

Expectations for Formal Communication in the Teacher Education Program

Your students, their parents, your colleagues, and the community at large will expect you, as a teacher, to have excellent written and oral communication skills and to model them for the children whom you teach. Therefore, the Teacher Education Program will hold you to high standards when evaluating the formal communication that you deliver in your courses, field experiences, and capstone portfolio.

“Am I expected *never* to make any errors?”

We acknowledge that error-making is a natural part of the learning process, and we will focus on content over correctness when you are writing and speaking informally for your courses (e.g., in-class discussion, reflective journaling) or creating early drafts of projects. However, when teaching students in a K-12 school, presenting a lesson for microteaching on campus, delivering a speech, or submitting an essay or other written product for summative assessment in a course, we will look for you to speak and write correctly using the conventions of standard formal English.

“What are the conventions of standard formal English?”

In general, those conventions include **mechanics** (e.g., spelling, punctuation, capitalization, formatting, citation style) and **usage** (e.g., grammatical rules, agreement within sentences, word choice). We will hear those conventions when you speak in class and in audio or video recordings; and we will see them when you submit documents or when you write on posters or on the board in the classroom.

We expect you to utilize the formal writing and speaking skills that you have been learning since childhood, including skills honed in your written composition and public speaking courses at the university. We expect you to review those skills and refresh your knowledge by consulting the resources available to you, including reference books and Web sites as well as the Writing Center in Stoxen Library.

“How will my errors affect how my work is graded?”

Each professor will develop his or her own grading rubric or other assessment guidelines for any summative project involving speaking or writing. Such a rubric will rate the content of your work according to the criteria specified by the professor’s initial instructions to you.

However, the professor also will be marking surface-level errors in your speaking while he or she listens, or in your writing while he or she reads. **After marking four errors per page of writing, or per two-minute segment of speaking, the professor will stop reading or listening to your work.**

At that point, you will be directed to re-do your work, editing it to correct any convention errors, and then re-presenting it for grading. If the course has a policy regarding the submission of late work, then it would apply, too, to such re-submitted work, even if the error-filled version was submitted on time.

“How can I insure both *correctness* and *high-quality content* in my work?”

A spoken or written project intended for summative assessment of your knowledge and skills is important enough to justify completing it in drafts. In fact, your professor may require that you submit parts of it in stages before its final due date. However, if he or she does not, then you should require that for yourself. Use a calendar to set deadlines for at least three drafts of the project.

The **first draft** should focus on content; after completing it, you should review it with an eye for whether it contains the components required by the assignment guidelines. Revise it accordingly in order to produce a **second draft**; you should review that version with an eye for errors in mechanics and usage. Edit it accordingly to produce a **third draft**, the version that you will submit to the professor. If it is a spoken product, such as a speech or a teaching demonstration, then this process could involve rehearsing your delivery of it instead of rewriting drafts of it. You might enlist a peer to help with revising, editing, or rehearsing.

Waiting until too close to a project’s due date to begin working on it will not allow you the time needed to focus on *both* content *and* correctness. Unless you are already a skilled user of standard formal English conventions, it may be necessary to adjust your academic work habits to allow more time for more drafts of your work.

“How will my errors affect my status in the Teacher Education Program?”

You are always under scrutiny in the Teacher Education Program; your professors on campus and your cooperating teachers in area schools are constantly monitoring your work to determine whether to recommend you for advancement in the program and, ultimately, for licensure to teach.

Persistence in producing error-filled written or spoken work would raise the concern that you cannot meet the high expectations for communication skills that we have of our schools’ teachers. Your status in the program would be in jeopardy if you show too little progress in learning and demonstrating the use of formal standard English in the work that you produce for the department and on its behalf when you represent it while working in area K-12 schools.