The Writing Requirement

Brown's open curriculum has long supported one general education requirement: that all students demonstrate the ability to write well. This fundamental aspect of liberal education has been a part of the curriculum since the late nineteenth century. Why? Good writing is essential to learning. Across the disciplines, scholars, teachers, and students write to explore ideas, uncover nuances of thought, and advance knowledge. Writing is not only a medium through which we communicate and persuade; it is also a means for expanding our capacities to think clearly.

The specific steps students must take to meet the writing requirement are detailed on the reverse side of this sheet. It’s important to know that the requirement as it is laid out here is a minimum expectation. Our hope is that students will work on their writing throughout their four years. By embracing this responsibility, students will become stronger writers and thinkers, thus fulfilling a critical aspect of their liberal education.

Courses that meet the requirement

There are three types of courses students can take to meet the writing requirement. All three types engage students in the writing process, provide them with feedback on their prose, and provide opportunities for revision.

Writing-designated (WRIT) courses provide students with feedback about their writing and opportunities to apply that feedback on the same assignment or when completing writing assignments later in the course. Offered in nearly all departments, WRIT courses for a particular semester may be viewed in the Banner class schedule by selecting "Writing-Designated Courses" in the Attribute Type section.

Writing Fellows courses allow students to work on their writing with a Brown undergraduate, called a Writing Fellow, who has been trained in composition and pedagogy. Writing Fellows read drafts of student papers and meet in conferences with student writers to discuss the drafts. When grading papers, professors in Writing Fellows courses consider both the process the student went through and the final product.

English, Comparative Literature, and Literary Arts courses all meet the writing requirement. Students are especially encouraged to enroll in English 110, which focuses on critical reading and writing, or English 130, which focuses on the research essay. Other popular courses focus on journalistic writing (English 160) and creative nonfiction (English 180).
How to meet the Writing Requirement

All undergraduate students must work on their writing at least twice: once during the first half of their college experience, and once during the second half.

With the exception of transfer students, who may meet Part I of the writing requirement with a course from a prior institution, only courses taken at Brown meet the requirement.

PART I of the Requirement

What to do: Successfully complete an approved course at Brown University
See page 1 for courses that meet the requirement.

When: During the first two years of study at Brown (semesters 1-4)

Transfer students admitted as sophomores

May meet Part I with an approved English, Literary Arts, or Comparative Literature course taken at their prior institution. Sophomore transfers with no such course must take an approved course at Brown, but they have an additional two terms to meet Part I of the requirement.

Transfer students admitted as juniors are exempt from Part I of the requirement.

PART II of the Requirement

What to do: Take another approved Brown course

~or~

Upload a paper you wrote for another Brown course into your writing portfolio in ASK.

When: Semesters 5 through 7

Multiple writing courses taken in the first four semesters will not meet Part II of the writing requirement.

Students who do not meet the writing requirement during the stipulated terms receive a writing “check” in the comments section of their internal academic record. A student is not allowed to graduate with a writing check, which must be cleared through Brown’s Writing Center.

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