School Name	Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids, IA
Course Name	Basic Writing
Course Format	Hybrid (part lecture, part lab)

Key Results After taking Basic Writing, a developmental writing course in which MyWritingLab accounts for 50 percent of the final grade, Compass exam retest scores average 24 points higher than initial placement scores.

Submitted by
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Course materials
Writing for Life, Henry; MyWritingLab

Kirkwood Community College is a comprehensive community college serving more than 23,000 students annually through a network of 11 strategically placed learning hubs that provide a diverse and in-depth set of class choices. Our flagship campus is in the city of Cedar Rapids.

About the Course

We offer two levels of developmental writing to our varied student population—from recent high school graduates to non-traditional adults returning to school. Basic Writing (3 credits) is the lower level course and is required for students who score below a 32 on the Compass placement test. It is a 16-week course that meets for 55 minutes three times a week. Basic writing skills are covered, including writing to communicate with the reader, writing fluency, sentence and paragraph structure, editing, spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors. Annual enrollment is 350–400 students.

Challenges and Goals

We chose to use MyWritingLab because we wanted a way to engage our students where they are: online.

Furthermore, we needed to incorporate a tool that would provide students with extra practice and review, as well as testing opportunities, in a format they could easily understand. Finally, MyWritingLab proved to be a great way to reinforce what I, and other instructors, already do in the classroom, and this is a great benefit.

Implementation

Work performed in MyWritingLab is worth 50 percent of a student's grade. Students take the Path Builder diagnostic at the beginning of the semester, which allows me to get a sense of the class's overall strengths and weaknesses. We often complete Overviews, Animations, and Recalls together as a class, after which students spend time working on their individual Learning Paths. I assign everything in the modules except the Write activities. All MyWritingLab work counts as homework credit, except the post-tests, which count as a separate test grade.

Our hybrid class is part lab, part lecture. At the beginning of the semester, I give students more class time to work on MyWritingLab so that they become familiar with the technology. After this initial period, a lot of the MyWritingLab work is done outside of class.

For the last few weeks of class, I use Path Builder results in conjunction with Compass results to create an individualized study plan for each student. I meet with students one-on-one, and we decide together what three areas of greatest need they should spend more time working on in MyWritingLab before they retake the Compass. This approach works well.

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"Use Pearson's implementation tools and resources to become a trained user. Experiment with what works best for your course and your students—track results, and don't be afraid to make changes based on data-driven decisions."
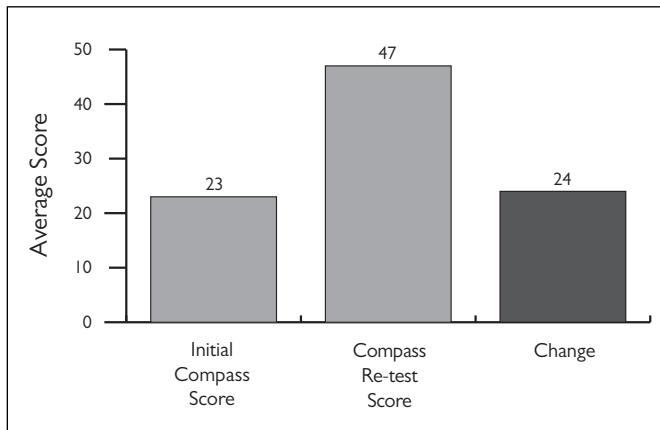

Figure 1. Compass Pre and Post Scores: Spring 2012–2014 ($n = 111$)

Benefits

MyWritingLab's auto-graded tests and Item Analysis feature in the gradebook allow me to spend less time correcting and more time analyzing the concepts I need to review in class. This is a huge benefit to instructors.

For students, MyWritingLab provides immediate feedback by presenting detailed information as to why an answer is incorrect. Students then have the opportunity to try again. Although some students are challenged by technology, MyWritingLab's consistent interface helps them quickly become more comfortable navigating topics and modules. Students get a solid amount of practice before testing and experience multiple modes of learning. The self-paced nature of the program is a great feature as well.

Assessments

50 percent	Writing assignments (5–6), class activities including reading a novel
35 percent	MyWritingLab post-tests
15 percent	MyWritingLab homework

Results and Data

To pass Basic Writing, students must achieve a grade of A, B, or C, or score 32 or higher on the Compass retest. Students do not automatically fail the course if they do not score 32 or above on the Compass. We realize that some students do not test well for various reasons, so it is their performance in the classroom over the course of the semester that determines whether or not they pass or fail.

Figure 1 shows Compass pre- and post-scores for students completing Basic Writing between spring 2012 and spring 2014. We have seen an impressive increase in performance from the initial Compass scores to the retest scores at the end of the semester.

After Basic Writing, depending on the academic program and the Compass retest scores, students move to upper-level developmental writing, Composition I, or Workplace Communication (required for students enrolled in Applied Science and Technology programs). To test into Composition I, a Compass score of 70 or higher is needed. It is, however, at the instructor's discretion to recommend the subsequent course in which a student should enroll. Unfortunately, we do not have access to the data regarding what percentage of students continued on to upper-level developmental writing, Composition I, or Workplace Communication.

Conclusion

For new MyWritingLab instructor users, I recommend taking the Path Builder diagnostic and becoming familiar with the Learning Path content before assigning it. Use Pearson's implementation tools and resources to become a trained user. Experiment with what works best for your course and your students—track results, and don't be afraid to make changes based on data-driven decisions.

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