English 100 or English 100Plus?
A Guide to Choosing the Right First-Year Writing Course

At Eastern, a key component of our mission is an emphasis on communication skills. The University Writing Program consists of specific courses and assessment activities especially designed to develop and evaluate your writing skill. The first component of this writing program is fulfilled by one of two first-year writing courses—English 100 or English 100Plus. Your first task within the program is to choose which course is right for you and support that choice in a written essay.

Expectations for First-Year Writing

The goal in first-year writing classes at ECSU is to provide you with a solid set of writing skills and strategies that can serve you throughout college and in the world of work. While it is not possible to make all first year students into perfect writers for all situations, we hope that you will leave the course with enough awareness of the nature of successful writing and of your own skills and weaknesses as a writer to be a lifelong learner of writing, able to solve the variety of new writing problems that may arise in your future.

Some students arrive at Eastern much closer to this kind of self-sufficiency than others. Your high school curriculum may have heavily emphasized writing as a tool for learning, or you may simply have a strong love for books and language that has given you an edge in the world of writing. It may be, however, that you were not required to do much writing in high school, or you may find reading more of a struggle than a pleasure. Given the differences in students' preparation for college-level writing, Eastern's English department has developed two different first-year courses, both of which are designed to prepare you for a lifetime of writing.

In ENG 100 or ENG 100Plus you can expect to write at least four or five formal assignments. Some may be shorter (2-4 pages); others will definitely be longer (as long as 12 pages). The assignments will ask you to read about and respond to different ideas and issues, to address your ideas to different audiences, to shape and develop your ideas according to the expectations of different readers or different situations, and to use information from sources to illustrate and support your ideas in intelligent and ethical ways.

100 or 100P: What's the Difference?

You may be asking yourself, "If the goals of these two courses are the same, and the kind of work I would do in each class is similar, where is the choice? What is the difference between ENG 100 and ENG 100P?" The difference lies not in the expectations of each course, but in the amount of instructional support and classroom time provided to help you meet those expectations.

English 100 is a three-credit course; therefore, it meets three hours a week. During a typical class, you may be introduced to and provided practice in various writing strategies, the expectations for assignments might be explained, you might discuss relevant reading, or you and your classmates might engage in other activities designed to help you better understand different genres and writing situations. We hope that students in English 100 will get a great deal of support from their instructor both in class and during office hours or scheduled conferences. If you enroll in English 100, you may also have the opportunity to see writing tutors outside of class for additional help with your writing. While such support is a part of English 100, it is more heavily emphasized in English 100Plus.

English 100Plus is a five-credit course, and therefore meets five hours a week. The two extra hours are referred
to as "lab." The lab hours allow students to choose (with some guidance from the instructor) from a number of activities which will help them improve as writers. The lab is not simply a grammar drill workshop, although many students choose to do a variety of grammar exercises. The lab is structured to allow for individualized instruction. During lab, you might participate in a variety of small-group and individual activities (from sentence-combining exercises to brainstorming sessions, from discussions of appropriate topics to collaborative writing of introductions) that will support you as you tackle the real, college-level writing projects that are required for successful completion of the first-year writing requirement.

The First-Year Writing Portfolio Requirement

Successful completion of either ENG 100 or ENG 100Plus means submitting an end-of-course portfolio. As part of your first-year writing course, you will be required to compile and turn in a portfolio of written work for evaluation and feedback by an English instructor other than your own.

Portfolio assessment has several benefits. Eastern's portfolio evaluation system

a) provides clear objectives and evaluative criteria for all first-year writing courses;
b) helps assure that you receive a comparable level and quality of instruction in first-year writing as your peers in other sections;
c) provides a real audience for your writing outside the classroom, helping you learn to direct your writing to unknown readers;
d) provides informed feedback (in addition to that provided by the course instructor, writing associates, or peers) about your strengths and weaknesses as a writer.

Whether you enroll in ENG 100 and ENG 100P, your portfolio will be evaluated against the same criteria, and it should contain written work which shows your ability to do the following:

- write essays in several genres that are sufficiently focused, clearly and logically organized, and fully developed so that you communicate ideas clearly to your intended audiences;
- use various kinds of evidence and reasoning to support your judgments;
- locate, evaluate, synthesize, and appropriately document various kinds of information gleaned from research;
- analyze text(s) or concept(s);
- effectively analyze the strengths and weaknesses of your own writing;
- adequately edit your writing according to the conventions of standard written English.

Submission of a writing portfolio for evaluation is a requirement for a passing grade in ENG 100 or ENG 100P.

Given the high expectations of the end-of-term portfolio, you should think carefully about which class is right for you. Some students are prepared to meet the goals of our first-year writing portfolio in a standard, three hour per week course, while others need the more intensive support and practice offered by the lab component of the five hour per week course. In either case, you must submit a portfolio for evaluation, and your portfolio will be judged against the same criteria.

Should I Take English 100?

If most of the characteristics in the following box seem to describe you and your experience, you would probably be most suited to ENG 100.
English 100 is probably best for me if:

- I read newspapers and magazines regularly.
- In the past year, I have read books for my own enjoyment.
- In high school, I wrote several essays per year.
- I feel fairly comfortable in planning and organizing an essay—knowing where to begin, how to paragraph, how to conclude, and so forth.
- I have used computers for drafting and revising essays.
- I haven't had many problems with grammar and punctuation—commas, apostrophes, and so forth.
- I consider myself a good reader and writer.
- My high school GPA placed me in the top third of my class.
- I got good scores on my SAT Writing and Reading Segments.

Generally speaking, you should be able to succeed in English 100 if you have done quite a bit of reading and have written a variety of essays in a variety of forms, including narrative, descriptive, and persuasive writing. In ENG 100, you will be expected to independently read, summarize, and think critically about published material—from books, magazines, and newspapers—in preparation for class discussions. You will also need to manage your time well in order to draft and revise essays outside of class, making use of peer and instructor feedback received in class and/or in conferences.

Should I Take English 100Plus?

If few or none of the above characteristics accurately describe you and your experience, then you may want to consider taking ENG 100Plus.

English 100Plus is probably best for me if:

- Generally I don't read unless I have to.
- In high school, I did not do much writing.
- I am often unsure how to organize my ideas—where to begin, how to paragraph, how to conclude, and so forth.
- I've used computers, but not often for writing and revising.
- I've had problems with grammar and punctuation—commas, apostrophes, and so forth.
- I don't think of myself as a strong writer.
- My high school GPA was about average.
- My scores for the SAT Writing and Reading Segments weren’t very impressive.

English 100Plus is probably the better course for you if your high school experiences included little variety in writing or reading and/or your ability to work independently in these areas is limited. In 100Plus, you will have more time in class to work with the instructor, your peers, and writing tutors to develop your ideas, figure out the demands of an assignment, shape complex ideas so that they make sense to your reader, and brush up on or acquire new skills in areas such as prewriting and planning, research, revision, grammar, and editing.
Explaining and Validating Your Choice

Whichever course you choose, you'll be asked to write an essay explaining that choice when you come to campus to take your placement exams. This essay will serve two purposes:

1) It will help assure that you think carefully about this decision.
2) It will allow expert instructors to evaluate your decision in light of the writing skill displayed in your essay. If a reader senses a profound mismatch between the course you've chosen and your writing ability as shown in your essay, you will be encouraged to change your decision.

Since this essay does have some impact on which course you will end up taking, we want it to show you at the best of your ability. While you will have to write the essay in a thirty-minute time period in a classroom on campus, you may prepare by going over the descriptions of the courses and the checklists above and carefully considering your decision. You will not be able to bring any paper with you into the classroom, but you will be given a clean copy of this brochure (to which you may freely refer) and paper on which to write your essay.

After reading the essays, we report your course placement (as recommended by the readers of your essay) to the Academic Advisement Center, who will help you register for your courses. When you arrive to register for classes, if the placement in the Advisement Center's records does not match the placement you requested, you have two options:

1) You may simply accept the placement readers' advice and enroll in the course indicated in the placement record; or
2) You may choose not to register for a writing course in the fall semester so that you can appeal the placement decision. Then, during the first two weeks of the fall semester you can appeal the decision by contacting Dr. Rita Malenczyk, Director of the University Writing Program at 465-4573.

Writing at Eastern After the First-Year

Choosing the right first-year writing course is not just about making sure you will pass that course. It is also about building a solid foundation for your continuing involvement in writing at Eastern. You will be writing in most of your classes, and chances are that skill in writing will be essential to success in your major courses and in your career whether you are studying History, Business, Biology, Sports Management, or any of the other majors offered at Eastern. You will also have to fulfill the remaining elements of the University Writing Program. These include a sophomore/junior-level competency requirement and a writing-intensive course requirement. You will be given more information about the University Writing Program requirements in your first-year writing class, and your academic advisor should be able to provide you with information about them as well. You can also contact the Director of the University Writing Program, Dr. Rita Malenczyk, if you have questions.

Still Unsure?

If you are still unsure about which Writing course to take, come prepared to ask questions. A representative of the writing program will be available to explain the options once again, answer your questions, and explain our goals and expectations for your essay.

If you have questions at any other time, you can contact Dr. Rita Malenczyk, Director of the University Writing Program at (860) 465-4573 or via email at malenczykr@easternct.edu.