

CSU Dominguez Hills -- Writing

QUESTION	9/18	12/18	GAIN	9/19	12/19	GAIN
1. How confident are you in your ability to write so that your readers will actually do something you want them to do - for example, refund your money for a bad product they sold you, or schedule you to interview for a job you'd like to have?	39.90	72.13	32.23	39.27	68.06	28.79
2. How confident do you feel about your ability to write a fairly long paper for a college course (say, eight double-spaced typed pages) without a lot of stress and without a last-minute rush?	26.13	52.41	26.28	19.95	45.00	25.05
3. How confident are you in your ability to get your point across when you write for personal reasons (for example, on social media like Instagram or Facebook, or texting)?	60.78	76.74	15.96	58.29	72.85	14.56
4. How confident are you in your ability to write for different audiences?	33.00	62.17	29.17	27.93	53.39	25.46
5. How confident are you that you can find good persuasive sources to back up points you want to make in your writing, and filter out sources that might be biased or otherwise bad to use?	39.56	64.84	25.28	40.26	63.01	22.75
6. How confident are you in your ability to write in different genres?	24.86	55.19	30.33	24.44	47.47	23.03
7. How confident do you feel about your ability to read a persuasive article – for example a newspaper editorial – and be able to tell whether it is making a strong argument or not? (Note that this doesn't necessarily mean that you AGREE with the argument; it means that the writer has written an argument that consistently uses solid, legitimate persuasion strategies instead of b.s.)	49.03	67.52	18.49	45.50	62.47	16.97
8. How confident are you in your ability to write without a lot of grammar errors?	41.49	55.74	14.25	42.84	52.27	9.43
9. How confident do you feel about your ability to write well in the classes you will be taking in college?	35.83	65.60	29.77	35.59	60.94	25.35
10. How confident do you feel in your ability to persuade an adult audience to accept your point of view about an important, serious topic?	35.83	63.56	27.73	33.24	57.72	24.48

These data are from an anonymous, online Likert scale survey of our first-year comp classes, administered in the first two weeks of Fall Semester 2018 and 2019, and then again in the last week of those semesters. The numbers displayed above are the totals in the top two domains (“extremely confident” and “fairly confident”) for each question.

Sample size is: Sept 19 = 1188, Dec 19 = 933, Sept 20 = 819, Dec 20 = 578. Due to the anonymity of the survey, these results aggregate all Fall FYC courses (ENG 108, 110, and 112).

The amount of confidence students gained regarding these skills (which were selected as a reasonable reduction of the skill set required for reasonable success in college and workplace writing) is notable, especially regarding their general persuasive skills (Questions 1 and 10), their abilities to write for different audiences (Question 4) and in different genres (Question 6), and their overall level of preparedness for college writing tasks (Question 9). However, we should also note that students’ confidence in their abilities to write in different genres and for different audiences remains relatively low despite these gains, as well as noting the students’ relatively low confidence in their abilities to write grammatically and to complete complex writing tasks without undue stress.

That increased confidence in one’s writing abilities yields verifiably better writing has been a central assumption of composition pedagogy since the 1970s; unfortunately, I have not been able to find any studies which compare student levels of confidence in their writing skills with outside assessment of those students’ writing.