

approved by the  
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University of California

Department of English

6 November 1989

To: Professor Anthony Newcomb  
Chair, Executive Committee  
College of Letters and Sciences

From: Professor Donald McQuade  
Chair,  
Reading and Composition Committee  
College of Letters and Science

Subject: Proposed Revision of the Reading and Composition Requirement  
in the College of Letters and Science

I am writing on behalf of my colleagues on the Reading and Composition Committee. They are:

Professor Robert Brentano (Department of History)  
Professor Mitchell Breitwieser (Dean, Freshman and Sophomore Studies)  
Professor Anthony Cascardi (Department of Comparative Literature)  
Professor Seymour Chatman (Department of Rhetoric)  
Professor Barbara Christian (Department of Afro-American Studies)  
Professor Louise Clubb (Dean of Humanities)  
Professor Edgar Knobloch (Department of Physics)  
Professor Warren Travis (Department of Dramatic Art)  
Professor B.A. Van Nooten (Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies)

I would also like to acknowledge the members of the 1988-89 Reading and Composition Committee who worked on the original draft of this proposal. They are:

Professor Carol Christ (then Dean of Humanities)  
Professor J.T. Monroe (Department of Comparative Literature)  
Professor Margaret Wilkerson (Department of Afro-American Studies)

**Background:**

As you know, the Reading and Composition Committee has spent the past eighteen months engaged in a thorough review of the current reading and composition requirement in the College of Letters and Science. The Committee met frequently during this period, and it also has consulted regularly with faculty in the eleven programs and departments in L & S that offer courses that satisfy the R & C

requirement. In addition, the Committee conducted a broad-ranging survey of students currently enrolled in 1A/1B as well as drew on the information gleaned from both a recent campus-wide survey of faculty attitudes toward and instructional uses of writing and a similarly-focused survey of the June 1988 graduating class.

The Committee discussed four options:

- 1) abolish the requirement;
- 2) modify the requirement; that is, to reduce the requirement from eight to six or four-units;
- 3) redistribute the requirement over the lower and/or upper division;
- 4) reconceptualize the courses.

After extensive consultation and discussion, we decided that the third and the fourth options were best.

#### **The Committee's Proposal:**

The Committee's proposal is predicated on the assumption that students have satisfied the University-wide Subject A requirement, either by examination or by course work. The Reading and Composition Committee reaffirms the standards established by the Subject A requirement as well as the importance of intensive instruction in basic writing provided by the campus' Subject A Program for those students who do not satisfy those standards as they enter the University.

The integration of reading and writing in these courses should be driven by the premise that good writing is best developed in response to careful reading, and in recognition of the fact that the task of writing depends on prior interpretive and analytical tasks. In strengthening the coherence of the sequence, the work of reading done in 1B would build in depth and sophistication on the interpretive and analytical skills introduced in 1A, so that students would learn over the sequence how to adopt a series of increasingly complex stances with regard to the texts they read.

The Committee also assumes that 1A/1B will be taken in sequence.

We unanimously recommend the Executive Committee's approval of the following revisions in the current R & C requirement.

#### The 1A Requirement:

1) that 1A normally be defined as a four-unit course to be taken during the Freshman year requiring the composition of a series of short essays.

Writing: Faculty should assign a minimum of thirty-two pages of writing, to be divided among a number of short essays (2-4 typewritten pages). Students will be required to revise at least three of these essays. Faculty should normally assign a short essay at the beginning of the semester to assess the students' writing skills. The course will stress the recursive nature of writing and reading—as well as their instruction—and will offer students frequent practice in a variety of forms of discourse leading toward exposition and argumentation in common standard English, which should constitute the majority of the writing done for the course. The course will aim at continuing to develop the students' practical fluency with

sentence, paragraph, and thesis-development skills but with increasingly complex applications.

Reading: Because learning to write cannot be done outside of a context of reading, frequent practice in both writing and reading should be the focus of 1A. Readings should be of two kinds: 1) published materials, of both a literary and non-literary character, including expository or argumentative works not unlike the sort that students are asked to read and write during their college careers; and 2) essays produced by students themselves. The inclusion of the latter is particularly important, to award the student essay the dignity of being included in the community of texts, and to demonstrate that the same kinds of issues—of audience, of organization, of style, etc.—are faced by student and professional writers alike.

Among published material, a minimum of five works should be assigned, at least two of which should be book length. At least two of these works should be written originally in English. Reading should be chosen to facilitate student writing projects: for example, they might focus on issues of student interest, provide particularly good examples of writing skill, represent literary experiences which are valuable in their own right, or integrate reading and writing in any number of other, pedagogically-sound ways.

The instructors of these courses are encouraged to construct focused reading lists that introduce students to a coherent area of intellectual inquiry.

Departmental Course Chairs or Departmental Reading and Composition Coordinators should ensure that the requirements for each of their 1A courses are consistent with those outlined in this proposal, and that all course material is intellectually-accessible to lower-division students without prior work in the discipline. These Chairs or Coordinators should meet periodically to discuss consistency in course standards and expectations.

#### The 1B Requirement:

2) that 1B normally be defined as a four-unit course to be taken during the Sophomore year requiring less frequent longer essays with revision to be practiced throughout the semester.

Writing: Faculty would normally assign a short essay (approximately three typewritten pages) to assess the students' writing skills at the beginning of the semester and to refresh the students' recollections of the skills practiced in 1A. Faculty would then assign two progressively-longer essays (totalling at least 16 typewritten pages), with at least an equal number of pages of preliminary drafting and revising. The course will stress the recursive nature of writing and reading—as well as their instruction—and will aim at developing the students' practical fluency with larger expository and argumentative units and at incorporating research results into argumentation.

Reading: Because learning to write cannot be done outside of a context of reading, frequent practice in both writing and reading should be the focus of 1B. Readings should be of two kinds: 1) published materials, of both a literary and non-literary character, including expository or argumentative essays not unlike the sort

that students are asked to read and write during their college careers; and 2) essays produced by students themselves. The inclusion of the latter is particularly important, to award the student essay the dignity of being included in the community of texts, and to demonstrate that the same kinds of issues—of audience, of organization, of style, etc.—are faced by student and professional writers alike.

Among published material, a minimum of five works should be assigned, at least two of which should be book length. At least two of these works should be written originally in English. Reading should be chosen to facilitate student writing projects: for example, they might focus on issues of student interest, provide particularly good examples of writing skill, represent literary experiences which are valuable in their own right, or integrate reading and writing in any number of other, pedagogically-sound ways.

The instructors of these courses are encouraged to construct focused reading lists that introduce students to a coherent area of intellectual inquiry.

Departmental Course Chairs or Departmental Reading and Composition Coordinators should ensure that the requirements for each of their 1B courses are consistent with those outlined in this proposal, and that all course material is intellectually-accessible to lower-division students without prior work in the discipline. These Chairs or Coordinators should meet periodically to discuss consistency in course standards and expectations.

3) that Departments be encouraged to eliminate the content-specifications now imposed on 1A and 1B, with the proviso that the course content must be readily accessible to lower division students without preliminary experience of the discipline.

In effect, 1A and 1B will not be distinguished by topic or by kind of reading. The Committee here envisions focused seminars on intellectually coherent and specific topics of interest to the instructor and students rather than the broadly inclusive courses currently being offered. The departments will be expected to review regularly individual seminar offerings for their appropriateness to the revised R & C requirement as well as for their likelihood of attracting full enrollment.

4) that any faculty-led seminar in those departments not currently teaching 1A/1B that satisfies the above criteria would qualify to be included on a general list of freshman and sophomore seminars satisfying the Reading and Composition requirement. As is the case in any writing course, the instructor is expected to pay careful and sustained attention to student writing and to write a general comment on the final draft of each essay as a whole and such specific marginal notations as may be necessary as well as to return each essay before the next writing assignment is due.

#### The Advantages of the Proposed Changes:

The Committee envisions no major disadvantages to such a redefinition of 1A and 1B. We have thought this idea through at length, debated its merits, and concluded that it has many advantages over the present situation.

On the practical level, it would help with the problem of "the float." When the Berkeley campus shifted in 1983-84 from a quarter to a semester schedule, it also changed the Reading and Composition requirement from two quarters to two semesters. The practical consequence was that the College of Letters and Science immediately was unable to provide places for approximately one-third of the students required to complete the 1A/1B sequence. In the intervening years, this "float" of students unable to enroll for 1A/1B has swollen to nearly two thousand. (The infusion of special allocations during the spring 1988 and spring 1989 semesters has reduced the float to approximately one thousand students.) Our plan will help deal with the "float" because, during the first year that the new requirement is in place, new freshmen would each be seeking only one section of composition (approx. 4000 attempted enrollments rather than 8000), which would provide L & S with the opportunity to eliminate the float. Demand would return to the present full level during the second year and thereafter. In addition, any 1A or 1B courses coming from non-R&C departments—however few or many they might be—would satisfy the requirement for some number of students without drawing on the College's R & C budget.

In order to project the impact of the current proposal on the 1A/1B "float," let us consider the following hypothetical situation. Let us imagine, for example, that the budget for Reading and Composition courses in the College of Letters and Science is approximately \$ 1.5 million annually. If the current proposal were approved for implementation in the fall 1990 semester, the costs of the R & C courses over the next few years would be as follows:

<u>1989/90</u>	<u>Fall 1990/Spring 1991</u>	<u>Fall 1991/Spring 1992</u> <u>Years</u>	<u>Subsequent</u> <u>Years</u>
Entering students required to take 1A (cost ca. \$750,000)	Entering students required to take 1A (cost ca. \$750,000)	Entering students required to take 1A (cost ca. \$750,000)	Same costs as in '91/'92
	Entering students required to take 1B (cost ca. \$750,000)	Fall 1990 Freshmen required to take 1B as sophomores (cost ca. \$750,000)	
Budget for '89/'90 \$1,500,000	Budget needed for '90-91 \$750,000	Budget needed for '91-92 \$1,500,000	Later years \$1,500,000

As this example illustrates, there would be a one-time saving of approximately \$750,000 in 1990/91, which would be targeted at eliminating the backlog of students who are required—but who have not yet satisfied—the 1A/1B requirement.

However, the Committee considers this benefit to be an incidental advantage rather than the central strength of the plan. One of the major problems with the Reading and Composition requirement as it currently stands is that there is no meaningful sequencing of the two courses. 1B does not now build on the skills practiced in 1A. 1A and 1B in their new forms would be more closely tied to what composition theory has identified as the essence of teaching writing—frequent practice with meaningful revision, and a coherent sequence of tasks moving from smaller to larger and from simpler to more complex prose units as well as from

experience-based to abstract discourse--both within each course and between the two courses.

The redefined courses would offer the students a deeper and more intensive experience of one area covered by the relevant departmental discipline, thereby eluding the blandness and inertness that currently characterize too many 1A and 1B sections, through no fault of the instructors. The current course descriptions for 1A and 1B point toward a specious core curriculum breadth. There is ample testimony to support the conclusion that the current course configurations discourage innovative participation in the reading and composition courses by faculty outside current R & C departments and programs. Finally, the survey of students currently enrolled in 1B suggests that many students regard the courses in their current formulation principally as institutional impositions on their already crowded schedules, requirements that impede rather than enable lower-division students both to make progress toward declaring a major and to explore areas in which they will not major. The students would catch fire from the instructors' enthusiasm, the course would have a more intricate and credible integrity, and the sequence of writing assignments would have the continuity and development along a single line that characterizes writing in university courses at large, for which 1A and 1B serve as preparation.

The infrequency of seminars in the lower division has been identified as one of the campus's major curricular weaknesses: enhancing the intellectual reputability of the two seminar-format courses they *do* take would address this problem in an important, if not entirely sufficient way. At the same time, such seminars really reflecting the character of a department's course offerings would allow freshmen and sophomores to sample the natures of disciplines, whether for the sake of breadth outside the major, for the sake of reaching an informed conclusion in choosing a major, or for the sake of making progress within a major.

The Committee hopes, finally, that this redefinition of the requirement would encourage more ladder-faculty to become interested in teaching 1A and 1B, both within the current R & C departments and in the other departments as a result of the greater topical freedom permitted the instructor. Were there to be more interest inspired among the faculty in departments not currently offering 1A and 1B, by promotion and word-of-mouth, the teaching of writing would expand even further beyond its current boundaries, and to percolate into the Berkeley curriculum as a whole. This plan is of course only a first and enabling step toward such an end.

#### Implementing the Plan:

If the College were to adopt this new conception of 1A-1B, implementation of the plan would require two courses of action. Most immediately, the departments now teaching the courses would have to be convinced of the wisdom and virtue of the plan, and persuaded to adjust course descriptions and teaching resources to fit. Second, and in the longer run, contact would have to be made with departments not currently teaching 1A-1B, to interest them in the possibility of teaching writing seminars based on the material of their disciplines. The plan, however, would work even if, in the worst case, no new department responded favorably.

The R & C Committee would also like to note that it has consulted extensively with colleagues in the two-year colleges and examined thoroughly the question of the potential impact of its recommendations on articulation agreements between UCB and its "feeder" community colleges. Because there are no changes proposed in the amount of reading and writing expected of students who seek to transfer to the Berkeley campus, our Committee anticipates that there will be minimal impact on articulation agreements. The Committee is prepared to deal with whatever exceptions and/or problems might arise.

#### Principles to Underpin Curriculum Design and Course Instruction:

The aim of 1A and 1B is to improve the student's ability to write clearly, effectively, and accurately about subjects of intellectual complexity, on the assumption that such writing—and the kinds of thinking that make such writing possible—is both a practical necessity for college students and a significant step in the life of the mind generally. The major emphasis of 1A and 1B will be on practicing the enabling skills of writing and reading, both in class and out of class. By exploring the possibilities inherent in different forms of writing, students will learn how the choice of a different form helps clarify their subject and their purpose as writers. Depending on their experience, students may need initially to practice in 1A with forms that depend upon concrete language (descriptive and narrative writing, for example), but these forms will serve to introduce other kinds of writing better suited to abstraction and analysis.

Principles that underpin the proposed revisions:

- \* 1A and 1B should be designed to encourage students to write frequently and attentively enough for them to experience how writing extends thought. Through frequent writing, class discussions, and conferences, 1A and 1B will introduce relatively inexperienced writers to the process, pleasure, and discipline of composing. Because frequent practice in writing and reading is the focus of 1A and 1B, work produced by the students should serve as the primary text.

- \* There are a number of skills that are essential to effective writing and reading. These skills are learned by and for writing, and they are extended by and for reading. Among these skills are:

- \* establishing increasing authority over whole structures. For writers, this means expressing a full and balanced presentation of their ideas. For readers, this means needing—for enjoying, comprehending, and for remembering—to sense the relation of the parts to the whole. To recognize readily and to identify the kinds of order students encounter when they read is to read expertly and to enjoy the intellectual satisfactions of an expert.

- \* moving from the concrete to the abstract and vice versa. Writers control the interplay of the abstract and the concrete to engage the mind of the reader and to involve the reader progressively in the development of the writer's idea. In principle, what students practice as writers they heed as readers. They recognize the move from the abstract to the concrete not only in unfolding ideas but also in establishing patterns of analysis and evaluating the evidence they propose for their readings and analyses.

\* practicing the distinction between observation and inference. This skill trains writers and readers to replace fruitless opinionating with original perception sustained by pertinent evidence; it also trains them to establish increasing intellectual independence.

\* practicing rewriting. Writers discover in rewriting a way to open up and to clarify what is in their idea. Rewriting offers writers the opportunity to understand and to explain the fullness of their ideas. Habitual rewriting means that students know how to spend time working on an idea until they make it their own, until, that is, they establish authority over it.

\* practicing rereading. (Rereading in this sense parallels rewriting.) Readers— with a similar appetite for the fullness and understanding that rewriting provides— come to expect such fullness and understanding from texts other than their own, and they reread these texts to discover and appreciate new dimensions of that fullness.

Practicing these skills regularly will result in prolific writing and reading marked by the student's ability to:

- \* control grammar by writing at will sentences suitable and correct;
- \* limit a topic, discover an idea about it, and formulate a thesis;
- \* develop and organize the whole essay through related paragraphs that exhibit the order of the parts;
- \* unfold the parts of the essay through outlining or writing rough drafts;
- \* support the logic of the thesis by subordinating some parts and expanding others;
- \* practice conventional structures and patterns in support of the developing thesis;
- \* integrate secondary sources in an essay by paraphrase, summary, and quotation as well as documentation of sources

The recent survey of UCB faculty suggests that the vast majority of faculty here readily agree that many, if not most, of their students need to improve their abilities to read, think, and write effectively. Articulating an idea and then developing it in writing are two of the most frustrating obstacles to effective and productive performance for many college students, and especially for those who in their first and second years of college must also adjust to the rigorous demands of substantive intellectual work in a variety of disciplines before they settle into the more specialized focus of their major field of study. First- and second-year students often complain that it takes them an unendurably-long time to think of "something to say" so that they can begin writing and that once they have finally begun they



discouragingly "run out of things to say" all too quickly. This problem is exacerbated by the current superficial breadth of many 1A and 1B reading lists. For many students, the act of thinking in writing within the special language of a particular discipline becomes a physically and mentally exhausting cycle of getting started and getting stuck.

A large part of the problem all students face when trying to express themselves fluently and intelligently is not how they think or how they write, but rather how they handle the continuous interplay between both activities while composing. If their tendency is to wait patiently for ideas to come to them fully expressed and "paper ready," they will sooner or later come to view writing as a kind of mental torture. Given such circumstances, they may never get started. On the other hand, if their tendency is to slap down whatever ideas come into their heads without paying attention to the structural patterns that can be generated from these ideas, then their writing will always remain haphazard and undeveloped—a form of mental torture for the faculty who read what they have written.

In their overall design and in their instructional activities, 1A and 1B should provide frequent occasions for students to practice the interconnectedness of reading, thinking, and writing. Thinking is, after all, a basic need—"reason's need." And writing, too, is a need—a powerful intellectual, humanistic, social, and professional one. In this respect, an important instructional principle for 1A and 1B can be stated quite simply: students think most rigorously and productively when they make the effort to express themselves in writing, and they write most fluently and maturely when they recognize the underlying critical and rhetorical patterns in their thinking. In this sense, thinking and writing can be considered interrelated mental processes that stimulate and reinforce each other. So closely intertwined are these two indispensable human activities that, as one well-known writer and educator has observed, "Learning to write is learning to think."

Students who like to see solid results after spending a reasonable amount of time working at reading and writing need to become conscious of how the interaction of reading, thinking, speaking, and writing can remarkably improve their intellectual motivation and momentum. They need to learn, for example, how they can extend and develop their ideas by seeing how small segments of writing contain the basis of larger organizational units. They need to recognize how a pattern of thought can lead to an essay structure, how single words and metaphors can often shape an entire piece of writing. This is not to suggest that thinking in writing is the only means to reinforce the spirited sense of intellectual inquiry that defines the primary work of a university. (Speech, for example, offers one useful alternative.) But thinking in writing is the most enduring means to strengthen the sense of intellectual community that distinguishes a university such as U C Berkeley. By creating a newly-invigorated context for 1A and 1B, the Reading and Composition Committee hopes not only to encourage faculty and students to consider the individual and collective benefits of thinking in writing in a variety of disciplines but also to celebrate the importance of thinking in writing as a central, rather than a marginal, activity in the life of this university.