

## Electronic Writing Portfolio Readings Report Fall 2006

Number of Readers: 22  
Number of Portfolios: 204  
Number of Papers: 657

Number of Portfolios w/ 2 submissions: 61  
Number of Portfolios w/ 3 submissions: 37  
Number of Portfolios w/ 4 submissions: 106

### **Method:**

In Fall 2005, volunteers were solicited from the faculty and staff. Readers were required to be full-time at Eastern, to have completed a master's degree or higher, and to teach at least one undergraduate course each year. Twenty-three readers were trained at a 1 ½-day workshop by Dr. Robert O'Brien Hokanson, Associate Professor of English and Coordinator of the Communication Ability Department at Alverno College. Readers came from all four colleges, the School of Continuing Education, the Center for Academic Support and Achievement, and Booth Library. Readers for Fall 2006 were trained in Fall 2005; they include:

LeAnn Athey, English  
Ronan Bernas, Psychology  
Kim Burnett, Bachelor of General Studies  
Melanie Burns, Family and Consumer Sciences  
Janet Cosbey, Sociology/Anthropology  
Tim Croy, Early Childhood, Elementary, and Middle Level Education  
Jonelle DePetro, Philosophy  
Jeff Duck, Early Childhood, Elementary, and Middle Level Education  
Carol Jean Dudley, English  
Jerry Eisenhour, Theater Arts  
Rose Gong, Secondary Education  
Karla Kennedy-Hagen, Family and Consumer Sciences  
Zhiwei Liu, Biological Sciences  
Gail Lockart, Early Childhood, Elementary, and Middle Level Education  
Wendy Long, Center for Academic Support and Achievement  
Daiva Markelis, English  
Bill Slough, Mathematics and Computer Sciences  
Jeff Snell, Management  
Scott Tremain, Chemistry  
Gordon Tucker, Biological Sciences  
Richard Wilkinson, Family and Consumer Sciences  
Bob Wiseman, Booth Library

Readers were urged to look at writing patterns across the portfolios rather than focusing on each individual document submitted to the portfolios. The reading guide asks readers to provide an assessment of writing ability for complete portfolios across seven aspects of writing: focus/purpose, organization, development, audience, style, mechanics, and use of sources. Readers are also asked to assess each portfolio overall.

A sample of 10% of the completed portfolios were read; readers were given a month to read their portfolios. Readers were given access to a secure web site and were assigned to read 9-10

portfolios that were chosen at random from the completed portfolios. After reading their set of portfolios, readers were asked to complete a reader's observation sheet and to attend one of four focus groups held at the end of October-early November to discuss student writing as displayed by the portfolios.

The qualitative data that follows represents the discussions at the focus groups as well as information taken from the reader's guides and observation sheets; all information has been collated and summarized by the Director of the Center for Academic Support and Achievement. A draft of this report was disseminated via email for readers' comments. Changes to the report were made based on those comments. The percentages given for each assessment of the various areas of writing are taken from a compilation of scores given by the readers for **each portfolio**, *not* each document.

The following data are divided into the categories assessed by the readers and their impressions of the portfolios as a whole, the potential uses for the data in terms of improving the curriculum/pedagogy, and readers' ideas for changes to the EWP itself. Where appropriate, readers' written and verbal comments have been quoted to support the general conclusions that have been drawn.

### **Portfolios Overall**

**Strong Portfolios:** 28%

**Adequate Portfolios:** 55%

**Weak Portfolios:** 17%

Several readers felt that the majority of portfolios were "consistently average." Only one or two portfolios per reader were deemed impressive. "All portfolios this year were very similar, much harder to differentiate adequate and weak. Focus and development were the weakest areas overall. Even the portfolios I rated weak don't seem as poor as last year's bunch. . . . Only one portfolio this year is what I would consider really strong." Another reader noted, "Most of the portfolios I read were strong on focus, audience, and organization. Although most of them had "adequate" development of ideas, that was the weakest area. I still had a few that were "weak" in style and mechanics—in every submission—which continues to be surprising to me."

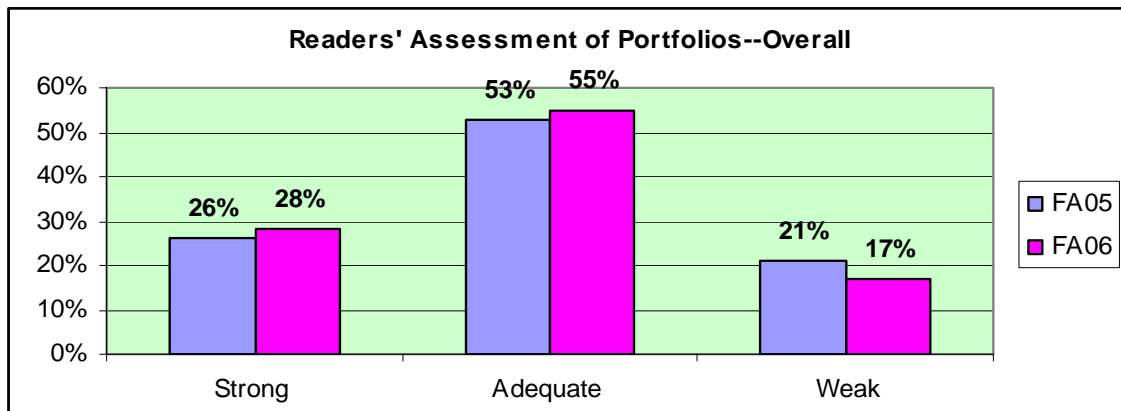
Portfolio submissions overall seemed to focus more on content/subject matter than audience. Little sophistication in writing was noted. "I found myself thinking that most of the papers I read were "adequate," often with more than a few simple mechanical errors that ought to be easily addressed—yet were left uncorrected. In very few cases it seemed that a student was writing on a topic that was of personal interest, which had a very positive effect on the end product. In most other cases, I thought that the topic really didn't interest the student and the paper simply served as a requirement that was being met."

As with last year's readings, papers from the writing-centered English 1001 and 1002 were better written than those submitted from other levels. "As was the case last year, the first submissions seemed in many ways to be the most focused and developed. It was interesting and gratifying to see students in a few of the portfolios write about a discipline in various ways and in different genres. In one strong portfolio, the writer was clearly a political science major; three of the essays covered such topics as freedom of speech, civic rights, and the uses of power." Several readers noted that overall this year's portfolios appeared stronger than last year's, and the

disparity between senior seminar submissions and other submissions was not noticeable. “The writing within the portfolios this year seemed very consistent with the submission from 1001 and 1002 (if they had one) still the strongest—probably because writing is more of a focus in those courses. I didn’t have any that made me think ‘wow’ this person really got a lot better (or a lot worse) at their writing over the course of their college career. So, many of them gave me the feeling that the writer had established a writing style that worked and kept with it (and not always to their advantage!).” Some readers indicated that a few portfolios showed growth or maturity of writing across the submissions.

Some readers found stronger development in this year’s portfolios than in those read last year. “Student voice and their opinions were more clearly developed in this set of portfolios. There were fewer examples of when a student said they disagreed with something but didn’t say why. They further developed their ideas and opinions beyond the simplistic (i.e., ‘I’m in favor of this because it is good.’) to more thoughtful descriptions.” Others found development to be an issue: “The most serious recurring problem among the papers I read is the lack of organization and linking of ideas. Each paragraph taken on its own may be fine, but there is a lack of overall cohesion.” Another reader concurred and added that “some [writers] tend to jump from one topic to another without the necessary transitions. Most essays are simply presentation of facts, often in a list-like manner, with no attempts to integrate or present a coherent idea; ideas are not pursued fully; arguments presented are mostly one-sided and do not display complexity or ability to think critically; personal opinions or claims are made but are not justified.”

The chart below compares the readers’ assessment of the portfolios read across the first two years of readings. The percentage of portfolios judged to be strong overall rose by 2% from 2005 to 2006 as did the percentage rated adequate. The portfolios judged to be weak overall fell by 4%.



The sections that follow discuss the strengths and weaknesses readers found in portfolios by area of writing.

## Focus/Purpose

**Strong:** 28%  
Consistently strong sense of focus/purpose throughout

**Adequate:** 53%  
Clear focus/purpose in most or all submissions

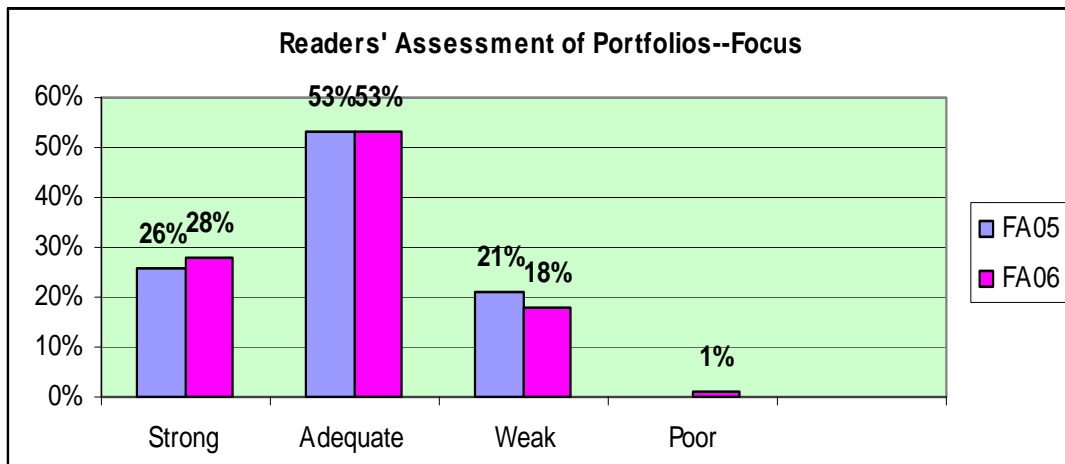
**Weak:** 18%  
Some evidence of ability to focus on a purpose

**Poor:** 1%  
Very little or no evidence of focus

There were some differences among the focus groups in terms of focus and purpose. Three of the four groups thought that this year's portfolios were stronger in this arena than last year while one focus group found more problems. "I found that of the many papers without a clear stated purpose, the writer tended to wander off topic, if there was a topic at all."

Overall, many readers found that most portfolios showed that students could indicate purpose and stay focused on the assignment or a given topic although most found the majority of portfolios to be simply adequate with this skill. Several readers noted that some portfolio entries showed that students were clearly writing for a faculty member who knew what the assignment was, so clearly stating the focus or purpose did not seem to be a priority to a number of the student writers.

The chart below compares the readers' assessment of the portfolios read across the first two years of readings. The percentage of portfolios that were deemed strong rose by 2% in 2006 while weak portfolios fell by 3%.



## Organization

**Strong:** 20%  
Consistent use of structure in ways that enhance presentation of ideas/information

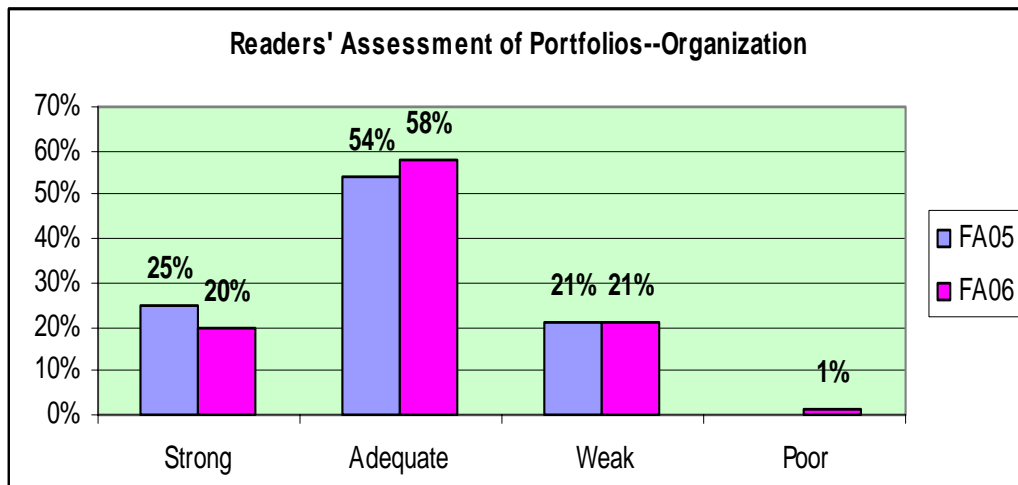
**Adequate:** 58%  
Logical organization and/or clearly identifiable structure

**Weak:** 21%  
Inconsistent sense of structure and/or lapses in organization

**Poor:** 1%  
Very little or no sense of structure or organization

Some readers indicated that organization was one of the weakest skills across the portfolios. One reader noted that she had five portfolios that were adequate in this category and four that were weak. Problems surrounding organization included very few transitions/cueing devices used between sentences or paragraphs, and many students had issues with paragraphing with some paragraphs going on for a couple of pages. Other issues mentioned were students using too many quotes in a paragraph and lack of awareness that readers need sign markers like headings, transitional sentences, and strong thesis statements. One reader observed that the portfolios showed basic organizational patterns: “They got their introductory paragraph and said what they were going to write about, then went paragraph by paragraph explaining what they were going to write. They looked like my son’s 7<sup>th</sup> grade papers. They just followed a logical pattern, nothing creative, just adequate.” Some readers indicated that there were some portfolios with really strong writing. Several readers lamented the “laundry list” paper that listed fact after fact after fact with little or no analysis or explanation in between.

The chart below compares the readers’ assessment of the portfolios read across the first two years of readings. In Fall 2006 the percentage of portfolios assessed to be strong in organization dropped by 5% from the first readings in Fall 2005 while the percentage in the weak category remained the same.



## Development

**Strong:** 21%

Ideas consistently developed in depth and supported with rich and relevant details

**Adequate:** 47%

Ideas developed in depth with appropriate supporting evidence/details

**Weak:** 30%

Some development of ideas and use of supporting evidence/details

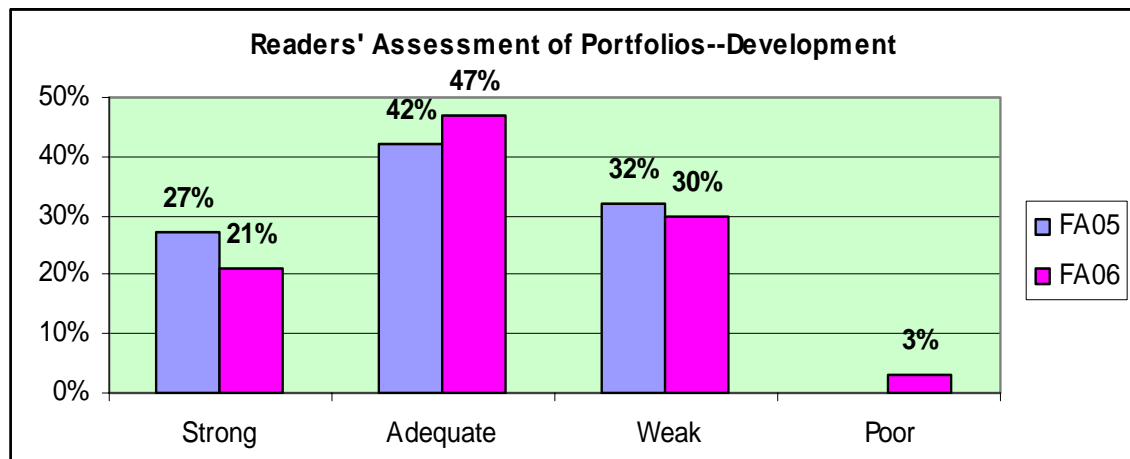
**Poor:** 3%

Very little or no development of ideas or use of supporting evidence

Development was the area that many readers indicated was one of the weakest among the portfolios; several readers linked a lack of development to poor critical thinking skills. Readers described development issues such as lacking rich and relevant details, making only superficial arguments rather than going in-depth, and lack of supporting evidence for claims made. While many portfolios had several submissions that indicated weak development, most readers had a few very memorable papers that were rich in descriptive detail and displayed an enthusiasm or passion for the subject. "One person described an event about a person in their hometown. It was well written. I wanted to know more."

Several readers indicated that scientific papers had less of an issue with development since by their very nature such documents demand a certain amount of detailed information.

The chart below compares the readers' assessment of the portfolios read across the first two years of readings. In Fall 2006 readers determined that 21% of portfolios were strong in the category of development which is a drop of 6% in the previous year. The percentage of portfolios falling into the adequate range rose by 5% while those assessed as weak fell by 2%. This topic is second to sources for the most portfolios assessed as poor.



## Style

**Strong:** 20%

Sophisticated use of language (sentence structure, word choice) that enhances presentation of ideas/information

**Adequate:** 57%

Appropriate use of language that effectively conveys ideas/information

**Weak:** 21%

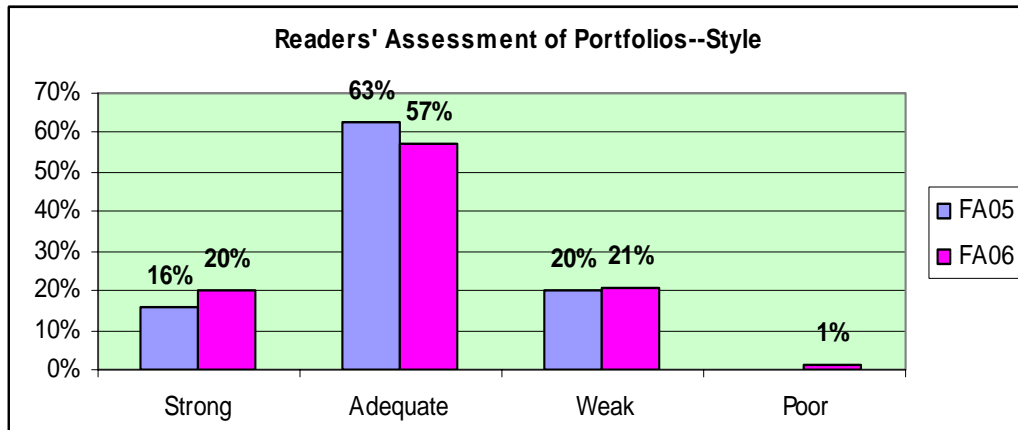
Use of language that is awkward, unnecessarily complex, and/or overly simplistic

**Poor:** 1%

Use of language that is highly inconsistent or indeterminate

Readers commented on similar issues this year to those identified last year in terms of style: lack of sophisticated or academic language; colloquial language; limited vocabulary; awkward phrasing. “In terms of style, few of these papers jumped out at me as the kind I get excited about when written by one of my students. While nearly all the portfolios are adequate or strong, few papers have a real sense of individual style.” “Immature” was used by multiple readers to describe much of the writing. Several focus group members questioned the amount of revision being done by students. Readers also commented on a lack of interest or passion in the writing. “The language overall was a little more sophisticated but going back to the wow factor, if you want to consider that style, I just didn’t see passion or strong voice that seemed engaged with the writing.”

The chart below compares the readers’ assessment of the portfolios read across the first two years of readings. Portfolios considered strong by readers in Fall 2006 rose by 4% over those read in 2005 while those falling into the adequate range dropped by 6%.



## Audience

**Strong:** 24%

Sophisticated sense of audience—e.g., distinctive voice and/or appropriate tone

**Adequate:** 59%

Some awareness of and/or attempt to communicate with audience

**Weak:** 17%

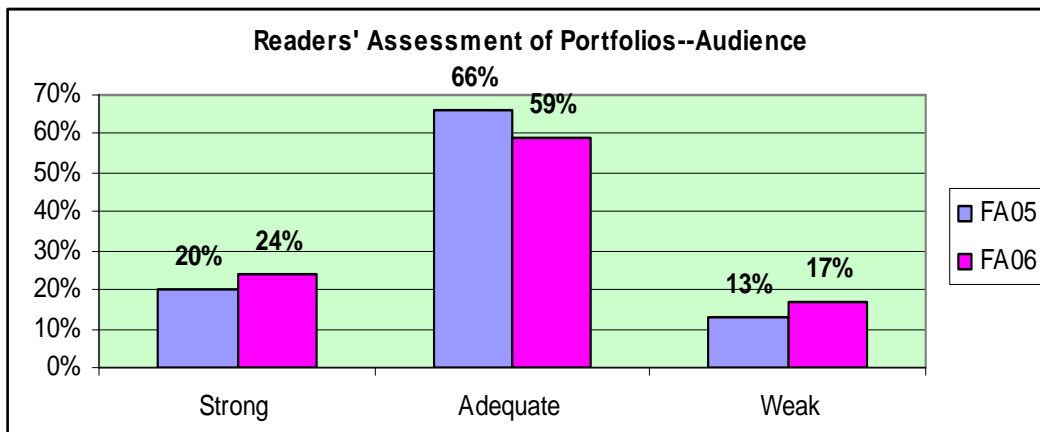
Little or no awareness of audience

**Poor:** 0

No sense of writing for an audience

Readers indicated that most portfolios showed students writing primarily for their instructor rather than an external audience. “Everything was geared towards one person—the instructor of the course. I don’t think anything I read gave me the impression that the student thought anyone else would read it.” One reader noted that she makes an effort in her classes to require her students to write for an audience other than the instructor, “I try to make assignments that they can imagine a real life audience. This report is for a boss, try to convince him of something—purpose and audience. I discourage writing just for me. I think this is more real life writing. You don’t write for a teacher in real life. So, I encourage them to imagine an audience outside the classroom.” Another reader concurred and suggested that students did not explain enough. “they’re writing for a grade and they’re not showing you they understand the material enough to show you something original about it.”

The chart below compares the readers’ assessment of the portfolios read across the first two years of readings. Strong portfolios went up by 4% in 2006 from 2005 while those considered adequate fell by 7% and the percentage deemed weak rose by 4%. No portfolios in this category were considered to be poor by readers.



## Mechanics

**Strong:** 29%

Few, if any, errors in mechanics relative to length and complexity of documents

**Adequate:** 49%

Some errors in mechanics that do not interfere significantly with communication

**Weak:** 22%

Patterns of errors in mechanics that affect clarity and/or credibility of writing

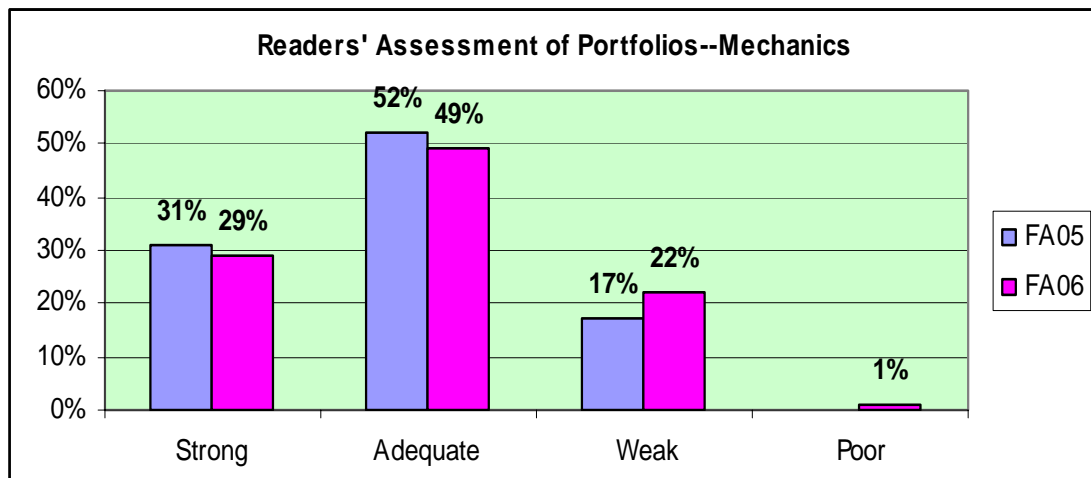
**Poor:** 1%

Large numbers of errors in mechanics affecting almost all aspects of the writing

Readers were torn over the issue of mechanics and the severity of mechanical issues. Some readers indicated that mechanical problems were more of an issue in this year's portfolios than in last year's while others disagreed. "This is the most aggravating. It shouldn't be that hard—things like "to" and "too" and missing commas. Why aren't these things being fixed?" Students tended to make the same errors throughout the submissions in their portfolios. Readers noted some mechanical issues that hurt communication; these errors were at the sentence and paragraph level. Such errors include lack of subject/verb agreement, sentence fragments, run-on sentences, spelling errors (especially substituting homonyms), vague pronoun references, and incorrect use of verb tenses.

While readers commented on problems with mechanics, very few submissions could not be understood. "It seems to me the sophistication of style should be a progression that gets better by the fourth year. I saw a backward trend there. I saw more mechanics and grammar problems than I'd like to see, but nothing was completely unreadable. But, I think we should be doing better than it's readable and not completely unreadable."

The chart below compares the readers' assessment of the portfolios read across the first two years of readings. Strong portfolios fell by 2% from 2005 while adequate dropped by 3% and weak rose by 5%. Although the percentage of portfolios judged to be strong was lower in Fall 2006 than last year, this category of writing ability received the highest percentage of portfolios rated as strong.



## Sources

**Strong:** 25%

Ability to integrate ideas/information from sources into own writing in meaningful and appropriate ways

**Adequate:** 55%

Some effective integration of ideas/information from source

**Weak:** 11%

Inappropriate/ineffective integration of ideas/information

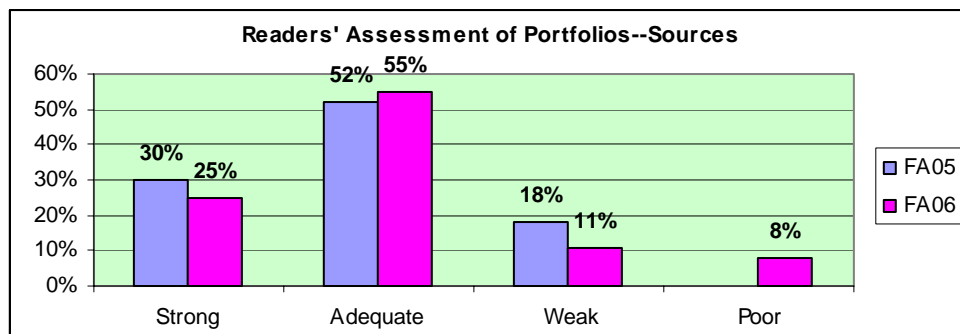
**Poor/NA:** 8%

No attempt to integrate ideas/information from sources

Readers expressed surprise at the small number of research papers in the portfolios as a whole. Since students are not required to submit papers that use outside sources, some portfolios contained no papers that incorporated sources. Issues surrounding sources included not knowing how to use a particular style of documentation, incorporating quotations into a paragraph, explaining the significance or importance of the quotation or reference, “I would like to see better INTEGRATION of quoted material into sentences. Half did well, the other half were only ‘ok.’” Some readers took this idea of integration of source material and connected it to development of ideas or using evidence to make a point. “I would like to see better use of quotes when they do use sources, better interpretations of the quotes. It’s like here’s their sentence, and here’s their quote, and boom, I did it and now we’re moving n to something else. [I want to know] why is it there?”

Other readers expressed concern over the sources students were using. “Documentation remains a problem. In several of the essays, writers used internet sources such as Wikipedia that are questionable. One writer used facts that were completely unsupported by sources; it’s highly doubtful that he/she knew this information from personal experience or first-hand research.” Despite the concerns expressed by the readers, they all acknowledged that this writing area was difficult to assess since not all students submitted documents that required research and documentation.

The chart below compares the readers’ assessment of the portfolios read across the first two years of readings. Portfolios deemed to be strong in the use of sources fell 5% from 2005 to 2006 while the number rated as adequate rose by 3%. When given the choice of poor as a category, readers selected this choice over weak. This is the category that received the highest percentage of poor ratings.



## **Using Data to Develop Curriculum & Improve Pedagogy**

After reading all of their portfolios, readers were asked to indicate ways in which the information gleaned from the readings could be used to develop curriculum and/or improve pedagogy. Many readers are quoted in this section to preserve the intent of their suggestions. Two themes emerged from readers' responses to this topic: uses for changes in the classroom, assignments, and in the curriculum; and the need to education faculty on writing issues.

### **Writing Instruction in the Classroom, Assignments, and Curriculum**

Some readers felt that citing sources and evaluating the quality of sources were important aspects that needed to be emphasized more. "We need to be assisting students in documenting sources. They seem to USE them logically and purposefully in what I have read here. However, they can't document effectively." Another reader agreed, and suggested that we could support/co-sponsor Turnitin sessions or workshops with WAC on MLA and APA style.

Several readers suggested that instructors draw students' attention to considering audience as they write. "Provide assignments that encourage a stronger consideration for audience. Much of what I read here seemed, to me, to be for 'anyone out there' to read. With some of these, I assumed an audience for a given field (example: readers of history or readers of current events). That assumption is based solely on the fact that all submissions had a common theme, or close to. Whereas, the essay itself should be a clearer indicator. When there was no common theme in the portfolio itself, the papers seemed a vague response to audience." Readers speculated that this problem could be found in the assignment itself as well as in the students' abilities.

Several readers expressed frustration with grammar and mechanical issues in students' papers and made suggestions regarding ameliorating this issue. "I feel EIU should require all students to attend an English writing course early in their studies. There needs to be writing workshops provided for students outside class time. The workshop focus should be on grammatical structure, idea organization, the use of vocabulary and writing style. It is disheartening to read the same grammatical mistake that would appear again and again in all 4 submissions. It shows that the student had never learned the use of correct English grammar throughout the 4 years at EIU, which reflects poorly on our programs. The writing intensive courses are not able to raise a student's writing ability due to time constraints for the curriculum and a lack of a systematic plan and intensity needed for training in English grammar and writing. There needs [to be] a special class or workshop available for needy students." Another reader suggested that this could be done at the classroom level. "I find myself being frustrated by having to stumble over and re-parse due to a lack of commas and other punctuation. More emphasis should be placed on these fundamentals."

Incorporating critical thinking assessment into the EWP was mentioned this year as well as last year. Critical thinking was linked by some readers to development. "The weakness in 'development' is associated with weaknesses in critical thinking and argumentative reasoning. Likewise, the weakness in 'style' is probably due to lack of exposure to sophisticated literature (which could also serve as models for good writing) and a rich vocabulary. I believe that good and effective writing goes hand in hand with reading. Much of what we need for writing (e.g., a rich vocabulary) comes from reading and knowing how to think. Our curricula should emphasize not only writing, but also reading and critical thinking." Other readers suggested workshops for faculty as a way to improve critical thinking as displayed through student writing. "Some of the essays seemed simplistic in their premises; students should be challenged with assignments that make them grapple with difficult concepts. I'm not sure how this can be encouraged, especially

since it takes longer (in general) to grade and comment on a difficult assignment. Workshops emphasizing critical thinking might be effective.”

A curriculum issue that was discussed was the intensity of writing instruction in the WI courses. “I am concerned that some of the so-called Writing Intensive (WI) courses are not, in my opinion, very intense. Some of the samples are very short, one or two pages. Maybe ‘someone’ needs to address what is writing intensive.”

### **Educating Instructors**

Several readers made suggestions on ways to educate faculty members on writing matters and ways to share the data from the readings. “The evidence [from the readings] clearly shows areas that need development and those that don’t. I think the important factor to consider is making sure WI instructors have a clear rubric of what is expected to be included in their assignments to the students. If we can present some sort of format, or general requirements as to what to look for, the students’ writing can only improve. Part of the problem lies in the fact that non-writing faculty members are teaching writing intensive courses. How can we expect our students to become proficient at writing if their instructors aren’t knowledgeable in that area, or don’t look for ways to help their students improve their writing techniques? I’m left with the same suggestion I made last time; ENG 1001 and ENG 1002 are good for incoming freshmen and sophomores, but our upper division students need an upper division methods of writing class as well. I know we have an advanced composition class, but it isn’t required at this point. Should it be?”

Several instructors indicated that sharing results with faculty was important. “While I know that the results of this analysis are shared with the university as a whole, I feel that a summary review piece sent to instructors of WI classes would be helpful. This may provide those teaching the WI classes an opportunity to discuss strengths and weaknesses of writing across campus with the students in the class, and to discuss how to improve upon the weaknesses. In addition, such a class discussion may reinforce upon the student that the EWP submissions are taken seriously, that they are read and analyzed, and that the university bases decisions on the quality of the work submitted. Sharing the results with the students may help to overcome the concept that the EWP submissions are just a ‘hoop to jump through’ before graduating.”<sup>1</sup>

The revision component was another area targeted for educating faculty. “I’m not convinced all students are incorporating instructors’ changes in the version they submit to the EWP. Perhaps faculty need more specific instructions on how to handle papers that will eventually come to the EWP.”

One reader noted that student writing will not improve if the faculty as a whole do not embrace making writing improvement a priority. “If the faculty don’t see it as part of their mission to aid in good writing skills then nothing else that is implemented will last.”

### **Suggested Changes for the EWP Process**

In addition to asking readers for their advice on using the data gleaned from the EWP readings for improvement of student writing, we also asked readers to provide ideas on improving the EWP

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<sup>1</sup> A one-page synopsis of findings from the Fall 2005 readings was developed by Dr. Daiva Markelis, Director of the Writing Center and chair of WAC. This synopsis was sent via campus mail to all WI instructors in Fall 2006.

itself and the reading process. Their suggestions for changes to the EWP itself follow; again, several quotes from the reader observation forms are given here to preserve the integrity of the comments:

- Some readers noted the difficulty of assessing writing when the assignment seemed to call for a list or many tables without much narrative or analysis. “Two portfolios contained only 2 submissions and one of those was “media for a day.” With these, it’s hard to form solid conclusions on the writing when this particular assignment doesn’t seem to request a lot of analysis. Organization in these essays was chronological at best.”
- Readers found assessing portfolios with four documents easier than assessing portfolios with only two submissions. “It was difficult to judge the overall quality of the portfolios because some portfolios would have 1 pretty strong paper and 1 pretty weak paper.” Another reader noted, “It was difficult to clearly compare students across several years of progress as many portfolios did not have evidence of writing at all four levels.”
- In addition to a small number of submissions, some readers found very short documents made it difficult to look at writing in the portfolio as a whole—especially in terms of development.
- Adding a reflective document to the portfolio was mentioned again this year. “I had a good submission by a student who had a reflection at the end, which must be required by that assignment where the student said, “I did this article and I probably didn’t spend enough time proofreading it, and if I would have strengthened this area, maybe I would have gotten a better grade. So, if the students could do a reflection of that portfolio process on each revision they submit, or after they submit portfolio 2 or 3, or after the last one, maybe it would get them thinking about things they need to develop or work on.”
- “What makes it difficult is that an ENG instructor will look for different things than say a BIO instructor. In my opinion, the focus for an ENG instructor is the writing process and how each student is able to complete it, writing ability versus content alone. For a BIO instructor, the focus might be more on content than actual ability. Of course, I could just be assuming this, but I think that all readers will read the submissions from a different standpoint. And of course, what we feel is reasonable/acceptable could be different from others. But as far as the areas that we assess from, I didn’t find a problem with knowing what was expected from each focus. Topic selection, from the students, is another issue. Hard to know if the student has correctly informed us about a topic we know nothing about!”
- Several readers suggested that we should ask the student to indicate the type of assignment on the form—narrative, comparison, etc.—or collect the assignment in another way.
- Concerns were expressed about ways to encourage students to do more revision and to submit the final product.
- One reader indicated that she would like for students to receive feedback from the portfolio process before their senior year, so they would not see the EWP as just a hurdle, but so they could see their own growth.
- Readers encouraged making the submission process more electronic..

- “The major weakness to the EWP itself is there is not a consistent standard I how professors sign off.”

**Suggestions for changing the assessment of full portfolios were few. Reader comments follow:**

- “I would like to see 5 levels of overall performance instead of 3.”
- “I think all 7 areas highlight the important parts of the writing process. For me, this rubric makes a great deal of sense and offers us a change to help students focus on what should be included and how to do that.”
- “Some students provided samples that displayed a wide range of ability; this makes it difficult to assign a score for the entire sample. While it may be that the student’s writing ability improved over time, we are not able to make that conclusion without knowing the timing of when the papers were completed. In addition, we do not know the importance of each paper in regards to the course grade. It seems likely and reasonable that a student would put more time and effort (including proofreading and revisions) into a paper which constituted a major component of a course grade, as opposed to a paper which had little impact on the course grade. As readers, not knowing the importance of the paper makes it difficult to provide an overall assessment when some papers are strong and some are weak.”
- “The format for judging the students’ writing performance is appropriate and all encompassing. I don’t see any weaknesses in the scoring guide.”
- Several readers mentioned that the section on the use of sources was difficult to determine since some students did not submit a bibliography or list of works cited and it was not apparent whether sources were required for the assignment or not. “The form could still make a better distinction between how students use sources to support their ideas and how they document sources. I found myself torn in the ‘score’ . . . they could use them wisely, but they couldn’t document them. So, which do I check?”
- Readers have also indicated that only the best writers can write in a way that indicates audience. Most students seem to be writing for their instructors, but it is not clear whether that was the assignment or not. Audience is hard to judge for scientific submissions, noted one reader. Another reader commented that students whose portfolios were strong excelled at audience awareness.
- Several readers suggested adding a section on creativity and originality that would include critical or independent thinking. “Although most of the portfolios exhibited some awareness of an audience, the essays I read lacked a sense of ‘voice.’ While many are able to summarize and relate facts that they’ve read, most of the writings did not exhibit the students’ own personal contribution (i.e., their own personal opinions, assessments, integration, etc.). There was not ‘I’ with its own ideas and opinions. If there were any attempts to do so, they were not fully developed or adequately justified. It is common to simply say ‘I agree’ or ‘I think it is good.’ Perhaps we need a criterion called ‘authentic voice’ or ‘voice.’”

- “I enjoy the process as far as I enjoy reading them. I think it’s interesting to see the different fields covered and it makes me more aware of what’s going on across campus because I don’t see the sciences or psychology. I think it’s enlightening.”