



ENGAGE TO ACHIEVE MORE

Respecting Every Student: Promoting Confidence and Belonging among College Students in Corequisite Composition

Helping composition students sharpen their non-cognitive skills can lead to success in the first-year course and in future college-level courses.

David Starkey

Santa Barbara City College

Corequisite Composition: The Rationale

“Getting stuck in remedial classes predicts academic failure. Students must pay for the classes but don’t earn any credits towards a bachelor’s degree. And over a decade of research shows that starting in a remedial class makes them less likely to earn a degree.”

Andrew Nickens

Vice President of Legislative Affairs at Student Senate for California Community Colleges

The rationale is simple: by putting our students in corequisite composition courses, we are empowering them to tackle the college-level courses in real time, with the support they need to succeed. In addition to supporting all types of students, there is evidence to suggest that corequisite composition courses can be a tool for increasing equity among students. In an article for the California Acceleration Project, Leslie Henson and Katie Hern remind us that “Increasing student access to college-level English can be a powerful lever for reducing equity gaps among the underrepresented students of color.”¹ They noted that while all students saw greater completion after the introduction of acceleration, students of color saw the greatest completion gains.

More evidence to support the usefulness and effectiveness for corequisite composition courses can be found at the [Community College of Baltimore’s Accelerated Learning Program site](#), at the [California Acceleration Project](#), or on the California Community College’s [Research and Planning Group](#) website.



The Transition to a Corequisite Composition Course

Transitioning to a corequisite composition course may first require a recalibration of faculty attitudes towards student preparedness and course design. Designing a corequisite composition course necessitates developing a curriculum that benefits corequisite students and especially assures them that they belong in the class. In terms of course planning, Stanford bioengineering professor Melissa E. Ko has developed a rubric (see next page) for assessing students' work that will remind instructors to evaluate the material they are assigning as well as how they expect students to respond to that material.

This rubric, which features categories such as “Personal Connections and Relevance,” “Transparency of Content,” and “Diversity of Perspectives,” is a useful tool for creating corequisite composition courses that are not only relevant but also accessible to every student.

As Tara Wood and her colleagues put it in “Moving Beyond Disability 2.0 in Composition Students,” there is a need to create “accessible course design and emphasize a dynamic, recursive, and continual approach to inclusion rather than mere troubleshooting... [and that] Disability’s presence, like the presence of students with race, class, or gender differences, is not a ‘problem’ but rather an opportunity to rethink our practices in teaching writing.”²



Course Design Equity and Inclusion Rubric (Version 1.0.1)

Content: how the content of learning experiences and assessments is chosen and presented				
Rubric Item	Exemplary	Present	Developing	Absent/Needs Improvement
Personal Connections and Relevance 1,2,3,4,5,6	Motivates content with its impact on students and/or their communities	Makes most content relevant and personal for students	Relates content to some common experiences and/or recent events	No evidence of attempt to connect content to student experiences or events
Adaptability of Content 2,5,6,7	Creates space and opportunities to tailor content to the interests and concerns of cohort	Allows for some adaptation on how content is covered based on student interests	Solicits student interests and adds content to address them	Course content and material set in stone from year to year
Transparency of Content 4,8,9	Communicates decisions and expectations around content: how content is chosen, how it connects together, and what level are students supposed to know and why	Communicates which content will be covered in the course and why it was chosen, as well as how the topics connect	Communicates which content will be covered in the course and how it connects together	Plan for content to be covered and the level of understanding required is largely unknown to students
Diversity of Perspectives 3,5,10	Sources are diverse in authorship and philosophy, showing multiple possibly even conflicting views on the content	Course brings in multiple sources with varying views or varying authorship	Course largely aligns to a single source and brings in a few supplemental sources	Course aligns to a specific textbook or a single source material
Diversity of Media 2,5,8	Course offers multiple options of media for learning that are equivalent and up to student choice	Course alternates between more than one form of media	Course occasionally incorporates different forms of media (e.g. written format with a few videos)	Course relies exclusively on one form of media (e.g. written format) to convey information

Created by [Dr. Melissa E. Ko](#) (mesako@berkeley.edu) licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

Building Community for Every Student in Corequisite Composition Courses

“Certain kinds of challenges in the transition to college...are common, shared by many students from diverse backgrounds, and likely to abate over time. Such thoughtful outreach seems to be especially powerful for Black, Latinx, Native, and first-generation students.”

Maithreyi Gopalan and **Shannon Brady**

First Day

Building a community—ensuring a sense of belonging and inclusion are baked in the course design—can only come if the classroom itself is a place where students feel at home, and this begins on the first day.

TRY THIS: Begin with ice-breakers. Introduce students to one another and their instructor, and create an environment where students feel comfortable sharing their worries about the class and obstacles they face. This will pave the way for sharing solutions that they each envision will help them successfully complete the course.



Within and Beyond the Classroom

Hostos Community College professor Sean Garrity emphasizes the vital nature of involving students in their campus community in order to ensure a sense of belonging in the classroom. He says, “As freshman composition instructors, we are often one of the first points of contact for students at the community college—students who are anxious, overwhelmed, fearful, and often feeling alone without their tight-knit high school friend group around them.”

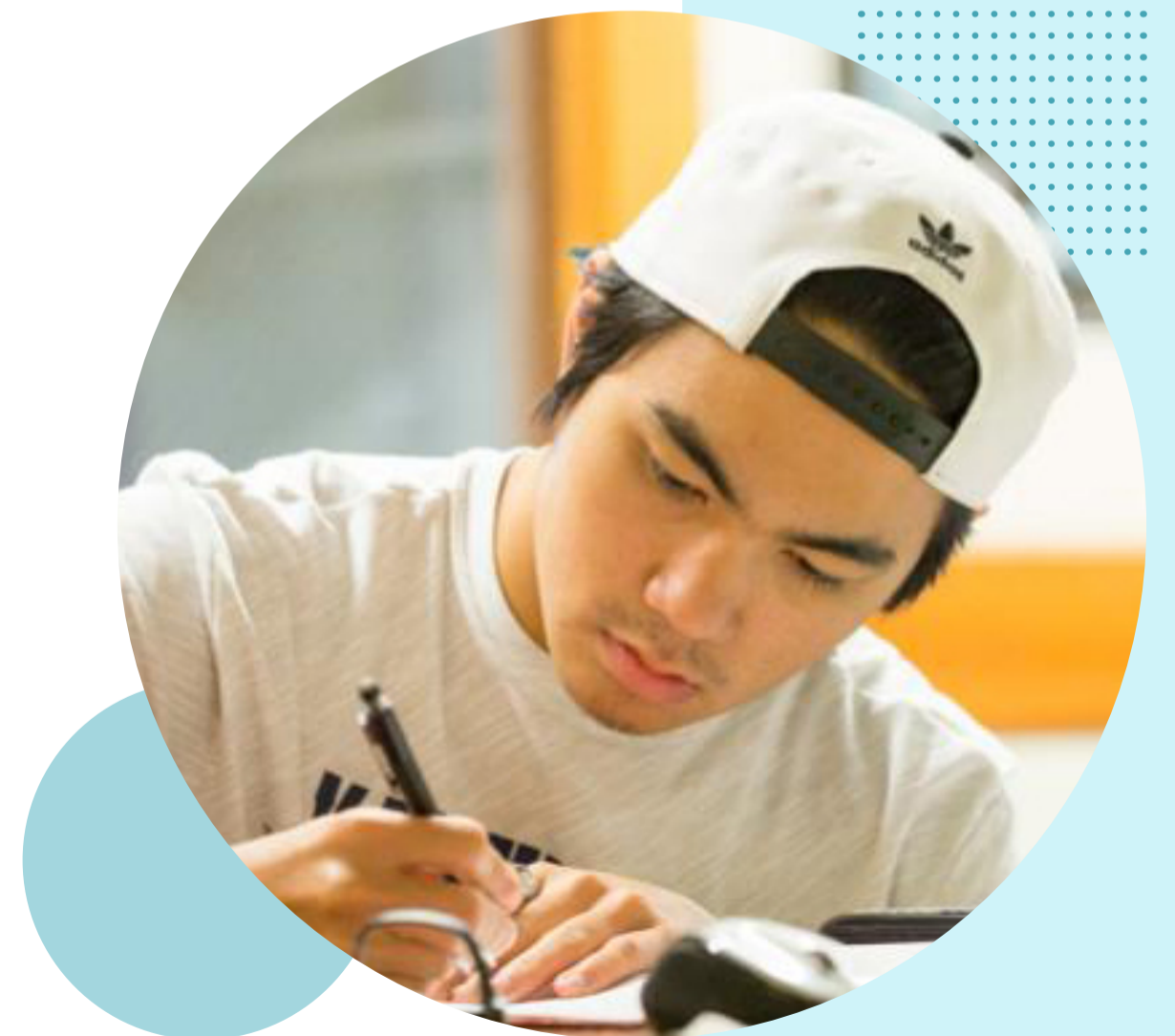
TRY THIS: In order to foster that sense of community in his corequisite composition course, professor Garrity recommends small group activities, extra credit awards for attending campus events, and asking students to learn about and share on-campus resources.

Building Up Student Self-Esteem

Psychotherapist Dennis Lawrence contends that “a person’s self-esteem is dependent on the relationship between their self-image and their ideal self.”³

While self-image refers to a person’s realistic view of their own strengths and weaknesses, the “ideal self” is recognized as the person they would like to become. When faced with the gap between their self-image and ideal self, some students are moved to close the gap or they meet that gap with significant levels of frustration. Lawrence notes that “people who have low self-esteem lack confidence in themselves so that they are reluctant to take risks either personally or in the learning of a new skill...They will be so aware of their inadequacies, both as people and in their skills, that they will avoid situations they perceive as likely to cause them further unpleasant feelings.

TRY THIS: One way that corequisite courses can address that gap is by providing opportunities for self-reflection and goal setting, but also by insisting that this gap between the self-image and ideal self is not only okay but necessary for growth to take place.



The Importance of a Growth Mindset

Stanford Psychologist Carol Dweck writes in *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, that a **growth mindset** “is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts. Although people may differ...in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperament—everyone can change and grow through application and experience.”⁴



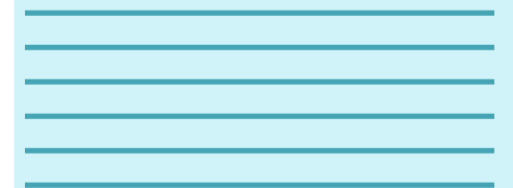
Source: Carol Dweck, *Mindset*



A growth mindset stands in stark opposition to a **fixed mindset**, which assumes that strengths and weaknesses, especially ones related to learning new skills (painting and math, for example), are set in stone.

People who have a growth mindset believe that feedback is constructive, that a person's abilities are determined by effort and attitude, that failure is an opportunity for growth, and they are excited by new challenges and opportunities to succeed. Growth mindsets are incredibly valuable when learning to write, as the act of writing is full of challenges, course corrections, constant minor victories, and defeats which make it a veritable laboratory for creating a growth mindset.

TRY THIS: College composition courses are particularly valuable sites for encouraging students to confront their setbacks head-on, so they can unpack them and strategize ways to effectively address similar challenges the next time they arise. From class discussions to essay prompts to praise for risk-taking, there are many ways our corequisite composition courses can be structured to facilitate the development of a growth mindset.



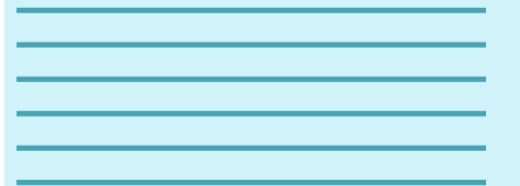
Frameworks for Student Success

The Eight Habits: A Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing

In addition to developing a growth mindset, the Council of Writing Program Administrators recommends eight other habits for success in postsecondary writing:

- flexibility
- curiosity
- openness
- engagement
- creativity
- persistence
- responsibility
- metacognition

According to the council, students who develop these habits and approach to learning from an active stance are likely to succeed in a variety of fields and disciplines inside and outside of school.



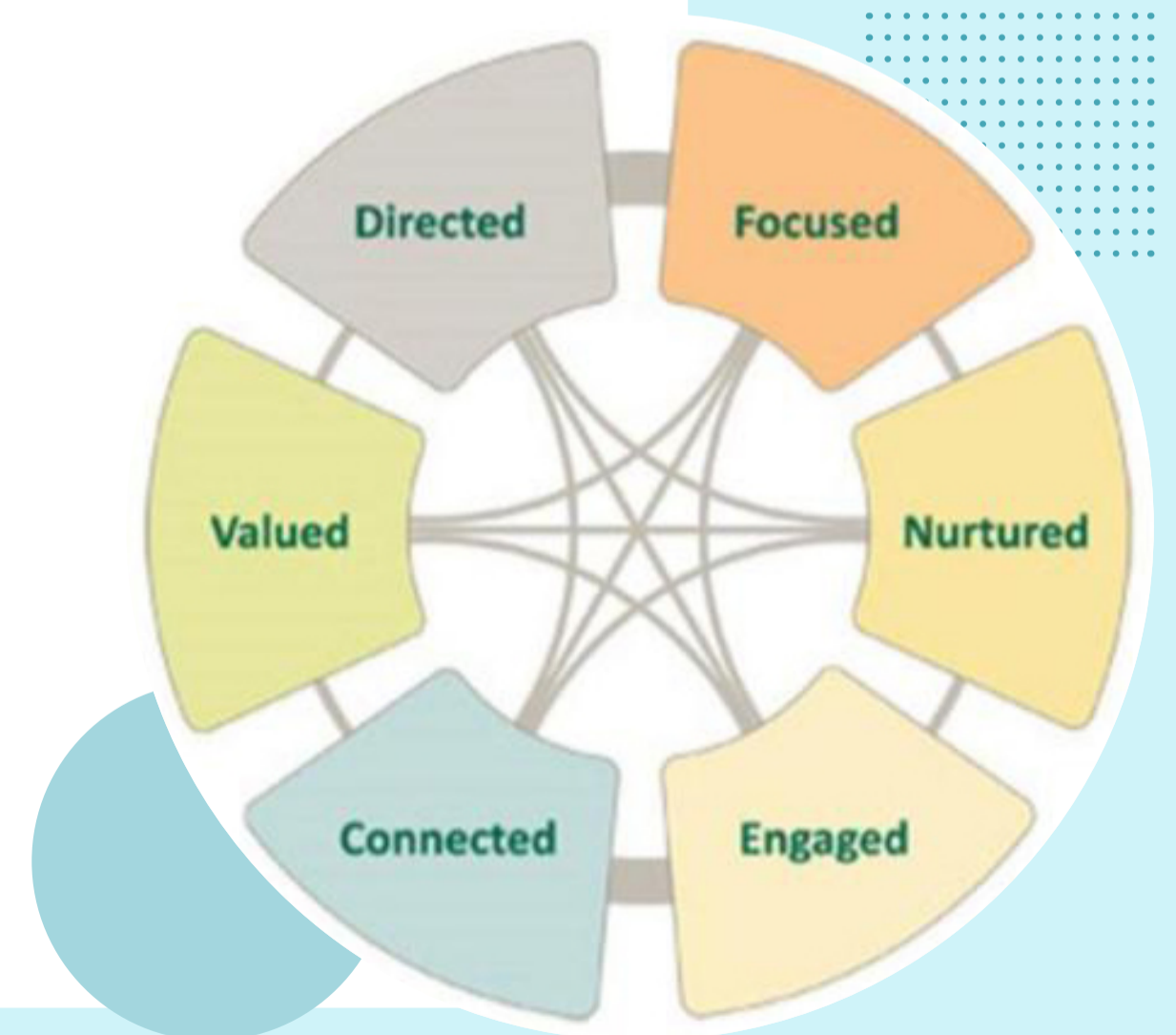
Frameworks for Student Success

The Six Success Factors

The Research and Planning Group from the California Community Colleges developed these factors based on their exploration of what California community college students say they need to succeed.

This image demonstrates two key concepts from Dweck's argument, that while students want to be nurtured and valued, they also expect to shoulder some responsibility for their education. They wish to be directed, focused, and engaged, and they also understand that these factors are interconnected, so that success in one area ideally fosters success in the others.

Source: The Resource and Planning Group
California Community Colleges



Conclusion

Showing respect for students and emphasizing the community that a college corequisite course has to offer increases student confidence. A confident student is one who feels like they belong in the classroom, and they are more likely to show respect for their classmates, their professor, and the entire learning process. Developing that sense of community and confidence creates a positive feedback loop, one that encourages a growth mindset and other non-cognitive skills that are essential to student success, and proclaim the message, “you can do it, you belong here, you are a writer.”

References

¹<https://accelerationproject.org/Portals/0/Documents/let-them-in-final.pdf?ver=2016-09-29-124642-623>

²Wood et al., Moving Beyond Disability 2.0 in Composition Students (*Composition Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Fall 2014))

³Lawrence, Denis. (2006). *Enhancing Self Esteem in the Classroom*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

⁴Dweck, C. S. (2008). *Mindset*. Ballantine Books.





David Starkey has taught English for 30 years. He is Founding Director of the Creative Writing Program at Santa Barbara City College, and a former director of the Composition Program. A frequent collaborator with the late Wendy Bishop, Starkey helped develop a pedagogy focused on the cross-pollination of composition and creative writing. Starkey's writing on corequisite composition is informed by his participation in SBCC's Express to Success program, an early-adopter of the ALP/corequisite model. He is the author of Macmillan titles *Creative Writing: Four Genres in Brief* (Fourth Edition, 2022) and *Hello, Writer!* (First Edition, 2022), the latter of which was developed for the first-year composition course with corequisite support.

If you're looking for intuitive learning support solutions to help you engage students at all levels of preparedness, wherever instruction happens, look to the combination of Macmillan Learning's Achieve platform, and its fully integrated classroom response system, iClicker. Seamlessly integrated into your campus's learning management system, Achieve and iClicker deliver powerful media and assessment tools that give every student a voice.

[Watch full webinar recording.](#)

[Contact your local Macmillan Learning representative.](#)