CSU Guiding Notes for General Education Reviewers

CSU GE-Breadth Area A and IGETC Area 1
Communication in the English Language & Critical Thinking

Area A emphasizes development of students’ communication and reasoning skills. It requires coursework in “communication in the English language, to include both oral communication and written communication,” making these the only courses in the GE pattern that must be taught in English.

From Executive Order 595:

A minimum of 9 semester units or 12 quarter units are required in communication in the English language—to include both oral communication and written communication—and in critical thinking, which shall include consideration of common fallacies in reasoning.

Instruction approved for fulfillment of the requirement in communication is to be designed to emphasize the content of communication as well as the form and should provide an understanding of the psychological basis and the social significance of communication, including how communication operates in various situations. Applicable course(s) should view communication as the process of human symbolic interaction focusing on the communicative process from the theoretical perspective: reasoning and advocacy, organization, accuracy; the discovery, critical evaluation and reporting of information; reading and listening effectively as well as speaking and writing. This must include active participation and practice in written communication and oral communication.

Instruction in critical thinking is to be designed to achieve an understanding of the relationship of language to logic, which should lead to the ability to analyze, criticize, and advocate ideas, to reason inductively and deductively, and to reach factual or judgmental conclusions based on sound inferences drawn from unambiguous statements of knowledge or belief. The minimal competence to be expected at the successful conclusion of instruction in critical thinking should be the demonstration of skills in elementary inductive and deductive processes, including an understanding of the formal and informal fallacies of language and thought, and the ability to distinguish matters of fact from issues of judgment or opinion.

English is the language of instruction for Area A1 and Area A2.

Outside of Areas A1 and A2, there is no CSU policy requiring that the course be taught in English to be incorporated into a GE-Breadth certification.

However, in Areas A1 and A2 the CSU has granted GE recognition only for courses taught in English for two reasons:

⇒ California Education Code Section 30 provides that “English be the language of instruction in all schools”

⇒ Community colleges have been urged to encourage prospective transfer students to take courses taught in English, to develop better the command of academic English that is required for upper-division study in the CSU.
A1 Oral Communication

Courses must include faculty-supervised, faculty-evaluated practice in communicating orally in the physical presence of other listeners. Rhetorical principles must be covered (study of effective communication in formal speeches or social interaction is appropriate, for example). The CSU Communications Departments have asked that for courses submitted for IGETC Area 1C or CSU GE-Breadth Area A1, the “methods of instruction” and “methods of evaluation” sections of the outline be very specific about how instruction and evaluation are conducted so that it may be determined that student presentations will be made in front of faculty and other listeners (not online or recorded).

Interpersonal communications courses are not a natural fit in Area A1, but a few have been made to work by incorporating significant faculty-supervised, faculty-evaluated practice in speaking with others and at least a small component of traditional rhetoric.

Typical reviewer comments applying to Area A1/1C

“The revised outline will need to specify methods of instruction.”

“Course must include faculty-supervised, faculty-evaluated practice in oral communication presented in front of other listeners (not online or recorded).”

“Rhetorical principles must be covered (study of effective communication in formal speeches or social interaction is appropriate, for example).”

“This course is accepted with reservations about the extent of faculty-supervised, faculty-evaluated practice in oral communication. Reviewers suggest revising the outline.”

Additional Criteria for IGETC: Area 1C Oral Communication

The UC system doesn’t require Oral Communication, so no additional criteria apply.

Area 1C has been set aside under the IGTEC pattern so that evaluators can see whether students transferring into the CSU have met this graduation requirement, but the review standards are identical to those for Area A1 Oral Communication in the CSU’s GE-Breadth pattern.
A2 Written Communication

Written Communication courses need to be conducted in English. They may be designed for speakers of other languages, but the courses must lead to achievement of the same “freshman composition” objectives as courses for native speakers of English. Courses should explore rhetorical principles independent of the application of writing to a specific profession: an advertising department’s course in Copy Writing or a journalism department’s course in News Writing would not be suitable for Written Communication.

Reviewers look for evidence of assigned and graded student writing, both in class and as assigned homework. There is no minimum word count, but some number of words should be specified in the course outline.

The course must carry an appropriate prerequisite, such as an SAT score or placement score, distinguishing it from a remedial class.

Typical reviewer comments applying to Area A2/1A

“Courses in this area must be conducted in English.”

“Courses designed exclusively for the satisfaction of remedial composition cannot be counted toward fulfillment of the English composition requirement.”

“A revised outline should include specify the approximate total number of words (counting only final drafts) that students are expected to write, and should specify writing assignments required in class and outside the classroom.”

“Courses in news writing and reporting are excluded from Area A2.”
A3  Critical Thinking  

Executive Order 595 is unusually specific in calling for student competencies “in elementary inductive and deductive processes, including an understanding of the formal and informal fallacies of language and thought, and the ability to distinguish matters of fact from issues of judgment or opinion.”

In practice this means critical thinking courses should include explicit instruction and practice in inductive and deductive reasoning or identifying formal and informal fallacies of language and thought. Literary criticism courses are typically not accepted in this area.

Reviewers look for courses that develop students’ ability to think systematically and identify faulty reasoning, such as:

- hasty generalization
- non sequitur
- false analogies
- post hoc arguments
- attacks ad hominem
- bandwagon appeal
- tautology/circular reasoning
- either-or fallacies

Over the past several years of review cycles, community colleges have developed courses to meet these student learning outcomes.

Unlike IGETC Area 1B courses, CSU GE-Breadth Area A3 courses do not have to have a prerequisite or instruction in writing.

Typical reviewer comments applying to Area A3/1B

“The content section of the outline does not provide enough detail to determine whether all elements of critical thinking required by CSU E.O. 595 for Area A3 are present (e.g., whether students will be able to advocate ideas effectively and to reason inductively and deductively.”

“This course does not appear to include sufficient explicit instruction and practice in inductive and deductive reasoning or identifying formal and informal fallacies of language and thought.”

“Area A3 courses must include evaluation of information.”

“Journalism courses are excluded from Area A3.”

Additional Criteria for IGETC: Area 1B Critical Thinking-English Composition

The two-system IGETC pattern combines critical thinking with a second semester of composition. So Area 1B criteria include all those for Area A3, above, plus:

⇒ a minimum writing requirement of 6,000 words, not including revisions
⇒ an explicit prerequisite course, which has been approved under IGETC Area 1A English Composition

Reviewers can verify course prerequisites by consulting collegesource.com.