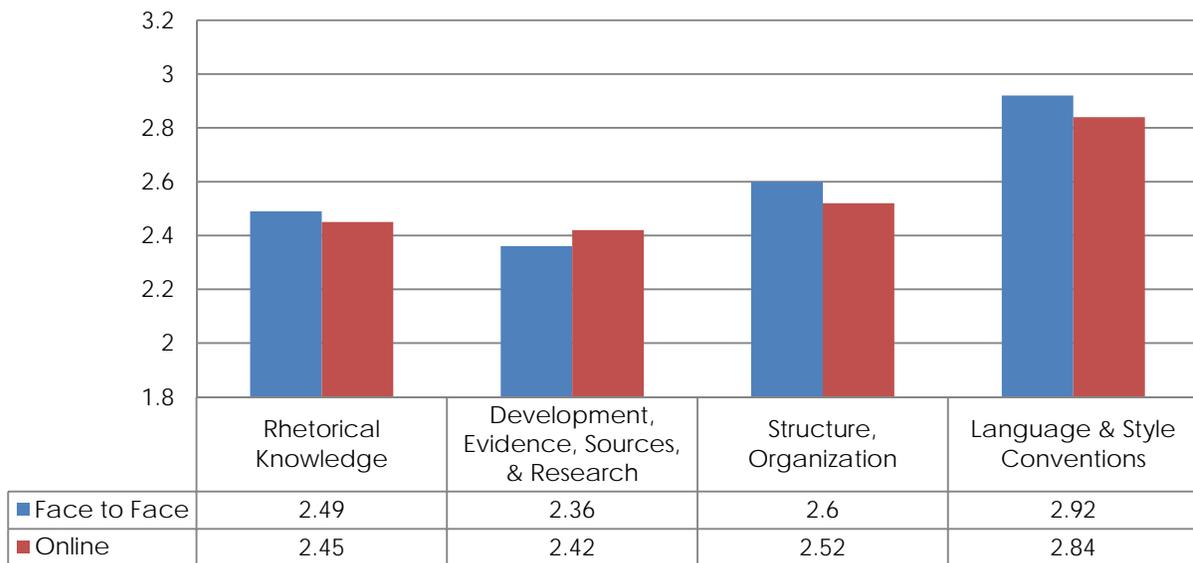
point to the complexity of these writing traits and/or the variability in the means by which students demonstrate achievement of these writing skills.

At the conclusion of the 2012 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 focused on rhetorical knowledge, and the degree to which the writing products were able to demonstrate their expertise, were aware of the audience for their writing, and the degree to which both the use of language and the structure of the writing served to affirm the focus and expertise of the writing and writer.

Student Writing Skills

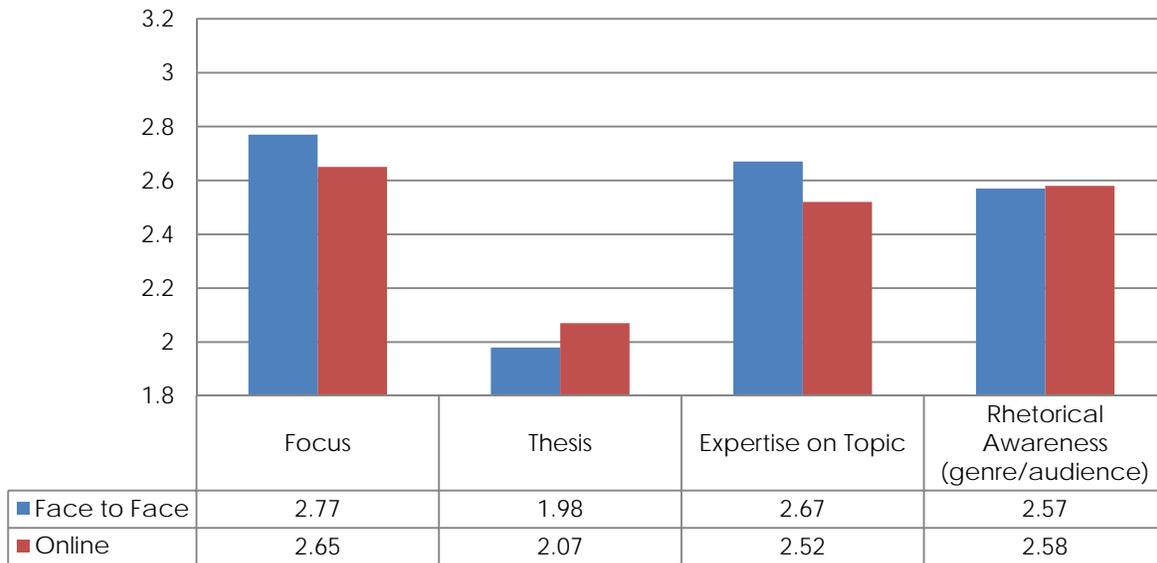
The Writing 39C quality results, as defined by the 4 overarching categories contained within the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric, are presented in Graph 1.

Graph 1: Summer Writing 39C Assessment Results



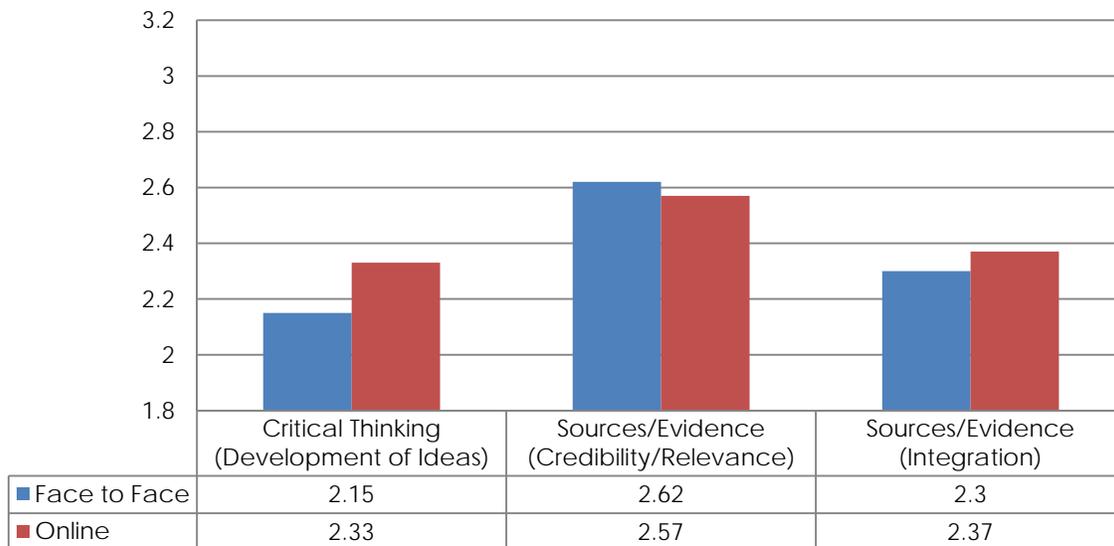
In reviewing the assessment results, the Summer Writing 39C Face to Face papers emerged as slightly stronger in three of the four categories contained within the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric. As these four categories represent 12 distinct writing traits, Graphs 2 through 5 present the scores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

Graph 2: Rhetorical Knowledge Category Results



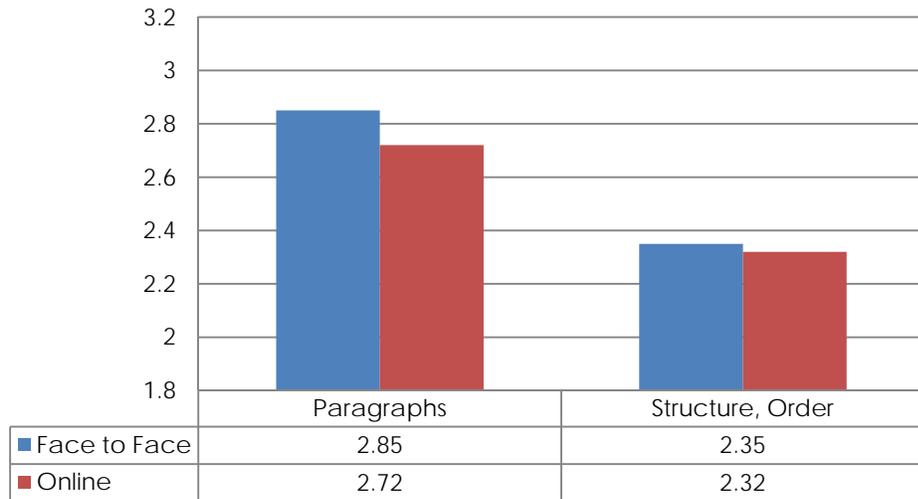
As displayed in Graph 2, the Summer Writing 39C Face to Face papers were stronger in two of the rhetorical knowledge writing traits. Nearly the same level of achievement was demonstrated in the rhetorical awareness trait for all Summer Writing 39C papers.

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



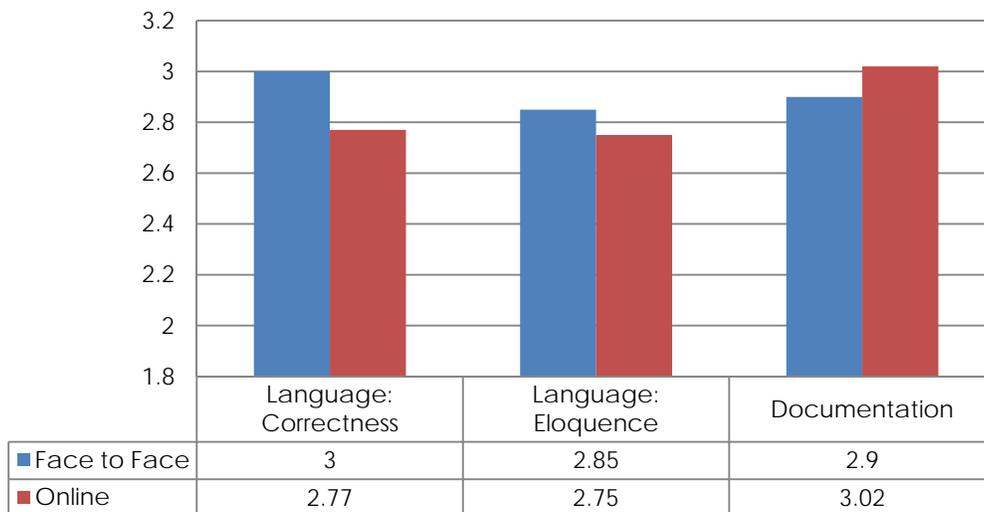
The results displayed in Graph 3 found the Writing 39C Online papers stronger in two of the writing traits contained in the development, evidence, sources and research category.

Graph 4: Structure and Organization Category Results



The results displayed in Graph 4 show that the Writing 39C Face to Face papers were stronger in the two writing traits contained in the structure, organization category. It has consistently been the case in previous year assessments that papers produced in fulfillment of the lower-division writing requirement are 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 stronger in two of the three writing traits contained in the language and style conventions category as noted in Graph 5. As was the case in 2011, all Writing 39C 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 differences in writing quality as a function of instructional method to be minimal. While the Writing 39C Face to Face papers received higher assessment scores in 7 of the 12 traits contained in the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric, no score difference as a function of instructional method was greater than .17.

As one of the goals of this assessment effort was to assess 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 no significant differences in the overall quality of student writing as a function of instructional method.

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

	WRITING TRAIT	Summer Writing 39C Face to Face (n=20)	Summer Writing 39C Online (n=20)
Rhetorical Knowledge	Focus	2.77	2.65
	Thesis	1.98	2.07
	Expertise on topic	2.67	2.52
	Rhetorical Awareness (genre/audience)	2.57	2.58
Sources/Evidence	Critical Thinking: Development of Ideas	2.15	2.33
	Sources/Evidence: Credibility and/or Relevance	2.62	2.57
	Sources/Evidence: Integration	2.3	2.37
Structure & Organization	Paragraphs	2.85	2.72
	Structure, Order	2.35	2.32
Language & Conventions	Language: Correctness	3	2.77
	Language: Eloquence	2.85	2.75
	Documentation	2.9	3.02
OVERALL SCORE		31	30.65

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

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

Table 4A: Rhetorical Knowledge Category Score Distribution

Quality Scores by Trait	Focus	Thesis	Expertise on topic	Rhetorical Awareness
Face to Face (20 papers, 60 reads)				
Insufficient (1-1.99)		11 (55%)		1 (5%)
Some (2-2.99)	11 (55%)	7 (35%)	12 (60%)	14 (70%)
Satisfactory (3-3.99)	9 (45%)	2 (10%)	8 (40%)	5 (25%)
Proficient (4)				
Online (20 papers, 60 reads)				
Insufficient (1-1.99)		9 (45%)		1 (5%)
Some (2-2.99)	13 (65%)	10 (50%)	17 (85%)	12 (60%)
Satisfactory (3-3.99)	7 (35%)	1 (5%)	3 (15%)	7 (35%)
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
Face to Face (20 papers, 60 reads)			
Insufficient (1-1.99)	6 (30%)	1 (5%)	2 (10%)
Some (2-2.99)	12 (60%)	11 (55%)	15 (75%)
Satisfactory (3-3.99)	2 (10%)	8 (40%)	3 (15%)
Proficient (4)			
Online (20 papers, 60 reads)			
Insufficient (1-1.99)	4 (20%)	3 (15%)	3 (15%)
Some (2-2.99)	14 (70%)	8 (40%)	10 (50%)
Satisfactory (3-3.99)	2 (10%)	9 (45%)	7 (35%)
Proficient (4)			

Table 4C: Structure and Organization Category Score Distribution

Quality Scores by Trait	Paragraphs	Structure, Order
Face to Face (20 papers, 60 reads)		
Insufficient (1-1.99)	1 (5%)	3 (15%)
Some (2-2.99)	7 (35%)	13 (65%)
Satisfactory (3-3.99)	12 (60%)	4 (20%)
Proficient (4)		
Online (20 papers, 60 reads)		
Insufficient (1-1.99)		2 (10%)
Some (2-2.99)	11 (55%)	15 (75%)
Satisfactory (3-3.99)	9 (45%)	3 (15%)
Proficient (4)		

Table 4D: Language and Style Conventions Category Score Distribution

Quality Scores by Trait	Language: Correctness	Language: Eloquence	Documentation
Face to Face (20 papers, 60 reads)			
Insufficient (1-1.99)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	
Some (2-2.99)	5 (25%)	5 (25%)	8 (40%)
Satisfactory (3-3.99)	13 (65%)	14 (70%)	11 (55%)
Proficient (4)	1 (5%)		1 (5%)
Online (20 papers, 60 reads)			
Insufficient (1-1.99)	1 (5%)	2 (10%)	
Some (2-2.99)	11 (55%)	9 (45%)	7 (35%)
Satisfactory (3-3.99)	8 (40%)	8 (40%)	13 (65%)
Proficient (4)		1 (5%)	

Overall, these findings suggest that 85% of students are able to demonstrate some evidence of achievement of the writing traits contained within the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric, with approximately 15% of students being able to demonstrate satisfactory evidence of achievement of the writing traits contained within the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric. All Summer Writing 39C papers, regardless of instructional method, were strongest in the language and style conventions category, as has been the case in previous assessments.

Student Background and Writing

In order to further understand the writing quality in the sample of Summer Writing 39C papers assessed in 2012, data was collected about students' language background.

Table 5 shows that nearly two-thirds 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. Most interesting is the difference in language backgrounds by instructional method. The majority of papers assessed from the Face to Face Writing 39C summer courses were produced by students who grew up in households where either only another language or both English and another language were spoken, whereas the language background distribution is even among the papers assessed from the Online Writing 39C courses.

Table 5: Language Background by Lower Division Writing Course

Language Status	Writing 39C Face to Face (n=20)*	Writing 39C Online (n=20)	ALL (n=40)*
English Only	5 (26%)	10 (50%)	15 (38%)
English & Another Language/Another Language Only	14 (74%)	10 (50%)	24 (62%)

*missing language data

Table 6 displays the results of an analysis of variance 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 $p < .05$. A significant difference emerged in writing quality as a function of students' language background for the language eloquence trait. In contrast to last year, though in alignment with previous lower-division writing assessment efforts, students from English only households achieved slightly higher writing quality scores than their English and another and another language only counterparts.

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

	WRITING TRAIT	English Only	English & Another/ Another Only
Rhetorical Knowledge	Focus	2.71	2.69
	Thesis	2.02	2.04
	Expertise on topic	2.6	2.57
	Rhetorical Awareness (genre/audience)	2.58	2.57
Sources/ Evidence	Critical Thinking: Development of Ideas	2.27	2.22
	Sources/Evidence: Credibility and/or Relevance	2.4	2.71
	Sources/Evidence: Integration	2.16	2.43
Structure & Organization	Paragraphs	2.93	2.68
	Structure, Order	2.44	2.26
Language & Style Conventions	Language: Correctness	3	2.81
	Language: Eloquence*	3.04	2.64
	Documentation	2.93	2.97
TOTAL		31.09	30.59

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

Conclusions and Recommendations

The 2012 Summer Writing 39C Assessment was designed with three goals in mind: (1) to assess the degree to which the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric captures the writing skills and quality expected upon completion of the lower-division writing requirement, (2) to assess the quality of student writing produced in Summer Writing 39C through different instructional methods, and (3) to determine whether students' language background impacts student writing quality.

The Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric continues to be a somewhat useful tool for assessing the quality of writing produced in fulfillment of the lower-division writing requirement. The review of the reliability coefficients found that the rubric is most reliable in capturing writing quality associated with the language and style conventions category and least reliable in capturing writing quality associated with the rhetorical knowledge category. As was the case in the 2011 assessment, 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 inconsistencies in student's ability to demonstrate their expertise, their awareness of audience, and the use of language and the structure of the writing to affirm the focus and expertise of the writing and writer. The variability in reliability coefficients, both overall and by instructional method, point to the complexity of capturing the skills associated with the focus, critical thinking, and structure/order traits. These results may also point to the complexity of communicating to students how one demonstrates achievement of these traits through writing. Ultimately, these results suggest that rubric modifications, and potentially instructional modifications, may prove helpful to more consistently understanding student writing skills across courses and instructional methods.

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. No statistically significant differences emerged in writing quality as a function of instructional method. All observable differences between papers produced in Face to Face versus Online Writing 39C courses were minimal at best.

Finally, writing quality differed as a result of students' language background, with students from English-only households achieving statistically higher scores in the language eloquence category. Overall, papers produced by students who grew up in English only households achieved slightly higher assessment scores on eight of the twelve writing traits contained within the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric. More interesting is the difference in language background by instructional method, with a higher proportion of students from non-English only households represented in the Summer Writing 39C Face to Face papers assessed for this project.

In light of these findings, the following recommendations emerge:

The Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric continues to be a moderately valuable tool for assessing Summer Writing 39C products. Refinements to the rubric that clarify the focus, critical thinking, and structure/order traits will help to strengthen the rubric's overall effectiveness in capturing writing quality produced in fulfillment of the lower-division writing requirement.

No statistical or meaningful differences emerged as a function of instructional method. Though this may reflect the skill of UCI's composition instructors to yield similar writing gains across different instructional methods, it is important that the writing quality continue to be assessed as a function of instructional method beyond this year to determine if this is indeed a pattern not an anomaly.

Slight differences in writing quality as a result of language background emerged, with significant differences observed in the language eloquence trait. It is recommended that writing quality as a function of students' language background continue to be monitored in future writing assessment projects.

Differences in the language background of student papers assessed in the Writing 39C courses by instructional method emerged. In the random sample of papers assessed for this project, students who grew up in households speaking either another language only or both English and another language were more highly represented in the Writing 39C Face to Face papers. It would be worthwhile to review the enrollment patterns in online versus Face to Face Summer Writing 39C courses to determine whether this pattern exists in the Summer Writing 39C course enrollments or is limited to this assessment sample.

Though the majority of papers assessed are able to demonstrate some achievement of the writing expectations upon completion of the lower-division writing requirement, few are able to demonstrate satisfactory achievement of these expectations. It is recommended that those involved in the instruction of lower-division writing continue to discuss and explore how best to increase the number of students who are able to demonstrate satisfactory, or even proficient, achievement of the lower-division writing expectations as captured by the Lower-Division Writing Assessment Rubric.