# Writing across the Curriculum
# Informational Writing

Writing across the curriculum (WAC) refers to incorporating writing in all courses, rather than isolating writing in the English Language Arts (ELA) course. While the ELA teacher continues to emphasize the development of writing skills, teachers of other disciplines include writing as a tool for both learning and assessment. Students benefit from WAC because they are writing more frequently and often for greater variety of purposes, audiences, and contexts. Additionally, students learn the content and the styles of discourse for other disciplines as they write for each course. Teachers can use writing to help assess student knowledge and understanding of the course content, as well as to encourage the development of communication skills essential to success in school and beyond.

According to the 1999 *North Carolina English Language Arts Standard Course of Study* (*ELA SCS*), informational communication (which is a type of exposition) involves giving information to explain realities or ideas, to teach people who want to know what the writer/speaker knows. The writer/speaker of informational text should be knowledgeable and should communicate so that the audience members may gain the knowledge they need.

Informational communication forms the basis of everyday living. Throughout students' lives, they will be asked to read information and to use information in their own writing, both personally and professionally. In high school, students in all courses use informational communication. Textbooks and resource materials, including articles and videos, provide the content information that students learn. To demonstrate knowledge gained and skills mastered, students often compose open-ended and essay responses on tests and complete research reports and projects. Informational writing is a natural aspect of students learning the content of each discipline.

## Informational Writing and Critical Thinking

Informational texts often depend on the traditional prompts of who, what, when, where, and how. Informational writing asks students to

- Answer research questions
- Assess problems and solutions
- Clarify meaning
- Compose business letters
- Define terms and concepts
- Describe processes
- Examine relationships such as cause and effect
- Explain insights and principles
- Interview sources
- Offer directions or instructions
- Recount personal or historical events
- Relate knowledge
- Report facts and hypotheses
- Summarize information and ideas
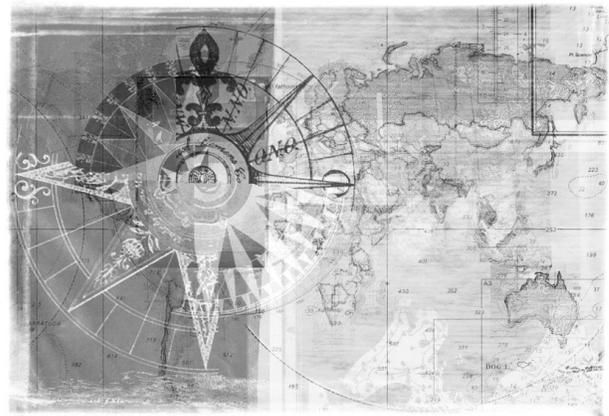
## Strong informational communication

- Maintains a clear sense of purpose and focus on the topic
- Creates or uses an organizing structure appropriate to purpose, audience, and context
- Uses language and style appropriate to the audience and context
- Includes appropriate detail and information for audience and context
- Uses a range of appropriate strategies, such as
  - Providing facts and details
  - Describing or analyzing the subject
  - Narrating relevant anecdote(s)
  - Comparing and contrasting
  - Explaining benefits and/or limitations
  - Demonstrating claims or assertions
  - Offering scenario(s) to illustrate
  - Incorporating effective visual or media aids
- Develops details rather than relying on general references
- Avoids extraneous and/or inappropriate information
- Uses transition words to increase coherence between ideas
- Contains a beginning, middle, and end
  (adapted from New Standards Performance Standards, High School, National Center on Education and the Economy, 1997)

Individuals who are competent at communicating with others are sensitive to the needs of different audiences and to the ways in which the purpose of communication shapes the kinds of ideas and information they choose and the way in which they present them.... Good communicators have learned how to vary their organizational strategies. They adapt the level of detail they provide and the language they use according to the context of the communication. Students recognize, for example, that visual diagrams can help clarify difficult concepts, that a timeline may illustrate historical relationships, or that a colorful illustration may make a story more vivid for other readers. Through practice in making subtle (or not-so-subtle) strategic changes in style to fit different circumstances and audiences, students increase the likelihood that the texts they create will be understood and interpreted as they would like them to be.

*NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts*, 1996

## Types of Informational Texts

According to the *ELA SCS*, all communication involves a message, a message sender, a message receiver, and a setting in which the message is transmitted. To become proficient and skillful users of language, students should understand and demonstrate control of these elements of communication and use language for different purposes, to different audiences, and in different contexts (why, to whom, and in what situations). Students need to use different types of writing for a variety of audiences and purposes.

Teachers can help students consider purpose, audience, and context by designing assignments that include authentic products. The list below suggests some of the forms that teachers of all disciplines can incorporate as part of their courses.

- Abstracts
- Affidavits
- Annotations
- Annual reports
- Autobiographies
- Articles
- Bibliographies
- Biographies
- Brochures
- Business letters
- Captions
- Case studies
- Catalogs
- Classified advertisements
- Contracts
- Depositions

- Diagrams
- Dictionary entries
- Directions
- Diaries
- Documentaries
- Encyclopedia entries
- Essays
- Explanation
- Financial statements
- Flyers
- Forms
- Graphs
- Guidelines
- Illustrations
- Instructions
- Interviews

- Job applications
- Journals
- Labels
- Lists
- Magazines
- Manuals
- Maps
- Memos
- Menus
- Minutes
- Newsletters
- Newspapers
- Obituaries
- Overviews
- Pamphlets
- Policies

- Posters
- Précis
- Profiles
- Programs
- Proposals
- Reports
- Resumés
- Rubrics
- Statistics
- Summaries
- Surveys
- Textbooks
- Time lines
- Travelogues
- Web pages
- Web sites