

First-Year Writing Portfolio

A Part of the SpEl.Folio Project at Spelman College

The due date for the Writing Portfolio is **Thursday, April 22, 2027.**

Writing Portfolio Guidelines

These serve as guidelines for completing your First-Year Writing Portfolio. If you have questions after reading the guidelines, please contact the [Comprehensive Writing Program staff](#) to obtain schedules for workshops you can attend to help strengthen your portfolio, information on obtaining one-on-one tutoring, and models of successful First-Year Writing Portfolios.

What is a Portfolio? What Is It For?

A portfolio is a compilation of work that has been put together for a specific purpose, and generally includes reflection on the whole. The First-Year Writing Portfolio at Spelman College has four primary purposes:

1. Demonstrate your achievements as a writer and critical thinker during your first year at Spelman.
2. Enable assessment of your work as a writer and critical thinker. This includes your own self-assessment as well as a review by a faculty assessment team.
3. Evaluate your level of preparedness to continue in more advanced writing and critical-thinking projects as you continue your education.
4. Determine what additional support you may need as a writer and critical thinker. Strong portfolios are built through a process of *collection*, *selection*, and *reflection*. In other words, the portfolio is more than just a showcase of your work; it is a location in which you make judgments about how best to present yourself as an academic writer, and in which you provide reflections that help you and your readers better understand how the portfolio was developed.

What Is the First-Year Writing Portfolio?

Spelman College supports the First-Year Writing Portfolio, along with other writing-across-the-curriculum initiatives, by requiring submission to a custom Canvas course. The advantages to completing an electronic portfolio are many: it is portable and flexible; it builds upon skills learned in first-year core classes including CIS 105, LMW103, SBQC 100, and ADW 111-112; it enables a high level of creativity in presenting your work; it builds and showcases skills which are attractive to employers and graduate schools; and, most important, it encourages you to show the connections between the many different skills you learn in your first year at Spelman.

As you will see below, the portfolio draws on much of your writing experience from the academic year. In addition to this portfolio that will be read and scored by Spelman and other faculty, you will complete other writing projects as they appear throughout your time here at

Spelman College. In other words, it is important to archive your work. As you store your writing assignments over time, they may be useful when applying for jobs and/or graduate programs.

Below are the directions for the First-Year Writing Portfolio to be submitted to the customized Canvas course at the end of the semester. If you have questions about this process, please [contact Prof. Melanie McKie](#).

What Are the Goals for Your Learning?

A student who successfully completes the First-Year Writing Portfolio demonstrates the ability to:

1. Conceive and develop a clear and focused academic essay.
2. Use relevant and reliable sources in support of an essay, with appropriately integrated evidence and documentation. Evidence may be drawn from experience, research of the literature (both print and multimedia), and/or empirical investigation.
3. Analyze and synthesize evidence.
4. Develop a clear sense of the rhetorical choices available for varied audiences and purposes, including voice, tone, diction, structure, and format.
5. Develop a clear sense of the composing processes required for various genres, including but not limited to academic research papers, multi-media compositions, and oral presentations.
6. Conduct accurate analytical and synthetic reflection on composing content and on the student's development over time.

What is the Administrative Process for the First-Year Writing Portfolio?

The First-Year Writing Portfolio is a collaborative project from the [Comprehensive Writing Program \(CWP\)](#), the [African Diaspora and the World Program \(ADW\)](#), the [Literature, Media, and Writing Department](#), and the [Office of Undergraduate Studies](#). The CWP distributes the assignment, schedules support workshops, offers individual peer tutorials, and facilitates the evaluation process. ADW and the Literature, Media, and Writing Department (LMW) assign writing projects suitable for the Writing Portfolio's content. Your submission of your portfolio is the first step in meeting the graduation requirement for First Year Writing. In your second year, you will receive the results of the portfolio reading and either pass or resubmit for a second reading (in the spring semester). Those who do not pass the resubmitted portfolio will be enrolled in a two-credit LMW course, LMW 250.

How is the First-Year Writing Portfolio evaluated?

The CWP assembles a team of readers from across various departments at Spelman, as well as expert readers from other schools. Each portfolio is read by at least two team members and is assigned an evaluation of "Pass" or "Resubmit." If the two readers' evaluations agree, the evaluation stands. If the two readers' evaluations differ, a consensus decision will be reached, or, in some cases, a third reader will determine the outcome. A copy of the assessment rubric is available on the portfolio Canvas course and on the CWP website. You will receive detailed feedback on your writing portfolio through the scoring record in the portfolio Canvas course. You may receive feedback comments on the essays as a whole, as well as on the cover letter reflection in distinctive categories. Additionally, a few outstanding portfolios may be assessed

as “Exemplary.”

When is the First-Year Writing Portfolio due? What happens after that?

- Portfolios are due Thursday, April 22, 2027, by midnight
- Portfolios are assessed in May 2027
- Individual results will be posted in the portfolio Canvas course by August 2027.

How do I turn in my First-Year Writing Portfolio?

First-Year Writing Portfolios will be submitted through your account in the portfolio Canvas course. Early submission is desirable and welcome. In the months before the submission date, decide upon appropriate essays, consult your advisor, FYE facilitator, or instructor about them, and revise and edit them. The penalty for non-submission or late submission is not achieving the first step toward the graduation requirement. Thus, if you do not meet the guidelines, your writing portfolio will be evaluated alongside next year’s resubmissions in Spring 2028.

What does “Resubmit” mean?

An assessment of “Resubmit” means that the writing in this First-Year Writing Portfolio indicates that the author will need additional support in one or more areas in order to be prepared for her upper-level writing and critical-thinking work. Each student whose writing portfolio receives an assessment of “Resubmit” also receives information tailored to them, specifying workshops to attend and at least one visit with a Writing Center tutor. Common reasons for writing portfolios to be evaluated “Resubmit” have included the following: insufficient citation (in-text and/or on the “Works Cited”/ “References” page); lack of a central focus; lack of demonstrated ability to use references in service of the author’s own argument (rather than simply “pasting in” quotations or paraphrases); lack of correct grammar and mechanics; and failure to include one or more required written pieces. For portfolios initially submitted in April 2027, resubmissions will be due in February 2028.

What should be included in my First-Year Writing Portfolio?

Your writing portfolio will contain three essays, as well as the items specified in the checklist below. Here’s a summary of the three essays to include:

SECTION A GUIDELINES

A letter of critical reflection, addressed to the assessment reader, that discusses the contents of your portfolio. This letter must follow the guidelines and must be at least 800 words. The first section of your writing portfolio is a letter introducing yourself to the assessment committee and offering a critical self-assessment of your work as a writer during your first year at Spelman College. A portfolio is more than the sum of its parts; its real value lies in its ability to demonstrate meaningful connections among them. Your reflective letter is your opportunity to articulate and deepen your readers’ and your own awareness of those connections.

Audience and tone.

Address your letter to the assessment committee. The tone of your letter should be moderately formal. In other words, assume that you are addressing faculty, but do not feel you have to take a highly formal or distant tone. Write in the first-person singular (“I”). Be as candid and

specific as possible.

Structure. The structure of your letter should be clear and simple. This is not an academic essay, so you do not need a thesis. If you wish, you may answer each question in order. Please note the evaluation descriptors for this reflection letter in the rubric.

Content. It is fine to address topics not included in the following questions. However, do be sure that your letter, at a minimum, provides a full and detailed response to each of the following questions.

- During your first year at Spelman, how have you developed as a writer? What writing skills have you acquired that you will carry forward into future classes? Explain exactly how you acquired each skill you mention.
- Why did you choose the two essays/projects in Sections B and C? What do they demonstrate about you as a writer that you would like the assessment committee to notice? Be specific about what you accomplished in each of these essays.
- Which of the three pieces in your portfolio most engaged you as a writer? Why?
- During your first year at Spelman, what writing skills have you realized you need more work on? How will you get the ongoing support you need? Explain exactly how you plan to improve each skill you mention.
- How is writing and/or critical thinking relevant to you as a student moving into your major? How might one or both of these abilities be relevant to you after you graduate?

SECTION B GUIDELINES

An academic argument or critical essay written during your time at Spelman.

Option 1

Although this essay does not have to be centrally argumentative, a critical essay will still have a discernible thesis that takes a clear position, with strong topic sentences in each paragraph that provide evidence and support for that thesis. A critical essay may inform (explain something), narrate (tell a story), or be reflective (recall a personal experience), but the focus of the essay should be a critical or argumentative position. This essay **may or may not include research; however, if you do include sources, you must properly document the use of those sources. The essay must be 1,000 words or more.**

Option 2

Students who do not have a traditional essay that fulfills Section B may select to fulfill the portfolio requirement by using a multimodal project/assignment created during their time at Spelman. This multimodal project must include text and visuals and/or text and audio. It should be a critically composed project that has been through a revision process. In addition to the project itself, **this multimodal project should be accompanied by a 500- to 1000-word process essay.** This process essay should answer the following questions:

- How did you define your objectives, identify your audience, and choose your research

methods? What methods did you use to plan or gather the necessary information?

- What modes (e.g., visual, auditory, textual) and media (e.g., videos, podcasts, infographics) did you incorporate into your project? Explain why you have selected them.
- Describe your critical thinking process on this multimodal project. What decisions did you make on how to rhetorically represent your ideas?
- Describe the challenges you encountered (technical, creative, or research-related) during the composition process and explain what strategies you used to overcome them.
- How did you evaluate the effectiveness of your multimodal project, and what feedback did you receive?

SECTION C GUIDELINES

An academic argument or critical essay written during your time at Spelman.

Although this essay does not have to be centrally argumentative, a critical essay will still have a discernible thesis that takes a clear position, with strong topic sentences in each paragraph that provide evidence and support for that thesis. A critical essay may inform (explain something), narrate (tell a story), or be reflective (recall a personal experience), but the focus of the essay should be a critical or argumentative position. This essay **must include at least two outside sources, and those sources must be properly documented. The essay **must** be 1,000 words or more.**

PORTFOLIO CHECKLIST

- The First-Year Writing Portfolio Pathway is located in your custom portfolio Canvas course account. Before the end of February 2027, you should receive an enrollment notice for the FYE Portfolio. **If you have not received that enrollment notice by March 1, please [contact Dan Bascelli](#).**
- Each item in the portfolio was written **while you were a student at Spelman**. Work completed during high school or at other schools is not acceptable. See the Writing Program Interim Director if you are unsure how to determine the eligibility of your essays.
- Professors' names or comments do **not** appear on any items in the portfolio.
- For Sections B and C, **the exact text of the professor's assignment accompanies each essay**. Preferably, the writing prompt has been uploaded as a PDF.
- Section A letter, with the link clearly named "Section A."
- Section B essay, with the link clearly named "Section B."
- Section C essay, with the link clearly named "Section C."
- Upload your papers as Word files and/or PDFs. Avoid Apple Pages files and Google docs.