



Assessment Report:	Electronic Writing Portfolio Readings Report
Assessment Period:	Academic Year 2021
Submitted by:	Dr. Suzie Park, Special Assistant to the Provost on Student Learning

THE TEAM

In Fall 2021, Dr. Suzie Park, who had just started as the Special Assistant to the Provost on Student Learning, asked for volunteer readers from the existing pool of readers from recent years.

The readers, along with their academic affiliations, are as follows:

- Dr. Karen Drage**, Technology, Lumpkin College of Business & Technology
- Dr. Terri Fredrick**, English, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
- Dr. Angela Jacobs**, Communication Studies, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
- Dr. Nichole Mulvey**, Communication Disorders & Sciences, College of Health & Human Services
- Dr. Jeff Snell**, Management, Lumpkin College of Business & Technology
- Dr. Tim Taylor**, English, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

THE PROCESS

Readers were asked to look at writing patterns across the portfolios rather than focus 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:

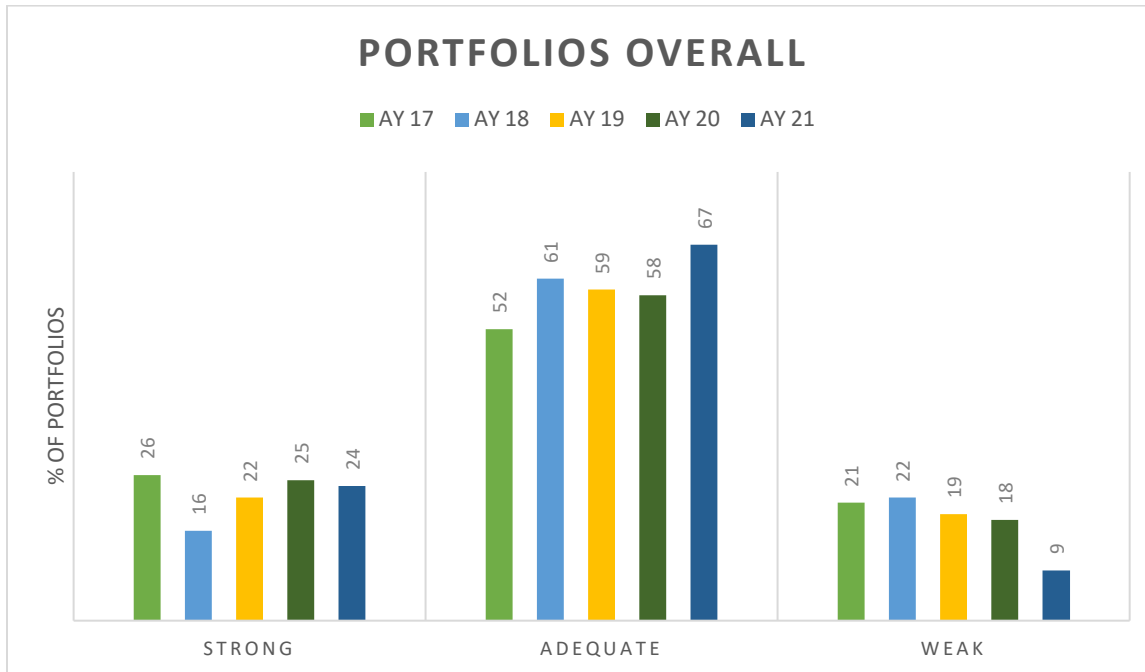
focus/purpose, organization, development, audience, style, mechanics, and use of sources.

Readers completed a reading guide for each of the six portfolios they read. Readers also completed a summative Reader Observations sheet, in which they assessed the whole set of six portfolios that they read.

In order to produce two rounds of readings in quick succession (one for Academic Year 2021—delayed by staff turnover and the pandemic—and one for Academic Year 2022 in the Spring of 2022), Park asked for six readers in Fall 2021, assigned six student writing portfolios to each reader, and requested complete reading reports by the end of October 2021. Since each complete portfolio is composed of three papers submitted by a student, chosen at random from complete portfolios only, each reader was assigned 18 papers. Due to a deliberate overlap of readers for 6 of the 36 portfolios, there were some portfolios that were not accessible on the OneDrive file share system. This resulted in a slightly lower number than the intended 108 individual assessments, and meant that readers conducted a total of 99 individual assessments.

THE RESULTS

The “Portfolios Overall” chart covers the last 5 years of EWP data collection and assessment. After this chart covering overall results, the remaining charts align with the 7 categories assessed by readers. Note that each chart captures readers’ assessment of the portfolios as a whole. This report quotes directly from the readers’ comments to lend evidence for our larger assessment. Percentages correlate with the portion of portfolios rated in the 7 categories.

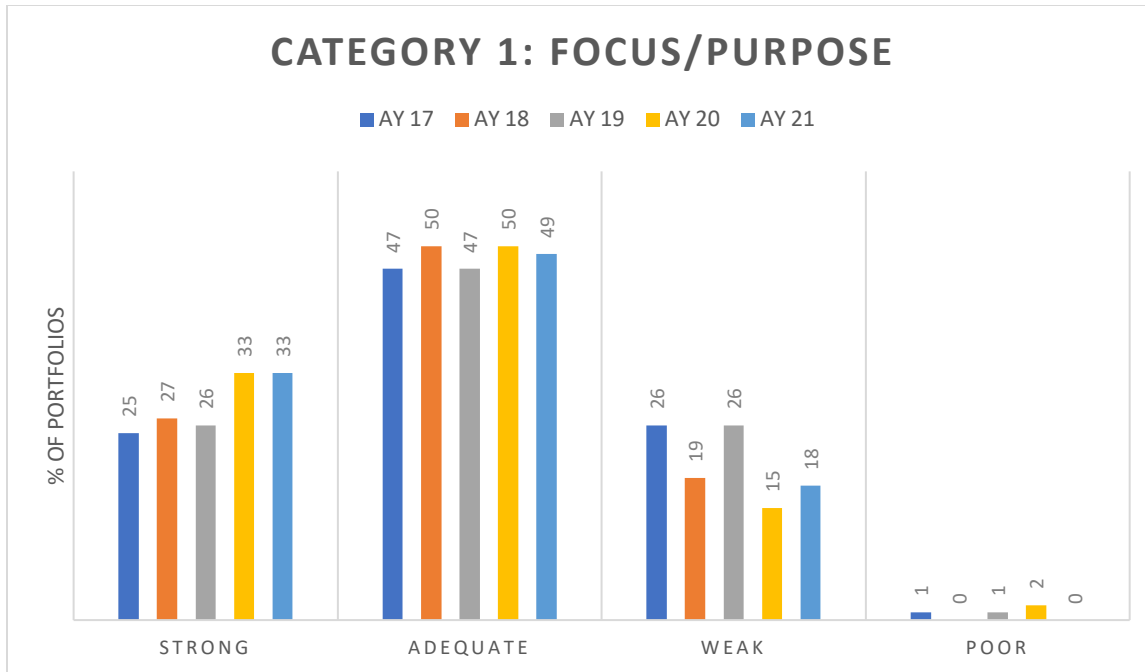


Strong Portfolios: 24%

Adequate Portfolios: 67%

Weak Portfolios: 9%

Comparing AY 21 over AY 20, the percentage of portfolios rated “strong” stayed flat, at 24%. The majority of portfolios rated “adequate” rose from 58% to 67%. “Weak” portfolios fell from 18% to 9%.



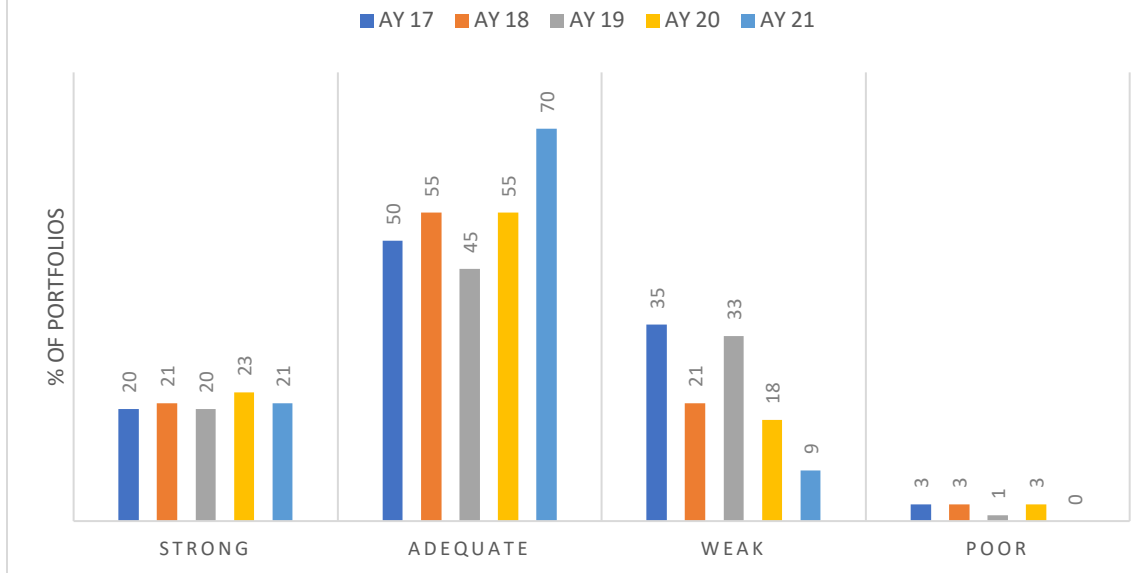
- 33% Strong** consistently strong sense of focus/purpose throughout
- 49% Adequate** clear focus/purpose in most or all submissions
- 18% Weak** some evidence of ability to focus on a purpose
- 0 Poor** very little or no evidence of focus

FOCUS/PURPOSE: Comparing AY 21 over AY 20, the percentage of portfolios rated “strong” stayed flat, at 33%. The majority of portfolios are rated “adequate,” a group that essentially stayed flat, at 49%. “Weak” portfolios increased from 15% to 18%. “Poor” portfolios went from 2% to 0.

Focus/Purpose seems to be one of the most bifurcated of the categories readers assessed. Why? Some readers noted a marked “lack of focus” throughout portfolio sets, while others noted portfolios that are “consistently strong across papers.” Readers often attributed strong portfolios to what could only be surmised as clearer assignments and rubrics: “Students appeared to know what they were supposed to convey in the paper.”

One reader noted that there was a significant absence of “strong evidence of students’ ability to think of their writing as an act of communicating with a reader in need of information.” While this critique could be suitable for the “Audience” category, this reminds us of the crucial role of “focus/purpose” in any act of writing. After all, if students don’t know why they are writing, and to whom, and for what purpose, then all is lost.

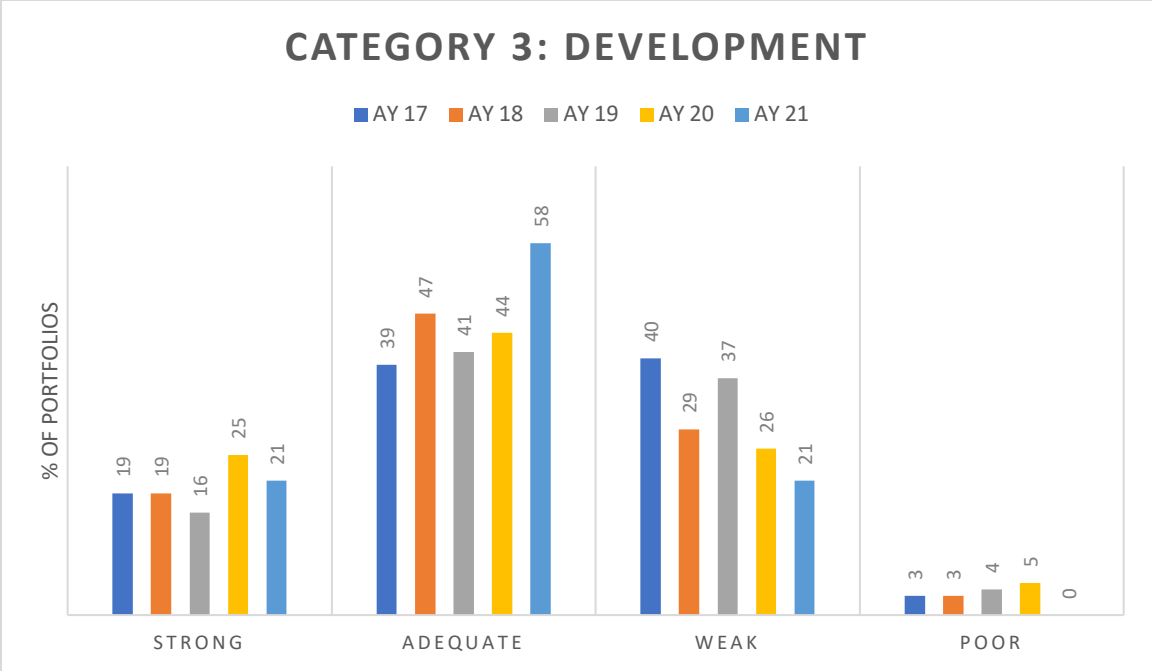
CATEGORY 2: ORGANIZATION



- 21% Strong** Consistent use of structure enhancing presentation of ideas/information
- 70% Adequate** Logical organization and/or clearly identifiable structure
- 9% Weak** Inconsistent sense of structure and/or lapses in organization
- 0 Poor** Very little or no sense of structure or organization

ORGANIZATION: Comparing AY 21 over AY 20, the percentage of portfolios rated “strong” dipped slightly, from 23% to 21%. The majority of portfolios are rated “adequate,” a sector that rose significantly, from 55% to 70%. “Weak” portfolios fell from 18% to 9%. “Poor” portfolios dipped from 3% to 0%.

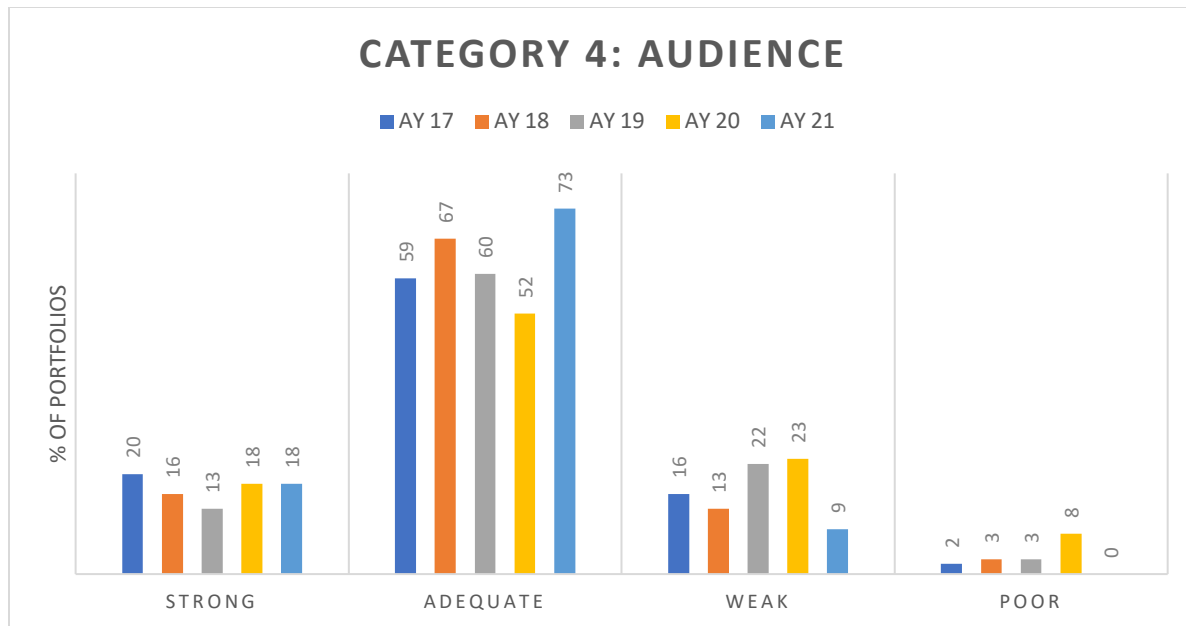
The greatest gains in Organization are in the “adequate” rating, with more than one reader noting that “students seem to be utilizing various tools to aid their organization (like headings) more than in the past.” However, one reader noted the disturbing presence of more papers exhibiting a “stream of consciousness” writing style: “While there was some organization, it seemed that they organized ideas by whatever popped into their head in that moment.”



21% Strong: Ideas consistently developed in depth and supported with rich and relevant details
58% Adequate: Ideas developed in depth with appropriate supporting evidence/details
21% Weak: Some development of ideas and use of supporting evidence/details
0 Poor: Very little or no development of ideas or use of supporting evidence

DEVELOPMENT: Comparing AY 21 over AY 20, the percentage of portfolios rated “strong” stayed flat, at 25%. The majority of portfolios are rated “adequate,” and this sector rose from 44% to 66%. “Weak” portfolios fell from 26% to 9%. “Poor” portfolios fell from 5% to 0.

While the greatest gains in Development are in the “adequate” category, several readers noted that papers demonstrated difficulty developing ideas, and instead peppered papers with a dash of details: “Details are spread throughout; small pieces of information about each topic per paragraph.” Another reader identified development of ideas as “the biggest challenge for students.”



18% Strong: Sophisticated sense of audience—e.g., distinctive voice and/or appropriate tone

73% Adequate: Some awareness of and/or attempt to communicate with audience

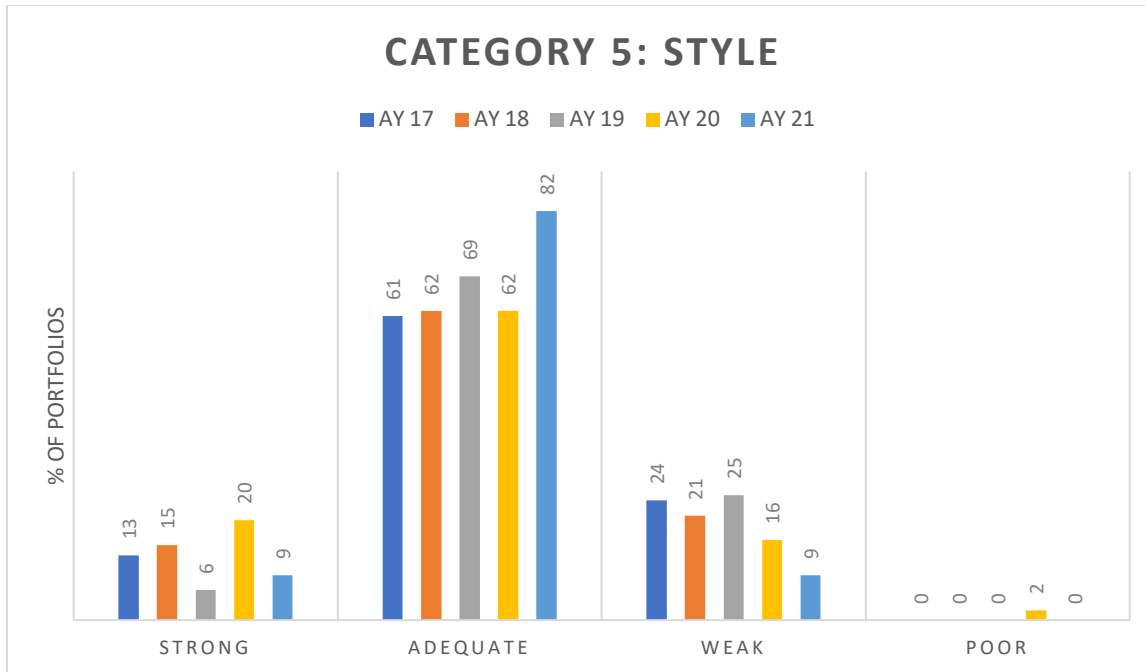
9% Weak: Little or no awareness of audience

0 Poor: No sense of writing for an audience

AUDIENCE: Comparing AY 21 over AY 20, the percentage of portfolios rated “strong” stayed flat, at 18%. The majority of portfolios are rated “adequate,” which rose significantly, from 52% to 73%. “Weak” portfolios fell from 23% to 9%. “Poor” portfolios fell from 8% to 0.

Judging from the reader comments, Audience is the most problematic—and most difficult to gauge—category. The greatest problem seems to be that there is no clear identification of who constitutes the ideal or targeted “audience,” and therefore what constitutes “sophisticated sense of audience.” Is the audience the faculty member who assigned the paper? Is it the general educated academic reader? Is it an assumed professional colleague?

An inconsistency in the rating of this category: when the faculty member is the assumed audience, readers seemed either to applaud or to criticize the papers’ grasp of audience. How does the category help us gauge improvement or decline if the terms are unclear?



9% Strong: Sophisticated use of language (sentence structure, word choice) enhances presentation of ideas/information

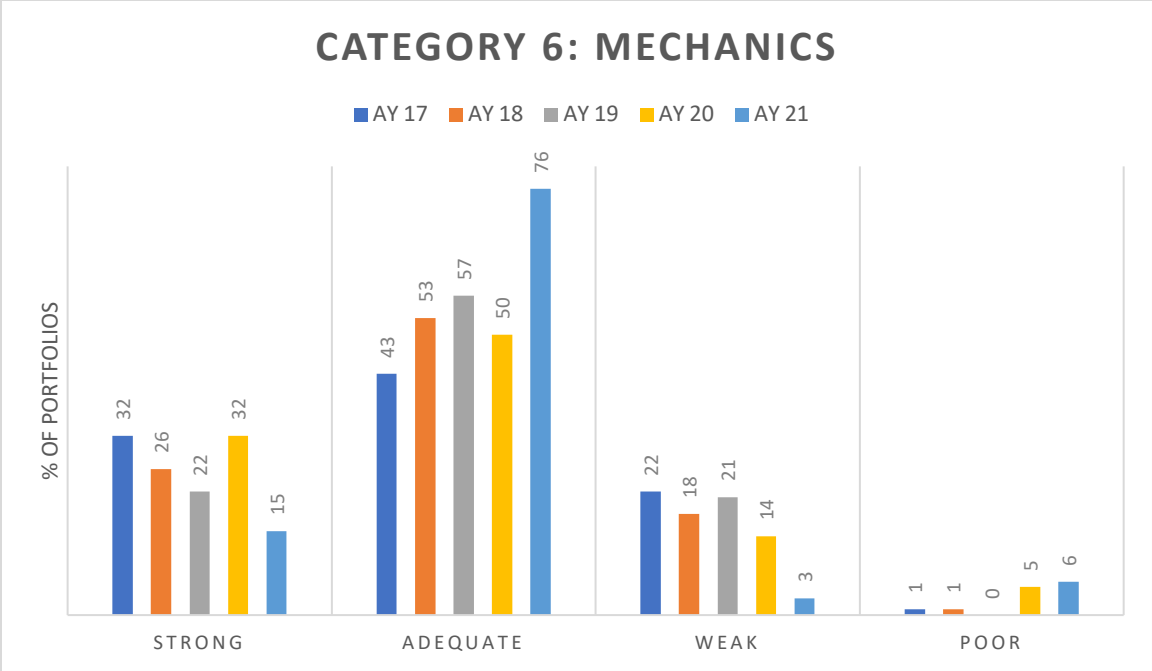
82% Adequate: Appropriate use of language effectively conveys ideas/information

9% Weak: Use of language is awkward, unnecessarily complex and/or overly simplistic

0 Poor: Use of language is highly inconsistent or indeterminate

STYLE: Comparing AY 21 over AY 20, the percentage of portfolios rated “strong” fell from 20% to 9%. The majority of portfolios are rated “adequate,” which rose from 62% to 82%. “Weak” portfolios fell from 16% to 9%. “Poor” portfolios fell from 2% to 0.

The fact that the greatest gains are in the “adequate” category for Style bodes well. We could see style as the invisible enhancer—or detractor—for many of the other categories, thus it may be useful to underscore some stylistic challenges. One reader noted the random genres of writing (including a film review paper) that, nevertheless, can be written “without jargon and informal writing.” Other readers noted “simplistic” and “very rudimentary” style; that is, the writing was not exhibiting college-level style.



15% Strong: Few, if any, errors in mechanics relative to length and complexity of documents

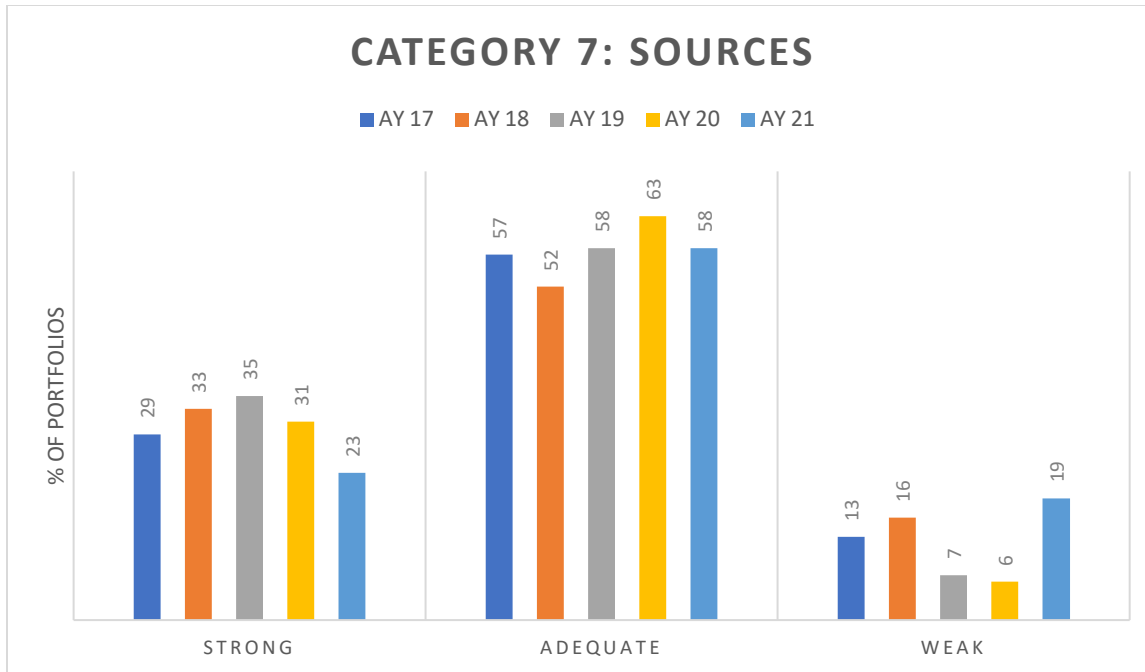
76% Adequate: Some errors in mechanics that do not interfere significantly with communication

3% Weak: Patters of errors in mechanics that affect clarity and/or credibility of writing

6% Poor: Large numbers of errors in mechanics affecting almost all aspects of writing

MECHANICS: Comparing AY 21 over AY 20, the percentage of portfolios rated “strong” fell from 32% to 15%. The majority of portfolios are rated “adequate,” which rose from 50% to 76%. “Weak” portfolios fell from 14% to 3%. “Poor” portfolios rose from 5% to 6%.

The largest gains are in the “adequate” category for Mechanics. However, readers expressed concern over the lack of attention to mechanical details in some papers. “Students should be required to use spell check and grammar check before submitting.” One reader noted that there is direct correlation between strong mechanics and effective writing, with a particular focus on the beautiful comma and semicolon: “To convey mature, complex syntax in writing, understanding how to use commas and semicolons has to be reviewed and explicitly taught.”



23% Strong: Ability to integrate ideas/information from sources into own writing in meaningful and appropriate ways

58% Adequate: Some effective integration of ideas/information from sources

19% Weak: Inappropriate/ineffective integration of ideas/information

SOURCES: Comparing AY 21 over AY 20, the percentage of portfolios rated “strong” fell from 31% to 23%. The majority of portfolios are rated “adequate,” which dipped from 63% to 58%. “Weak” portfolios rose from 6% to 19%.

The greatest increase was in the “weak” category for Sources. Readers noted the challenge of moving beyond simple incorporation of sources (“Most students demonstrate that they can (and do) use sources to support their claims”) and reaching the heights of “stronger reflection or application” and “a high level of critical thinking.”

One reader put this necessary leap quite succinctly: “Faculty seem to be doing a solid job of teaching the practice and process of synthesizing research into papers. There seems to be an opportunity for faculty to assign writing that asks students to actually communicate with an audience rather than simply using writing to demonstrate command of course concepts.”