Expectations for College-Level Writing

Bates faculty have agreed on a number of learning goals for students in writing-attentive courses and for students’ writing across the four years of college. The following is a condensed version of a document generated by faculty outlining our expectations of student writers.

Above Average
Above-average writing—writing that exceeds our expectations for the first-year student—does all of the following:
• Explores original scholarly questions
• Has a sophisticated and engaging argument
• Draws in readers with logic and an understanding of the importance of the topic
• Gathers a variety of sources through research and uses these sources effectively to support (and test) the writer’s argument, integrating source material smoothly into the prose
• Organizes ideas effectively with guideposts for readers (introduction, transitions, conclusion)
• Is written in clear, sophisticated prose
• Has no grammatical or mechanical errors
• Has no errors in citation style or scholarly conventions

Meets Expectations
Writing that meets our expectations does all of the following:
• Adequately addresses the question posed by the assignment
• Has a clearly stated thesis
• Explains the scholarly context of the argument or topic
• Chooses adequate scholarly sources and integrates adequately through quotation and paraphrase
• Shows awareness of an organizational scheme
• Is written in clear, straightforward prose
• May have some errors in grammar, mechanics, and citation

Needs Improvement
Writing that needs improvement to meet our expectations may exhibit some or all of the following:
• Does not address a compelling question and/or does not adequately address the assignment
• Has an unclear argument or guiding question
• Does not adequately explain for the audience the focus, context, or importance of the question
• Depends too heavily on limited types of evidence and rarely analyzes this source material but merely summarizes it
• Lacks essential organizational guideposts (such as transitions or an effective conclusion)
• Is written in prose that is sometimes confusing or monotonous
• Has repeated errors in grammar, mechanics, and citation

Not Yet Proficient
Writing that is not yet at the level we expect of college students has one or more of the following problems:
• Does not address the assignment or explore a question of scholarly interest
• Has no explicit or implicit argument
• Does not consider the questions or expectations of an audience
• Does not incorporate adequate scholarly evidence to support an argument, or merely summarizes evidence used
• Lacks a clear organizational scheme; may include much tangential material
• Has many confusing or incoherent sentences
• Has many errors in grammar, mechanics, and citations