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RESEARCH REPORT

Assessing Written Communication in Higher Education: Review and Recommendations for Next-Generation Assessment

Jesse R. Sparks, Yi Song, Wyman Brantley, & Ou Lydia Liu

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Written communication is considered one of the most critical competencies for academic and career success, as evident in surveys of stakeholders from higher education and the workforce. Emphasis on writing skills suggests the need for next-generation assessments of writing proficiency to inform curricular and instructional improvement. This article presents a comprehensive review of definitions of writing proficiency from key higher education and workforce frameworks; the strengths and weaknesses of existing assessments; and challenges related to designing, implementing, and interpreting such assessments. Consistent with extant frameworks, we propose an operational definition including 4 strands of skills: (a) social and rhetorical knowledge, (b) domain knowledge and conceptual strategies, (c) language use and conventions, and (d) the writing process. Measuring these aspects of writing requires multiple assessment formats (including selected-response [SR] and constructed-response [CR] tasks) to balance construct coverage and test reliability. Next-generation assessments should balance authenticity (e.g., realistic writing tasks) and psychometric quality (e.g., desirable measurement properties), while providing institutions and faculty with actionable data. The review and operational definition presented here should serve as an important resource for institutions that seek to either adopt or design an assessment of students' writing proficiency.

Keywords Writing; writing assessment; higher education; written composition; communication; student learning outcomes

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Effective communication is fundamental to success in many aspects of life. Scholars such as Dewey (1938/1997) have acknowledged the importance of language as a primary medium through which learning takes place in educational and everyday experiences, asserting that “all human experience is ultimately social . . . it involves contact and communication” (p. 38). In order to interact successfully with others in academic, workplace, and community settings, individuals must be able to communicate—to convey or exchange information, knowledge, and ideas—clearly and effectively. Young learners begin to develop their communication skills in oral contexts, but as they progress through K–12, writing skills become increasingly important, shifting in emphasis from the development of foundational print literacy and transcription skills, to composing narratives about one's experiences, to expositions or analyses of phenomena, and ultimately to more sophisticated tasks, such as writing arguments or research reports.

The ability to write effectively using standard written English is particularly important in higher education, where proficiency with written communication is considered a critical student learning outcome (SLO). A survey conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U, 2011) found that 99% of the chief academic officers from 433 higher education institutions rated writing as one of the most important intellectual skills for their students. More recently, the Educational Testing Service (ETS, 2013a) conducted interviews with provosts or vice presidents of academic affairs from more than 200 institutions regarding the most commonly measured general education skills, finding that written communication was the most frequently mentioned competency considered by respondents as critical for both academic and career success. The focus on written communication is also apparent internationally. Notably, written communication is included as a *generic skill* expected of all students in the Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) project, an effort to evaluate general learning outcomes of college students across nations, which is sponsored by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2012).

Reports from the workforce echo that of higher education. Written communication was among the most desired skills mentioned by a sample of 431 employers from various industries surveyed by the Conference Board (Casner-Lotto &

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Barrington, 2006); over 93% of respondents reported that written communication was “very important” (p. 41) for the workplace, yet 28% of respondents rated the writing skills of 4-year college graduates entering the workforce as “deficient” (p. 41). Further, 89% of 302 employers surveyed by the AAC&U (2011) said that colleges and universities should place more emphasis on communication skills, the highest endorsement of any skill included in the survey. Written communication skills are crucial for the workplace, yet many employers perceive college graduates as being underprepared for the writing tasks required at work. By contrast, college graduates report that learning to write effectively is one of the most important skills learned in their undergraduate career (e.g., Krahn & Silzer, 1995).

These discrepancies in perceptions across stakeholders underscore the need for valid, reliable assessments of written communication as a learning outcome that can provide institutions, employers, and individual students with meaningful information about students’ skills. Recent calls for assessment reform also reflect the importance of designing assessments that have instructional relevance, provide feedback to teachers and students, and can be used to improve curriculum (Gordon Commission, 2013). A next-generation assessment of written communication competency at the higher education level could be used to inform revisions to curriculum and instruction in the service of developing students’ writing skills, to make effective hiring decisions, and/or to provide students with feedback about their preparation for future academic or workforce pursuits. Such an assessment should be based on a precise definition of the written communication construct, which is supported by and consistent with current empirical research on writing in higher education.

Although there is general agreement that effective communication skills (both oral and written) are important, there is some ambiguity about how this competency should be defined. Markle, Brenneman, Jackson, Burrus, and Robbins (2013) reviewed definitions of effective communication from seven key frameworks of general education competencies in higher education. Based on this synthesis, the authors defined this competency as the ability to “effectively communicate multiple types of messages; communicate across multiple forms; and effectively deliver messages to varying audiences” (p. 16). This definition highlights three aspects of communication: the message’s type (i.e., genre), form (i.e., medium), and recipient. Understanding these aspects of communication is important in both oral and written modalities. However, these aspects alone may not fully delineate the range of skills that specifically constitute proficiency with written communication.

The overwhelming emphasis on written communication among stakeholders suggests a need to examine existing frameworks, focusing on outcomes specific to writing. As with communication in general, definitions of writing skill vary across frameworks. Similarly, existing writing assessments vary in the extent to which they are designed to measure particular skills. For example, the writing component of the *TOEFL*[®] test is designed to measure writing in English as a second or foreign language, with particular attention to the integration of reading, writing, and listening skills, and use of particular rhetorical forms, such as summary or description (Cumming, Kantor, Powers, Santos, & Taylor, 2000); the particular configuration of writing skills assessed in the *TOEFL* test is consistent, but not completely overlapping, with the writing skills that might be targeted in an assessment of writing as an SLO. Thus, despite the apparent consensus on the importance of written communication as a critical competency, there are multiple definitions of what constitutes effective writing at the college level. For the purposes of designing and building next-generation assessments of written communication for higher education, a clear construct definition is needed. A primary goal of this article is to provide such a definition. A secondary goal is to identify and discuss the issues and challenges that must be considered when designing an assessment of written communication as a learning outcome.

In the first section of this report, we review existing definitions and frameworks of written communication in higher education. We also discuss models and theories from the field of writing research that can inform our definition of this construct. In the second part of this report, we review current assessments of written communication with respect to construct coverage, item formats, and reliability and validity evidence. We then discuss challenges in designing written communication assessments, including use of automated scoring techniques, and consider their relevance to curriculum and instruction. In the final section of this report, based on a synthesis of the frameworks reviewed, we propose an operational definition for a next-generation assessment of written communication; this definition is specifically intended to support the development of assessments of this particular SLO in higher education contexts. We also provide examples of item types designed to assess key writing skills.

In particular, the review of existing written communication assessments presented in the second part of this report is intended to aid higher education institutions in choosing among alternative assessments. Evidence suggests that the institutional emphasis on assessment of SLOs continues to increase, with learning institutions turning to a wide variety of assessments and approaches to meet demands for accountability (Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014). Navigating

the landscape of available instruments and assessment methods poses a challenge for higher education institutions, so the current synthesis is intended to serve as a helpful guide. We also hope that the approach to designing a next-generation written communication assessment described here will serve as a resource for institutions in developing their own writing assessments. Building collaborative partnerships between higher education institutions and testing organizations in the assessment design process can help ensure that SLO assessments meet standards of technical quality while maximizing instructional relevance.

Review of Existing Frameworks and Research

Definitions of Written Communication in Key Frameworks

Written communication involves the ability to effectively convey multiple types of messages, in multiple forms, to varying audiences, through a written medium (see Markle et al., 2013). However, writing is a multifaceted construct and is defined differently among various sources. Notions of what constitutes quality writing vary even among experts (Behizadeh, 2014). As emphasized by Murphy and Yancey (2008), arguments for the use of particular techniques for assessing students' writing are often based on competing theories about the nature of the writing construct—as a set of discrete skills, as a cognitive (or instructional) process that takes place over time, and more recently, as a meaning-making and highly social activity that varies across contexts and purposes for writing (p. 449). Since these various perspectives affect assessment design decisions, it is critical to determine consistencies among stakeholders' views of the underlying construct.

Table 1 presents definitions of written communication¹ drawn from nine key frameworks, including the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and National Writing Project (NWP)'s *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (2011); the National Institutes of Health (NIH)'s definition of communication competency (OHR-NIH, 2014); the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (QAA-FHEQ); AAC&U's Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) VALUE rubrics (Rhodes, 2010); Lumina's Degree Qualifications Profile (Adelman, Ewell, Gaston, & Schneider, 2011); the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (US-DOL, 2014) Industry Competency Model Clearinghouse; European Commission's European Higher Education Area (EHEA) Competencies (i.e., the Bologna Framework; European Higher Education Area, 2005; González & Wagenaar, 2003); the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS)'s Framework for Learning and Development Outcomes (CAS, 2009); and the Assessment and Teaching of 21st-Century Skills KSAVE frameworks (Binkley et al., 2010).

Table 2 shows the correspondence between each framework reviewed and different dimensions of the writing construct mentioned within the various definitions. Definitions and learning outcomes across the various frameworks show some degree of consistency, but, interestingly, the configuration of features thought to underlie skilled writing at the college level varies such that no two frameworks define the construct in exactly the same way. Importantly for our present purposes, no single assessment of college writing has been designed on the basis of any of these frameworks or on a synthesis of them; these frameworks suggest learning and assessment targets but have not directly informed the development of specific large-scale assessments. We explore the relationships between existing assessments and aspects of the writing construct in the second part of this report.

Key Dimensions of Written Communication

Members of the CWPA, NCTE, and NWP (2011) collaborated to develop a framework describing the rhetorical and 21st century skills required for success in reading, critical thinking, and writing at the college level. This *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* is intended to describe college readiness, or the expected knowledge, skills, and abilities of a student who has completed a first-year composition course in college and who demonstrates readiness to take on more advanced intellectual work in further academic or career settings. Specifically, the *Framework* organizes literacy skills into five dimensions: rhetorical knowledge (including understanding of various purposes, audiences, contexts, genres, and forms of writing), critical thinking (including analysis of reading materials, evaluating information sources' usefulness and reliability, and using research to support writing), writing processes (including planning, drafting, editing, revising, and responding to feedback), knowledge of conventions (including both surface-level grammatical conventions and more global concerns related to discourse content, organization, tone, and style), and composing in multiple environments (e.g.,

Table 1 Definitions of Written Communication From Current Frameworks of Learning Outcomes

Framework	Author/Sponsor	Written communication (or equivalent) definition
<i>Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing</i>	Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English, and National Writing Project	Rhetorical knowledge: The ability to analyze and act on understandings of audiences, purposes, contexts, genres, and forms in creating texts. This includes learning to compose a variety of texts for different disciplines and purposes. Critical thinking: The ability to analyze a situation or text and make thoughtful decisions based on that analysis. This includes conducting research from primary and secondary sources; evaluating those sources' credibility, bias, evidence, and reasoning; identifying and challenging writer's assumptions; and writing texts that are informed by one's research. Writing processes: The multiple strategies writers use to approach and undertake writing and research. This includes generating ideas, conducting research, drafting, revising, editing, and responding to feedback. Knowledge of conventions: The formal and informal guidelines that define what is considered correct (or appropriate) and incorrect (or inappropriate) in a piece of writing. This includes the surface features of a text, such as mechanics, spelling, and attribution of sources, as well as more global concerns, such as content, tone, style, organization, and evidence. Correct use of conventions is defined within specific genres and contexts. Composing in multiple environments: The ability to create writing using everything from traditional pen and paper to electronic technologies. This includes composing multiple forms, such as a traditional essay, a webpage or video, or a print brochure, and using electronic sources in those documents. http://wpacouncil.org/framework (CWPA et al., 2011)
Employment Competencies Dictionary - Communications	National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Human Resources	Communications: Clearly and effectively conveys information; asks appropriate questions; organizes, expresses, and communicates ideas clearly in writing; asks clarifying questions and summarizes or paraphrases what others have said to verify understanding; uses analogies, visuals, and other techniques to tailor communications to specific audiences; identifies and uses effective communication channels and methods (e.g., presentations, electronic dissemination, social media); utilizes skill in presenting information, analysis, ideas, and positions in a clear, succinct, accurate, convincing manner, as is appropriate for the audience. http://hr.od.nih.gov/workingatnih/competencies/core/communication.htm (OHR-NIH, 2014)
Assessment & Teaching of 21st Century Skills (ATC21S)	Collaboration among Cisco, Intel, and Microsoft	Ways of Working – Communication Knowledge: Sound knowledge of basic vocabulary, functional grammar and style, functions of language; awareness of various types of verbal interaction (conversations, interviews, debates, etc.); understanding the main features of written language (formal, informal, scientific, journalistic, colloquial, etc.). Skills: Ability to communicate in written form and understand or make others understand various messages in a variety of situations and for different purposes; ability to write different types of texts for various purposes; to monitor the writing process (from drafting to proofreading); ability to formulate one's arguments in writing in a convincing manner and take full account of other viewpoints; skills needed to use aids (such as notes, schemes, maps) to produce or present complex texts in written form. Attitudes/Values/Ethics: Willingness to strive for esthetic quality in expression beyond the technical correctness of a word/phrase. (Binkley et al., 2010)
Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP)	The Lumina Foundation	Intellectual Skills – Communication Fluency At the associate level: Presents substantially error-free prose in both argumentative and narrative forms to general and specialized audiences. At the bachelor's level: Constructs sustained, coherent arguments and/or narratives and/or explications of technical issues and processes, in two media, to general and specific audiences. In a language other than English, in writing, conducts an inquiry with a non-English-language source concerning information, conditions, technologies, and/or practices in his or her major field. With collaborators, advances an argument or designs an approach to resolving a social, personal, or ethical dilemma. (Adelman et al., 2011, p. 14)

Table 1 Continued

Framework	Author/Sponsor	Written communication (or equivalent) definition
The Employment and Training Administration (ETA) Industry Competency Model Clearinghouse	U.S. Department of Labor (US-DOL)	Organization and development: Creates documents such as letters, directions, manuals, reports, graphs, and flow charts; communicates thoughts, ideas, information, messages and other written information, which may contain technical material, in a logical, organized and coherent manner; ideas are well developed with supporting information and examples. Mechanics: Uses standard syntax and sentence structure; uses correct spelling, punctuation, and capitalization; uses appropriate grammar (e.g., correct tense, subject-verb agreement, no missing words). Tone: Writes in a manner appropriate for business; uses language appropriate for the target audience; uses appropriate tone and word choice (e.g., writing is professional and courteous). (US-DOL ETA, 2014)
European Higher Education Area Competencies (Bologna Framework)	European Commission: European Higher Education Area	Generic competencies: Ability to communicate through the written word in one's native language; ability to communicate information, ideas, problems, and solutions to both specialist and nonspecialist audiences; ability to communicate in a second language. Specific competencies: Skills in presenting domain-relevant material and arguments in writing, to an informed audience; ability to write in one's own language or other languages using correctly various types of writing within one's discipline; ability to present arguments with clarity and accuracy in forms that are suitable for the audiences being addressed; receiving and responding to a variety of information sources (e.g., textual, numerical, verbal, graphical); communicating appropriately to a variety of audiences in written, verbal, and graphical forms (González & Wagenaar, 2003).
Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (QAA-FHEQ)	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education	Communicate the results of their study/work accurately and reliably, and with structured and coherent arguments; effectively communicate information, ideas, arguments, analysis, problems, and solutions in a variety of forms to both specialist and nonspecialist audiences, and deploy key techniques of the discipline effectively (QAA, 2008).
Framework for Learning and Development Outcomes (CAS Standards)	The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Education	Effective communication: Conveys meaning in a way that others understand by writing coherently and effectively; writes after reflection; influences others through writing; effectively articulates abstract ideas; uses appropriate syntax and grammar; makes and evaluates presentations or performances (CAS, 2009); expresses thoughts and emotions through writing; writes essays or personal letters; writes in an organized fashion; moves from general to specific topics in writing; communicates in nontraditional forms (e.g., e-mail; CAS, 2006).
Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP)	Association of American Colleges and Universities	Written communication is the development and expression of ideas in writing. Written communication involves learning to work in many genres and styles. It can involve working with many different writing technologies and mixing texts, data, and images (Rhodes, 2010). Written communication involves five dimensions. Context of and purpose for writing , which includes considerations of audience, purpose, and the circumstances surrounding the writing task(s). Content development , the ways in which the text explores and represents its topic in relation to its audience and purpose. Genre and disciplinary conventions , formal and informal rules inherent in the expectations for writing in particular forms and/or academic fields. Sources and evidence , use of high-quality, credible, relevant sources to develop one's ideas. Control of syntax and mechanics , appropriate use of language (Rhodes, 2010).

Table 2 Mapping of Written Communication Skills to Key Frameworks

Dimensions of writing construct	CWPA, NCTE, &								
	WPA Framework	NIH-OHR	ATC21S	DQP	DOL-ETA	BOLOGNA	QAA	CAS	LEAP
Context and purpose	X	~	X	X	X	-	~	X	X
Audience awareness	X	X	~	X	X	X	X	~	X
Content development and organization	X	X	~	~	X	X	X	X	X
Genre conventions (text types/formats)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Disciplinary conventions (major/field)	X	-	~	X	-	X	X	-	X
Use of sources and textual evidence	X	~	-	X	~	X	-	-	X
Processes (planning, drafting, revision)	X	-	X	-	-	-	-	~	-
Modes and forms (multimedia, digital)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Word choice, tone, voice, and style of language	X	~	X	-	X	-	-	-	-
Language use, grammar, syntax, and mechanics	X	~	X	X	X	~	~	X	X

Note. X = mentioned as part of framework definition or rubric statements; ~ = indirectly mentioned as part of framework definition or rubric statements (i.e., statement that could be related to a dimension); - = not mentioned in the framework.

using traditional and digital production modes, and incorporating electronic sources in the written work; see Table 1). These five dimensions correspond nicely to the aspects of writing in higher education and workforce frameworks, and they appear to encompass all of the critical elements of written communication; accordingly, the following review is organized around these five dimensions. Importantly, this *Framework* includes critical engagement with and use of sources and emphasis on the writing process, two skills that are infrequently mentioned across the set of frameworks we reviewed. The *Framework* also highlights connections among reading, critical thinking, and the development of skilled writing; the interconnected nature of these literacy skills is widely acknowledged (e.g., NCTE-WPA, 2010).

Rhetorical Knowledge of Forms/Modes, Genres, and Disciplines

The most prevalent dimension across the frameworks we reviewed concerns skill in handling different forms of written products, with each of the nine frameworks including some attention to different types of communication. As defined in the AAC&U's LEAP VALUE rubrics, written communication "can involve working with many different writing technologies, and mixing texts, data, and images" (Rhodes, 2010, p. 1). Accordingly, frameworks emphasize that college graduates should be able to proficiently integrate multimedia (e.g., visual aids, charts, graphs, and images) to support comprehension of complex written material (Binkley et al., 2010); to "use effective communication channels and methods" (OHR-NIH, 2014, p. 1) including social media and electronic distribution; and to produce a variety of written forms, including letters, essays, e-mails, websites, reports, or presentations. This view of writing incorporates the notion of *multiliteracies* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), which emphasizes multilingual and multimodal literacy as critical in the 21st century. Thus, writing involves producing text using a variety of communication technologies, media, and dissemination channels.

With respect to genres of writing, the frameworks place particular emphasis on the genre of argument (mentioned in four of nine frameworks), which requires skill in presenting clear, coherent, and effective arguments that are convincing to an audience and that consider others' perspectives (Binkley et al., 2010). The genre of explanation is mentioned less often than argument. Explanations are called for explicitly in the DQP in the form of "explanations of technical issues and processes" (Adelman et al., 2011, p. 14) and are more indirectly referenced in terms of "effectively [articulating] abstract ideas" (CAS, 2009, p. 46) in the CAS outcomes. Narrative, more common in K–12 settings, is mentioned in only one framework (Adelman et al., 2011). Other genres include directions, manuals, flow charts, and interviews.

In addition, adherence to disciplinary conventions (i.e., the forms and genres of expression that are valued within a major field or discipline) is mentioned in five of nine frameworks. Students are expected to be able to conduct inquiry within their discipline and to use correctly types and techniques of writing that are consistent with the values and expectations of the field. Genre and disciplinary considerations can be treated as part of a student's rhetorical knowledge (CWPA et al., 2011), but could also be considered a part of a student's conceptual knowledge of the discipline.

Rhetorical Knowledge of Context and Purpose

Attention to the context and purpose of a writing task is mentioned in a majority of frameworks (six of nine). Example purposes include advancing an argument to influence others or designing an approach to solve a problem. Writing should be appropriate for the purposes of the writing task, including use of appropriate tone and register (e.g., distinguish between formal and informal uses of language; write in a professional and courteous manner appropriate for business purposes). Context and purpose are closely related to genre and disciplinary considerations, and they are also a part of students' rhetorical knowledge (CWPA et al., 2011).

Rhetorical Knowledge of Audience

Audience awareness is directly mentioned in a majority of frameworks (seven of nine for audience and content) and is indirectly mentioned in the remainder. Audience design concerns a writer's attention to the knowledge, interests, and values of the recipient of a communication and skill in tailoring writing and expression to suit that audience (e.g., address experts and nonexperts in a specific field; address general and specific audiences). Some frameworks only indirectly mention audience awareness as part of the writing construct, in that writers should "convey meaning in a way that others understand" and should "write to influence others" (e.g., CAS, 2009, p. 46). These statements imply the notion of an audience (i.e., others should understand and be influenced by what is written), but they do not explicitly mention the term, nor do they indicate what *kinds* of others the writer might reasonably be expected to address.

Development and Organization of Content

Content development and organization is mentioned in seven of nine frameworks and can be defined as "the ways in which the text explores and represents its topic in relation to its audience and purpose" (Rhodes, 2010, p. 2). Organization involves producing prose that is logical, well structured, and coherent by, for example, moving from general topics to more specific ideas and details (CAS, 2009). Content development refers to the extent to which the writer effectively articulates abstract ideas and uses adequate supporting details (US-DOL ETA, 2014). When students are engaged in writing about something, their skill in developing and organizing that content in a coherent manner is critical for the communication to be successful.

Adherence to Language Conventions

Attention to language conventions is mentioned in six of nine frameworks. Statements relating to conventions (including syntax, grammar, and usage) underscore the idea that, by college, students should be fluent with text production skills and be able to compose "substantially error free prose" (Adelman et al., 2011, p. 14) with appropriate syntax and mechanics, spelling, grammar, and so forth. This includes knowledge of vocabulary, stylistic conventions, and the functions of language, both at surface and global levels (CWPA et al., 2011).

Writing From Sources and the Writing Process

The frameworks reviewed give relatively little attention to two features of written communication emphasized by the higher education writing community: (a) critical analysis and use of sources and (b) attention to the writing process. Using sources to support writing is included as a major dimension of the LEAP rubrics, suggesting attention to evaluating the relevance, quality, and credibility of those sources² (Rhodes, 2010); in contrast, the Bologna framework (González & Wagenaar, 2003) suggests that students should "receive and respond to a variety of information sources" (p. 144) in

visual, oral (i.e., auditory), and textual formats, while the DQP states that students will be able to conduct inquiry from non-English language sources³ (Adelman et al., 2011). The *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (CWPA et al., 2011) deals with writing from sources as an aspect of critical thinking and analysis of text materials, a process of conducting research from sources, knowledge of source attribution conventions, and incorporating electronic sources in multimedia productions; including elements related to use of sources in four of five dimensions of writing skill suggests that source use is particularly important for higher education.

With respect to the process dimension, skill in monitoring the writing process “from drafting to proof-reading” (Binkley et al., 2010, p. 22) is an important aspect of writing in ATC21S and is a major dimension of the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (CWPA et al., 2011), but no other frameworks address this issue. In fact, the LEAP VALUE rubrics (Rhodes, 2010) specifically exclude notions of writing processes or strategies from their framework for student learning outcomes. However, as underscored by the *Framework* (CWPA et al., 2011), these strategies and processes are a critical aspect of writing at the college level and, thus, should be included in any comprehensive definition of written communication.

To summarize, based on the review of frameworks presented here, it is clear that in defining written communication, we must consider facility with multiple types (i.e., genres), forms (i.e., media), and audiences, in addition to the importance of the context and purpose for writing, and the importance of skill in manipulating both conceptual content (i.e., development and organization of ideas, critical analysis, and use of sources) and linguistic information (language, syntax, and mechanics; tone of voice and register) to suit the current communicative goals. The writing process (planning, drafting, and revision) is also critical.

Theoretical Perspectives on Writing From the Research Literature

It is evident from the frameworks reviewed in the previous section that writing is a complex skill, involving multiple dimensions, and that different perspectives on writing may differentially emphasize some of those dimensions. In this section, we explore theoretical perspectives that underlie these various dimensions of written communication competency and the importance of these dimensions for becoming a skilled writer. This survey of extant research literature is intended to enrich our definition of the construct and to suggest which dimensions might be more or less critical for higher education. Consistent with previous efforts to summarize the writing construct (Cumming et al., 2000), the work surveyed here suggests that writing involves cognitive processes situated within particular rhetorical or social contexts.

Sociocognitive Perspectives on Writing

Both social and cognitive perspectives on writing converge on the notion that writing is, by definition, social and purpose-driven (e.g., Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Graham & Perin, 2007; Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997; also see Deane, 2011). Genres of writing, for example, serve specific social goals and purposes (Bazerman, 2004), and those rhetorical goals shape and constrain the types and methods through which information should be recorded and shared with others when writing within a particular genre. In higher education, the focus is typically on *transactional* writing (i.e., writing to communicate or exchange information, ideas, or arguments with others in order to achieve particular purposes, such as to inform, persuade, or explain information to others; Burstein et al., 2014). Therefore, writers must consider the nature and needs of their audience(s) in order for communication to be successful (cf. Clark & Murphy, 1982). Sociocultural perspectives also emphasize that cultural conventions and social situations impact literacy practices (Perry, 2012), such that attention to the social context for writing is critical for both assessment and learning (cf. Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011). This is consistent with work in the learning sciences suggesting that learning to write is best conceptualized as a process of socialization into a literate community of practice, whereby writers are guided by expert practitioners to gradually take increasing responsibility for producing the forms and genres of writing that are valued within a discipline or research community (Barab & Duffy, 2000; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Instruction should strive to make writing socially meaningful to students (Alvermann, 2002).

This sociocognitive perspective has been applied to support the design of competency models and assessments. As an example, a model of ELA literacy incorporating social, conceptual, and linguistic dimensions has been developed under the Cognitively Based Assessment *of, for, and as* Learning (CBAL™) research initiative at ETS (Bennett, 2010). The CBAL

ELA competency model (Deane, 2011; Deane, Sabatini, & O'Reilly, 2011; Sabatini, O'Reilly, & Deane, 2013) specifies the reading, writing, and critical thinking skills that are necessary to learn in order to participate in key literacy practices (e.g., learning from informational text, engaging in argumentation, conducting inquiry and research). It is possible to conceptualize the various levels of knowledge and skill required for participation in literate activities as dealing with different types of knowledge representations (i.e., social, conceptual, and linguistic—including discourse, verbal, and print⁴—levels; Deane, 2011). Broadly, expert writing can be considered to involve a set of receptive skills (processing and comprehending information from source texts), expressive skills (synthesizing information from source texts and translating one's ideas into written words), and deliberative skills (applying appropriate strategic and meta-cognitive knowledge), which rely on the social, conceptual, and linguistic representations. A written product is the result of interactions among complex cognitive processes, as well as the knowledge of and skill in adapting one's production to meet the social and rhetorical constraints on what kind of writing must be produced to achieve one's purposes (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011). Thus, writing can be appropriately conceptualized as a set of sociocognitive practices (Behizadeh, 2014; Deane, 2011; Deane et al., in press), which experts can deploy strategically to achieve particular goals.

The CBAL ELA model specifies how the skills that support participation in various literate practices may develop, from novice to expert-level performances, by positing a set of hypothesized learning progressions (LPs) for the skills that constitute and contribute to performance of those key practices. These LPs can be used to support the design of assessments that target specific component skills (e.g., distinguishing between primary and secondary sources, making cross-text synthesizing inferences), while modeling the integrated practices required of professionals (e.g., writing a research report). At the most advanced levels of practice, writers are expected to take into account their purpose, audience, and disciplinary knowledge; in conducting research and inquiry, for example, writers are expected to present and support an original synthesis, review and evaluate evidence from relevant literatures (including seminal sources within the discipline), and to articulate how one's work contributes to and extends current knowledge and discourse about the issue (Sparks & Deane, 2014). These types of performances may not yet be achieved by the time students enter college, but are consistent with those expected in advanced undergraduate, graduate study, or professional practice. For more information on this effort, see <http://elalp.cbalwiki.ets.org/>.

Cognitive Processes of Writing

As described above, skilled writing requires the deployment and coordination of complex cognitive processes. A prevailing cognitive model, the Hayes-Flower model of writing (Hayes & Flower, 1980), specifies writing as consisting of interactions between the task environment (i.e., features of the writing assignment, such as the topic, audience, and context or purpose, and any text one has produced so far), the writer's long-term memory (i.e., knowledge of the topic, knowledge of the audience, and general plans for writing), and the writing process (i.e., planning, translating, and reviewing). Each aspect of the writing process is goal-directed and requires self-regulation. In the planning process, the writer retrieves relevant knowledge from long-term memory, evaluates the usefulness of the retrieved information, selects the most useful information, and organizes the information into a writing plan. Then the writer translates all these operations into sentences that can be understood by others. In the reviewing process, the writer reads or rereads the existing text and revises it when writing goals have not been satisfied (e.g., "I should address this counterargument to persuade the audience" or "I need to explain this complex idea in simple words"). These processes are recursive and interactive, as planning, translating, and reviewing can be triggered by one's goals.

Expert writers demonstrate qualitatively different writing processes compared to novices. Hayes and Flower (1980) found that skilled writers typically established their main writing goals and subgoals early in the writing process, while unskillful writers spent little time planning. Attention to one's goals for revision similarly explains observed differences in revising behaviors between expert and novice writers (Fitzgerald, 1987). First, expert writers typically spend substantial time and effort in revising their drafts (e.g., Holland, Rose, Dean, & Dory, 1985), but novice writers ignore the revision process or have little idea about how to do it well (Graves & Murray, 1980). Second, expert writers revise their work to improve its overall quality and to clarify the ideas that they want to convey to their audience (Hayes & Flower, 1986), while novice writers view revision as a task to correct grammar, spelling, diction, and punctuation (Faigley & Witte, 1981; MacArthur, Schwartz, & Graham, 1991; Sommers, 1980). Novice writers have an impoverished understanding of the revision process, resulting in revisions that are irrelevant to the meaning of the text, unconnected to genre considerations, and insufficient to help improve the quality of writing. While the ability to revise develops over time (Fitzgerald & Markman, 1987), many

college students cannot perform this task adequately (Kinsler, 1990), suggesting that revision skill may differentiate more expert from less skilled writers.

Knowledge-Telling Versus Knowledge-Transformation

Another key difference between the writing practices of experts and novice students is in their approach to and conceptualization of the writing task with respect to content development and organization. In complex writing situations, where a writer must maintain and work toward achieving multiple goals, it is challenging for novice writers to handle all of the writing constraints without any support. Therefore, novices tend to approach the writing task as simply telling what is known about the topic (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). In fact, many students, including some in college, compose using this *knowledge-telling* approach, because knowledge-telling may help reduce the burden of other cognitive processes, such as planning and revising, which makes the task of producing text manageable. However, students using this approach often overlook their rhetorical goals, the needs of the audience, the organization of the text, and the writing genre (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Graham & Harris, 1997), reflecting a lack of goal setting and self-regulation. In contrast, expert writers and domain experts are likely to use a *knowledge-transforming* approach, which involves viewing the writing task as a problem-solving process. Writers who adopt this approach do not only deal with knowledge and beliefs related to the topic, but also consider the rhetorical goals of the composition; experts make decisions about how to represent this knowledge best in terms of the appropriate language for the intended audience, which is directly reflected in the structure of the text (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

Reading and Writing From Sources

Reading and comprehending source texts gives writers content knowledge about which they can write (e.g., Hayes, 1996; see also Hillocks, 1987, 2005). Expert researchers across multiple domains rely on synthesis of multiple sources to situate their ideas within a particular literature and to build support for their knowledge claims (e.g., Bazerman, 1985; Goldman, 2004; Goldman et al., 2010; Latour & Woolgar, 1986). Writers of arguments, reports, and other research-based genres of writing must interpret sources, determine what information is relevant to their task and purpose, and decide what quotations or paraphrases to embed in the text to support their ideas. These reading-writing connections, including the importance of critically analyzing and using source texts to support one's writing, are emphasized in the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*, as described previously. However, according to reports from the National Adult Literacy Survey (Kutner, Greenberg, & Baer, 2006), fewer than one third of college graduates surveyed were proficient in comprehending prose (extended texts, such as newspaper articles) and other documents (practical directions, such as a prescription medicine label), suggesting that many college students' writing difficulties may be due to failures of reading comprehension.

Even students who read proficiently may have difficulty writing syntheses or arguments because they fail (and perhaps do not know how) to evaluate or to cite sources appropriately. Empirical research demonstrates that attention to sources (i.e., author expertise, publication venue, possible biases) supports understanding and integration of information from multiple documents (e.g., Bråten, Strømsø, & Britt, 2009; Britt & Aglinskias, 2002; Sparks, 2013; Wineburg, 1991), suggesting that students who are more attentive to the characteristics of source documents are better equipped to write essays or reports based on those sources. Unfortunately, empirical research generally suggests that undergraduates fail to attend to source information unless given specific instructions or tasks to consider it critically (e.g., Britt & Aglinskias, 2002; Rouet, Britt, Mason, & Perfetti, 1996; Sparks & Rapp, 2011; Wiley et al., 2009). These difficulties with sourcing likely contribute to several common issues observed in undergraduates' source-based essays, including plagiarism, inclusion of quotations without source attribution, excessive use of quotations (i.e., *quote pastiche*), little use of explicit citations (e.g., "according to Carnegie, . . ."), and little evidence of synthesis across sources (Britt, Wiemer-Hastings, Larson, & Perfetti, 2004). In one study, Britt et al. (2004) asked 108 undergraduates to write opinion essays from a set of seven sources on a history topic, finding that "only 28% of the essays included at least one explicit reference. Considering that no participants made more than two explicit references, it appears that undergraduates are not fully proficient at sourcing" (p. 2). Students tended to cite one to two key sources rather than incorporating content and ideas from across a variety of documents. However, findings from experimental tasks that require students to write and cite sources from memory may not fully generalize to situations where students write essays with source texts and notes available to them, such as in classrooms or

assessment situations. It remains an open question whether these contexts might encourage additional attention to critical analysis and incorporation of sources.

Given the preceding theoretical discussion, it is worth considering the extent to which these research perspectives on written communication correspond to the instructional goals and outcomes observed in educational settings, both within higher education and in K–12, where college readiness is a particular concern. The following section outlines the writing skills that are important for success in college writing.

Writing Instruction and Learning to Write in College

Writing for College Readiness: Connections to Common Core State Standards

In developing a framework for written communication at the college level, it is critical to have expectations concerning incoming students' knowledge and skills. To understand what writing skills are expected of someone who is ready to take on college-level work, one can consider the upper levels of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for ELA/literacy (National Governors Association & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), with a particular focus on the writing standards for Grades 11–12. As these standards define the highest levels of K–12 performance, they are equivalent to the incoming skills expected of a first-year undergraduate who demonstrates readiness for college-level writing literacy.

As seen in Table 3, students who meet the expectations of the CCSS college and career readiness standards can comprehend and evaluate a variety of different texts and documents; construct effective arguments and explications of complex or multifaceted information; build and share their knowledge with others through writing; tailor communications to particular audiences, tasks, purposes, genres, and disciplines; select and use evidence that is appropriate for the discipline (e.g., history, science); conduct research and inquiry from multiple sources, evaluating their reliability and credibility; evaluate sources for their use of evidence; and cite specific textual evidence to support claims and explanations in one's writing. While it is certainly the case that many students will enter into higher education settings with these skills being less than fully developed, it is important to note that the standards correspond to many of the major dimensions of writing that emerged from the review of frameworks above, including attention to one's task, purpose, and audience; writing in the genres of argument and explanation; developing and organizing one's ideas coherently; proficiency with the writing and revision process; conducting research; and engaging in close reading and synthesis of sources.

Writing Instruction in the College Classroom

Undergraduates' experience with writing instruction varies with, historically, the bulk of this instruction occurring in first-year composition courses with little continuing writing instruction when students move on from general education courses to more specialized work within their major discipline. Since the 1980s, however, Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programs have emerged, emphasizing "active student engagement with the material and with the genres of the discipline through writing, not just in English classes, but in all classes across the university" (McLeod, 2012, p. 54). WAC views writing as a skill that must be continuously integrated into curricula, so that students can learn to communicate effectively within the constraints and values of their discipline through exposure to and practice of the conventions and genres that are valued for success in that discipline (i.e., *writing in the disciplines*). Importantly, writing is viewed not just as a way to demonstrate learning, but also as a method of learning and of refining one's thinking (i.e., *writing to learn*; WAC Clearinghouse, 2014). Writing to learn emphasizes the reflective and sense-making functions of writing, which can help the writer to organize and represent his or her thoughts coherently. Writing in the disciplines asks students to produce genres and forms of products that are used routinely by working professionals within the field (e.g., lab reports, position papers, literature reviews, journal articles, and project or grant proposals), consistent with sociocognitive perspectives described previously.

Despite its popularity, WAC can pose significant challenges for students. As described by Haswell (2008), "academic fields differ in the way they regulate every aspect of writing, from usage as minute as the function of the colon in titles to usage as pervasive as the way evidence is respected, gathered, and presented" (p. 416). For undergraduates, learning to write in the disciplines exposes them to "unfamiliar composing processes, novel genres and tasks, shifting standards and expectations" (p. 416), often resulting in discrepant feedback across courses (e.g., Anson, Schwiebert, & Williamson, 1993).

Table 3 Common Core Standards for Writing, Grades 11–12

CCSS standard	Description
W.11-12.1	Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
W.11-12.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
W.11-12.3	Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
W.11-12.4	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Follow standards 1-3)
W.11-12.5	Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of language standards 1-3 through grades 11-12).
W.11-12.6	Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.
W.11-12.7	Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
W.11-12.8	Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.
W.11-12.9	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
W.11-12.10	Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

The ability to understand and adapt one's writing to the current social and situational context (including disciplinary considerations) is an important part of the development of skilled writing (Carroll, 2002). After having mastered fluency with text production skills, college writers learn to produce different text structures, for different audiences, with various goals or purposes. However, development of these skills is uneven and dependent on students' experiences with various instructional strategies. The most common strategies for teaching college writing, as observed across a sample of more than 2,300 teacher intervention studies, include audience awareness, coauthoring and peer discussion, journaling, planning and prewriting (e.g., outlining, concept mapping), editing and proofreading, detecting and correcting errors, drafting or revising, and grammar instruction (Haswell, 2008). As these strategies are most commonly taught, one might predict that writing skills associated with those strategies would be among the most likely candidates for improvement during college and, therefore, could be considered potential targets for assessment.

What Skills Can Be Expected to Develop in College Writers?

Evidence from cross-sectional comparisons of first-year and senior students' writing reveals that advanced undergraduates show the largest gains with respect to vocabulary development, organization, reasoning and argumentation, use of composition strategies, and use of longer sentences with more complex syntactic structures (e.g., Flowers, Osterlind, Pascarella, & Pierson, 2001; Haswell, 1991; Hunt, 1970). However, there are clear limitations to drawing inferences about student improvement from cross-sectional data. Oppenheimer, Zaromb, Pomerantz, Williams, and Park (2014) conducted both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses of growth in undergraduates' writing performance in response to persuasive (e.g., convince an audience about the importance of an issue; 20 minutes) and/or expository (e.g., explain a game or hobby so that someone could read the instructions and participate in the activity; 15 minutes) writing prompts. Writing samples were scored by trained raters on a 4-point scale and submitted to cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis. Cross-sectional results revealed average gains from first-year to fourth-year students of 0.33 points for persuasive and 0.25 points for expository writing. Longitudinal comparisons of first to third year, or second to fourth-year growth showed similar patterns, with essay scores improving by an average of 0.30 points. Evidence of growth was stronger for higher performing students, with approximately half of these

students showing some improvement, but this study did not indicate what specific aspects of writing might improve over time.

Haswell (2000) reported results of a longitudinal study of the specific features of writing that can be observed to develop from the first to third year of college, using a random sample of 64 students' responses to an impromptu persuasive writing prompt. Haswell found significant improvement in several areas, including mean holistic rating (8-point scale, human scored, consistent with Oppenheimer *et al.*, 2014); mean sentence, clause, and overall essay length (related to fluency and content development); proportion of words in introductory paragraphs, proportion of words in free modifiers (i.e., independent phrases or clauses, which can be moved to sentence-initial, mid-sentence, or sentence-final positions); and vocabulary (use of words with nine or more letters; p. 331). In sum, students can improve the cohesion, elaboration, logic, and overall quality of their persuasive and expository writing through instruction, with these improvements in the direction of the skills expected in professional practice (Haswell, 1986, 2000). The extent to which skill in the writing process and use of sources can be expected to develop during college is yet unclear, but because these dimensions differentiate expert from more novice writers, one could predict that college may help students develop these skills, to the extent that students receive appropriate instructional support. In the next section, we review existing assessments of written communication and the design challenges and considerations associated with developing such an assessment.

Review of Existing Assessments and Design Challenges

Existing Assessments of Written Communication

In support of the goal of developing an operational definition of written communication, we reviewed a variety of existing writing assessments designed to be administered to students approaching the entry or exit point of their college education. Specifically, we reviewed the assessments with a goal of understanding the advantages and disadvantages of existing approaches to assessing writing, and to inform both our notions of the construct and our recommendations for negotiating particular challenges in designing such an assessment. Key features of the assessments reviewed are described in terms of the assessment purpose, format, construct coverage, and reliability and validity evidence. Detailed information on each assessment appears in Table 4. Table 5 shows the correspondence between the targeted skills (i.e., as described in rubric statements and definitions) and the dimensions of the writing construct outlined in the section of this report.

Purpose of the Assessments

Assessments are created for various purposes, and these purposes affect how the assessment is designed, used, and interpreted. Because our goal is to support the development of SLO assessment of written communication in higher education, we examined assessments designed for a range of purposes and use cases, including placement into developmental or college-level English courses (e.g., ASSET, COMPASS, ACCUPLACER, English Placement Test, AP and CLEP tests), admission to graduate or professional programs (e.g., GRE Analytical Writing, GMAT Analytical Writing), assessment of student learning outcomes (e.g., Collegiate Assessment of Academic Progress, Collegiate Learning Assessment, ETS Proficiency Profile; ETS, 2010a; Liu, 2008), or multiple purposes (e.g., College BASE is used for both placement and SLO assessment).

Assessment Format and Construct Coverage

Large-scale writing assessment in the United States typically takes the form of selected-response (SR) tests, extended constructed-response (CR) tests (i.e., composing an essay response to a prompt), or writing portfolios, which consist of multiple examples of student writing across contexts, genres, and purposes, collected over time (Yancey, 1999). Portfolio assessment could be an effective complement for higher education institutions wishing to get a more detailed view of students' writing performance, particularly across genres, disciplines, and modes of expression, supported by interactions with and feedback from instructors (cf. Behizadeh, 2014; see Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000, for an in-depth review of portfolio assessment). Here, however, we focus on tests with SR and CR item formats.

Table 4 Existing Assessments of Written Communication

Test	Vendor	Purpose	Length	Delivery	Format	Forms & items	Scoring	Task type
ACT Writing Test	ACT	Placement	30 m	Paper	Essay (1, optional)		Essays scored by 2-3 human raters; holistic score (1-6), with scores summed across 2 raters (2-12)	Prompts describe an issue relevant to high school students; examinees are asked to explain their perspective on the issue.
ASSET Writing Skills Test	ACT	Placement	25 m	Paper	MC	36 items, with 12 items for each of 3 passages		Revision in passage context; assesses usage/mechanics, rhetorical skills (strategy, organization, style).
Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP)	ACT	SLO assessment	40 m	Paper	Essays (2)		Essays scored by 2 human raters; holistic score (1-6), with scores averaged across 2 essays	Prompt specifies an issue under discussion and a specific audience; examinees write an argument explaining their position on the issue.
CAAP	ACT	SLO assessment	40 m	Paper	MC	72 items, with 12 items for each of 6 passages		Revision in passage context; assesses usage/mechanics, rhetorical skills (strategy, organization, style).
COMPASS Writing Essay Test (e-Write)	ACT	Placement	60 m (varies)	Computer	Essay (1)		Automated scoring; holistic score from 2-8 (or 2-12), with subscales from 1-4 (1-6) on focus, content, organization, style	Students respond to an issue or problem (e.g., “take a position and offer a solution supported with specific example or evidence regarding the position taken”).
COMPASS Writing Skills Placement Test	ACT	Placement	Untimed	Computer	MC	22 to 24 MC questions per essay prompt; 20 forms		Revision in passage context; assesses usage/mechanics, rhetorical skills (strategy, organization, style).
Medical College Admissions Test Writing Section	American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC)	Admissions	60 m (30 m/prompt)	Computer	Essays (2)		Essays scored by 2 human raters	Each prompt is a 3-part expository task: (a) explain the prompt; explain what you think the statement means; (b) explain a view opposite the prompt; (c) bring new meaning; explain a view that resolves the sides explained in (a) and (b).

Table 4 Continued

Test	Vendor	Purpose	Length	Delivery	Format	Forms & items	Scoring	Task type
English Placement Test (EPT)	California State University	Placement	45 m	Paper	Essay (1)	New prompt per each admin.; all concurrent examinees take same prompt	Human scored by 1 faculty member, 1-6 scale (0 for off topic or unscorable; 3 or below suggests that examinee lacks college readiness)	Prompts take a position on or present an argument about a situation or issue; examinees are instructed to evaluate the argument's reasoning and may invoke reasons and examples from their own experience, observations, and reading.
EPT	California State University, ETS	Placement	30 m	Paper	MC	45 items	40 items count toward total score; 5 are for field test purposes	4 item types: construction-shift items (select best continuation of sentence given a new introduction), sentence correction items (select best revision of underlined portion of a sentence), missing sentence items (select best sentence for paragraph initial, middle, or final-position blanks), and supporting sentence items (select sentence that best supports or explains preceding sentence).
CUNY Assessment Test in Writing (CATW)	City University of New York (CUNY)	Placement	90 m	Paper	Essay (1)	Human scored by 2 faculty members, with analytic (trait) scoring (1-6) in 5 categories	Prompts consist of a 300-350 word passage on topic of general interest. Examinees must respond to the passage as follows: (a) summarize the passage in their own words; (b) identify and explain a significant idea from the passage; and (c) support claims with evidence or examples (from the reading, prior experience, or other sources).	
ACCUPLACER® Sentence Skills	College Board®	Placement	Untimed	Computer	SR	20 items	Revision in sentence context and construction-shift items.	

Table 4 Continued

Test	Vendor	Purpose	Length	Delivery	Format	Forms & items	Scoring	Task type
ACCUPLACER WritePlacer®	College Board	Placement	Untimed	Computer	Essay (1)		Automated scoring; holistic score from 1-8, with 0 for off topic or unscorable; examinees may receive feedback (1-3 level proficiency statements) for each of 6 dimensions	Prompts present contrasting views on a topic of general interest; test takers are asked to write an essay that presents and explains their position on the issue to a specified audience; students are asked to “plan, write, review, and edit” the essay in the allotted time.
Advanced Placement® English Language and Composition (Section ii)	College Board	AP® course outcomes, credit	2 h (40 m/ prompt)	Computer	Essays (3)	Synthesis, passage analysis, and argument tasks	Human scored by 2-3 raters per essay; holistic scoring (0-9)	4 tasks. <i>Synthesis</i> : test takers respond to a general topic by synthesizing at least 3 of the accompanying 7 sources for support; <i>passage analysis</i> : test takers read a passage and write an essay that analyzes writing techniques (e.g., rhetorical devices, organization strategies, argumentative techniques, etc.); <i>argument</i> : the prompt presents a general issue and instructs test takers to write an essay presenting their own view of the issue, drawing from their own readings, experiences, observations, etc.
College Level Examination Program (CLEP®): College Composition Modular	College Board	Placement, credit	70 m for prompts provided by CLEP, or institution can set own test time	Computer (online), or determined by institution	Essays (2) provided by CLEP, or institution can substitute other direct writing assessment		Essays scored by institution	Prompts provided by CLEP include two tasks. <i>Argument</i> : write a response to a prompt using the student’s own observations, experiences, or readings as support. <i>Synthesis</i> : write a response involving the synthesis and citation of 2 provided source texts.

Table 4 Continued

Test	Vendor	Purpose	Length	Delivery	Format	Forms & items	Scoring	Task type
CLEP: College Composition Modular	College Board	Placement, credit	90 m	Computer (online)	SR	90 items		Items assess revision skills, rhetorical analysis, ability to use source materials, and conventions of standard English. Item types include identifying errors in sentence contexts, revision in passage context, and items pertaining to the passage's use of rhetoric or sources.
CLEP: College Composition	College Board	Placement, credit	70 m	Computer (online)	Essays (2)		Essays scored by 2 human raters; holistic score (1-6), with scores summed across 2 raters (2-12)	2 tasks. <i>Argument</i> : write a response to a prompt using the student's own observations, experiences, or readings as support. <i>Synthesis</i> : write a response involving the synthesis and citation of 2 provided source texts.
CLEP: College Composition	College Board	Placement, credit	50 m	Computer (online)	MC	50 items	MC and essays weighted approximately equally; total score 20-80	Item types include identifying errors in sentence contexts, revision in passage context, and items pertaining to the passage's use of rhetoric or sources.
Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLAT)	Council for Aid to Education (CAE)	SLO assessment	60 m	Computer (online)	Essay (1)	Performance task	Essays scored by human raters, with automated scoring as supplement (Pearson's <i>Intelligent Essay Assessor</i>); examinees receive subscores (1-6) in 3 dimensions	Performance task requires students to read a scenario, analyze and take a position or draw a conclusion about the issue described, using sources from a document library to support one's claims, including citing those sources.
<i>Criterion</i> ® Online Writing Evaluation Service	ETS	Placement, formative assessment, various	Varies	Computer (web-based)	Essays (varies)	Topic pool includes over 120 prompts appropriate for college writing courses	Automated scoring (<i>e-rater</i> ®); examinees receive a holistic score (1-6 or 1-4), and diagnostic feedback on 5 dimensions	<i>Criterion</i> is an integrated assessment and instructional system that collects writing samples (i.e., essays in response to prompts) and provides instant scores and annotated feedback, to identify weaknesses in writing and to support students in the revision process. Instructors can create their own prompts or choose from a library of prompts.

Table 4 Continued

Test	Vendor	Purpose	Length	Delivery	Format	Forms & items	Scoring	Task type
ETS Proficiency Profile (EPP), formerly Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP) and the Academic Profile	ETS	SLO assessment	30 m	Computer (online)	Essay (1, optional)		Automated scoring (e-rater); examinees receive a holistic score (1-6)	Prompts present a claim about a topic of general interest that can be discussed from various perspectives; examinees are asked to think critically about the claim and to construct a well-organized, clear, and effective response that takes a position on the issue and supports that position with reasons and evidence.
EPP, formerly MAPP and the Academic Profile	ETS	SLO assessment	30 m/10 m abbreviated	Paper	MC	27 items (9 for abbreviated form)		Revision in sentence context and construction-shift items.
GRE [®] revised General Test: Analytical Writing	ETS	Admissions	1 h (30 m/ prompt)	Internet-based testing (iBT)	Essays (2)		Essays scored by 1-2 human rater (holistic scoring, 1-6), with automated scoring (e-rater) used as a check score; scores on 2 tasks are averaged	2 tasks. <i>Issue</i> : prompts provide generalizations, positions, reasons, etc. about a particular topic, along with a specific analytical task that candidates should enact in their responses (e.g., consideration of counterarguments to their own positions). <i>Argument</i> : prompts present arguments that include claims, examples, and flawed reasoning, sometimes from a particular source, and examinees must analyze the argument (e.g., discussing alternative explanations, identifying assumptions, or describing specific evidence needed as support).
TOEFL iBT [®] Writing Assessment	ETS	Placement, admissions	55 m (30 m for independent task; 20 m for integrated task; 5 m break)	Internet-based testing (iBT)	Essays (2)		Responses scored by 1-2 human raters who focus on content and meaning (holistic scoring, 0-5), with automated scoring (e-rater) of linguistic features. Scores on 2 tasks are summed and converted to a scale score of 0-30	2 tasks. <i>Independent task</i> : examinees are asked whether they agree or disagree with an opinion on a topic of general concern and to support their positions with reasons and examples (similar to GRE issue task). <i>Integrated task</i> : examinees read a passage and then listen to a lecture on the same topic (i.e., the lecture either supports or opposes the reading); they are instructed to summarize the information in the lecture and describe the relationship between that information and the information provided in the passage.

Table 4 Continued

Test	Vendor	Purpose	Length	Delivery	Format	Forms & items	Scoring	Task type
Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT): Analytical Writing Assessment	Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC)	Admissions	30 m	Computer	Essay (1)		Essays scored by 1–2 human raters (holistic scoring, 0–6), with automated scoring (Vantage Learning's <i>Intellimetric</i>) used as a check score; scores from 2 raters are averaged	<i>Analysis of an argument task.</i> Prompts present arguments that include claims, examples, and flawed reasoning in a fictional context, sometimes from a particular source, and examinees must analyze the argument in terms of specifics of the prompt (e.g., discussing alternative explanations, or describe the specific evidence needed to evaluate the argument).
Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) writing sample	Law School Admissions Council (LSAC)	Admissions	35 m	Paper	Essay (1)		Essays are not scored but are sent with LSAT scores to institutions identified by examinees	The prompt presents a fictional scenario describing 2 “equally defensible” decisions or positions; candidates must choose which of the 2 to support and provide reasons supporting the decision with reference to both alternatives presented.
Analytical Writing Placement Examination (AWPE; formerly Subject A)	Pearson/State of California	Placement	2 h	Computer	Essay (1)		Essays scored by 2–3 human raters (holistic scoring, 1–6)	Prompts present a prose passage (700–1,000 words) on an accessible general topic; examinees are asked to write an essay analyzing the passage and developing their own thoughts about issues described in the passage, using specific examples from experience, observations, or readings.
Georgia Regents' Essay Test	Regents' Testing Program Office	SLO assessment	60 m	Paper	Essay (1)	Topic list available (http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwrtp/topics.htm)	Essays scored by 3 raters (holistic scoring, 1–3), with scores of 2–3 passing	Examinees are asked to write an essay responding to their choice of 1 from a set of 4 possible prompts on topics of general interest, relevant to society, politics, history, literature, or other subjects (e.g., “What could be done to make students more interested in learning about science? Discuss.”).

Table 4 Continued

Test	Vendor	Purpose	Length	Delivery	Format	Forms & items	Scoring	Task type
College Basic Academic Subjects Examination (College BASE)	University of Missouri	Admission to educator preparatory programs, SLO assessment	20 m	Paper	MC	16–18 items	Students receive an overall writing cluster score and skill scores for understanding the writing process, use of language conventions, and the essay section	Items assess student skill in understanding the writing process, including (a) identifying and applying appropriate prewriting strategies, organizational methods, and research techniques (e.g., select the best source for a particular purpose) and (b) improving the clarity, coherence, organization, and style through revision (e.g., select the best revision of a sentence) and use of language conventions (e.g., recognize or repair flaws in mechanics and punctuation).
College BASE	University of Missouri	Admission to educator preparatory programs, SLO assessment	40 m	Paper	Essay (1, optional)		Essays scored by 2–3 human raters with holistic (1–6) scale	Prompts describe a scenario of general interest to college students, such as a proposal; examinees must express an attitude toward or take a position on the issue and defend that position using supporting examples and direct their response to a specified audience.
Writing Placement Exam	Washington State University	Placement	2 h	Online or paper	Essays (2)		Essays scored by human raters	2 tasks. <i>Argument</i> : examinees construct an argument about a short reading passage. <i>Reflection</i> : examinees reflect on the writing sample they just completed.

Note. m = minutes; h = hours; admin = administration; AP = advanced placement; MC = multiple choice; SR = selected response; SLO = student learning outcome.

Table 5 Correspondence Among Existing Assessments and Dimensions of Written Communication

Assessment	Task, context and purpose	Audience awareness	Genre conventions	Modes and forms	Development and organization	Use of sources	Disciplinary conventions	Style, word choice, tone	Language use and conventions	Writing process
<i>Selected-response assessments^a</i>										
ACCUPLACER	X	—	—	—	—	—	—	X	X	~
ASSET Writing Skills Test	X	—	—	—	X	—	—	X	X	~
CAAP Writing Skills	X	—	—	—	X	~	—	X	X	~
College BASE	X	X	X	—	X	X	—	X	X	X
COMPASS Writing Skills	X	—	—	—	X	—	—	X	X	—
EPT-CSU	—	—	—	—	X	—	—	~	X	—
EPP	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	X	X	~
<i>Constructed-response assessments^a</i>										
ACT Writing Test (Essay)	~	—	~	—	X	—	—	—	X	—
ACCUPLACER WritePlacer (Essay)	~	—	~	—	X	—	—	X	X	—
AWPE (Essay)	~	—	~	—	X	~	—	~	X	—
CAAP Essay	~	X	X	—	X	—	—	—	X	—
CATW (Essay)	X	—	X	—	X	X	—	—	X	—
CLA+ (Essay)	X	—	X	—	X	X	—	X	X	—
CLEP: College Composition (Essay)	X	—	X	—	X	X	—	—	X	—
College BASE (Essay)	X	X	~	—	X	—	—	X	X	—
COMPASS E-Write (Essay)	X	X	~	—	X	—	—	X	X	—
EPP (Essay)	X	—	~	—	X	—	—	—	X	—
EPT-CSU (Essay)	X	—	X	—	X	X	—	—	X	—
Georgia Regents Essay Test	X	—	~	—	X	—	—	—	X	—
GMAT Writing	X	—	X	—	X	~	—	X	X	—
GRE-R Analytical Writing	X	—	~	—	X	~	—	X	X	—
MCAT Writing	X	—	X	—	X	—	—	—	X	—
TOEFL Writing	X	—	X	—	X	~	—	—	X	—
WSU Writing Placement Exam	X	—	X	—	X	~	—	—	X	—

Note. X = assessment provides evidence of this aspect; ~ = assessment provides partial evidence of this aspect; — = assessment does not provide evidence of this aspect.

^aSee Table 4 for full names of tests.

Selected-Response Format (Indirect Writing Assessment)

Eight assessments we reviewed included an SR section; of these, assessments designed for placement purposes were most prevalent (e.g., ASSET, ACCUPLACER, and EPT), but SLO assessments such as the EPP and CAAP include SR items as well.⁵ Most common SR item types include (a) *revision-in-context* items, in which a section of a sentence or passage is underlined, and examinees can either select the most appropriate revision to correct an error in grammar, usage, or syntax or indicate that no revision is needed and (b) *construction-shift* items, which present an alternate beginning to a stimulus sentence and require examinees to select the best continuation of that stem from the options provided. ACCUPLACER, EPT, and EPP include both of these item types; CAAP includes revision-in-context items presented within a passage. Other SR item types ask examinees to select the best sentence to fill a blank in a paragraph (in initial, middle, or final-sentence position; e.g., EPT) or to answer questions about the writer's rhetorical or stylistic goals (e.g., CAAP).

From a measurement perspective, SR assessments have some advantages, as they tend to be more cost-effective in terms of administration and scoring than CR items, and they are considered more objective (i.e., with specific and distinct correct responses versus open-ended items that may not have a single correct answer). SR items are often faster to complete, meaning that examinees can respond to more of these items in the allotted time compared to the number of CR items (e.g., for the CAAP, test takers are asked to respond to 72 SR items, as compared to two CR essays, in 40-minute sessions) and, therefore, an SR test typically has a higher reliability than a CR test taking the same amount of time.⁶ The SR items may also demonstrate better prediction of criterion scores (i.e., scores on a series of short essay tasks) than a single holistically scored CR essay (e.g., Godshalk, Swineford, & Coffman, 1966).

However, with respect to construct representation, use of SR items has some clear limitations. SR items have been said to “fail to address the cognitive and reflective processes involved in creating a text—such as making plans for

writing, generating and developing ideas, and making claims and providing evidence” (Murphy & Yancey, 2008, p. 450; see also Odell, 1981), suggesting that SR items underrepresent the writing construct. Consistent with this notion, the SR items we reviewed overwhelmingly assessed lower level writing abilities, such as language conventions (grammar, usage, mechanics), style (i.e., word choice, sentence variety, and register), and organization (text structure and sequence of ideas), at the expense of higher order writing skills. SR item types such as revision-in-sentence-context and construction-shift items are typically used to assess students’ knowledge of local organization, style, and language conventions while only indirectly assessing skill in the revision process. CAAP Writing, for example, provides students with subscores for usage/mechanics and rhetorical skills (i.e., strategy, purpose, organization, and style). Revision-in-passage-context items assess skill in usage, mechanics, or style, targeting a specific text section, while strategy and organization items might ask about the passage as a whole; a typical rhetorical strategy question might ask examinees to evaluate the appropriateness of a quotation in the passage, given a particular communicative goal. This example item indirectly addresses use of sources but is considered mainly in terms of attention to rhetorical purpose. The College BASE SR writing test also includes items assessing skill in selecting appropriate prewriting strategies, text structure and organization, choosing sources for a particular purpose, and revision; these items contribute to a subscore for understanding the writing process. While the College BASE had the widest construct definition of any SR assessment we reviewed, given the limited number of items on the test (i.e., 16–18), it is unlikely that the intended construct can be adequately covered such that it provides useful information about rhetorical or conceptual skills.

Thus, while SR items can be used to evaluate linguistic as well as more rhetorical dimensions, the emphasis on rhetorical skills—and the extent to which they can be measured reliably—may vary with particular test designs. For example, students who demonstrate proficiency with SR revision items can be said to possess the abilities to manipulate sentences, to correct errors in diction and syntax, and to recognize inappropriate relations among clauses (e.g., ACCUPLACER). Given the review presented in the first section of this article, it is clear that the writing skills that can be effectively assessed by asking students to correct errors within single sentences are largely limited to those related to language conventions (i.e., grammar, usage, syntax, and mechanics). This tendency of SR items to focus on low-level mechanics and usage in lieu of higher order cognitive skills is a primary objection to the use of SR tests to measure writing proficiency (cf. Murphy & Yancey, 2008). Arguably, revision-in-passage-context items can assess discourse-level, rather than sentence-level, processing, which is more consistent with the kinds of literacy practices that are expected of college writers who deal more often in extended text and discourse than with discrete sentences presented in an isolated fashion. However, in general, SR assessments still only estimate students’ *probable* writing ability, by testing discrete knowledge and skills that are *associated* with writing, rather than evaluating students’ ability to produce coherent, error-free writing, as in CR assessments.

Constructed-Response Format (Direct Writing Assessment)

The majority of writing assessments we reviewed included CR items, which directly assess students’ writing skills. Typically, CR assessments require examinees to compose an essay in response to a prompt or stimulus under controlled conditions; the texts produced are then evaluated, whether by human raters, automated writing evaluation systems, or some combination of the two. The CAAP essay, COMPASS e-Write, CLA+ Performance Task, CUNY CATW, and the GRE Analytical Writing are all examples of CR tests. Many such assessments ask examinees to take a position and present a well-developed argument using supporting evidence from one’s own readings and experiences (e.g., CAAP essay, GRE issue task) or to critically analyze arguments or information presented in a text (e.g., CLA+, GRE argument task).

Use of CR format items is consistent with the widely held perspective that the most valid measures of writing ability are those that actually require students to write extended text (cf. Fowles, 2012; Yancey, 1999). In contrast to SR tests, CR items are more authentic, in that they treat writing as an active, social, communicative process (Murphy & Yancey, 2008). That is, CR tasks require examinees to deploy and demonstrate proficiency with the social, cognitive, and linguistic processes that are necessary to solve the rhetorical problem posed by the prompt (cf. Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). Under timed conditions, the writer’s fluency with these processes becomes particularly important, as he or she needs to be able to produce clear and effective text with a logical and coherent organization and structure, despite limited time for planning and revision (Hayes & Flower, 1980). The greater one’s fluency with low-level language processes, the more one can use available cognitive and conceptual resources to develop and organize ideas, to engage with the intended audience, and

to address the rhetorical goals of the piece. Fluent writers' essays are also less likely to be marked by errors in syntax, mechanics, grammar, and word choice.

However, the extent to which examinees are expected to engage in higher level social and rhetorical problem solving in a given CR assessment depends on the assigned prompt. Most assessments we reviewed assessed students' response to the assigned task and genre of writing requested (i.e., argument); organization and content development; word choice and style; and adherence to conventions and control of grammar, usage, and mechanics. For example, CR prompts that ask examinees to take a position on an issue, to support that position with reasons and examples, and to anticipate counterarguments, while addressing the response to a specific audience (e.g., CAAP, COMPASS e-Write), provide evidence of students' skill in several aspects of writing: adapting writing to purpose and audience, adherence to genre conventions for argument structure and quality, development and organization of ideas, and facility with both stylistic and grammatical language conventions. It is notable that while any CR assessment could potentially evaluate audience awareness by asking writers to address a specified audience, only three assessments we reviewed included this task requirement (i.e., CAAP, COMPASS e-write, and College BASE). In the majority of CR assessments, then, aside from the raters that score the essay, examinees are writing arguments to no one in particular, which does not truly count as an instance of written communication (Condon, 2013); this lack of authentic social features has led some researchers to claim that CR tests largely ignore social and cultural elements, using "one narrow version of literacy to represent a broad construct" (Behizadeh, 2014, p. 128). Given the importance of audience awareness in advanced writing proficiency, it is important to assess this aspect of writing; yet, many current CR assessments fail to do so.

CR assessments can also be used to evaluate students' use of sources in writing. For example, the CLA+ performance task presents examinees with a document library, which they can consult and use as evidentiary support in addressing key questions and making an argument about an issue described in the prompt. Others include a more limited text stimulus, yet they still require students to critically evaluate or summarize information from sources. For example, CATW asks examinees to respond to a reading passage of 300–350 words by summarizing the most important ideas of the author and explaining the significance of one key idea, using supporting evidence and examples from prior learning or experience (CUNY, 2012). Students are assessed in terms of understanding and responding to the main ideas in the passage and the use of supporting details and examples, including specific references to the passage. Other assessments partially deal with use of sources, by either asking examinees to summarize or explain the ideas in a passage (e.g., TOEFL integrated task) or to critique those ideas, without requiring examinees to quote or cite information from those sources as support for their ideas. For example, studies of expert raters indicate that although the GRE Analytical Writing tasks provide much information that is relevant to important writing skills at both the undergraduate and graduate levels (e.g., organizing ideas and information coherently, following conventions of standard written English), they do *not* provide information about students' ability to credit sources appropriately or to integrate quoted or referenced material into their own text (Rosenfeld, Courtney, & Fowles, 2004). Such assessments provide better measurement of students' critical reading and analytic skills, rather than their skill in writing from multiple sources, *per se*.

Further, no CR assessment provided information about students' writing process, other than drafting. The nature of most on-demand writing assessments precludes assessment of planning or revision, because examinees respond to a single prompt in a limited amount of time. While the final written product is saved and evaluated, the composition process is not captured. However, with technology-enhanced delivery, the writer's process can be captured for subsequent analysis. Evidence from analyses of keystroke logs suggests that process-level features can predict students' writing proficiency (e.g., Deane, 2014), though efforts to use keystroke-logging techniques on the fly to evaluate and score the efficiency and effectiveness of students' processes or to deliver just-in-time feedback are still in early stages. Systems like ETS's *Criterion* Online Writing evaluation service can help support students and teachers in understanding and engaging in the writing process by providing planning tools and a collection of prompts to which writers can compose responses and receive instant feedback (provided by the e-rater engine) about aspects of the text that could be improved through revision. When students successfully address the feedback provided by the system, their scores may improve if they resubmit the revised essay to *Criterion* (though evidence suggests that some implementations of *Criterion* may not take full advantage of the planning and revision tools; Warschauer & Grimes, 2008). However, even this system does not provide assessment of the writing process *per se*. New assessment designs that incorporate distinct planning and revision tasks, or traditional revision-in-context SR items, may be required beyond typical CR tasks, if assessing the writing process is considered a priority. Similarly, assessments intended to provide information about students' proficiency with composing in multiple

modes and formats (i.e., using technology-enhanced composition tools); disciplinary conventions; or genres other than argument, critique, or explanation (such as a research report) will necessitate different assessment design strategies than those currently observed in the market.

In sum, relative to SR items, CR items demonstrate better coverage of the written communication construct. However, CR items have other notable constraints, such as the extended testing time required for essay writing tasks and the increased costs associated with scoring the responses, particularly if human raters are to be used (Williamson, Xi, & Breyer, 2012). We return to these issues when discussing assessment design challenges; but, first, we examine reliability and validity evidence for the assessments reviewed.

Reliability and Validity Evidence

Table 6 presents a summary of reliability and validity evidence available for each assessment reviewed. Reliability and validity evidence has been examined throughout the literature, particularly for three popular, widely used assessments: CAAP, CLA/CLA+, and EPP. Substantial validity evidence has also been gathered for the GRE Analytical Writing assessment. Importantly, for many of the assessments we reviewed, written communication represents only a part of a larger assessment; accordingly, for the purposes of the current review, only reliability and validity evidence pertaining to the writing sections will be examined here.

Reliability Evidence

Often, written communication assessments represent a subtest of a larger suite of assessments; therefore, it is important to demonstrate evidence of adequate reliability (i.e., internal consistency) for those subtest scores. The reliability of a particular test score is highly related to the number of items within that test, so test length is an important consideration with respect to reliability (Sinharay, Puhon, & Haberman, 2011). In part due to this, CR assessments often demonstrate low reliability compared to SR assessments, where a larger number of items can be administered within the same testing time. Still, sufficient numbers of items must be administered to achieve adequate reliability. For example, the EPP only reports individual subtest scores (i.e., a separate score for EPP Writing, Reading, Critical Thinking, and Mathematics) if individuals take the standard form, with 27 items per section, but not the abbreviated form, with only nine. EPP Writing has demonstrated alpha reliability coefficients of .81 (ETS, 2010a) and school-level reliability of .91 (Klein *et al.*, 2009); estimates for the SR CAAP writing section are similarly high, with school-level reliability of .88 (Klein *et al.*, 2009) and KR-20 of .92 (CAAP Program Management, 2012). CAAP also reports sufficient reliability of the Rhetorical Skills and Usage/Mechanics subscales, with KR-20 ranging from .84 to .86 across forms (CAAP Program Management, 2012).

In contrast to SR tests, CR assessments are typically less reliable. For example, school-level reliabilities for CAAP Essay (.75), CLA Make an Argument (.84), and the CLA Performance Task (.75) are lower than estimates observed for SR-format assessments, but all reliability estimates exceeded .70 except for the school-level reliability of the CAAP Essay for first-year students, which was .68 (Klein *et al.*, 2009). Reliability for the GRE Analytical Writing section is estimated at .82 (ETS, 2013b), similar to the figures for the CAAP and CLA MA tasks, but slightly higher than the estimated reliability (.77) of the analytical writing section in the version of the GRE used prior to August 1, 2011⁷ (ETS, 2010b). The CLA+, the most recent version of the CLA, also yields relatively low individual-level reliability estimates for the Performance Task; specifically, CAE reports coefficient alphas for the Performance Task of .43 and .57 for test forms A and B, respectively (Zahner, 2013). The CLA+ Performance Task provides measures of students' writing mechanics and writing effectiveness, in addition to analytic reasoning and problem solving (i.e., a critical thinking measure), by using trait scoring, rather than holistic scoring. The total CLA+ test achieves a higher reliability (i.e., alpha between .85–.87) by combining the CR Performance Task with highly reliable SR items assessing other skills. However, the low reliability estimates observed suggest that a subscore for writing should not be reported.

Interrater Reliability

Interrater reliability measures the degree of agreement among raters for CR assessments. Many studies measure interrater reliability by estimating the consistency between raters using correlation methods or percent agreement; for these consistency estimates, values exceeding .70 are considered acceptable, yet thresholds for interrater agreement may vary,

Table 6 Reliability and Validity Evidence for Existing Written Communication Assessments

Assessment	Author/Year	Subjects	Sample	Reliability	Validity evidence
ACT Writing Test	ACT (2009)	Students	20	Interrater reliability = 0.94	ACT Writing alone accurately placed 65% into college classes, an estimated 7% increase over placing all students into a college-level course. 66% of students accurately placed earned a grade of B or better. Grades in writing courses increase with increases in ACT Writing scores. Regression analysis predicting course grades is improved by added ACT Writing vs. using high school English grades and ACT English alone ($R = 0.448$). 57.61% of students were correctly classified.
		Students	6,346	Alternate forms reliability = 0.67	
		Colleges	10		
ASSET Writing Skills Test	Hughes and Nelson (1991) Moss and Yeaton (2006)	Students from 147 writing courses from 36 colleges	4,598		In grades for college-level English, 89.3% of students who were sorted into developmental English first scored C or better, and 87% of students sorted into college-level English scored C or better. In grades for college-level English, 53.8% of students who were sorted into developmental English first scored B or better, and 68.1% of students sorted into college-level English scored B or better. The test received a favorable rating by no more than 30% of the faculty on any dimension.
		Entry-level college students	578		
Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP)	Council of Presidents and State Board for Community College Education (1989)	Baccalaureate students who earned between 75 and 105 credit hours and community college students who earned at least 70 credit hours	1,302		At the student level, the essay section correlated with MAPP at $r = 0.33$, and the CLA MA at $r = 0.37$. It had a precision-weighted average observed effect size of 0.37, with a standard error of 0.092. At the institution level, the essay section correlated with the MAPP at $r = 0.70$, the CLA MA at $r = 0.67$, and the CAAP itself at $r = 0.74$.
		Freshman and seniors of 11 colleges	1,051	$\alpha^b = .75$	

Table 6 Continued

Assessment	Author/Year	Subjects	Sample	Reliability	Validity evidence
COMPASS Writing Skills Placement Test	CAAP Program Management (2012)	Students participating in national administrations from 1998 to 2001	80,010	KR-20 ^a = .92 for Writing Skills	
	ACT (2006)	Students in participating colleges	68 colleges	.90 for writing	Accurately placed 66% of students expected to earn a B or higher based on test cutoff scores.
	Belfield and Crosta (2012)	College freshmen	3,425		Accurately placed 60.5% of students expected to earn a B or higher based on test cutoff scores.
COMPASS Writing Essay Test (e-Write)	Davey et al. (1997)	Students from postsecondary institutions	13,106		Average estimated accuracy rate of 60% for students to earn a B or higher, a 13% improvement over placing all students in an entry-level course.
	Matzen and Hoyt (2004)	Incoming freshmen	431		Accurately placed 62% of students.
	Scott-Clayton (2012)	Students enrolled in a large urban community college system (LUCCS)	36,917		Accurately placed 61% of students expected to earn a B or higher based on test cutoff scores.
English Placement Test (EPT)	ACT (2006)	Responses to 6 prompts	300		The correlation between human raters and the e-Write program varied between $r = 0.67$ to $r = 0.83$ across prompts.
	ACT (2006)	Responses to 6 prompts	900		The correlation between human raters and the e-Write program varied between $r = 0.55$ to $r = 0.60$ across prompts when evaluating for the analytic subscales of the e-Write program.
	Matzen and Sorensen (2006)	College freshmen	~300		Essays scored by e-Write correlated at $r = 0.267$ with the ACT COMPASS test, $r = 0.290$ with the ACT English test, $r = 0.192$ with the ACT Reading test, and $r = 0.209$ with the ACT Composite score.
English Placement Test (EPT)	Michael and Shaffer (1978)	Incoming freshmen	637		EPT-Essay correlates with grade in English class at $r = 0.35$ and fall semester GPA $r = 0.21$. EPT total score correlates with grade in English class at $r = 0.47$ and fall semester GPA $r = 0.30$.
	White (1995)	Students enrolled fall 1978	3771		EPT-Essay correlates with SAT [®] Verbal score $r = 0.42$. EPT total score correlates with SAT Verbal score $r = 0.74$. Of percent enrolled in spring 1981, those who did not take EPT had fallen to 37.8%, while those placed in remedial English had fallen to 51.8%, and those placed in regular English had only fallen to 57.8%.

Table 6 Continued

Assessment	Author/Year	Subjects	Sample	Reliability	Validity evidence
ACCUPLACER and WritePlacer	Belfield and Crosta (2012)	College freshmen	1,983		Accurately placed 59% of students expected to earn a B or higher based on test cutoff scores. Correlation between WritePlacer plus and human scorers $r = 0.63$. Correctly predicted the results of students 70% of the time, 90% in an introductory writing course and 66% for a literature and composition course.
	James (2006)	Students	60		
Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)	Mattern and Packman (2009)	Students at 17 different colleges	3,408		For B or better adjusted $r = 0.35$, with 59% of students correctly placed, for C or better adjusted $r = 0.29$, with 75% of students correctly placed. At the institution level, the entire CLA has a correlation of $r = 0.90$ with the SAT. At the student level, the scores on CLA have a correlation of $r = 0.50$ with GPA, and $r = 0.65$ when adjusted for reliability.
	Benjamin and Chun (2003)	Students at 14 different colleges	1,300		
	Klein et al. (2007)	Freshmen and seniors			At the student level, the essay section correlates with the SAT at $r = 0.44$ for freshmen and $r = 0.46$ for seniors.
	Klein et al. (2009)	Freshmen and seniors at 11 colleges	544	$\alpha^b = .84$	At the student level, the CLA MA has a correlation of $r = 0.37$ with the CAAP essay; and $r = 0.44$ with the MAPP writing section. It had a precision-weighted average observed effect size of 0.28, with a standard error of 0.089.
Collegiate Learning Assessment PLUS (CLA+)	Council for Aid to Education (2013)	Students at four colleges		$\alpha^b = .43 - .57$ between 2 forms for Performance Tasks	At the institution level, the CLA MA has a correlation of $r = 0.67$ with the CAAP essay and $r = 0.86$ with the MAPP writing section.
Criterion Online Writing Evaluation Service	Klobucar et al. (2012)	First-year students	1,482		78.5% of students believed that the test was at least a moderately good test of writing (face validity). Criterion scores and SAT Writing correlated at $r = 0.43$ for 2009 and $r = 0.41$ in 2010. In 2010, Criterion predicted course grades at statistically significant levels for all groups with sufficient sample size.

Table 6 Continued

Assessment	Author/Year	Subjects	Sample	Reliability	Validity evidence
ETS Proficiency Profile (EPP), formerly Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP) and the Academic Profile	Banta and Pike (1989)	College seniors	1,228	KR-20 ^a = .79 - .84	Multiple choice writing subscore correlated at $r = 0.58$ with ACT scores, total score correlated at $r = 0.72$ with ACT scores.
	Council of Presidents and State Board for Community College Education (1989)	BA students who earned between 75 and 105 credit hours and community college students who earned at least 70 credit hours	1,302		Academic Profile received a favorable rating by no more than 30% of the faculty on any dimension.
	Klein et al. (2009)	Freshmen and seniors at 11 colleges	1,051	$\alpha^b = .91$	At the student level, the MC section correlated with CAAP at 0.72, the CAAP essay at $r = 0.33$, and the CLA MA at $r = 0.44$. It had a precision-weighted average observed effect size of 0.34, with a standard error of 0.063.
ETS Proficiency Profile (EPP) Optional Essay	Liu et al. (2012)	Students from 3 colleges	757		Essay correlated with SAT scores at $r = 0.34$ for the research university, at $r = 0.27$ for the master's university, and with a college placement exam at $r = 0.51$ for the community college.
Graduate Record Examinations (GRE): Analytical Writing (AW)	Klieger et al. (2014)	Doctorate students from a statewide university system	4,229		GRE-AW correlated with doctoral level graduate GPA at $r = .16$ for all fields of study. Psychology was the field with the highest correlation $r = .24$. Correlation of GRE-AW tasks with master's level graduate GPA for any field is $r = .16$. Math students had the lowest correlation at $r = .11$, and the highest correlation was for English language and literature students, $r = .28$.
	Klieger et al. (2014)	Master's students from a statewide university system	21,127		Correlation of GRE-AW issue task rated by humans with undergraduate GPA is $r = 0.13$, the correlation of GRE-AW argument task as rated by humans with undergraduate GPA is $r = 0.20$. While the correlation of GRE-AW issue task as rated by humans with GRE Verbal score is $r = 0.51$, and the argument task is $r = 0.55$
	Ramineni et al. (2012)	Essays drawn from test takers between Sep. 2006 and Sep. 2007	750,000		Correlation of GRE-AW issue task rated by humans with undergraduate GPA is $r = 0.13$, the correlation of GRE-AW argument task as rated by humans with undergraduate GPA is $r = 0.20$. While the correlation of GRE-AW issue task as rated by humans with GRE Verbal score is $r = 0.51$, and the argument task is $r = 0.55$

Table 6 Continued

Assessment	Author/Year	Subjects	Sample	Reliability	Validity evidence
TOEFL iBT Writing	Schaeffer, Briel, and Fowle (2001)	Students from 26 colleges	2,326	$r_{xx}^c = .70$	Correlation between the issue task and the argument task varied between $r = 0.56$ and $r = 0.46$, depending on order of task given.
TOEFL iBT Writing	ETS (2011) Weigle (2011)	Operational data from 2007 Nonnative speakers of English from 8 colleges	386	0.74 for writing	Correlation of TOEFL iBT Writing task and instructor rating of writing ability was $r = 0.32$ when scored by human raters, but rose to $r = 0.37$ when writing and assessing in the student's subject area.
Georgia Regents' Essay Test	The Regents' Testing Program (n.d.)	Students at the 45-credit hour mark from 2002 – 2009	30,417		By the 45-credit hour mark, 89.4% pass the essay portion of the test, 88.4% pass the reading portion of the test, resulting in 84.6% passing both tests.
College Basic Academic Subjects Examination (College BASE)	Cole and Osterlind (2008)	Students from more than 51 institutions	1,318	$\alpha^b = .771$ for English	
	Gao (2003)	Students who took College BASE in 2000	8,009	$\alpha^b = .79$ for English	English portion correlated at $r = 0.49$ with SAT Verbal scores, at $r = 0.57$ with ACT composite scores, and at $r = 0.36$ with college GPA.
	Osterlind, Robinson, and Nickens (1997) Pike (1992)	Students from 56 institutions Students	74,535 1,037	KR-20 ^a = .67 for Writing	Both total score and subscore scoring models are supported by the empirical structure of the test. Writing loaded 0.50 on the total score of the test and 0.82 on English/Writing subscore of the test. 78% of students placed into regular English pass, 9% pass at a questionable pass, and 13% fail. 63% of students placed into regular English plus a tutorial pass, 15% questionably pass, and 22% fail. Only 58% of students who did not take the exam passed. 81% of native writers, transfer and nontransfer, and nontransfer nonnative writers pass.
Washington Writing Placement Exam	Haswell (1998)	Entering students	2,800	KR-20 ^a = .83	
	Haswell (1998)	Juniors	2,500	KR-20 ^a = .83	

Table 6 Continued

Assessment	Author/Year	Subjects	Sample	Reliability	Validity evidence
Analytical Writing Placement Examination (AWPE; aka Subject A)	University of California (2014)	New freshmen	32,947		5,529 students (17% of total enrolled) passed the writing requirement; 8,792 (27% of total enrolled) did not pass the writing requirement.
Advanced Placement (AP) English Language and Composition (Section ii)	Dodd, Fitzpatrick, De Ayala, and Jennings (2002)	AP students	959		AP scores above 3 scored significantly higher grades on a subsequent English course than those who scored 2-, $F = 3.86, p < .0002$
Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT): Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA)	Kass, Grandzol, and Bommer (2012)	MBA students	69		Adding the analytical writing section to the regression model did not significantly improve the prediction in MBA GPA (value-added $R = .019$) over undergraduate GPA, GMAT-Verbal, and GMAT-Quantitative. However, AWA had significant and positive correlations with four of five managerial competencies (leadership, decision making, communication, and teamwork, but not organization).

Note. CLA MA = Collegiate Learning Assessment Make an Argument; MAPP = Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress; GPA = grade point average; MBA = master of business administration.

^aKR-20 (Kuder-Richardson Formula 20) is an index of the internal consistency reliability of a measurement instrument, such as a test, questionnaire, or inventory. ^b α Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency, that is, how closely related a set of items are as a group. ^c r_{xx} is the proportion of variance that is true variance in score and is a measure of reliability.

depending on the stakes of the assessment. For the CLA+, interrater correlations of .67 to .75 have been observed across several forms of the performance task, which is scored using a 3-trait rating system (Zahner, 2013). For the CAAP Essay, interrater reliability estimates range from .68 to .74 across seven prompts, with percentage of perfect agreement ranging from 70 to 78% on a 1–6 holistic rating scale (CAAP Program Management, 2012). Thus, these assessments appear to achieve acceptable interrater reliability as measured by consistency estimates (Stemler, 2004).

For CR items scored by both human raters and automated scoring systems, correlations between those two ratings are reported as a measure of the extent to which the human and automated system agree. Correlations observed between human and automated scores were somewhat lower than correlations among human raters. As one example, the WritePlacer online assessment reports Pearson correlations of $r = .63$ between holistic scores assigned by humans and those assigned by the IntelliMetric automated essay scoring system (James, 2006); operationally, this assessment uses automated scoring as the sole method of scoring student essays. For COMPASS e-Write, observed correlations between human raters and automated scores ranged from $r = .67$ to .83 across prompts for holistic scores; correlations between human and automated scores on analytic (trait scored) subscales ranged from $r = .55$ to .60 across prompts (ACT, 2006), suggesting that automated scoring methods may not be able to provide sufficiently reliable trait scores.

Further research on the validity of ETS's e-rater has reported correlations between human and e-rater scores that are comparable to those observed between two human raters. For example, Burstein, Kukich, Wolff, Lu, and Chodorow (1998) examined scores on a sample of 500 GMAT analytical writing essays, across a sample of eight argument and five issue prompts. They reported correlations of .82 to .89 between two human raters, compared to .79 to .87 between e-rater and each of the human raters. Reported human/e-rater correlations for the GRE are somewhat lower (.73 to .74) compared to human/human correlations (.83 for argument and .85 for issue prompts; Powers, Burstein, Chodorow, Fowles, & Kukich, 2002a, 2002b). Research on the IntelliMetric system has reported average correlations between human and automated scores of .83 across six different GMAT analytical writing prompts (Rudner, Garcia, & Welch, 2006); this correlation is the same as the average observed correlation among two human raters ($r = .83$), indicating comparable interrater reliability across automated essay scoring (AES) and human scoring methods. Correlations ranged from .80 to .84 across forms of the argument task and from .83 to .87 for the issue task, indicating that both task types achieved good reliability. However, because this agreement is imperfect, Powers et al. (2002a) suggested only using automated scores to supplement human ratings, particularly under high-stakes testing conditions.

Convergent Validity Evidence

Convergent validity evidence concerns the relationship between scores across tests measuring similar constructs (AERA, APA, & NCME, 1999). Klein et al. (2009) reported correlations between the two SR EPP and CAAP Writing tests of .72 at the student level and .97 for the school level, representing a very strong relationship in the aggregate. Overall, SR assessments of writing skill as an SLO appear to be better correlated with one another than comparable CR format tests. The lowest student-level correlations among the writing measures administered by Klein et al. (2009) were observed between the CAAP essay and the EPP ($r = .33$), the CLA Performance Task ($r = .32$), and the CLA MA task ($r = .37$). Again, at the institution level, these correlations were somewhat higher ($r_{\text{EPP}} = .70$, $r_{\text{CLA-PT}} = .58$, $r_{\text{CLA MA}} = .67$), indicating that, to some extent, both SR and CR assessments measure a comparable construct, but that this relationship is far from perfect. Klein et al. (2009) attributed low correlations with open-ended measures of written communication as due, in part, to the low reliability of CR assessments with few items, noting that multiple essays would enhance test reliability. Others have suggested that good estimates of students' writing ability can be obtained by combining SR and CR formats (e.g., Breland, Camp, Jones, Morris, & Rock, 1987). This logic is evident in the designs of the CLA+ and CAAP, which each combine SR with extended CR item formats.

For the GRE, moderate correlations have been observed among GRE Analytical Writing tasks and the GRE Verbal section, with estimates ranging from $r = .51$ for the issue task and $r = .55$ for argument (Ramineni, Trapani, Williamson, Davey, & Bridgeman, 2012) to .66 overall (ETS, 2013b), suggesting that the CR Analytical Writing section measures skills that are related to, but somewhat distinct from, verbal reasoning skills. Further, scores from the Criterion Online Writing evaluation system showed moderate correlations with SAT writing in 2009 ($r = .43$) and 2010 ($r = .41$; Klobucar, Elliot, Deess, Rudniy, & Joshi, 2012). Thus, CR assessments achieve moderate evidence of convergent validity.

Concurrent Validity Evidence

Concurrent validity refers to the relationship between an outcome and a criterion measured at the same time (AERA et al., 1999). Evidence of concurrent validity has been evaluated for several assessments we reviewed, particularly by computing correlations among the assessment scores and other measures, such as ACT scores, SAT scores, or GPA. For example, EPP writing correlates with ACT scores ($r = 0.58$; Banta & Pike, 1989), while data sampled over a 10-year period shows that students with a higher college GPA consistently achieved higher EPP writing scores (Liu & Roohr, 2013).

For CR tests, the optional EPP essay correlates with both community college placement exams ($r = .51$) and SAT scores ($r = 0.27 - 0.37$; Liu, Bridgeman, & Adler, 2012). Compared to EPP, the CLA Performance Task demonstrates higher correlations with SAT (.56 and .54 for first-year and senior students, respectively; Klein, Benjamin, Shavelson, & Bolus, 2007). Total CLA scores have a school-level correlation with SAT of .90, while at the student level, CLA total has a moderate correlation with college GPA ($r = .50$, increasing to .65 when adjusted for reliability; Benjamin & Chun, 2003). Correlations between GRE Analytical Writing scores and college GPA are relatively low, ranging from $r = .13 - .20$ (Powers, Fowles, & Welsh, 2001; Ramineni et al., 2012), with the highest correlations observed with GPA in writing-intensive courses ($r = .34$; Powers et al., 2001). In terms of placement tests, the COMPASS e-Write essay, which is scored using automated scoring techniques, correlates $r = .27$ with the total COMPASS test, $r = .29$ with ACT English, and $r = .21$ with ACT composite (Matzen & Sorensen, 2006).

Predictive Validity Evidence

Predictive validity concerns the extent to which outcomes such as college GPA can be predicted from the assessment scores. The predictive validity of the SR CAAP writing skills test was evaluated by examining the relationship between sophomore CAAP writing scores and junior-level GPA. Across seven institutions ($n = 1,514$), junior English GPA had a median correlation of .25 with sophomore CAAP writing skills scores (ACT, 2010). Further, the median cross-institutional correlation between sophomore CAAP writing skills and cumulative English GPA was .37, with a range of .26 - .57 across a sample of eight postsecondary institutions (ACT, 2010). Thus, sophomore CAAP scores have modest predictive ability for junior-level GPA. For the EPP, Lakin, Elliott, and Liu (2012) observed a significant relationship between college credit hours and EPP Writing score ($r = .31$). Marr (1995) also reported significant Spearman rank correlations between EPP Writing and percent of total core college courses completed ($r = .19$) and core courses completed in humanities ($r = .07$), social science ($r = .06$), natural science ($r = .12$), and mathematics ($r = .12$).

While predictive validity evidence for CR format tests is more limited, the English Placement Test essay has been demonstrated to correlate $r = .35$ with English grades and $r = .21$ with fall semester GPA (Michael & Shaffer, 1978). For the GRE, Klieger, Cline, Holzman, Minsky, and Lorenz (in press) reported small but significant correlations ($r = .16$) between GRE Analytical Writing scores and graduate-school GPA for samples of more than 24,000 graduate students. The highest correlation of GRE-AW with GPA at the master's level was observed for English language and literature students ($r = .28$), suggesting that this test was most predictive for fields requiring considerable reading, critical analysis, and writing of texts.

For placement tests, predictive validity is evaluated in terms of placement accuracy, or the extent to which students are placed in a course of study in which they are likely to be successful. ACT Writing accurately placed 65% of students, with 66% of students earning a B or better (ACT, 2009). The ASSET Writing Skills test performs similarly, with Moss and Yeaton (2006) reporting that in college-level English classes 68% of students correctly placed in college English earn a B or better, compared to 54% of students who were initially sorted into developmental English courses. Placement accuracy rates for the COMPASS Writing Skills test range from 60% (Davey, Godwin, & Mittelholtz, 1997) to 66% earning a B or higher (ACT, 2006; Belfield & Crosta, 2012; Scott-Clayton, 2012). Placement accuracy rates are lower for the ACCUPLACER (59% earning a B or higher; Belfield & Crosta, 2012; Mattern & Packman, 2009).

Challenges in Designing Written Communication Assessment

Designing educational innovations involves negotiating a series of tradeoffs, which requires considering and making decisions to prioritize certain design aspects over others, which may be in tension with one another (cf. Collins, 1996). Designing assessments of written communication presents a number of specific challenges, which we describe below.

Balancing Authenticity and Psychometric Quality

Authenticity of writing assessment is considered a critical component of the validity of writing assessments, concerning both face and construct validity (Murphy & Yancey, 2008). Authenticity can be defined as the extent to which the features of an assessment task correspond to the features of the situations in which the skills being assessed will be used and applied in the real world (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). For higher education, the notion of authentic writing assessment suggests that the tasks included in the assessment design should correspond to the types of writing assignments required of students in their undergraduate coursework, such as writing arguments or research articles (Burstein et al., 2014). The notion of authentic writing assessment is consistent with the position statement on writing assessment released by the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC, 2009), which asserts that best assessment practices ask students to produce writing within a meaningful context:

The assessment of writing must strive to set up writing tasks and situations that identify purposes appropriate to and appealing to the particular students being tested. . . . What is easiest to measure—often by means of a multiple choice test—may correspond least to good writing; choosing a correct response from a set of possible answers is not composing. (Principles 2A and 2B)

Generally, CR format assessments are considered more authentic relative to tests consisting solely of discrete SR items, because they require students to compose extended text. However, some scholars argue that CR tasks are still not particularly authentic because they ask students to write about unfamiliar topics under highly constrained conditions. For example, Weigle (2002) argued that on-demand CR assessments “[do] not accurately reflect the conditions under which most writing is done in nontesting situations or writing as it is taught and practiced in the classroom” (p. 197).

A balance of authenticity and psychometric quality could be achieved through a combination of direct and indirect writing assessment (i.e., use of both SR and CR item formats; Breland et al., 1987). Providing students with a meaningful and realistic task context for writing an essay (e.g., to persuade the Board of Trustees to adopt a particular policy; to identify and explain to key stakeholders the critical flaws in a business proposal) offers a more authentic assessment task with a specific purpose, audience, and context for the writing task, consistent with the notion that all writing is fundamentally social (CCCC, 2009). The authenticity of SR items assessing skill in identifying and revising errors could be enhanced by presenting items in the context of an extended passage (versus discrete sentences) and a realistic task (e.g., attending to a peer’s feedback on a passage; Haswell, 2008). Research on scenario-based assessments (Sabatini et al., 2013; Sheehan & O’Reilly, 2012) can inform the design of literacy assessments that have a balance of authentic purposes and desirable measurement properties.

Assessment Purposes: Supporting Institutional or Individual Goals

Members of the higher education writing community have suggested that assessment should primarily function to support evidence-based decision making intended to improve the teaching and learning of writing (CCCC, 2009; NCTE-WPA, 2010). Further, the intended purpose of a writing assessment should influence its design (CCCC, 2009). The desire for assessment results to provide actionable information to the institution in the service of improving teaching and learning suggests a need for alignment between the constructs measured in the assessment and the competencies that are relevant to the local curricular and instructional context. Alignment between instruction and assessment is also important for the measurement of student growth attributable to a curriculum or course of study; as Haswell (2008) noted, “The gain [from an intervention strategy] most often occurs when the classroom intervention is clear and concrete and when the measurement of writing accomplishment focuses analytically on traits associated with the teaching method” (p. 410). Thus, to have instructional value, the assessment results should inform institutions about the aspects of writing that pose challenges for their students, which could be addressed through instruction.

Some assessment formats may be more appropriate for supporting some institutional goals. For example, portfolio assessment represents an approach to evaluating student writing that is highly tailored to the local context (Behizadeh, 2014; Yancey, 1999), which may be quite useful for informing local curricular and instructional improvements. Institutions may also wish to make comparative evaluations of writing proficiency for groups of students across institutions, for purposes of benchmarking or accountability; this requires assessments that are not so locally defined that the test will

fail to yield meaningful comparisons when administered to a different population of students, at schools using different curricula or instructional approaches. This goal suggests a relatively domain- and discipline-general approach to designing writing assessment such that assessment tasks should measure aspects of the construct that are practiced across a range of student majors and fields of study, so as not to advantage students from a specific curriculum or course of study. This logic is evident in SR assessments that measure the surface-level, linguistic aspects of writing skill, which may yield reliable comparisons yet have more limited instructional relevance, particularly for low-level editing skills that students are presumed to have mastered prior to enrolling in college.⁸ Despite this presumption, usage and mechanics may still be considered instructionally relevant, given that college student populations are increasingly diverse, with many students enrolling in college courses, unprepared for the writing assignments that are required of them. Because institutions need assessments that provide actionable information about the strengths and weaknesses of highly diverse student groups, evaluating the linguistic aspects of students' writing remains an important goal. Therefore, to support the goals of comparability and instructional improvement across populations and institutions, writing assessments should provide evidence of students' proficiency with linguistic, as well as conceptual and rhetorical, aspects of the writing construct.

Beyond institutional goals, the extent to which a writing assessment is intended to support individual-level goals dictates the extent to which scores that are reliable at the student level are required. If the assessment is designed for institutional use only, the scores provided by the assessment need only be reliable at the group level (i.e., at the level of the institution), rather than reliable at the level of the individual student. For example, some SLO assessments are primarily designed to provide information at the aggregate group level and may not require highly reliable individual scores. Alternatively, placement tests, which have stakes in terms of the course of study an individual may pursue, must be reliable at the individual level, due to the potential consequences for the student's educational trajectory. Similarly, if the results will be used for credentialing, such as a certificate or badge, it is important that such certifications be reliable at the individual level—particularly if those credentials have consequences for educational attainment or employment.

Reporting Overall Scores Versus Subscale Scores

A related issue is the extent to which a single score can be used to represent students' writing proficiency and whether meaningful subscale scores can be reported to institutions or to examinees. From an institutional perspective, subscales can yield valuable information about the relative strengths and weaknesses among students' proficiency with particular aspects of written communication and whether proficiency varies as a function of students' major, years of college experience, and so on. Such information can be used to make improvements to curriculum and instruction. For the individual, subscale scores can provide useful feedback about the aspects of writing in which additional practice is needed. Thus, to support learning and instruction, provision of subscale scores may provide greater diagnostic information beyond overall scores. However, from a measurement perspective, it is only defensible to offer examinees subscale scores if these scores are reliable and valid. Haberman (2008) described methods for determining the added value of subscores relative to total test scores; these methods should be applied when determining whether or not subscores should be reported to examinees. In some cases, subscores do not add useful information to examinees; therefore, these subscores should not be reported (Sinharay & Haberman, 2008).

Subscale scores can be computed from SR assessments by having sufficient numbers of items assessing each skill of interest, such as rhetorical skills or mechanics and usage, such that reliable subscores can be reported for each skill (e.g., CAAP provides scores for these two dimensions). For CR assessments, subscale scores can be obtained by applying analytic or trait scoring. In contrast to holistic scoring, in which raters assign a single numerical score to the examinee based on an overall evaluation of the work, trait scoring requires raters to assign a numerical score for each of the qualities (or traits) that are important in the assessment, considered separately. For example, the CLA+ performance task scoring rubric asks raters to evaluate students' responses for three traits: analytic reasoning and problem solving, writing effectiveness, and writing conventions. For a given essay, a rater must provide three separate scores. Accordingly, trait scoring can provide more detailed, diagnostic information to examinees about their writing compared to a single, holistic score, which may not provide detailed information with respect to the writer's specific weaknesses but rather descriptions of the types of weaknesses commonly exhibited by responses receiving the same score (as in GRE Analytical Writing).

In a study comparing the use of trait and holistic scoring in the CUNY CATW, Faggen (2001) found that holistic scoring was somewhat more efficient than trait scoring, with raters divided as to which method they preferred. While

some believed that trait scoring would provide more diagnostic information, evidence of high correlations among the traits suggested that trait scoring might not provide more detailed information than a holistic score, provided that the scoring criteria were comparable. Thus, holistic scoring is often preferred. In assessments with both SR and CR components, these test sections may either be reported separately, combined into a single, weighted proficiency score, or both.

Human Scoring Versus Automated Scoring

Beyond the issue of whether to report an overall proficiency score or multiple subscores is the issue of whether to employ automated scoring engines to support—or supplant—the use of human raters to score CRs. Recruiting and providing training and calibration to human raters is a time-consuming and often costly process, particularly in the case of large-scale assessments administered to thousands of students. Automated scoring engines offer two distinct advantages relative to human raters, in terms of reliability and cost. The scores provided by automated essay scoring systems are highly reliable (i.e., internally consistent), in that they apply an identical scoring algorithm each time an essay is scored; further, they demonstrate high correlations with human ratings (i.e., interrater reliability; Burstein & Chodorow, 2003; Chodorow & Burstein, 2004), often comparable to the agreement among two human raters. With respect to cost, automated essay scoring systems require little time per essay to apply the scoring model after model development has occurred, making the average cost to score one essay minimal compared to that of a human rater. These advantages have led automated scoring systems such as the ETS e-rater engine (Burstein & Marcu, 2003) to be used as a check score or second score in operational scoring of CR assessments (cf. Deane, 2013). For example, each GRE essay is scored by e-rater and at least one human rater, using a holistic scoring rubric with a 1–6 scale. If e-rater and the human rater agree within a certain threshold, the human rater's score is accepted as the final score; however, if the discrepancy between human and e-rater scores exceeds that threshold, a second human rater will score the essay, with the final score being the mean of the two human scores, rounded to the nearest half-point (ETS, 2013b). In contrast, systems like Criterion (Burstein, Chodorow, & Leacock, 2004), as well as WritePlacer and the optional EPP essay, use automated scores as the primary method of evaluating students' writing.

Although automated scoring has clear advantages, the decision to use such methods should take into consideration the validity of the test scores for a particular intended use. Critiques of the use of automated scoring methods alone (or in general) hinge on the notion that the features of text that can be feasibly evaluated using automated methods are not necessarily coincident with the features that correspond to good writing, including logical and accurate content (Condon, 2013; CCCC, 2009; Perelman, 2012). As noted by Deane (2013), writing is a complex skill, some aspects of which can be better captured by automated writing evaluation methods than others. Automated scoring methods rely on natural language processing techniques to detect and compute features of the text that are associated with higher quality writing. Many of these features are low level, such as nonstandard grammar, spelling, and punctuation, which are relatively easy for automated methods to detect, but automated scoring models also attempt to evaluate higher level features of writing quality. For example, e-rater is designed to measure both lower and higher level features, categorized under dimensions such as organization and development, vocabulary (i.e., word choice), grammar, usage, mechanics, and style (i.e., sentence variety). However, as Deane (2013) emphasized, concepts like *organization* and *development* as they are instantiated in an e-rater model are not interpreted in ways that humans would understand and apply these terms; development, for example, is largely a measure of length, rather than the quality of supporting ideas or examples. Research by Attali and Powers (2008) suggested that the text features measured by e-rater can be collapsed into three factors: fluency (including organization and development), accuracy of text production (i.e., skill in producing error-free text), and vocabulary sophistication (i.e., use of low-frequency vocabulary words). These factors do not correspond to the social and rhetorical elements of writing that are emphasized in the frameworks reviewed in the first section of this article.

Overall, automated writing evaluation systems seem to measure a restricted version of the construct, which excludes some critical communicative elements. Deane (2013) concluded that e-rater and other state-of-the-art scoring engines provide a measure of *text quality* based on surface linguistic features, rather than a measure of writing skill per se. With respect to using information from sources, previous research projects have developed effective methods for detecting use of explicit citations, plagiarism from sources, and other sourcing related issues (e.g., Britt et al., 2004; Deane, 2014; Hastings, Hughes, Magliano, Goldman, & Lawless, 2012), but this development often requires hand-coding of sources and training of prompt- and/or task-specific models in order to detect certain anticipated strings in student responses

(e.g., according to Blake, as Carnegie writes; Britt et al., 2004). These model building efforts would be required for each prompt or test form, making them costly to develop. Further, these efforts have not yet effectively developed automated methods for detecting critical analysis and synthesis of sources, and other higher-order skills, such as argumentation and the accuracy of content, pose significant challenges as well (e.g., Powers et al., 2002a). Research in these areas is ongoing, but existing automated scoring models do not yet provide reliable, valid assessment of these aspects of writing sufficient for operational use.

To assess the features of students' writing that are important at the higher education level, it is likely that humans will be required to read, evaluate, and provide ratings of students' work with respect to a holistic or analytic rubric that takes into account these social and conceptual aspects, until automated scoring methods advance significantly. The CCCC (2009) asserted that best practice of writing assessment is to use direct assessment with human raters, particularly in the case of high-stakes assessment. While use of automated methods alone may be sufficient for a low-stakes assessment, we concur with the CCCC that the greater the assessment stakes, the more important it is to use human scoring. Because writing is fundamentally a social act, done to communicate meaning to an audience, it is important that a human reader evaluate the extent to which that communication successfully achieved the task goals.

An Operational Framework for Next-Generation Written Communication Assessment

Below, we outline a proposed operational framework to support the design of next-generation written communication assessments. We present our framework and construct definition, followed by a description of the structural features and task types that such an assessment might include. We then describe how the current framework compares with existing frameworks and assessments.

Proposed Framework and Definition

Informed by the preceding review and synthesis presented in the first and second parts of this article, the proposed operational framework and construct definition for written communication appears in Table 7. We have organized the construct definition for written communication into four major dimensions:

- *Knowledge of social and rhetorical situations*, which concerns the purpose-driven, social nature of all written communication, includes the ability to adapt one's writing to the demands of the specific context, audience, and purpose for writing; adherence to genre conventions, such as those for writing arguments or explanations; and skill in creating multimodal or multimedia products, using traditional and digital methods of production.
- *Domain knowledge and conceptual strategies*, which concerns the use of relevant content knowledge and development strategies, includes the ability to develop one's ideas using sufficient and effective reasons, evidence, and examples; presenting those ideas in an organized, logical, and coherent sequence; use of information drawn from sources to support one's ideas without distorting the author's original meaning; and adherence to disciplinary conventions, such as evidentiary or organizational standards.
- *Knowledge of language use and conventions*, which concerns the linguistic elements of writing, includes the ability to convey meaning clearly by using appropriate word choice, tone, and style, given the purpose of the writing, as well as the ability to produce relatively error-free text without substantial flaws in usage, syntax, and mechanics.
- *Knowledge of the writing process*, which cuts across the preceding social, conceptual, and linguistic dimensions, concerns the various strategies used to support prewriting or planning, drafting, and revision of text, as well as reading and appropriately responding to others' feedback.

Taken together, these dimensions represent a rather comprehensive view of written communication, spanning social and rhetorical, conceptual, and linguistic aspects of producing quality writing, including knowledge of the writing process (planning, drafting, and revision) as a major aspect of the framework. Importantly, the purpose-driven social and conceptual aspects of writing should be the primary focus of the assessment, in contrast to lower level language elements; further, information about students' proficiency with the writing process could provide useful feedback to both instructors and students in the service of supporting teaching and learning. However, these framework dimensions and corresponding definitions alone reveal little about how these aspects of writing will be assessed. Below, we propose a set of structural features and task types that may be used to evaluate these various aspects of written communication.

Table 7 Proposed Operational Definition and Construct for Written Communication

Construct dimension	Definition	Example assessments	Example rubric statements
Knowledge of social and rhetorical situations Task, context, and purpose	The ability to effectively consider and adapt one's writing to particular purposes (to inform, to argue, to persuade), contexts (academic, professional, social), and task instructions.	Any CR that asks test takers to respond to a specific task or prompt (e.g., "develop a position on the issue described, supported by reasons and examples"); essays that do not respond to the prompt are "off topic" and receive a 0. Explicitly, CUNY CATW (critical response to task and text is one trait dimension). Rhetorical skills CAAP items dealing with "strategy" assess purpose (e.g., "is X appropriate, given a particular purpose?").	CLEP College Composition: degree of focus on the assigned task; CATW: critical response to the writing task and the text; COMPASS Writing Skills: rhetorical skills (strategy: appropriateness of expression for audience and purpose, supporting material to strengthen writing, effective choice of theme or purpose statements); TOEFL iBT: appropriateness of the essay for topic and task (independent); GRE-AW: degree to which the writer addresses the specific task directions. CAAP: supporting assertions appropriately for a given audience; CLA+: effectiveness of essay in persuading audience; COMPASS Writing Skills: rhetorical skills (strategy: appropriateness of expression for audience and purpose).
Audience awareness	The ability to effectively consider and adapt one's writing to particular audiences (e.g., experts, nonexperts, specialist, general).	Writing process items of College BASE (ask about whether X would be appropriate, given Y audience); CAAP, COMPASS E-Write, and College BASE each specify an audience for the essay task(s), for example, "Start your letter, Dear School Board:".	CAAP: supporting assertions appropriately for a given audience; CLA+: effectiveness of essay in persuading audience; COMPASS Writing Skills: rhetorical skills (strategy: appropriateness of expression for audience and purpose).
Genre conventions (text types/forms)	The ability to compose texts that adhere to conventions (formal and informal guidelines as to what is appropriate for a piece of writing) specific to the genre or type of writing (e.g., argument, exposition, essay, critique, summary). For higher education, writing arguments and research reports are common and valued genres.	Most CR tasks require argument writing or a critique, typically in the format of a 5-paragraph essay. CLA + Performance Task (argument), CAAP Essays, CLEP College Composition (argument), GRE issue (argument); MCAT writing (expository), TOEFL integrated (expository), CSU English Placement Test (source-based expository).	APELC: development of a position on the topic; CLA+: effectiveness of essay in persuading audience, identifying flaws in a specific argument.
Composing in multiple modes and forms	The ability to use a variety of technologies (pen and paper, digital software, online environments) to create written products, which may include multimedia elements, particularly when communicating complex information and ideas.	No assessments we reviewed tested this.	n/a
		Portfolio assessments; innovative item types (e.g., select an image that best illustrates your point).	

Table 7 Continued

Construct dimension	Definition	Example assessments	Example rubric statements
<p>Domain knowledge and conceptual strategies Disciplinary conventions (major/field)</p>	<p>The ability to compose texts that adhere to conventions (formal and informal guidelines as to what is appropriate for a piece of writing) specific to one's discipline or field of study; related to genre conventions. Includes conventions related to source attribution, content, tone, style, organization, and use of evidence, as appropriate given the discipline.</p>	<p>No assessments we reviewed tested this. Portfolio assessment</p>	<p>n/a</p>
<p>Content development and organization</p>	<p>The development and logical expression of ideas in writing. The ability to fully develop one's ideas with supporting information and examples from one's prior knowledge, reading, and experiences, and to present information and ideas in a logical, organized, and coherent way.</p>	<p>Any direct writing assessment; e-rater scores a limited version of this construct (i.e., development as sentence length, rather than quality or appropriateness of examples chosen to support a point, as a human might interpret it; organization can look for discourse elements such as thesis statement).</p>	<p><i>Content development. ACCUPLACER:</i> elaboration of ideas and presentation of supporting details; AWPE: quality of reasons and examples; development and elaboration; APELC: quality of evidence and explanations in support of the position; CAAP: supporting assertions with appropriate evidence; CLA+: developing relevant support for a position; COMPASS Writing Essay: extent to which the topic is addressed by the development of ideas and the specificity of details and examples; CATW: development of ideas; CLEP College Composition: development of ideas and support; TOEFL iBT: development and support of ideas using examples or evidence; GRE-AW: the development of reasons and/or examples to support a position/analysis.</p>

Table 7 Continued

Construct dimension	Definition	Example assessments	Example rubric statements
Use of sources and textual evidence	The ability to comprehend and critically analyze a source text (i.e., text, document, data table, image, etc.) and to effectively incorporate information drawn from source texts to develop and support one's ideas, using appropriate attribution.	CUNY CATW; CLA+ Performance Task; CLEP College Composition; CSU English Placement Test.	<p><i>Organization</i>. ACCUPLACER: overall structure of response and sequence of ideas; AWPE: organizational structure; ASSET Writing Skills: organization; CAAP Essay: organizing and connecting ideas; CAAP SR: organization of ideas, relevance of statements (order, coherence, unity); CLA+: organizing arguments, organizing an essay and using transitions; COMPASS Writing Skills: rhetorical skills (organization: organization of ideas, relevance of statements [order, coherence, unity]); COMPASS Writing Essay: unity and coherence achieved through logical sequence of ideas; CATW: structure of the response (thesis and connection of ideas); CLEP College Composition: organization; TOEFL iBT: organization, unity, progression, and coherence; GRE-AW: organization (for both task types); MCAT: organization.</p> <p>APELC: quality use of sources; CLA+: use and analysis of specific sources, use of sources to support decisions; CLEP College Composition: degree to which candidates synthesize two sources; CATW: critical response to the writing task and the text; TOEFL iBT: task-appropriate use of sources (integrated).</p>

Table 7 Continued

Construct dimension	Definition	Example assessments	Example rubric statements
<p>Knowledge of language use and conventions Language use: word choice, tone, voice, and style of language</p>	<p>The ability to compose text that conveys meaning clearly by using appropriate word choice, sentence variety, tone, voice, and style; what is appropriate will be determined by the context, purpose, and genre of writing.</p>	<p>Any direct writing assessment; e-rater scores this construct in terms of word choice (sophistication of vocabulary) and use of varied syntax; tone/voice cannot quite be assessed in the way that a human rater might interpret them.</p>	<p>ACCUPLACER: effectiveness of sentence constructions; AWPE: word choice, variety and complexity of sentence structure; APELC: control of the elements of effective writings; CAAP: expressing ideas clearly and effectively; CLA+: effectiveness of word choice; COMPASS Writing Skills: rhetorical skills (style: precision and appropriateness of word choice, effective management of sentence elements, avoidance of ambiguous pronoun references, economy in writing); COMPASS Writing Essay: effectiveness of style; CATW: sentence structure and word choice; GRE-AW: sentence structure; MCAT writing: control of vocabulary and sentence structure; EPP: organize units of language for coherence and rhetorical effect.</p>
<p>Language use: grammar, usage, syntax, and mechanics</p>	<p>The ability to compose text that is relatively free of errors in grammar, usage, mechanics, syntax, and spelling. Command of the fundamental skills needed to produce fluent text.</p>	<p>Any direct writing assessment; e-rater scores this construct, with most differentiation among low scorers. Revision-in-sentence-context items assess errors at the sentence level.</p>	<p>ACCUPLACER: control of language usage and mechanics; AWPE: control of the conventions of standard written English; CLA+ facility with the conventions of standard written English, control of grammar; COMPASS Writing Essay: control of the conventions of standard written English; CLEP College Composition: control of the conventions of standard written English; CATW: grammar, usage, and mechanics; TOEFL iBT: overall language facility, including grammar, usage, mechanics; GRE-AW: control of the conventions of standard written English; EPP: organize elements into larger units of meaning.</p>

Table 7 Continued

Construct dimension	Definition	Example assessments	Example rubric statements
Knowledge of the writing process Writing processes (planning, drafting, and revision)	Strategic knowledge of the writing process, including prewriting strategies (idea generation, research), drafting, reviewing, revising, editing, and responding to others' feedback.	Revision-in-context items (revising, editing); rhetorical skills items (research, prewriting); keystroke logging (measures actual writing process, but not operational).	EPP: organize units of language for coherence and rhetorical effect, organize elements of writing into larger units of meaning. <i>Note that all assessments requiring revision-in-context type items, where examinees detect and correct errors in texts, would fall here.</i>

Note. CR = constructed response; CUNY CATW = City University of New York/CUNY Assessment Test in Writing; CAAP = Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency; CLEP = College Level Examination Program; GRE-AW = Graduate Record Examinations Analytical Writing; College BASE = College Basic Academic Subjects Examination; CLA+ = Collegiate Learning Assessment; MCAT = Medical College Admission Test; CSU = California State University; APELC = Advanced Placement English Language and Composition; AWPE = Analytical Writing Placement Examination; SR = selected response; EPP = ETS Proficiency Profile.

Item and Task Types

As described in the second section of this article, existing assessments of written communication typically use CR items, though several couple these with SR items to compensate for the relatively low reliability of CR items. While many of the SR items included in these assessments are traditional discrete items (i.e., single-selection multiple choice [MC]; EPP), other assessments use groups of SR items associated with a particular passage (i.e., a set leader and set members; CAAP). Single-selection SR items presented in a passage context could also be administered as drop-down menus, drag-and-drop, or other more innovative technology-enhanced item types. While more complex technology-enhanced item types can sometimes require more effortful and time-consuming processing to read and make a response compared to basic MC response types (see Graf, 2009), they may provide evidence about an examinee's higher order reasoning skills as opposed to the passive recognition skills often elicited by traditional MC. Because some item types and tasks are more appropriate for measuring some aspects of the writing construct than others, we recommend using various item types to provide a more complete view of students' proficiency with writing, spanning the social and rhetorical, conceptual, and linguistic dimensions of this skill. For example, single-selection SR items may be better suited to measure the lower level linguistic aspects of writing, while drag-and-drop formats may be useful for assessing students' use of sources (e.g., by dragging an in-text citation to an appropriate location in a passage).

Structural Features of Items

Table 8 presents a proposed taxonomy of structural features for items assessing written communication, based on the framework and operational definition described above. Consistent with other widely used writing assessments, we propose the use of both CR items (i.e., direct writing assessment) and SR items (i.e., indirect writing assessment) to achieve a balance of authenticity and psychometric quality (i.e., reliability and validity). Beyond the typical single-selection SR items, we propose the use of more interactive structural features (e.g., drop-down menu, select in passage, drag-and-drop) where appropriate for measuring the intended construct (e.g., using drag-and-drop to add appropriate supporting evidence or citations to a stimulus passage). The use of technology-enhanced item types affords different kinds of measurement opportunities compared to traditional MC assessment. For example, such item types could be used to assess multimodal composition skills that cannot easily be assessed with typical CR item types, such as selecting an image or graph that best supports one's arguments and inserting it into a particular location in the text. Further, composing text on a computer can provide information about the writing process that cannot be captured with traditional CR items (i.e., pencil and paper). The use of technology-enhanced items also makes the assessment experience more dynamic and potentially more engaging to students, which can provide more robust, valid information about their abilities.

Task Types

The specific nature of the assessment task(s) is also an important consideration for assessment design. The structural features described above could be used to support several task types that we consider promising for measuring the aspects of written communication defined in the current framework. Table 9 presents descriptions for several CR and SR assessment task types, with their correspondence to the operational framework, and examples of similar assessments.

As consistent with best practices in writing assessment (CCCC, 2009), CR should be preferred when possible, because these item types permit direct assessment of multiple aspects of students' writing simultaneously and directly, while SR items tend to target a specific aspect of the construct, such as organization or syntactical errors, and then only indirectly. Importantly, with respect to use of SR items, we do not advocate the use of discrete, sentence-level traditional MC items for an assessment of written communication at the higher education level. Low-level items such as these do not represent the skills and competencies that are required of real-world writers, who work with ideas in the context of extended discourse rather than discrete and isolated sentences. Therefore, if these linguistic-level skills are to be assessed, they should be done so in the context of extended written discourse, which examinees must either read, respond to, and make revisions to—or which they produce themselves in a CR task. In addition, to the extent possible, the tasks should be introduced in such a way that they represent an authentic context and purpose for writing, with a specified audience to be addressed. For example, a set of revision-in-passage-context items could be framed as a peer-editing task or as responding to feedback from an instructor rather than an abstract task done solely for the purpose of taking the

Table 8 Descriptions of Structural Features of Written Communication Items

Item type	Description
CR prompt	Writing-based CR item, in which examinees compose an open-ended response to a prompt, which may or may not include source texts.
Set leader	Stimulus (i.e., passage) for which there are one or more items (set members) that are based on the stimulus content.
Set member, single selection MC	Stem with multiple answer choices, of which one is the correct response; displayed along with set leader for reference. Revision-in-passage context items follow this format (e.g., CAAP).
Single selection MC	A stem with multiple answer choices, of which one could be a correct response.
Multiple selection MC	A stem with multiple answer choices, of which two or more could be a correct response.
Drop-down menu	A variation of a traditional MC item, where one answer choice is selected via a drop-down menu.
Select in passage (single selection/multiple selection)	Item where the answer choices are predefined set of words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs within a set leader. When test taker clicks on selection, the word/sentence is highlighted in the passage. If only one answer, use <i>Select in Passage SS</i> . If two or more answers, use <i>Select in Passage MS</i> .
Drag-and-drop	An examinee selects objects (i.e., text segments, citations, or images) and places them in a specific location or order within a text.

Note. CR = constructed response; MC = multiple choice (MC); CAAP = Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency.

assessment. Such tasks may be more reflective of the real-world settings in which college-level writers engage in the practice of writing.

Unique Features of this Framework

The framework and construct definition presented in this article are informed by current research on writing and writing instruction, which views learning to write as a process of socialization into a particular set of practices for achieving particular social and rhetorical goals (e.g., presenting a scientific argument or advancing a particular historical or literary interpretation), and by current higher education frameworks, which recognize that the construct of writing must be updated to reflect the place of written communication in a contemporary social and technological context. The abilities to produce multimedia compositions, to synthesize information from a wide variety of information sources, and to convey complex information effectively and succinctly are increasingly important for success in both academic and workforce domains in the 21st century. Consistent with the developmental competency model of literacy that underlies the design of CBAL assessments in K–12 (Deane, 2011; Deane et al., 2011; Sabatini et al., 2013), we conceptualize written communication as involving the coordinated recruitment of social, conceptual, and linguistic (i.e., discourse, verbal, and print) representations, on which the writer's cognitive processes operate. Fluency with lower level linguistic processes frees up cognitive resources for engaging in the conceptual and social aspects of the writing. We include rhetorical aspects of writing in the social dimension, as rhetorical considerations are a part of the social and communicative goals of writing. By addressing social, conceptual, linguistic, and process-level dimensions of writing, we present a comprehensive operational framework that can be used to evaluate existing assessments and to support the development of new assessments.

We have included knowledge of composing in multiple modes and forms (including use of technological tools to compose text) under the social and rhetorical dimension of the writing construct, and this represents a unique feature of the current assessment framework. It is important to note that while the vast majority of frameworks reviewed mentioned this skill as important for higher education, particularly in the 21st century, none of the assessments of written communication we reviewed made any attempt to provide evidence of students' proficiency with creating multimedia compositions or using technology-enhanced composition methods. Skill in composing multiple different types or forms of text (including multimedia, PowerPoint presentations, etc.) as a writing outcome is typically assessed through portfolio assessment methods, if at all. Most assessments of writing skill do not evaluate this dimension of student writing explicitly. Specific information about student proficiency with multimedia composition skills might also be provided by an assessment of another, related construct, such as digital or information and communication technology (ICT) literacy, which concerns

Table 9 Descriptions of Task Types of Written Communication Items

Task type	Description	Example task	Dimensions assessed
Make an argument	CR prompt that presents an issue, opinion, or hypothetical situation and requires the examinee to take a position on the issue, use reasons and evidence to support the position, and organize the response in a logical and coherent manner with clear and effective language use.	GRE issue; CAAP Essay; EPP Essay	Task/Context/Purpose/Audience, ^a Genre (Argument), Development/Organization, Word Choice & Style, Grammar/Usage/ Mechanics, Process (Drafting)
Critique an argument	CR prompt that presents a flawed and problematic line of reasoning about a fictional situation and requires the examinee to analyze the argument with respect to task instructions, writing a response that presents a high-quality analysis, with sufficient development and support for one's ideas, and organizes the response in a logical and coherent manner with effective language use.	GRE argument; CLA Critique an argument	Task/Context/Purpose/Audience, ^a Genre (Argument), Use of Sources (Evaluation only) ^b , Development/Organization, Word Choice & Style, Grammar/Usage/ Mechanics, Process (Drafting)
Source-based synthesis	CR prompt that presents examinees with one or more stimulus passages that serve as the basis for one's response; examinees should summarize or explain information from the passage, incorporate paraphrases or quotes from sources to support one's ideas, and include appropriate citations and references to the source texts. Examinees may also be asked to critically evaluate the ideas in the source text(s).	CLA + Performance Task; CLEP College Composition; CUNY CATW	Task/Context/Purpose/Audience, Genre (Argument or Expository), Use of Sources, Development/Organization, Word Choice & Style, Grammar/Usage/ Mechanics, Process (Drafting)
Revision in passage context	SR item types that present examinees with a stimulus passage containing errors at the level of organization, word choice and style, or usage and mechanics, and ask examinees to identify the most appropriate revision to the error or indicate that no change is needed. These errors should often extend beyond a single-sentence context.	CAAP Writing; COMPASS Writing Skills	Development/Organization, Word Choice & Style, Grammar/Usage/ Mechanics, Process (Revision)
Selected-response in passage context	SR item types that present examinees with a stimulus passage accompanied with questions that span longer segments of text (i.e., paragraph to whole passage) but do not require the examinee to detect and correct an error. This task type could be used to evaluate aspects of writing that are not effectively assessed by revision-in-context items (e.g., use of supporting evidence, audience awareness).	CAAP Writing; COMPASS Writing Skills (i.e., rhetorical strategy items spanning the entire passage)	Task/Context/Purpose/Audience, Genre (Argument or Expository), Use of Sources, Development/Organization

Note. CR = constructed response; SR = selected response; GRE = Graduate Record Examinations; CAAP = Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency; EPP = ETS Proficiency Profile; CLA = Collegiate Learning Assessment; CLEP = College Level Examination Program; CUNY CATW = City University of New York/CUNY Assessment Test in Writing.

^aThe current GRE Analytical Writing measure does not require examinees to address their response to a specific audience, so the audience awareness dimension is not evaluated by this assessment. ^bArgument critique tasks do not typically require examinees to summarize, paraphrase, or quote from the stimulus prompt, nor do they require examinees to cite sources. Therefore, this task does not fully correspond to the definition of use of sources and textual evidence as defined in the current framework.

the extent to which students can use technological tools to compose multimodal communication, such as writing an e-mail to a colleague explaining data displayed in a graph (e.g., Katz & Macklin, 2007).

We also include use of sources and adherence to the conventions of argument and expository genres, which are particularly critical skills at the higher education level, yet are not explicit components of many assessment frameworks. Similar to use of sources, disciplinary considerations are considered a part of the conceptual aspects of writing, because they directly affect the writer's interaction with the content; however, our goal is to design a writing assessment that can inform the evaluation of general student learning outcomes across curricular or disciplinary boundaries, and, thus, our proposed operational definition and task types do not directly address this aspect of the framework. Rather, adherence to disciplinary conventions could be assessed locally, within a particular school or department, through some form of portfolio assessment, if disciplinary writing assessment is sought beyond typical classroom assessment practices.

In sum, the proposed framework offers several advantages, which support its use for developing written communication assessments at the higher education level. The framework captures multiple dimensions of writing, informed by a review of extant frameworks and literature from the learning sciences and the higher education writing community. It affords the use of multiple assessment formats, including extended CRs, traditional SR items, and more innovative item types. The use of technology-enhanced item types as proposed here has the potential to provide more robust measurement of student proficiency by obtaining evidence of skills that are difficult to measure with traditional methods and by potentially enhancing student engagement in the assessment experience. Such item types have been developed and administered in the context of assessing the language skills of English learners; these designs could be adapted for use in measuring undergraduates' proficiency with college-level writing tasks. Further, combining a direct writing assessment with multiple indirect items designed to assess aspects of the construct that are not covered by the specific CR prompt can provide a balance of authenticity and technical quality. This framework can also support the design of assessments that are reliable at the group or at the student level, depending on the intended purpose of the assessment, though the specific degree of reliability obtained is an empirical question, to be revealed through pilot testing.

Conclusions

Written communication has been identified as one of the most important learning outcomes among higher education institutions, as well as employers. Frameworks from higher education, educational institutions, national associations, the workforce, K–12 standards, and the research literature have each offered definitions of proficiency with written communication. At the higher education level, in particular, writing should involve critical and reflective engagement with others' ideas, development and support of one's own ideas, skill in producing compelling arguments directed to an audience, and fluency with producing coherent and logical written text that is free of errors. The operational definition proposed in the current article emphasizes the intersection of social, conceptual, and linguistic processes in the writing process, providing a comprehensive view of what skilled written communication involves, which can be used to obtain more complete evidence of students' proficiency with various aspects of writing. This framework aligns with current writing assessments but extends beyond current offerings by emphasizing the authentic social contexts and tasks in which real-world written communication skills will be deployed.

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Notes

- 1 Note that not all of the frameworks provided an explicit definition of writing or written communication; therefore, in some cases, a definition of the targeted construct was inferred from the statements describing the desired student learning outcomes (e.g., rubric statements) relevant for a particular aspect of writing skill.

- 2 Related competencies appear in other frameworks under the heading of information literacy or critical thinking, which deal with evaluating the relevance, reliability, and credibility of various information sources and using those sources to make and defend arguments, develop solutions to problems, and so forth.
- 3 Second-language communication was mentioned across several frameworks (ATC21S, LEAP, BOLOGNA, DQP), but we do not deal with this issue in detail as second-language learning is outside the scope of the written communication per se.
- 4 The linguistic aspects of literacy can be further decomposed into discourse, verbal, and print levels of representation. The discourse representation includes information about text structure, organization, and the situation being described in the text (i.e., a situation model of the text). The verbal level of representation includes information about the meaning and usage of words (i.e., vocabulary knowledge). The print level includes representations of print conventions (i.e., knowledge of spelling, morphology, and phonology). Facility with print, verbal, and discourse-level representations is required for skillful command of the linguistic aspects of writing.
- 5 The CLA+ now includes an SR section, but these items assess students' skill in scientific literacy, critical analysis and evaluation of sources, and critiquing arguments, rather than writing skill.
- 6 Of course, compared to SR tests, CR format assessments often have lower reliability due to other reasons, such as failure to achieve high reliability in CR scoring, which are separate from concerns about test length per se.
- 7 The GRE revised General Test was implemented after August 1, 2011.
- 8 The presence of such items on college placement tests such as the ACCUPLACER and COMPASS which are used to determine whether students demonstrate readiness for college-level writing instruction or require remediation through developmental coursework, is consistent with this notion.

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