

English 280 Proficiency Exam Handout

Western Illinois University, Department of English, Writing Program

Students who believe they have mastered the goals and objectives of ENG 280 without taking the class may be able to earn proficiency credit. This document describes the process for preparing materials for the exam: 1) a portfolio of the student's writing, and 2) an exam (students write responses to a set of questions about their portfolio).

Deadlines:

- Prior to the start of the semester: Request a signed application form and submit it to the Registrar
- Tuesday of the second week of the semester: Receive exam questions via email.
- Thursday of the second week of the semester: Email complete portfolio to the director of the [Writing Program](#)

Course Goals and Objectives

This course focuses on writing as a social activity with the goal of providing you with the knowledge and strategies that will help you succeed as a writer in college and beyond. You will start to identify how rhetorics and genre influence your writerly choices. In doing so you will:

- Explore how power, privilege, and oppression affect the topics that are selected for research and the decisions writers make;
- Examine how your social identities, values, beliefs, and behaviors affect your writing;
- Learn the role discourse communities play in shaping writing expectations, grammar conventions, and genres and consider when these expectations should be followed or challenged;
- Employ flexible writing processes, including various invention, drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading strategies; using relevant, available technologies; and revising based on regular peer and instructor feedback;
- Apply an understanding of rhetorical situations (how audience, purpose, author, and message interact) and rhetorical appeals when engaging in writing and reading as social practices and forms of communication;
- Acquire strategies for formulating and articulating research questions and methods for primary and secondary research, including library research;
- Evaluate research for credibility, reliability, and relevance;
- Practice synthesizing, integrating, and citing multiple different sources in multiple citation styles.

Proficiency Credit for English 280

To receive Proficiency Credit for English 280, complete the following steps:

1. Prior to the start of the fall or spring semester, request a signed application form from the Director of Writing. Note that you cannot take the proficiency exam for ENG 280 if you have already taken the course.
2. Follow the directions on the form. You must submit this form to the Registrar prior to taking the proficiency exam.
3. Create a portfolio of your writing using the directions below. Familiarize yourself with the goals and objectives of ENG 280 as well as its place within the writing sequence at WIU. For more information on the writing sequence, please see our website: <http://www.wiu.edu/cas/english/writing/index.php>.
4. Proficiency Exams will take place online. Email the director of the [Writing Program](#) your portfolio materials (as outlined below) no later than 10 AM Tuesday of the second week of classes. The director will then email you a set of questions based on the materials you've submitted. You will need to email your responses to the director of the Writing Program no later than Thursday (10:00 AM), the second week of the semester.
5. If you are enrolled in ENG 280, you should attend class and submit work in class until notification that you have passed the proficiency exam. If you are force-enrolled in ENG 280, you will not be given permission to drop until you have passed the proficiency exam.

The Portfolio

The Proficiency Exam for English 280 requires you to prepare a portfolio of writing that shows you have mastered the goals and objectives of ENG 280. You are to submit a folder containing the following:

1. At least two papers, each approximately 4–6 pages long, written for college classes other than English 280. Professional writing you have done is also acceptable as long as it adheres to the length and content requirements. In rare cases, papers written in high school will be acceptable. The two papers should represent different kinds of writing (i.e., they should not both be literary analyses or researched arguments or reports). At least one of the papers should use primary research, and at least one of the papers should use secondary research. The most successful portfolios will provide papers from at least two different classes or professional contexts. Any pre-writing that you did for each paper should also be included. Copies with your teacher's comments are preferred. You are also welcome to revise either paper. If you choose to revise, please provide the original version in addition to the revised version.
2. **A cover letter** addressed to the Writing Program Director explaining why you feel you should be given proficiency credit. Include as much background as appropriate about

yourself as a writer. Discuss your method of writing and your experience as a writer. The question to be answered is, "Why should you be given credit for English 280 without having taken the course?"

A note on tone: You will need to make a strong case for yourself, so this is not a time to be overly modest. On the other hand, it won't serve you well to sound arrogant or self-righteous. The best bet is to write honestly about your methods, background, and experiences.

The Writing Committee, your audience for this letter, is made up of English Department faculty members. They will want to know as much as they can about you as a writer and a student. It will also help if you indicate an understanding of the goals and objectives of ENG 280.

The Exam

During the proficiency exam period (between Tuesday and Thursday of the second week in the semester) you will be required to write responses to a series of questions about the writing you have included in your portfolio and how that writing demonstrates mastery of the goals and objectives of ENG 280. Specific questions will be emailed to you on Tuesday of the second week of the semester. You must email your responses along with your completed portfolio to the director of the [Writing Program](#) by 10:00 AM on Thursday of the second week of the semester*.

Notification of Results

We will e-mail you to let you know if you have earned ENG 280 credit as soon as possible, definitely before the last day to drop a course and receive a full refund.

Questions about the proficiency exam should be directed to the Director of the [Writing Program](#), Dr. Lisa Parzefall at L-Parzefall@wiu.edu.

* This deadline may change based on need and when materials are received by the Director of the Writing Program.