7.0 Writing in Area F

Area F refers to a student's major area. As Gordon State College now offers eleven baccalaureate degrees as well as dozens of transferrable associate-level areas of concentration, space limitations prevent full discussion of writing practices in each individual program. Instead, this work will take a close look at two of Gordon State College's most popular programs: Nursing and Health Sciences and Education.

7.1 Writing in Health Sciences

Whether students are part of the ASN program, the BSN program, or merely taking one of the required Health Sciences classes, writing and writing-related activities form a substantial portion of their curriculum.

7.2 Health and Wellness for Living and Physical Fitness for Life

Gordon State's two institutional requirement classes, Health and Wellness for Living and Physical Fitness for Life are both often taught without requiring students write a major research paper—though students should check with their individual professors as individual requirements can vary. Despite the lack of a research paper, writing plays an important part in these classes due to professors' reliance on short answer question on tests and examinations.

7.2.1 The short answer question on tests and examinations

A key element of health class test is the short answer prompt. Students should note that although the question calls for a “short” answer, it does not call for a vague or incomplete answer. Sometimes students approach the short answer prompt by haphazardly jotting down anything vaguely related to the topic in the slim hopes that something they write might address the prompt. Such a scattershot approach is grossly inefficient and often fails to bring about the desired result. Instead, students should focus on specificity and accuracy and tailor their responses to the prompt as written.

7.2.2 Definitions and examples

Professors in Health Sciences classes find it particularly vexing when their prompts ask for a definition and they receive an example from a student; or conversely, when the prompt asks for examples and the professor receives definitions. For example, if a prompt asked a student to “define the term carcinogen” and the student responded, “asbestos fibers,” such an answer is incorrect and is unlikely to receive even partial credit. (Of course, if the prompt had asked the student writer to list an example of at least one suspected or known carcinogen, the matter might be different.)
7.2.3 Critical thinking and Health Sciences classes

Students should be sure to model the precepts of good critical thinking practices when composing their Health Science short answers. See Section 3 of this work for a detailed explanation of critical thinking, but basically critical thinking refers to the practice of supporting ones contentions with reasons and evidence—especially evidence in the form of observable and quantifiable data.

7.2.4 Scenario-based tests in Health Sciences classes

One venue for the Health Sciences student to demonstrate his or her critical thinking skills is with the scenario-based test. Scenario-based tests present a situation and ask the student to interpret what has happened, adapt to environmental factors, and apply what has been learned to a “real world” situation.

7.3 Writing in a Health Sciences Colloquium

Writing in a Health Sciences Colloquium, such as Global Health Perspectives, will offer new challenges for the student writer. Both the assignments given and the writing qualities looked for will differ from the writing done in Physical Fitness for Life or in Health and Wellness for Living classes. A key difference is the policy brief assignment.

7.3.1 Writing a Global Health Perspectives policy brief

The policy brief assignment asks the student to pretend that he or she is a public health official of a particular nation and has been asked to advise the nation’s leaders regarding one health issue. For example, the student could work with “HIV-AIDS” as the health issue and “Senegal” as the nation. After careful research, the student would select a course of action for the government and then use the policy brief to convince the government to adopt the selected course of action.

7.3.2 Attributes of an effective Global Health Perspectives policy brief

A strong Global Health Perspectives policy brief will be convincing, well-researched, and succinct.

7.3.2.1 A convincing policy brief

Students writing the Global Health Perspectives policy brief should remember that at its heart, the policy brief is meant to convince someone (government officials) to do something (adopt a specific course of action). In this manner, the policy brief is not all that different from the argument or persuasion essay students write in English 1102.

7.3.2.2 A well-researched policy brief
Of course, readers are more likely to be convinced if writers use quality sources to back up their contentions. Students should avoid “just Googling it,” or infamously unreliable sources such as Wikipedia. Instead students should use reliable academic sources like *The Lancet*, The World Health Organization website, and the UNICEF website.

### 7.3.2.3 A succinct policy brief

“Succinct” is an often misunderstood term. It does not mean “short,” as many people seem to think; nor does it mean “vague.” According to *Meriam-Webster’s Dictionary*, “succinct” means “marked by compact precise expression without wasted words” (“Succinct”). So a succinct answer uses every word it needs to completely answer the question without any extraneous “fluff.” Being able to express complicated thoughts in a succinct manner is a vital skill for success in college and beyond.

### 7.4 Writing in the Nursing program

Strong communication skills are a vital asset to a successful nursing career; therefore, it is probably not surprising that writing forms a significant part of the study of nursing. In many ways, however, writing in the Nursing program is significantly different from writing in other areas of the curriculum.

#### 7.4.1 Documentation

One key difference between writing in the Nursing program and writing in the Humanities is in the documentation system used. English, the Humanities, and much of the rest of the GSC community use MLA-style documentation. But MLA is far from the only documentation system in use throughout the academic world. In nursing, APA format is used. APA and MLA have a few similarities, but they also have many differences. For example, APA differs from MLA in the way that it privileges dates; the year is listed in every parenthetical reference. Such a difference is rooted in the very differences between the two disciplines: whereas a twenty-year old comment on *Hamlet* might still be useful, a twenty-year old idea on cancer prevention might well be considered ancient. Hence, the documentation system used in Nursing reflects the academic needs of those in the profession.

#### 7.4.2 Writing in the ASN program and writing in the BSN program

Not only does writing for the Nursing program differ from writing in other programs on campus, but expectations in writing for the ASN program differs from the expectations students face when writing for the BSN program. In accordance with nationwide QSEN standard competencies, writing assignments in the ASN program are given to promote growth and are evaluated primarily on content; grades take a back seat to the student’s
academic growth. In the BSN program however, writing “counts” as part of a grade. The BSN program classes will feature a major written paper in every course.

7.5 Good writing in the Nursing program

Good nursing writers demonstrate proficiency in writing strong sentences, paragraphing, strong source selection practices and responsible use of sources.

7.5.1 Sentences

Strong writing—in the Nursing program or elsewhere—is built on a bedrock complete sentences. Nothing marks a neophyte writer faster than the occasional sentence fragment or fused sentence (aka “run-on” sentence). Students should check their written work carefully and make sure that it is free of both fragments and fused sentences. In addition, students should make sure that their work carries a variety of sentences: *simple, compound, complex*, and *compound-complex* sentences should all be represented.

7.5.2 Paragraphing

Another aspect of good writing is paragraphing. To review, a strong paragraph is composed of a topic sentence (often the first sentence of the paragraph), three to six sentences expanding on that topic sentence and, when appropriate, a transitional sentence leading to the next paragraph. A good paragraph is four to seven sentences long and is *never* longer than ten sentences.

7.5.3 Source selection

The digital revolution of the past few decades has dramatically changed academic research. Today’s students simply do not carry out research the way that their teachers did when they were students. Therefore there is sometimes a gap between students and professors about what constitutes responsible research. “Just what is it that makes a ‘reliable’ source reliable?” is the topic of a long and detailed conversation that every student should have with her professor when embarking upon a research project. Despite the changes in research in the wake of the digital revolution, the essence of what constitutes a “good source” has not changed all that much. Good sources are timely, peer-reviewed, and written by experts in the field—that much is true whether a source appears in a paper-based or in an online-based journal. The MEDLINE database (available through Galileo) is a generally reliable locale to start most research projects in Nursing.

7.5.4 Responsible use of sources
Just finding quality sources is not enough to ensure success in Nursing writing assignments. Students also should use their sources responsibly. Responsible use of sources includes knowing the difference between quotation and paraphrase, using quotations judiciously, and understanding plagiarism.

A key part of using sources responsibly is understanding the difference between quotation and paraphrase. Quotation refers to a word-for-word repetition of exactly what appears in the original source. Quotations are set off from the remainder of the student writer’s text by use of quotation marks and are cited parenthetically. A good paraphrase changes every (or almost every) word in the original passage as well as the original syntax. Although quotation marks are not used with paraphrases, they are cited parenthetically. Struggling students sometimes become over-reliant on quotation. Generally, no more than ten percent of a student’s paper should be composed of quotations.

Students need to take the concept of plagiarism seriously, but at the same time they should not be so afraid of plagiarism that they cannot use sources effectively. Plagiarism literally means “an act of copying the ideas or words of another person without giving credit” (“Plagiarism”) and, when the plagiarism is intentional and/or repeated, can carry punishment up to and including expulsion from the institution. But the plagiarism spectrum can also include such relatively minor infractions as failure to cite a particular statistic or submitting an incomplete list of references. Nursing faculty members are trained to recognize these various levels of plagiarism and are quick to differentiate between an offense that requires disciplinary action and a teachable moment. Additionally, students should be aware that the Nursing School at Gordon State College uses the Turnitin.com plagiarism detection service on a school-wide basis.

7.6 Writing in the Education program

Students in GSC’s Education program may find themselves required to produce numerous written assignments including bibliographies and research papers. Many professors in the Education program adopt a process-based approach to student writing; that is, professors are not only interested in the finished product that a student submits but will also want to see evidence of the various steps (drafts, pre-writing activities, etc.) that lead to that finished product.

7.6.1 Bibliography

Students in the Education program may be assigned a large bibliography assignment that can require up to fifty sources. Students will need to both summarize and critique the works on the bibliography. Obviously understanding the difference between summary and critique is a key component of doing well on the assignment. In short,
“summary” refers to distilling the book’s content into a couple of sentences or paragraphs; “critique” refers to looking critically and ranking the work’s merits and faults.

7.6.2 Research paper

At the risk of stating the obvious, a good research paper is based on research, not the writer’s opinion. Students should follow the directions carefully. They should collect strong sources—and it should be noted that many education professors do not accept general websites as sources—synthesize (that is, put together) what the sources say on a topic, and organize the paper in a logical, coherent, and organic manner. Additionally, many Education professors strongly encourage students to make use of the Student Success Center. Finally, ever-mindful of the way that teachers and would-be teachers need to model strong educational habits, Educations students should proofread their papers carefully before submitting the papers for evaluation.

7.8 Pitfalls to be avoided when writing in the Education program

There are a number of pitfalls students should try to avoid when writing in the Education program. Some of the pitfalls include failure to follow directions, failure to properly understand synthesis, poor organization, poor transitions, verbosity, and a lack of attention to grammar, mechanics, and usage.

7.8.1 The failure to follow directions pitfall

It has been said that one-half of life is simply following the directions. Although we could, perhaps, quibble with the exact percentage, it is undisputed that following directions is important. Yet good students often do poorly on easy assignments for precisely this reason—they have failed to follow directions. Why is this so? Perhaps over-confidence is part of the reason; the student, having read the directions early in the unit fails to read them again to double check. A good way to guard against this is to make sure to read the directions at least twice: once when the assignment is distributed and once again when the assignment has been completed, but before it has been submitted.

7.8.2 The synthesis pitfall

Some education professors have noted that the synthesis step trips up many students. Synthesis should not be confused with summary; nor should it be confused with analysis or critique. Synthesis is a putting together of disparate ideas. For example, if a student asked fifteen colleagues where the best place for lunch around campus was and six of them replied “Highlander Hall,” four of them insisted that it was Subway, three suggested the pizza restaurant and one each liked the Chinese restaurant, and the Mexican restaurant, the student could synthesize that information and conclude that
Highlander Hall was a popular—but by no means unanimous—choice for lunch among Gordon students. Remember: synthesis is a putting together and it differs from both summary and analysis.

7.8.3 The organization pitfall

A second pitfall for Education students is the organization pitfall. Although professors can often be tolerant of a variety of organizational strategies, every paper should have an organizational strategy. New paragraphs should not come as a surprise to the reader; in fact, a paragraph should be placed in such a way that it cannot logically go anywhere else in the essay. There are many different organizational strategies: temporal—from the earliest to the most recent, from the general to the specific, from the specific to the general, from an argument’s weakest reason to its best reason, but all essays need an organizational pattern.

7.8.4 The transitions pitfall

Closely related to the organizational pitfall is the transitions pitfall. Most students know that every paragraph needs a topic sentence—a sentence that announces the purpose of the paragraph. But paragraphs also need transitional sentences—a way to guide the reader from the paragraph he or she is reading to the new paragraph. For example, in a paper touting the advantages of attending Gordon State one paragraph might be about its ample parking and the following paragraph might be about its new and modern student housing. A transitional sentence at the end of the first paragraph might say something like, “Of course, not every student is a commuter; for those who want to live on campus Gordon offers many attractive options.”

7.8.5 The verbose pitfall

Education students should be careful not to confuse quantity with quality. More is not always better and students should not labor under the assumption that merely piling on more extraneous information will save a weak writing assignment. The best advice seems to be, “make your point; make it fully and then move on.” Good Education writing is succinct.

7.8.6 The grammar mechanics and usage pitfall

Sometimes students writing in the Education program are surprised and disappointed to learn that poor grammar, mechanics, and/or usage habits can derail otherwise strong efforts in writing. It is important to remember that things like subject/verb agreement, proper comma usage, and appropriate tone are not just for English classes, but should stay with the student during his or her entire career. This is especially true for teacher candidates who will be looked on to model appropriate academic behavior.
7.8.7 Works cited
