Writing Instruction for Teaching Assistants (WIT) Program:
Description and Guidelines

This document outlines how the WIT (Writing Instruction for TAs) Initiative works in academic units in the Faculty of Arts and Science, clarifying participants' roles and explaining the benefits as well as expectations. This description is intended as a guide for both potential applicants and ongoing participants in WIT.

GOALS

The WIT Project is funded by the Faculty of Arts & Science and is a teaching-assistant training initiative that addresses the goal of integrating writing instruction with disciplinary teaching. Participation in WIT helps academic units implement their commitments to building students’ core skills in communication. WIT also fosters discussions about a program's wider learning objectives and offers opportunities for units to develop distinctive approaches to the teaching of writing as part of their curricula and disciplines.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The WIT Coordinator (Lecturer, Writing Instruction, for Arts and Science) works with academic units and a TA from each unit selected for WIT. This TA is designated as the unit’s Lead Writing TA (LWTA) and participates in special training led by the WIT Coordinator and other writing specialists at the University on how best to teach writing skills to undergraduate students and to train TAs to teach writing. Together, the WIT Coordinator and LWTA support writing instruction in academic units by helping departments develop their own statements of writing goals, working with course instructors to incorporate writing and writing instruction into assignment design, and training and supporting course TAs in providing writing instruction and formative feedback to students on their course assignments.

PARTICIPANTS: BENEFITS AND EXPECTATIONS

Academic Units

Units selected for WIT receive funds for the designated Lead Writing TA (LWTA) and for supporting course TAs engaged in WIT activities over and above their normal duties for a course. Funded activities include intensive training and support for the LWTA and training and support for groups of course TAs in WIT-designated courses. Units also gain access to expert consultation on teaching and evaluating writing in the disciplines from the WIT Coordinator. Academic units use this support to strengthen their attention to writing as part of curriculum renewal and to develop and share best practices related to writing instruction in their discipline. In turn, academic units are expected to

- Develop and implement writing expectations for students in the unit's programs, designing course sequences that help students to achieve these expectations over the four-year program, and planning for future years to ensure that more students benefit from writing instruction and/or more TAs are trained to provide it.
- Reflect on WIT activities and outcomes in the academic unit and report on them in a brief formal account to the writing committee near the end of each academic year.
- Include the LWTA and the WIT coordinator appropriately in the unit’s activities, especially in discussions about writing and help disseminate information about WIT by inviting the Coordinator and LWTA to present on WIT initiatives in the unit at Faculty meetings and other events related to teaching.
- Provide access to office space for the LWTA.
Unit WIT Contact

To facilitate the collaborative nature of WIT activities, academic units will also designate a departmental contact (usually the undergraduate coordinator or program director) who will plan and facilitate administration of WIT in with the WIT Coordinator and the LWTA. The work of the WIT contact, using funding provided by WIT, will include the following responsibilities:

- Posting and administering an LWTA position based on a suitable contract.
- Providing additional TA-hours in WIT-designated courses and administering timely contracts that outline WIT duties.
- Consulting with instructors to select appropriate courses for WIT participation (especially first- and second-year courses) and discussing aims and methods with their instructors before proposing them.
- Allocating instructors and TAs for WIT courses as early as possible to allow time for consultation and planning.
- For any sessional lecturers assigned to teach WIT courses, discussing expectations for WIT participation and including WIT participation in the contract.
- Tracking and reflecting on WIT activities and outcomes in the academic unit, and assisting the unit head in reporting on them at the end of the academic year.

Unit Instructors

Instructors involved in WIT courses benefit from having trained TAs who can integrate writing instruction into tutorials and grade effectively, consistently, and efficiently. Instructors also gain access to individual consultation with the WIT Coordinator and LWTA on course and assignment design. Their work should be recognized as a contribution to the unit's teaching goals. In turn they are expected to

- Provide the WIT Coordinator and LWTA with the course syllabus and writing assignments at least a month before the start of term.
  Commit at least 4 hours a term to meet and communicate with the LWTA and WIT Coordinator to discuss course plans.
- Work collaboratively with the LWTA and WIT coordinator in some or all of the following activities: formulating the aims of WIT activities in the course, developing or revising assignments to incorporate skills-building related to writing (e.g., by increasing the number of assignments, sequencing writing tasks, allowing for drafts or rewrites), liaising with instructional librarians in support of relevant assignments, structuring tutorials or class time to integrate some writing instruction by themselves or by TAs, formulating grading criteria and helping benchmark incoming essays, facilitating data collection to measure outcomes of WIT activities in the course.
- Respond to a survey evaluating the WIT activities and their impact in the course.

Teaching Assistants gain valuable experience in a key professional responsibility and benefit from focused training on relevant types of instructional activities. The LWTA in particular also gains a deeper reflective understanding of the challenges of integrating writing instruction into a discipline and builds skills in academic management. Both groups of TAs have commented that their own writing skills improve, and that they gain confidence in their ability to take on new types of teaching.

LWTAs use their disciplinary expertise to develop strategies for applying general methods for writing instruction and TA-training in their home units. They are expected to have 100-120 hours of WIT duties throughout the year (including the initial and continuing TATP training). In turn they are expected to
To work with the WIT Coordinator to help instructors incorporate skills-building in writing as part of assignment design.

- Work with the WIT coordinator to adapt and develop instructional materials for use by TAs in their unit.
- Hold training sessions for TAs in designated courses and/or general training sessions for TAs in their unit (e.g. as supplements to the TATP’s 2-hour sessions for first-time TAs).
- Meet regularly with the TAs for WIT-designated courses to improve marking techniques, increase writing-oriented activities in tutorials, etc.
- Work with the unit’s designated WIT contact to help develop and implement the unit's statement about writing expectations in its programs.
- Collect data to evaluate the effectiveness of WIT.

Course TAs use their disciplinary knowledge to participate in WIT activities within their courses. They are expected to have at least 10 hours per term of WIT duties (including training and other meetings and additional time for grading). These hours should be over and above the normal (non-WIT) duties for the course. In turn they are expected to

- Participate in training and grading meetings arranged by the LWTA.
- Provide constructive written and/or oral feedback on student work.
- Where requested, offer targeted instruction in tutorials, workshops, or classes to help students meet the expectations of specific course assignments.
- Consult with the LWTA about issues or challenges that arise in their WIT duties.

The WIT Coordinator

The WIT Coordinator and Lecturer, Writing Instruction, works with academic units in the WIT project, including unit WIT contacts and course instructors, but her primary responsibility is to support the work of the LWTA in each unit. She is expected to

- Liaise with the unit’s designated WIT contact to plan and facilitate the implementation of WIT in that unit and contribute to unit discussions about curriculum where writing is concerned.
- Participate in the unit’s development and implementation of statements about writing expectations.
- Consult with instructors on course, assignment, and rubric design as well as tutorial and lab activities involving writing.
- Work with TATP and other writing specialists on campus to introduce LWTAs to principles of writing instruction and to train them in best practices for sharing and applying that knowledge to their academic disciplines, including training in designing workshops for course TAs and coaching them in teaching practices.
- Support training workshops by directing LWTAs to resources, assisting in the development of materials, attending and participating in sessions, and providing feedback.
- Help develop and adapt instructional material for use by instructors, LWTAs, course TAs, and, in some cases, students.
- Oversee collection of this material to create a legacy of teaching resources for future use in the academic unit and beyond.
- Collect data and evaluate the effectiveness of WIT initiatives in the various units.