



University of  
Massachusetts  
Lowell

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT MEMORANDUM

**To:** College Writing Instructors  
**From:** Paula Haines, x4186  
**Date:** July 14, 2009  
**RE:** Start-of-semester writing samples

In order to assure that all students have the best possible placement for College Writing, I ask, as always, that you collect a writing sample from each student during the first week of classes, and that you follow these guidelines:

**Please use the department-wide prompts** if you are teaching College Writing A or I. You will find the prompts at [commontext.wiki.uml.edu](http://commontext.wiki.uml.edu). You might want to print and copy that page for your students; you might allow them to choose between the prompts, or present students with one of those prompts, or re-format the text as you like. You will find some communal, reusable copies in the Department offices on North and South at the start of classes. If you use those, please return them as quickly as possible so others can take them. Depending on your preference, you might allot anywhere from 15 minutes to a full class period for the sample. If you have a strong desire to use a prompt of your own device, please do, but we would appreciate it if you would keep it in line with the Common Text, as we would like students to be reminded about its place in your class. If you are teaching College Writing II this semester, feel free to design any prompt you like, but please do take a sample so that we can identify misplaced students.

**Please take the samples in class during the first week of class.** Please do not assign the sample as homework. Students who arrive to class after you have taken the sample should be asked to write a sample in person, under the same time limit. If the student cannot meet you in your office hours for this purpose, please let me know, and I will be happy to make arrangements with the student to proctor the sample, using the directions and options you set for your class.

**Please read the samples you receive from your students immediately**, noting any samples that you feel might reflect an inappropriate placement, particularly samples that are markedly outside the class average, or samples that show an abundance of typically ESL-related errors. Remember that samples need not be graded. Open seats are always scarce, and, of course, it is always better for students to get settled in their courses early, so your prompt attention to the samples is important.

**Please let me know if you find any questionable placements.** Leave a copy of any such sample in my mailbox on North or South, checking to be sure that the student is clearly identified by name (and, ideally, by student ID#), by instructor, and by section. Please note the best way for me to contact you. This will allow me to look into the student's placement history and adjust the student's schedule if those steps are warranted and possible. If you leave me a sample on South, it's a good idea to drop me an e-mail (Paula\_Haines@uml.edu) or a voicemail (978-934-4186) to let me know there's a sample waiting for me.

**Please wait for my response before you advise any student to make changes to his or her writing placement.** An alternative placement may not always be available, so it is important that you not tell students to drop, or that they don't belong in your class. I will get back to you as soon as possible after you bring the sample to my attention.

Of course, if you have **any questions** at all about this process or about a sample, do not hesitate to contact me for assistance. Thank you for your cooperation with this process, and for your help in making sure that our students have the best possible experience in College Writing.