

## MONMOUTH COLLEGE LANGUAGE RUBRIC

Revised by Gersich, Hale, McGaan, Spring 2010

**The following rubric identifies communication skills in which all students should be proficient by the end of the freshman year, acquiring and developing the skills in foundational courses such as COMM 101, ENGL 110, and ILA, and reinforcing the skills across the curriculum in general education and major courses.**

**More specifically, students should be able to:**

1. FORM AND DEVELOP A THESIS. “Thesis” may be defined as the central idea of an essay. A thesis (most often an introductory thesis) should not only identify the essay’s topic but also assert something about that topic (a position). In other words, a thesis may be thought of as an arguable assertion coming at the head of an essay. A thesis is generally not a statement of fact (self-evident). Nor is it a matter of pure opinion (unarguable). A thesis, then, requires development: illustration, elaboration and support in the body of the essay. Development might also consist of a series of topically focused paragraphs (the body of the essay) and a conclusion (restatement of thesis, final examples, implications of the essay’s work, etc.). Faculty usually comment on the quality of the thesis and its development in EVERY assignment that calls for a thesis.

Formation and development of a thesis statement may involve several or all of the following prewriting exercises:

- a. Identification of topic (COMM 101, ENGL 110)
- b. Analysis of assignment (COMM 101, ENGL 110)
- c. Audience Analysis (COMM 101)
- d. Brainstorming for ideas: free writing, list-making (ENGL 110)
- e. Organizing of ideas (COMM 101, ENGL 110)
- f. Tentative thesis (COMM 101 / ENGL 110)
- g. Revision of thesis during drafting of the essay/speech (COMM 101, ENGL 110)

**PRIMARY COURSES: COMM 101, ENGL 110, ILA**

2. DETERMINE PURPOSE FOR A SPECIFIC AUDIENCE. Messages should be designed to accomplish some specific purpose (to inform..., to analyze..., to change beliefs/attitudes..., to call for action..., to express personal feelings, etc.). The author’s awareness of his/her audience should influence the message’s purpose and the technique used to accomplish that purpose. The parts of the message should be selected with the purpose in mind. For example, particular arguments are included because the author feels they will appeal to the audience; the vocabulary matches the audience’s level of sophistication; the support material has some relevance to them.

**PRIMARY COURSE: COMM 101  
Secondary Course: ENGL 110, ILA**

3. ORGANIZE MAIN POINTS. Messages should be organized so that the main points raised to develop the thesis appear in an effective order. Typical organizational strategies used in developing the body of a message include: temporal, spatial, compare/contrast,

problem/solution, pro/con, general-to-specific, weak-to-strong, etc. Some disciplines prescribe organizational patterns for particular scholarly purposes. Faculty often comment and base grades partially on the effectiveness of organizational strategies for all messages.

**PRIMARY COURSES:** COMM 101, ENGL 110  
**Secondary Course:** ILA

4. **SUPPORT ASSERTIONS.** The thesis is the central assertion which is comprehensive of the whole essay or speech. Similarly those points raised in developing the thesis take the form of subordinate assertions (usually declarative sentences). An assertion is a statement which indicates what the author argues is true. If the audience is not inclined to believe the author without question, an assertion alone is not sufficient to make them believe him/her (or, perhaps, even to understand what the author means). Students must provide support for all but the most obviously clear and correct assertions. Support material (or evidence) includes facts, illustrations, examples, reasoning, or statements from authority which will lead the audience to recognize that the author's assertion is correct and/or appropriate. The presence of good, clear assertions that have compelling, appropriate support material is the hallmark of college-level communication.

**PRIMARY COURSES:** COMM 101, ENGL 110, ILA

5. **AVOID MECHANICAL ERRORS.** Mechanical errors include all punctuation and grammatical mistakes. Of particular concern are major errors, including sentence fragments, comma splices, tense errors, case errors, run-on sentences, agreement errors, and slang/colloquialisms. The elimination of these errors does not guarantee good writing, but it is a minimum standard. Faculty mark these errors when they appear in student papers and indicate that competency in mechanics influences grading. The Bedford Handbook, purchased by students in ENGL 110, can be used as a resources throughout the student's academic career.

**PRIMARY INSTRUCTION:** ENGL 110  
**Secondary Courses:** COMM 101, ILA

6. **USE LIBRARY RESOURCES.** Students should recognize that adequate research at the college-level demands the identification and use of proper resources beyond what might be freely available on the Internet. They should be familiar with the variety of library resources, both print and online, including: library catalogs, general and discipline-related databases (and the scholarly journals they include), newspaper databases, and subject-related reference materials, as well as the appropriate use of interlibrary loan. Generally, faculty require that students go beyond the most basic sources in constructing bibliographies and want their majors to be aware of scholarly resources in their discipline.

**PRIMARY COURSES:** COMM 101, ILA  
**Secondary Course:** ENGL 110

7. **DOCUMENT SOURCES.** Anytime a student borrows language or ideas, the student must acknowledge clearly the material borrowed and cite the information properly. In addition to

direct quotation, these borrowings may include paraphrase and summary. Faculty will explain documentation procedures to students (including how to introduce, integrate, and punctuate outside sources) and insist that proper documentation be used when necessary.

**PRIMARY COURSE:** COMM 101, ENGL 110  
**Secondary Course:** ILA

8. **IDENTIFY ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES.** Students should be able to identify various developmental strategies and rhetorical models when they encounter them while reading. Students should also be able to use the appropriate strategy, or combination of strategies, when crafting their own arguments. Some of these models are:

- a. Descriptive strategies (spatial arrangements, organization) (ILA)
- b. Narrative strategies (chronology, anecdote, flashback) (ENGL 110, ILA)
- c. Definition strategies (denotation, connotation, examples, comparison, negation, etc.) (COMM 101, ENGL 110)
- d. Classification and division (grouping the many; dividing the “one” into parts [analysis]) (ENGL 110)
- e. Comparison strategies (block model, point-by-point model, similarities-differences, analogy) (COMM 101, ENGL 110)
- f. Cause-effect analysis (ENGL 110)
- g. Argumentative strategies (induction, deduction, counter-argument, Pro-con, Problem-solution) (COMM 101, ENGL 110)

**PRIMARY COURSE:** COMM 101, ENGL 110  
**Secondary Course:** ILA

9. **PRESENT IDEAS ORALLY.** For informal situations students should be able to clearly state assertions and provide support material. When giving formal presentations, students should be able to develop a thesis, adapt the argument to a particular audience, organize their main points, and support their assertions (skills 1, 2, 3, and 4). Students should not merely “read” to the listeners. Rather, their presentations should demonstrate control over verbal and nonverbal skills, including sufficient volume, eye contact, and a minimum of distracting movement.

**PRIMARY COURSES:** COMM 101 **Secondary Courses:** ENGL 110, ILA

10. **THINK CRITICALLY.** Students should recognize that college work in all disciplines involves critical thinking and that the elements of this process include the reflective evaluation of ideas, evidence, sources, reasoning, author’s position, purpose and audience.

**PRIMARY COURSES:** COMM 101, ENGL 110, ILA