California State University, Hayward
Writing Skills Subcommittee of Committee on Instruction and Curriculum

Statement of Philosophy on Writing

In order to help future members of the Committee understand the policies of the Writing Skills Subcommittee, we present here our philosophy on writing.

The Writing Skills Subcommittee adheres to the prevailing theory that writing is a process as well as a product, and that finished writing has usually gone through many steps, including thinking, drafting, peer review, and final editing and polishing for a particular audience. We recognize that the writing process is often chaotic, that it is rarely linear, and that imposing organization and audience-readiness on a piece of writing comes after much work has already been done.

At the same time, the Writing Skills Subcommittee realizes that people often must write under pressure and that they will not have the time to implement the process described above. Because memos, email, quick reports, etc., are often written under severe time constraints, our graduates need to be able to write under similar circumstances. The time constraints of the Writing Skills Test resemble in important ways those of writing in the world of work. However, writing created under extreme time pressure such as that of the Writing Skills Test must be judged by standards that are sensitive to those constraints.

It is the position of the Writing Skills Subcommittee that students who take the Writing Skills Test should not be seriously penalized for errors that do not grossly distort meaning and that might otherwise be edited out were the writer given time to revise. These errors include certain grammar and spelling errors and errors common to English learners that do not seriously interfere with meaning.

Bearing in mind the difficulties inherent in on-the-spot writing, the Writing Skills Subcommittee requires readers of the Writing Skills Test to apply a rubric that focuses on organization, ideas and overall grammatical structure rather than on relatively minor errors.

Finally, the Writing Skills Subcommittee urges those who set writing policy and those who design writing assessments to take into account the fact that timed writing tests are a special subset of the writing experience and that these tests provide a necessarily limited picture of our students’ actual abilities.