



SPRING 2016

RESULTS: CAMPUS SURVEY ON WRITING

FACULTY PERSPECTIVES

TEACHING MATTERS AND ASSESSMENT CENTER
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY-CAMDEN



OVERVIEW

In the beginning of 2016, the Teaching Matters and Assessment Center conducted a campus-wide survey intent on determining the state of writing at Rutgers University-Camden from the perspective of faculty members. The survey functioned as a type of “snapshot” that provided insights into the feelings, procedures, and policies that faculty members uphold in their respective classrooms. Questions ranged from the assignation of grades to the accessibility of writing resources. In this packet you will find not only the results of the survey, but also a featured list of pedagogical writing tools.

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RESOURCES

One finding of the Campus Survey on Writing was the request for writing resources to aid both instructors and students through the challenges of writing. Below is a featured list of tools and readings that take aim at these challenges and will hopefully provide some useful insight into writing instruction. While this list has been curated to meet a wide range of needs, you are encouraged to check out the more robust list of resources available to you at the [TMAC website](#).

Teaching Apps:

[VoiceThread](#) is a web-based annotation tool that allows students and teachers to offer audio and video comments, including responses to student papers. Using VoiceThread, you can create a conversational timeline which can be played back to jump start class discussions. Now fully integrated with Sakai; sign up to access premium features. This app is most useful in the relay of writing feedback to students. (voicethread.com)

[Google Docs](#) is a powerful tool for use in education, especially now that “Scarlet Docs” (with 30 GB of storage) is available to all students and faculty at Rutgers. Because the service is available from any computer or mobile device, course notes and presentations can be worked on from any location without the need for a flash drive. Beyond its value as a planning tool, the Docs service facilitates collaboration through sharing of editable documents, which serves as a good tool for peer review. (google.com/docs)

Teaching Tools:

[Online Writing Lab \(OWL\), Purdue University](#) OWL provides students and teachers with over 200 free resources including style guides, grammar guides, and research help. The online resource also offers video tutorials, ESL specialized guides, and professional development help. (owl.english.purdue.edu/)

[Practices and Resources for Faculty, George Mason](#) This comprehensive online center for writing and research provides faculty with resources ranging from developing and formatting writing assignments to responding to student writing. It also offers ways to help students avoid plagiarism offer up better critiques for peer review. (ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/writing-and-research)

Pedagogical Readings:

[“Thinking About Undergraduate Research: What Do We Mean? What Do We Want?”](#)

[John Bean](#) This guide to student writing and research comes from highly regarded educator, John Bean. It features his BEAM concept as well as ways to structure assignment design in order for students to get the most out of research projects. (depts.washington.edu/writeuw/Bean-Handout.pdf)

[“Grading Student Work,” Vanderbilt](#) This guide to grading from Vanderbilt University offers tips and advice on how to best evaluate your students’ writing and foster good communication practices between instructors and students. (cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/grading-student-work/)

SELECTED QUOTES FROM LONG-FORM RESPONSES

Briefly describe a typical writing assignment in your course:

“It is either a position piece, in which a student uses the classic strategies of rhetoric to convey an opinion, a research-backed article, a personal reflection, or other formal and informal styles.” –Intro level, English

“Typically I require two 4-6 page papers and one 8-10 page paper per class. In some classes I also assign weekly 0.5-1 page response papers, which are less formal.” – Upper level and non-major, History

“Students are asked to make an argument for their position on an issue discussed and read about in the course, including in response to likely counterarguments.” –All levels, Philosophy and Religion

“Students are required to find an article in the media and asked to identify the main features of the study. They are also asked about their opinion on the quality of the research and implications of the study.” –Intro level and non-major, Psychology

“I often give formal papers which allow students to consider data in relation to theory, alongside more informal reading responses.” –Upper level and non-major, Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice

“One page responses to reading assignments, two page responses to reading assignments, five page paper on a book, five page paper applying ideas learned through the course” –Upper level, Teacher Prep Program

If you have one, briefly describe your policy on revision:

“Students are encouraged to turn in a rough draft ~ 1 month before the due date to receive comments/suggestions. These comments can be used to improve the final submission.” –Upper level, Biology

“Students are given feedback after each submission of a writing assignment and required to make any necessary revisions before a mandatory re-submission.” –Intro and upper level, Childhood Studies

“Revisions must involve more than simple replacement of punctuation and misspellings. Students must complete an in-depth revision, reexamining formal and thematic choices and arguments.” –Intro level, English

“Since I have students do at least one preliminary draft, they always revise. I grade the preliminary draft, and if they are really unhappy with their performance, I will let them do a second preliminary draft. After all, the whole point is to improve their writing, so while I grade drafts (otherwise many would put little effort into them) I don't mind having them do a second one.” –All levels, History

“Students may not revise papers. Instead, they are required to describe how they incorporated feedback on the previous paper into improving the next assignment. Each assignment builds on the skills applied in the previous one.” –All levels, Philosophy and Religion

“I don't have a formal one, but if someone asks for feedback before an assignment is due, I provide it, and if someone clearly misses the point in an assignment, I will sometimes offer them a chance to rewrite it to make up half of the credit they lost.” –Intro level and non-major, Psychology

SELECTED QUOTES FROM LONG-FORM RESPONSES

Do you encourage students to seek writing assistance from the learning center? Why or why not?

“Yes, always -- improves grammar especially and sometimes it improves sentence structure and other mechanics of writing”—All levels, Gender and Women’s Studies

“Yes. I encourage all my students to visit the writing center. This is especially the case with any students who approach me about writing issues or insecurities. However, since I think most professional academics, myself included, would probably benefit from a trip or two to the writing center, I frequently recommend it to my most advanced students as well.” —All levels, Fine Arts

“Always at the beginning of the semester and after the first writing assignment. This is because learning to write with new jargon is challenging and additional help is often required.”—Intro and upper level, Childhood Studies

“No; I make corrections as the semester progresses and the students are made aware in this manner of my expectations.”—Intro level, Chemistry

“Yes. I encourage my students to visit both the Learning Center and the Writing & Design Lab. It is helpful for them to get individualized attention to work on their writing, and it can be useful to gain the perspective of experts other than myself.”—Intro level and non-major, English

“I do encourage students to seek writing assistance, when they write in English. I encourage them because their writing is often very poor.”—All levels, Foreign Languages

Briefly describe your peer review process, if you have one:

“Students are strongly encouraged to consistently engage each other in written online discussions, and on conversations pertaining to the midterm and final. The actual midterms and finals are reviewed by me alone.”—Intro and non-major, Fine Arts

“I’d rather explain why I DON’T have one: I believe the students lack the knowledge to identify each other’s problems, the ability to indicate these problems in a tactful yet forceful matter to classmates, or both.”—Upper level and non-major, History

“students are allow to share feedback on work peers present with my supervision after explaining criteria and how to provide feedback on work”—Upper level, Public Policy and Administration

“When I assign discussion questions, each student is required to respond to the question and then provide feedback on what several other students have written and vice-versa. ”—Intro and upper level, Sociology

“At the beginning of the course, I ask students to develop 'study buddies' to ensure peer support throughout the semester. The peer support also is used to encourage students to support their course submissions in advance.”—All levels, Teacher Prep

“I try to group students thematically, ie "Sally will probably have something interesting to say about Sue’s paper." Then I give a sort of checklist for things to look for in each paper.”—All levels, English

SELECTED QUOTES FROM LONG-FORM RESPONSES

Briefly describe a writing assignment that is specific to your field of study.

“For my class, which is Ethics and Policy in Criminal Justice, their final paper involves describing and defining an ethical issue or dilemma that they have read about in a book and then designing a policy to address that issue.”—Upper level, Anthropology, Sociology and Criminal Justice

“Describe clearly the significance of nanotubes composed of C60. Include introduction to the field as well as 2-3 recent innovations (within last 2 years).”—Upper level, Chemistry

“Read a specific research paper (on a topic of interest to student) and summarize the results for someone not familiar with the research problem addressed in paper.”—Upper level, Computer Science

“For my Memory class, students wrote a paper describing what a piece of media (movie, tv show, etc) got right and wrong about how memory works.”—Upper level, Psychology

“Analyze a piece of landmark legislation to explain the outcome. Essentially track the issue through the policy process (agenda setting-->decision making--> implementation) and explain each phase. What are the interests involved? Who (people & institutions) are the stakeholders? What are the sources of influence? Who wins and who loses? Why? Does your outcome align with a political science theory we have studied?”—Intro and upper level, Political Science

“A general theme is: give current opinions on how historical design and innovation is still relevant today, or how has a contemporary design been inspired or influenced by the past.”—Intro level and non-major, Fine Arts

Do you find that students struggle with any of the learning goals in your course? If so, describe:

“Most students have difficulty posing a thesis statement and supporting it with evidence from the assigned readings. Students also have difficulty talking in front of the class and expressing their ideas clearly.”—Upper level and non-major, History

“My students struggle with thinking analytically about an idea or piece of writing rather than summarizing it. They also have difficulty arranging and supporting arguments. We work on this throughout the semester.”—Intro level and non-major, English

“Yes, students struggle conceptualizing the material. Many students focus on the terminology for the exams and miss the larger picture of the writing assignments.”—All levels, Childhood Studies

“yes. critical thinking. They have difficulty understanding the need for persuasiveness to be based on logical arguments and/or concrete examples. On a related matter, they have difficulty how to apply theoretical or conceptual frameworks”—Intro and upper level, Political Science

“One big challenge is critical thinking around scientific issues and findings. They struggle with the written communication in part because they struggle with the critical thinking skills that should largely make up the content of the writing.”—Intro level, Psychology

SELECTED QUOTES FROM LONG-FORM RESPONSES

Based on how you answered the previous questions, in what ways would you describe any challenges you may face when giving writing assignments?

“Getting students to express results in a complete and clear manner, particularly for main ideas used to solve a problem in the sciences.”—Upper level, Computer Science

“There is often a range of abilities in a given class. Students seem disinterested in the process. (Students who need help how often concluded they “can’t write” and seem to give up.) It’s hard to integrate teaching writing methods with the subject matter of the course.”—All levels, English

“Many students have difficulty generating their own topics. Some students do not want the choices given, say, for a comparative essay. So, I try to accommodate both viewpoints.”—Intro level, Fine Arts

“The main problem with scientific papers is that students jump straight to the equations with very little justification for it. Sometimes it is hard to figure out if the student is randomly picking equations or if there is a logical pattern of some sort. This is a problem because if I cannot follow the line of thoughts of the student it is difficult to help him/her to fix it.”—Intro and Upper level, Physics

“The challenge, obviously, is to get the students to write better. I suppose, in the long run, the challenge is to get students to adopt a positive view of writing, in general.”—All levels, Foreign Languages

“Writing ability varies greatly. As I am not an English professor, I try to focus on science. Sometimes the student writing is so poor, the science is lost.”—Upper level, Chemistry

What support would you like in assigning writing?

“Students who seek writing assistance show notable improvements. Making writing assistance available and socially acceptable helps.”—All levels, Childhood Studies

“I would love to have someone from the writing center come to my class for 1 or 2 days to teach my class basic writing. As an instructor of an upper-level course, I find these students REALLY need a refresher in writing. They are going to struggle in the real-world if they cannot write proper sentences.”—Upper level, Criminal Justice

“A robust writing center staffed with tutors trained in contemporary writing center theory and practices.”—All levels, English

“I would like all first year students to have the fundamentals down so that when I see them in the content specific class, I can count on using writing assignments as a tool in instruction.”—Intro level, Psychology

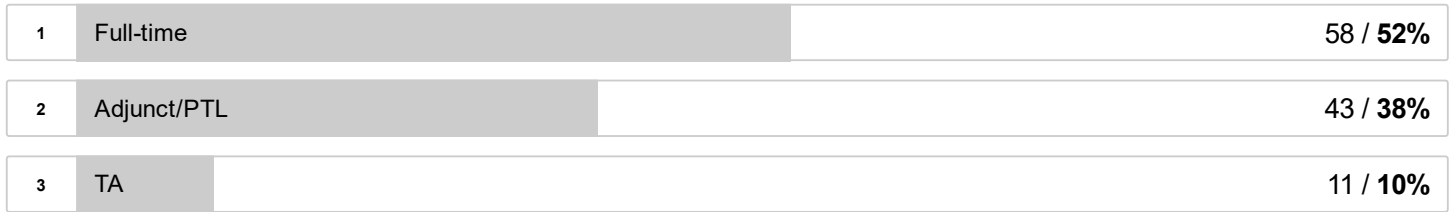
“Getting students to see the value in using the learning center for writing assistance. And, how to incentive the use of the lab in conjunction with writing the paper.”—Intro and upper level, Sociology

SHORT-FORM RESPONSES

The following pages represent the short-form answer data taken from all 112 respondents to the campus survey on writing.

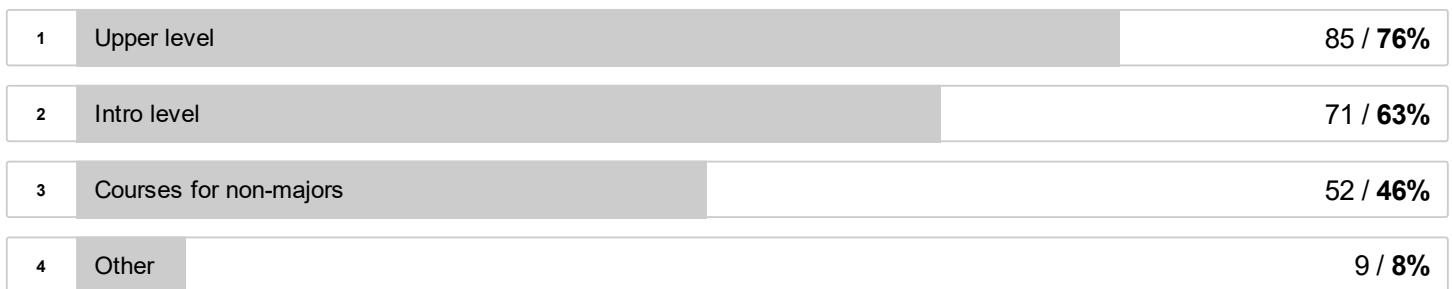
I am a(n) _____ instructor at Rutgers-Camden.

112 out of 112 people answered this question



I assign writing in the following types of courses:

112 out of 112 people answered this question



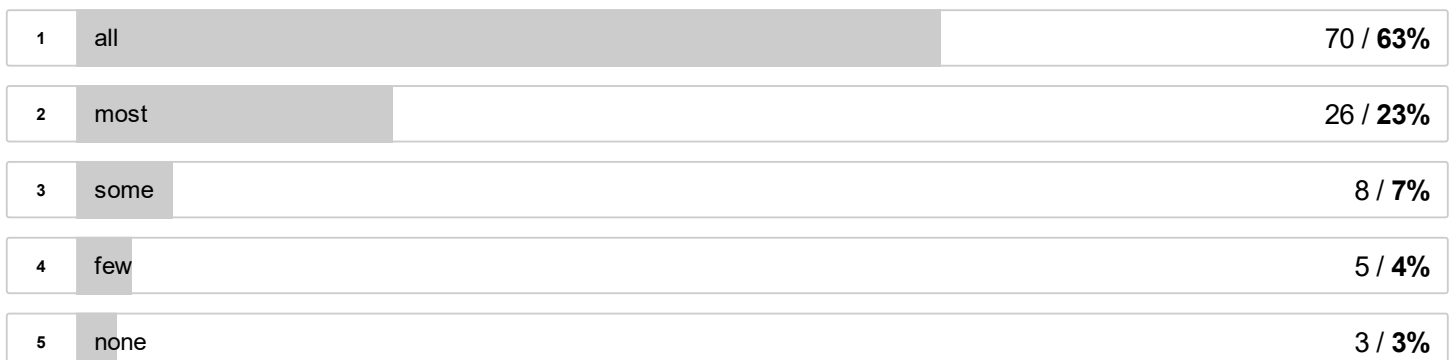
I typically assign papers of the following lengths:

112 out of 112 people answered this question



I assign writing in _____ of my classes.

112 out of 112 people answered this question



When I assign writing, it is typically _____ assignments per course.

112 out of 112 people answered this question



Do you assign in-class writing exams?

111 out of 112 people answered this question



Do you typically assign informal writing assignments in your course?

110 out of 112 people answered this question



Do you typically provide students with an assignment sheet?

112 out of 112 people answered this question



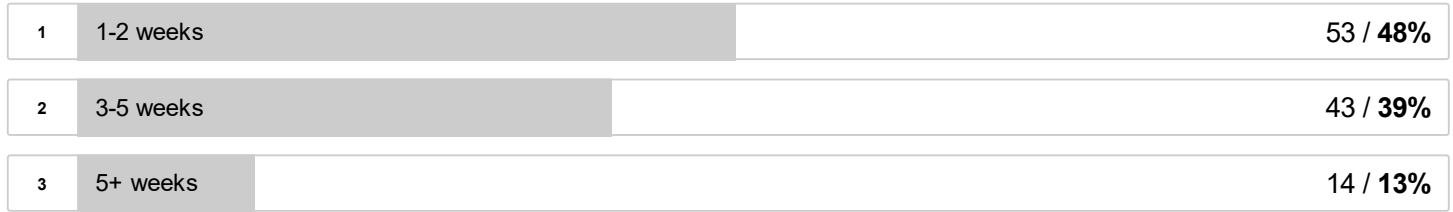
Do you typically provide students with an audience for whom they should be writing?

111 out of 112 people answered this question



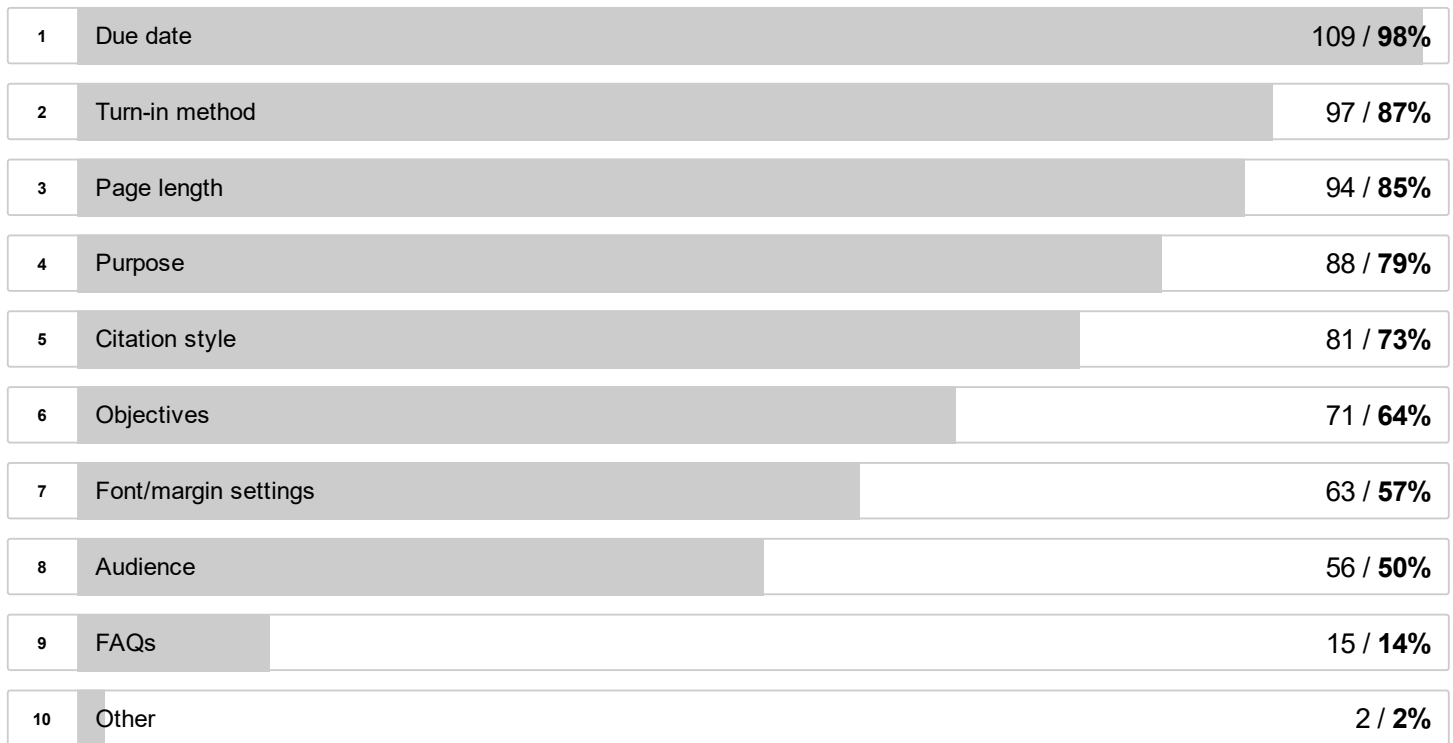
How long do students have to complete a typical writing assignment?

110 out of 112 people answered this question



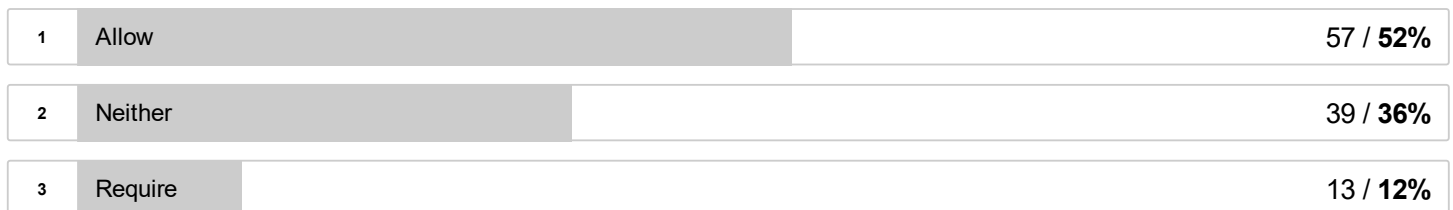
Check all the components of your writing assignments for which you give explicit instruction.

111 out of 112 people answered this question



Do you allow or require students to revise assignments?

109 out of 112 people answered this question



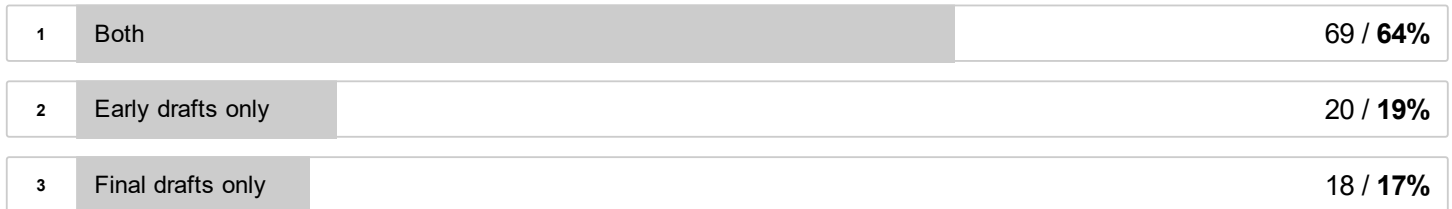
Do you have a policy on revision?

110 out of 112 people answered this question



Do you comment on early drafts or final drafts?

107 out of 112 people answered this question



In general, how long does it take you to comment on a paper?

111 out of 112 people answered this question



How much do you line edit/correct papers for grammar?

111 out of 112 people answered this question



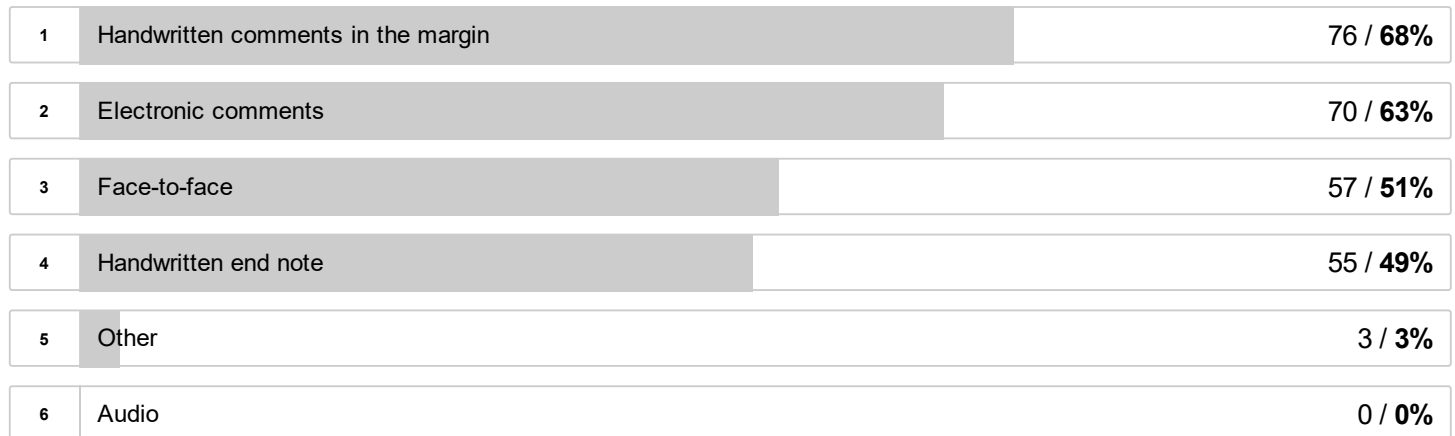
How often do you make marginal notes on drafts regarding clarity of content or ideas?

110 out of 112 people answered this question



What form does your feedback take?

112 out of 112 people answered this question



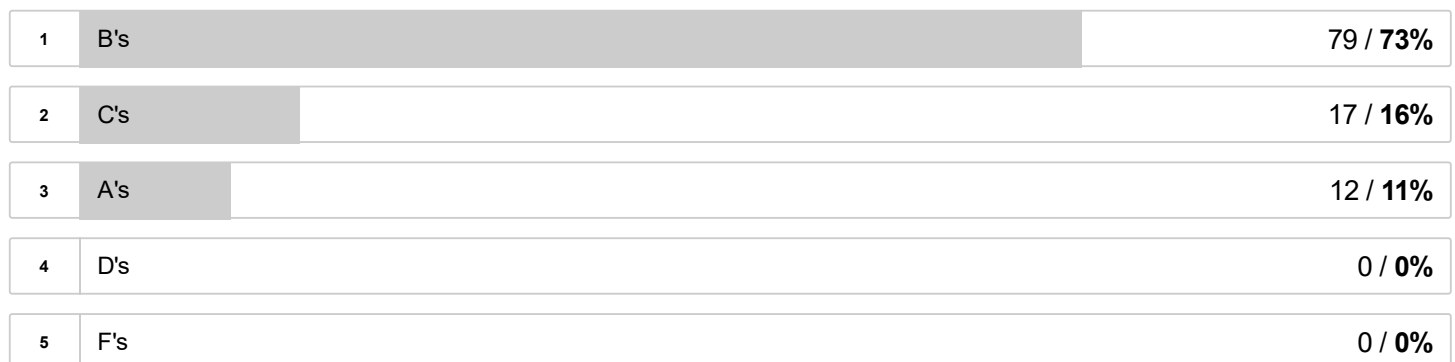
Writing assignment typically make up _____ percent of a student's final grade in your course.

112 out of 112 people answered this question



In a typical writing assignment, students tend to get mostly _____.

108 out of 112 people answered this question



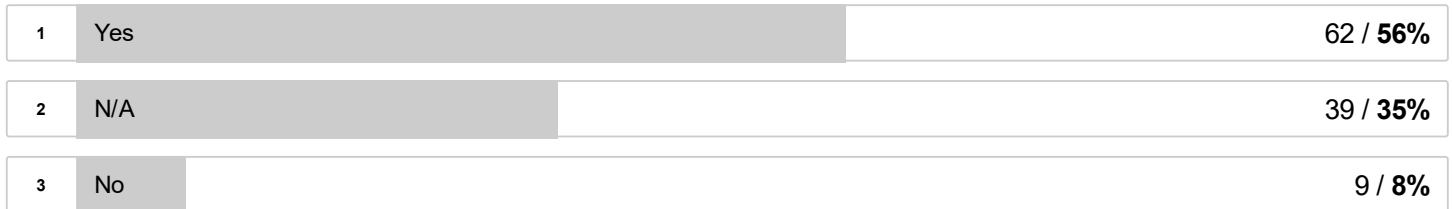
Do you use a rubric when grading writing assignments?

110 out of 112 people answered this question



Do students have a copy of (or have access to) the rubric that you use?

110 out of 112 people answered this question



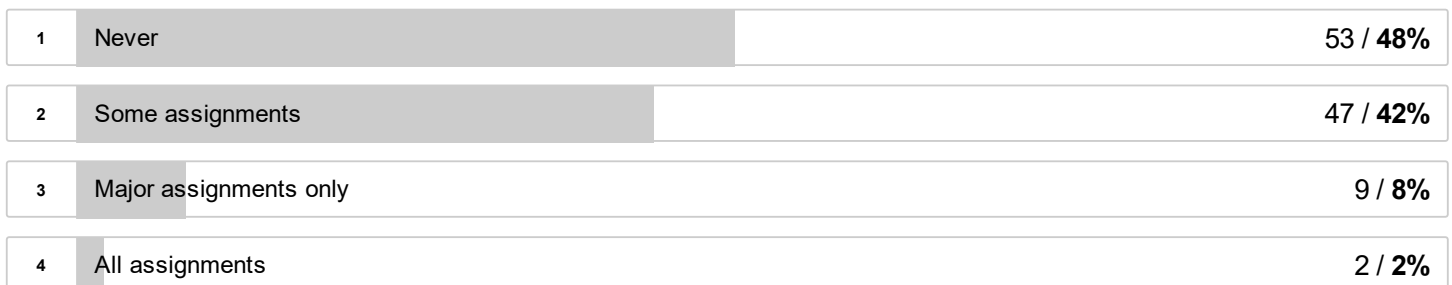
When grading writing assignments, which do you tend to favor more: coherent grammar or coherent ideas/content?

111 out of 112 people answered this question



How often do you do peer review?

111 out of 112 people answered this question



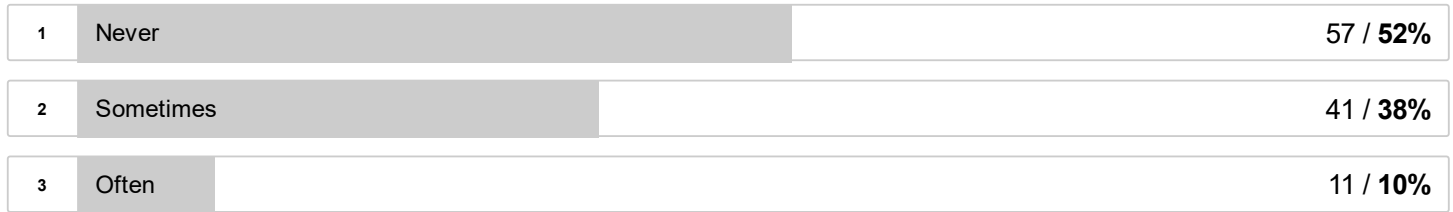
Does participation in peer review factor into a student's grade?

112 out of 112 people answered this question



How often do you ask that students collaborate on writing assignments?

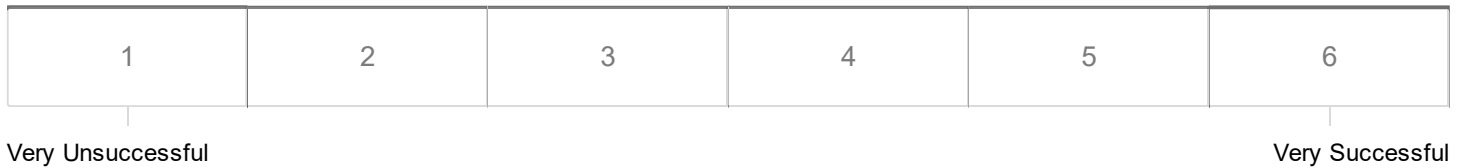
109 out of 112 people answered this question



In terms of final products, how successful would you consider student collaboration?

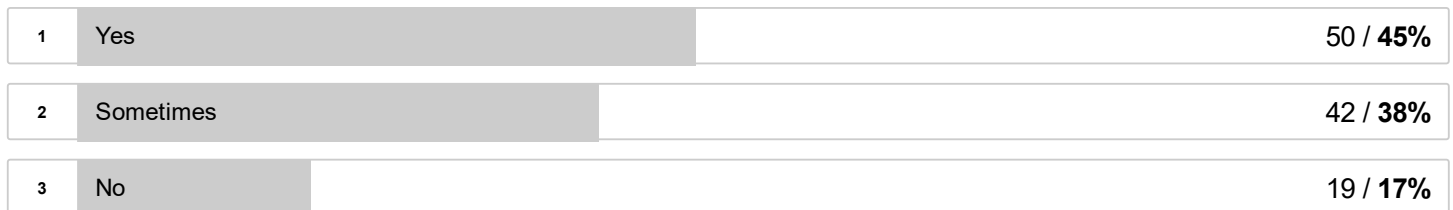
83 out of 112 people answered this question

Average: 3.06



Do you provide your students with professional or peer models to work from when giving writing assignments?

111 out of 112 people answered this question



In terms of writing skills, how would you describe the level of preparedness students come to you class with?

111 out of 112 people answered this question



2	Poorly prepared	46 / 41%
3	Well prepared	7 / 6%

How would you rate the level of satisfaction you have with the writing that your students typically turn in?

111 out of 112 people answered this question

Average: 2.83



3		60 / 54%
2		26 / 23%
4		15 / 14%
1		7 / 6%
5		3 / 3%