Composition Program Learning Goals and Outcomes

The Program’s writing sequence for English 3, English 4, and English 5 specifies different learning outcomes for each course, appropriately sequenced to help students build their skills in critical thinking, written communication, and information evaluation and research practice. In doing so the Composition Program supports the Saint Mary’s Habits of Mind Learning Goals, preparing students for collegiate writing across the disciplines in general and for other courses in the Habits of Mind sequence, namely Collegiate Seminars and Writing in the Discipline courses, in particular.

Composition’s Critical Thinking Learning Goals (English 3, 4, 5)
Critical thinking includes the processes of analysis, synthesis and evaluation necessary to understand and acquire knowledge. To that end, in our Composition courses, students will learn to recognize, formulate and pursue meaningful questions about their own and others' ideas, and to incorporate logic, careful observation, reflection and experience in the process of developing arguments. The writing sequence of English 3, English 4, and 5 develops skills that allow for sound judgments to be made when multiple, competing viewpoints are possible and provides a forum for students to actively practice the habits of critical thinking and move forward in their ability -- and perhaps willingness -- to question their assumptions.

Composition’s Critical Thinking Learning Outcomes: With increasing proficiency, students will comprehend challenging texts and analyze them thoughtfully as shown

1. in their ability to discuss the text, showing an understanding of the writer’s thesis, style and structure, and

2. in their own writing, where they must demonstrate an ability to
   a. seek and identify confirming and opposing evidence relevant to original and existing theses;
   b. ask meaningful questions, originate plausible theses, and identify their own underlying assumptions; and
   c. identify and understand assumptions and theses that exist in the work of others.

Composition’s Written Communication Learning Goals (English 3, 4, 5)
Because our minds can only be truly liberated when we are able to communicate effectively what we know, the Core Curriculum seeks to develop strong written communication skills in all students. To that end, students will develop communication skills that reflect an understanding of the power of language to shape thought and experience. They will learn to write and speak logically, with clarity, and with originality.

Composition’s Written Communication Learning Outcomes: With increasing proficiency, students will

1. recognize and compose readable prose, as characterized by clear and careful organization, coherent paragraphs and well-constructed sentences that employ the conventions of Standard Written English and appropriate diction;
2. recognize and formulate effective written communication, giving appropriate consideration to audience and context;
3. analyze arguments so as to construct ones that are well supported, well reasoned, and controlled by a thesis or exploratory question; and
4. use the processes of writing to enhance intellectual discovery and unravel complexities of thought.

Composition’s Information Evaluation and Research Practices Learning Goal (English 4, 5)
Through the Composition sequence, though primarily in English 5, students will gain an understanding of the standards by which information is evaluated. They will learn to judge the authenticity, validity, reliability, and originality of the sources of information they use. They will learn methods of research in order to weigh evidence objectively in both traditional and electronic formats. By the end of the course, students will have the necessary skills to produce an Extended Research Essay of 8-12 pages that synthesizes and integrates relevant material, discovered through research methods appropriate to a non-specialist, in the service of an original argument.

Composition’s Information Evaluation and Research Practices Learning Outcomes:
With increasing proficiency, students will
1. develop search strategies and use library catalogs and databases to find relevant material;
2. critically evaluate sources;
3. evaluate and synthesize evidence for the purpose of drawing valid conclusions; and
4. understand the concept of intellectual property and practice academic honesty, as evidenced by integrating and citing evidence appropriately.