Philosophical Disposition for Composition Classes in the English Department

English composition courses at all levels will

1. Integrate critical thinking, reading, writing, and other modes of communications such as speaking, and listening.

2. Address directly students’ reading practices. Reading is critical to academic success, and we strive to include a greater range and depth of reading in our program since students who improve their reading tend to improve their writing and vice-versa.

3. Encourage readers to read for ideas and to process units of meaning rather than focus on word by word reading since an active reading style is vital to improving reading comprehension.

4. Approach the teaching of writing by inviting students to write prose pieces of varying length and complexity. Writing is not taught in a progression from the sentence to the paragraph to the essay but rather is taught, like reading, on levels of increasing complexity and depth. The whole language approach, involving reading, writing, speaking and listening, is preferred for English composition courses of all levels.

5. Emphasize critical thinking not limited to concepts of formal logic or to entirely personal problem-solution paradigms. Rather, critical thinking in academic settings is textually-based; thus, student writings should largely be based upon a response to a reading, a chapter, a book, a movie, a television show, and so on. Consequently, academic critical thinking includes grouping items and seeing patterns; drawing inferences; evaluating for purpose, synthesis and argumentation; differentiating fact from opinion; asking questions; evaluating for standards of fairness and accuracy; and making judgments. In other words, students in composition classes should practice summary, analysis, evaluation, and response.

6. Employ a process-oriented rather than a product-oriented approach to writing. Students should be encouraged to write and revise preliminary drafts of substantial written work, to improve their writing through focused peer discussions, and to provide self-evaluation of their written works. Additionally, students should receive prompt feedback throughout the process from their instructors, from their peers, and, as appropriate to the individual needs of the student, from the Language Success Center.

7. Create settings which include speaking, listening and responding that foster the building of academic cooperation and forge links to critical reading and writing. Teaching those skills sometimes needs to be explicit and directed. Activities may include student presentations (solo and group/panel); small- and large-group discussions in which students speak not only to the instructor but to each other; student/teacher conferences; interviews in the class or community. We also encourage listening skills that involve note-taking and feedback/response.
8. Include full-length works, defined as any work that sustains themes, including a book of short essays by a single author. We suggest that the work(s) be integrated into the course thematically. On the developmental level, we recommend that non-fiction be used; that if fiction or autobiographical works are assigned, they be analyzed for issues, themes, and aspects of composition pedagogy connected to other readings in the course rather than for literary aspects; that a combination of book-length works and short essays be used to provide a variety of models; and that students be asked for both personal and analytical responses.

9. Increase students’ familiarity with and knowledge of academic culture, themselves as learners, and the relationship of the two. Some ideas include: collaborative teaching and learning, using materials reflecting successful college experiences, acknowledging and validating the students’ experiences while introducing them to academic culture and values, modeling academic values, demystifying the institution, and using the resources of the campus community (such as the Success Centers, the Museum, lecture series, DSP&S, the Library, and other campus resources and activities) to assist and deepen the students’ knowledge of academic life.

(Modeled on the Chabot College English Department's "Throughline" and "Articulated Assumptions" [2001] documents)