



UNIVERSITY OF
TEXAS
ARLINGTON

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND REPORTING

**MEASURING WRITTEN COMMUNICATION USING AAC&U VALUE
RUBRICS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS ARLINGTON**

Fall 2025 Report

Measuring Written Communication, Fall 2025 Report

According to Bean (2011), capabilities like critical thinking, audience awareness, and clarity of expression are essential for success in diverse disciplines and real-world settings, and strong writing skills foster these capabilities. Written communication remains a cornerstone of higher education, enabling students to articulate ideas, construct logical arguments, and convey information effectively across academic, professional, and civic contexts (Graham, 2018). The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) identifies Written Communication as one of the six core objectives within the Texas Core Curriculum (TCC), emphasizing the ability to express ideas clearly, concisely, and effectively in written form (THECB, 2019). Written Communication core objective is embedded across multiple Foundational Component Areas (FCAs), ensuring that students cultivate writing proficiency throughout their undergraduate experience.

At The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA), assessment of the Written Communication is conducted through a structured, cyclical process designed to evaluate student proficiency. Student artifacts are collected from embedded assignments in approved core curriculum courses and assessed using the VALUE Rubric developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U, 2009), the rubric evaluates key dimensions of writing skills.

Methodology

Data and Participants

The syllabus for each core curriculum class at UTA describes the Signature Assignment(s) that focuses on specific core objectives. Students enrolled in core courses complete the Signature Assignment(s) as they would complete other required coursework and assignments. For the Fall 2025 assessment cycle, data (signature assignment work) were drawn from three courses offered in Fall 2024 in an in-person format: *ENGL 1302 – Rhetoric and Composition II*, *LING 2301 – Study of Human Language*, and *LING 2371 – Language in Multicultural USA*. The selected courses were intentionally chosen for this assessment cycle because their signature assignments were well aligned with the Written Communication core objective and the AAC&U VALUE Rubric used for evaluation. This alignment ensured that the collected student work directly reflected effective written communication skills of UTA students. Student work samples from these courses were evaluated to

determine the extent to which UTA students demonstrate the competencies outlined in the Written Communication rubric

To preserve the validity and consistency of the scoring process, only complete student artifacts, meeting the minimum requirement of two double-spaced pages, were included in the dataset. Incomplete or insufficient submissions were excluded, as they did not provide adequate evidence of students' writing abilities for reliable rubric-based evaluation. This methodological decision helps maintain the integrity of the assessment by ensuring that all evaluated samples contain sufficient content to demonstrate proficiency across all rubric dimensions.

Table 1: Student Demographics

Categorical Information	N	%
Gender		
Female	100	74.4%
Male	61	25.6%
Racial/Ethnic Description		
Hispanic/Latino	77	47.83%
Black/African American	26	16.15%
White	23	14.29%
Asian	16	9.94%
Foreign/International	12	7.45%
Multiple Ethnicities	4	2.48%
Not Specified	3	1.86%
First Generation Students		
First Generation	86	53.41%
Non-First Generation	61	37.88%
First Generation Data Unavailable	14	8.69%
Pell Recipients		
Yes	101	62.73%
No	60	37.27%

A total of 161 written work samples of students were evaluated. As shown in Table 1, the participant group was predominantly female (74%), with male students comprising 26% of the sample. The racial and ethnic composition of the cohort reflects the diversity of UTA's undergraduate population, with Hispanic/Latino students representing the largest group (48%), followed by Black/African American (16%), White (14%), Asian (10%), and International students (7%). A small percentage of participants identified with multiple ethnicities (2%) or did not specify their race/ethnicity (2%).

In terms of first-generation college status, slightly more than half of the participants (53%)

identified as first-generation students, while 38% were non-first-generation. Data were unavailable for 9% of participants. Additionally, 63% of the students were Pell Grant recipients, indicating a significant representation of students from lower-income backgrounds, while 37% were not Pell recipients.

Table 2: *Student Status at UT Arlington*

Categorical Information	N	%
Academic Level		
Sophomore	64	39.75%
Freshman	46	28.57%
Junior	26	16.15%
Senior	24	14.91%
Fifth Year	1	0.62%
Enrollment Year		
2024 - 2025	69	42.86%
2023 - 2024	58	36.02%
2022 - 2023	16	9.94%
2021 - 2022	10	6.21%
2020 and Prior	8	4.97%
Academic Load		
Enrolled Full-Time	147	91.30%
Enrolled Part-Time	14	8.70%
Transfer Student		
Non-Transferred	125	77.64%
Transferred	36	22.36%

The assessment sample represented a broad cross-section of undergraduate students at UTA, primarily consisting of those in the earlier stages of their academic programs (see Table 2). The largest proportion of participants were sophomores (40%), followed by freshmen (29%), juniors (16%), and seniors (15%), with less than one percent of fifth-year students. In terms of enrollment year, the majority of students began their studies at UTA in 2024–2025 (43%) or 2023–2024 (36%), while smaller groups entered in 2022–2023 (10%), 2021–2022 (6%), or 2020 and prior (5%). The composition indicates that most participants were relatively new to the university and engaged in foundational coursework where written communication skills are actively developed. Regarding academic load, nearly all participants (91%) were enrolled full time, with a small proportion (9%) enrolled part time. Additionally, the majority of students (78%) were non-transfer students, while 22% had transferred from other institutions.

Table 3: *Students by Colleges/Schools*

College/School	N	%
College of Liberal Arts	39	24.22%
College of Business	32	19.88%
College of Nursing & Health Innovation	23	14.29%
College of Engineering	23	14.29%
College of Science	19	11.80%
Division of Student Success	14	8.70%
College of Architecture, Planning & Public Affairs	9	5.59%
School of Social Work	2	1.24%

As shown in Table 3, participants in the Written Communication assessment represented a wide range of colleges and schools at UTA. The largest proportion of students were enrolled in the College of Liberal Arts (24%), followed by the College of Business (20%), College of Nursing and Health Innovation (14%), and the College of Engineering (14%). Additional representation included students from the College of Science (12%), Division of Student Success (9%), the College of Architecture, Planning, and Public Affairs (6%), and one percent from the School of Social Work.

Assessment Instrument

The Signature Assignments were assessed using the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) Rubric for Written Communication (AAC&U 2009). The rubric categorizes written communication into five dimensions: Context and Purpose, Organization and Structure, Content Development, Source and Evidence, and Control of Syntax and Mechanics. The rubric describes each dimension and uses a four-point scoring scale (see Appendix A). The rubric functions as a matrix that provides narrative descriptions of expected work quality and corresponding point values for scoring the five measures. The point values range from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating baseline performance (Benchmark-1), 2 indicating approaching milestone (Milestone-2), 3 indicating achieved milestone (Milestone-3), and 4 indicating the highest mastery (Capstone-4) of Written Communication. AAC&U, the authors of the rubric, permit zero ratings if the paper does not meet the minimum content or quality standards defined in the rubric. The attainment target (numerical ratings) was set at a score of 2 (Milestone-2). The attainment target was set above the benchmark following recommendations from the research community (Greenhoot & Bernstein, 2012) and standard acceptance criteria in the assessment community.

Procedures

Written student work samples were obtained from multiple sections of selected courses. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Reporting (IER) prepared student work for rating. Preparation consisted of assigning the papers a coded tracking number, adding a cover sheet for rating, and removing all personal identification information (e.g., student or instructor name, course title, semester) to prevent rater bias during the planned group "Core Scoring Day" activities.

Eleven faculty members and professional staff with advanced degrees served as raters for the scoring session. Raters scored the student writing samples during a scheduled scoring day, and each paper was reviewed by two raters in a group setting. A third "tiebreaker" rating was obtained when ratings diverged by more than two points on a single dimension. All raters assigned a score to each of the five dimensions in the rubric for each student's work sample. Higher values indicate more evidence of written communication skills in student work and vice versa. Raters were advised to use zero, per AAC&U recommendations, if any dimension is absent in a student's work.

The scoring day began with an orientation and description of the rating process. An IER facilitator led the raters through reviewing the rubric and discussing the rating dimensions and scale designed to calibrate the raters' understanding and use of the rubric in the rating process. Then, the entire group read and rated one practice anchor paper, which was chosen beforehand by the facilitator. Following the sample paper review, the facilitator led a discussion among all raters using the anchor paper to reach a common understanding of the rubric dimensions and to find exemplar indicators within the paper for the rubric levels.

Following the completion of the calibration activity, formal review and rating of student papers began. During the formal review and rating of papers, raters read each paper and assigned scores for each dimension on the rubric using the four-point scale. If the values of the skill measure scores for a paper from the two raters were identical or within a one-point difference, then the two scores were considered in agreement and averaged. For example, if Rater A scored the Content Development measure with a value of 2 and Rater B scored the same measure with a value of 3, then the rating was considered in agreement, and scores for that dimension were averaged as 2.5. If the scores from the two raters differed by two points, then the two scores were still averaged but rating was considered in disagreement. If the scores from the two raters differed by more than two points, a third rater was assigned the paper, and then the three scores were averaged together to determine the final score in such cases. For example, if Rater A scored the Content Development measure with a value of 1 and

Rater B scored the same measure with a value of 4, a third rater was asked to read and score the paper. In such cases, the mean score of three ratings was used as a final score.

Analysis and Results

Inter-rater Agreement and reliability

To ensure the reliability and consistency of scoring, each student artifact was evaluated independently by two raters. Agreement percentages were calculated based on instances in which the two raters' scores differed by no more than one rating point across rubric dimensions.

Table 4: *Agreement Percentages Among Raters*

Dimension (Written Communication VALUE Rubric)	Percentages
Context and Purpose	96%
Organization and Structure	95%
Content Development,	95%
Source and Evidence	91%
Control of Syntax and Mechanics	94%

Note: If values assigned by the raters differed by the rating interval of one point or less, it was counted as agreement. The agreement percentage was computed by dividing the number of agreements by the total number of ratings.

As shown in Table 4, inter-rater agreement average was strong across all five dimensions, ranging from 91% to 96%. The highest levels of agreement were observed in Context and Purpose (96%) and Organization and Structure (95%), followed closely by Content Development (95%) and Control of Syntax and Mechanics (94%). The lowest, though still high, agreement occurred in Sources and Evidence (91%). These results indicate a high level of scoring consistency among raters, confirming the success of the calibration process conducted prior to assessment.

Apart from the simple percentage agreements, researchers widely measure the reliability of rating agreements between different raters to eliminate chance agreements. All raters who participated in the scoring process had advanced degrees and work experience, and they attended the training and calibration session just before the scoring session. Hence, the probability of chance agreement was very low, but inter-rater agreement was still computed to follow best research practices. Inter-rater reliability is the consistency among raters when scoring the same subjects independently. The extent to which different raters agree on their judgments establishes the validity and credibility of measurements or ratings.

The inter-rater reliability was examined using the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC), calculated with a two-way random effects model. This model type assumes random pairing of raters across student artifacts, which typically yields slightly lower coefficients compared to fixed rater pairings but provides a more conservative and realistic estimate of reliability in multi-rater assessments. High ICC values indicate more reliability between rater scores. Commonly accepted guidelines were used to interpret the ICC results. These suggest that the range of 0.40 to 0.74 is considered fair to good inter-rater agreement, with results above 0.74 classified as excellent inter-rater agreement and results lower than 0.40 considered poor inter-rater agreement (Fleiss, 1986; Shrout & Fleiss, 1979).

As shown in Table 5, the ICC values across the five rubric dimensions ranged from 0.58 to 0.70, indicating fair to good agreement according to established criteria. The highest reliability was observed for Sources and Evidence (0.70), followed by Organization and Structure (0.66) and Context and Purpose (0.65). Slightly lower but still acceptable coefficients were observed for Content Development (0.64) and Control of Syntax and Mechanics (0.58).

Table 5: *Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha)*

Dimension (Written Communication VALUE Rubric)	Coefficient
Context and Purpose	0.65
Organization and Structure	0.66
Content Development,	0.64
Source and Evidence	0.70
Control of Syntax and Mechanics	0.58

Note 1: *less than 0.40 = poor agreement; between .40 and .74 = fair to good agreement; greater than .74 = excellent agreement.*

Note 2: *The intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC) was calculated as a two-way random effects model. Values in this model type with random rater pairings are typically expected to be lower than those where rater pairings are fixed throughout the rating day.*

Overall, these results demonstrate that raters applied the rubric consistently and reliably across dimensions, supported by prior calibration and training activities.

Students Performance

Overall student performance demonstrated developing to proficient levels of writing competency across all five dimensions (see Table 6). The highest mean score was observed in

Context and Purpose (M=2.74, SD=0.62), suggesting that most students were able to convey a clear sense of purpose and awareness of audience in their writing. Control of Syntax and Mechanics (M=2.51, SD=0.68), Organization and Structure (M=2.42, SD=0.74) followed closely. Lower mean scores was observed in Content Development (M=2.29, SD=0.74) and Sources and Evidence (M=2.05, SD=0.90). These results suggest that while students can generally communicate purpose and maintain structure, some encounter challenges in developing ideas with depth and integrating credible, well-cited evidence to support their arguments.

Table 6: *Means for Written Communication Measure Scores*

Measurement Dimensions	N	Mean	SD
Context and Purpose	161	2.74	0.62
Organization and Structure	161	2.42	0.74
Content Development,	161	2.29	0.74
Source and Evidence	161	2.05	0.90
Control of Syntax and Mechanics	161	2.51	0.68

In this assessment instance, all five dimensions met or exceeded the attainment target 2.0, indicating that most students demonstrated adequate command of written communication. The lowest performance was observed in Sources and Evidence (2.05), where students struggled to effectively integrating and documenting supporting materials. The Sources and Evidence dimension inherently depends on assignments that include research-based writing components, which may not have been equally emphasized in every participating course/section. This pattern aligns with common challenges identified in prior assessments of written communication.

Overall, these findings suggest that while UTA students exhibit solid foundational writing skills, targeted instructional support in content elaboration, argument development, and evidence integration could further enhance student performance and ensure consistent attainment across all dimensions of the Written Communication rubric.

Summary, Observations, and Limitations

The Fall 2025 assessment of the Written Communication core objective at UTA evaluated 161 student artifacts collected from three courses. Overall results indicate that students are at or above attainment target, and progressing toward highest mastery (Capstone-4) in written communication. Inter-rater agreement and reliability measures were strong, with agreement

percentages between 91% and 96% and ICC coefficients ranging from 0.58 to 0.70, confirming that the scoring process was consistent and methodologically sound.

The results of this assessment reveal some important observations regarding students' writing proficiency and the overall assessment process. Students demonstrated their strongest performance in areas emphasizing clarity of purpose, audience awareness, and structural organization, reflecting a solid foundation in rhetorical development and written expression. These strengths suggest that students are generally able to communicate effectively when addressing specific writing tasks and can organize their ideas coherently within an academic framework. In contrast, lower performance in Sources and Evidence highlights continuing challenges in research integration, citation accuracy, and the use of supporting materials to strengthen written arguments. These findings are consistent with trends commonly observed among lower-division students who are still developing advanced analytical and evidence-based writing skills. The careful selection of courses ensured strong alignment between the signature assignments and the rubric dimensions, allowing for a meaningful evaluation of the intended learning outcomes.

While the results provide valuable insights, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The data were collected from three courses offered during a single semester, which may limit the generalizability of findings across all disciplines. Although each signature assignment was aligned with the Written Communication core objective, differences in assignment design and disciplinary writing conventions may have influenced how students demonstrated specific competencies, particularly in source integration. The exclusion of incomplete or short submissions strengthened the methodological rigor of the study but also potentially omitted artifacts that might have reflected lower levels of proficiency.

Despite some constraints, the results offer credible and actionable evidence to support curricular and pedagogical improvements aimed at strengthening students' written communication skills across the core curriculum at UTA.

References

- Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2009). *VALUE rubrics*: Written communication. Retrieved from <https://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics>
- Bean, J. C. (2011). Engaging ideas: *The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Graham, S. (2018). *A writer(s) within community model of writing*. *Educational Psychologist*, 53(4), 258–277. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2018.1536981>
- Fleiss J. L. (1986). *The design and analysis of clinical experiments*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Shrout, P., & Fleiss, J. L. (1979). Intraclass correlation: uses in assessing rater reliability. *Psychological Bulletin*, 86(2), 420 - 428.
- Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. (2019). Texas core curriculum Report]. <http://board.theccb.state.tx.us/apps/TCC/>

Appendix A: Written Communication VALUE Rubric

Communication Rubric

Criteria	Levels of Achievement			
	Capstone 4	Milestone 3	Milestone 2	Benchmark 1
Context & Purpose	Demonstrates a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose and a clear focus on the assigned task.	Demonstrates adequate consideration of context, audience, and purpose and is responsive to the assigned task.	Demonstrates awareness of context, audience, and purpose and to the assigned task.	Demonstrates minimal attention to context, audience, purpose, and to assigned task.
Organization and Structure	Demonstrates detailed attention to successful organization, content presentation, formatting, and stylistic choices.	Demonstrates consistent use of organization, content presentation, formatting, and stylistic choices.	Follows expectations for basic organization, content presentation, formatting, and stylistic choices.	Attempts to use a consistent system for basic organization and presentation.
Content Development	Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to illustrate mastery of the subject, conveying the writer's understanding, and shaping the whole work.	Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work.	Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop and explore ideas through most of the work.	Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop simple ideas in some part of the work.
Sources and Evidence	Demonstrates skillful use of high quality, credible, relevant sources to develop ideas. Writer contextualizes sources and credits sources throughout the essay in a works cited/bibliography page or other appropriate source documentation format.	Demonstrates consistent use of credible, relevant sources to support ideas. Writer clearly identifies sources in essay and in a works cited/bibliography page or other appropriate source documentation format.	Demonstrates an attempt to use credible and/or relevant sources to support ideas. Writer generally identifies sources in essay and in a works cited/bibliography page or other appropriate source documentation format.	Demonstrates a basic attempt to use sources to support ideas. Writer does not consistently credit borrowed material to its source in essay and/or in a works cited/bibliography page or other appropriate source documentation format.
Control of Syntax and Mechanics	Uses effective, virtually error-free, language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency.	Uses straightforward language with minimal errors to convey clear meaning to readers.	Uses language that conveys general meaning to readers although the language may contain some errors.	Uses language that sometimes impedes meaning because of errors in usage.

Adapted for The University of Texas at Arlington
from AAC&U's Written Communication VALUE Rubric
Last Revised 9/24/2014