All indications are that writing really does matter at Methodist University. From freshman-level composition courses to senior-level writing assessments, from our vibrant Writing Center to our ambitious Writing QEP, MU’s curriculum, assessment procedures, and support services make writing integral to an MU education.

Despite these many efforts, however, MU faculty are often disappointed in the writing students produce. For several years now, we have been assessing research papers written by graduating seniors, and on average, those papers are failing to meet the faculty’s expectations.

Hopefully our new Writing QEP will help—but without the support of the entire faculty, it may not have the impact we are hoping for.

So how do you, the MU faculty person holding this booklet, support the QEP and other writing-related initiatives around campus? This booklet is designed to answer that question.

The following pages briefly describe six different but interrelated writing-related initiatives or entities at MU, with links to various sites providing more detailed information. In each of the six sections, you will find a list of things you can do to support the initiative or entity in question.

Some suggestions are simple and take little to no time. Other suggestions are more complex and take more commitment on your part. Please read through this booklet and find one or more things you can do to help our students become better writers.

Emily Wright
Director, Writing Across the Campus
May 2019

P.S. If you would like an electronic version of this document so that you can click on URLs included in it, please contact me.
Writing competency is one of MU’s seven general education goals, along with computer usage, critical thinking, information literacy, oral communication, quantitative reasoning, and research.

While computer usage, oral communication, and quantitative reasoning are assessed in specific general-education courses, MU uses research papers written by graduating seniors to assess the other four goals of written communication, critical thinking, information literacy, and research.

This approach is described in detail in the portal. If you go to “Forms and Documentation” in MyMU and then scroll down, you will eventually see, on the right side of the page, “General Education Writing Assessment,” which presents more detail about this assessment process than is given here. Meanwhile, a brief description:

Every year, one-third of MU’s majors undergo general education assessment. All of the graduating seniors in a given year’s selected majors supply a research paper written as close as possible to the time of graduation. A sample of those papers is then selected for assessment in the yearly Writing Assessment Workshop (WAW), which takes place in the week after graduation in May.

At the WAW, fourteen faculty, including representatives from each of the five schools, assess the sample papers according to a common rubric. The rubric used in the WAW can be found on the following page. The page after the rubric gives a little more information about each of the rubric’s eight criteria.

If you would like to download the rubric, go to “Forms and Documentation” in the portal, scroll down, and eventually you will see, on the right side of the page, “General Education Assessment Rubric.” Note that there is a short form, which is the one reproduced on the next page, as well as a long form, which provides more information on how the criteria are evaluated.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Adapt the WAW rubric to your discipline and use it in grading student papers. This way students will get a consistent message about writing expectations, which will hopefully improve the gen. ed. assessment results.
### Instructions: For each of the eight criteria below,

- **a)** identify specific phrases on the accompanying longer form that describe the work, and
- **b)** circle a numeric score on the short form for each criterion.

### 1. Issue Identification and Focus

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**Focus:** Issue is clearly identified, and focus on issue is maintained consistently.

### 2. Clarity and Coherence

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**Focus:** Conveying ideas to the audience in a clear and organized way.

### 3. Support/Evidence

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**Focus:** Supporting ideas with specific, sufficient, and relevant details.

### 4. Research

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**Focus:** Incorporating a sufficient number of appropriate sources.

### 5. Information Use/Citations

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**Focus:** Effectively communicating, organizing, and synthesizing information and avoiding plagiarism.

### 6. Assumptions/Context

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**Focus:** Positioning one's perspective in a larger context, recognizing one's own and others' assumptions, and acknowledging the relevance of context as appropriate.

### 7. Conclusions

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**Focus:** The ability to derive logical, informed conclusions.

### 8. Sentence-Level Clarity

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**Focus:** Sentence-level grammar, usage, and mechanics.
EXPLANATION OF CRITERIA ON EDUCATION ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

1. Issue Identification and Focus
   Gen. Ed. Competencies Assessed: Research, Written Communication, Critical Thinking

   Main Question: Does the paper clearly identify a central issue and remain focused thereon?

2. Clarity and Coherence
   Gen. Ed. Competencies Assessed: Critical Thinking, Research, Written Communication

   Main Question: Is the paper well and clearly organized, with material presented in a logical order, in focused paragraphs, and with helpful transitions and clearly phrased sentences?

3. Support/Evidence
   Gen. Ed. Competencies Assessed: Information Literacy, Written Communication

   Main Question: Are ideas thoroughly supported with specific, sufficient, and relevant details in the form of facts, statistics, expert opinions, appropriate examples, and thorough explanations?

4. Research
   Gen. Ed. Competencies Assessed: Information Literacy, Research

   Main Question: Are a sufficient number of relevant, appropriate, and authoritative sources used?

5. Information Use/Citations
   Gen. Ed. Competencies Assessed: Critical Thinking, Information Use, Research, Written Communication

   Main Question: Does the writer effectively communicate, organize, and synthesize information, using proper citation mechanics, using in-text citations as necessary, using information in ways true to the original context, and putting paraphrased material fully into the writer’s own words?

6. Assumptions/Context
   Gen. Ed. Competencies Assessed: Critical Thinking, Information Literacy

   Main Question: Does the writer position his or her perspective in a larger context, acknowledging other perspectives on the topic?

7. Conclusions
   Gen. Ed. Competencies Assessed: Critical Thinking, Research

   Main Question: Do conclusions and discussions of consequences and implications reflect the writer’s informed evaluation of material presented in the paper?

8. Sentence-Level Clarity
   Gen. Ed. Competencies Assessed: Written Communication

   Main Question: Is the paper free of errors in grammar, mechanics, usage, and syntax?
COMPOSITION CLASSES

Our effort to improve students’ skills in writing (as well as critical thinking, information literacy, and research) begins with composition classes. Below are brief descriptions of each of the five composition classes. Appendix A: English Department Synchronization for Composition Classes provides more information, including a detailed description of the source-citation issues covered in each class.

ENG 1000 SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN ENGLISH:
What is it? This is a developmental course that approximately one-quarter to one-third of MU students are required to take. It is currently taught as a stand-alone 3-credit course. However, in keeping with national trends in Accelerated Learning, the English Department is currently piloting a new approach to ENG 1000 in which the course is reduced to 2 semester hours and linked to a specific section of ENG 1010.

Who takes it? Students who score below 470 on the SAT Reading Test or below 19 on the English section of the ACT. Students who have no ACT or SAT scores must take our English Placement Test, and if they score below 66, they must take this class.

ENG 1010 COMPOSITION:
What is it? This is your basic freshman composition class. It covers everything from sentence structure to how to incorporate sources in a research paper.

Who takes it? Most incoming freshman are required to take this class.

ENG 1020 COMPOSITION AND INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE:
What is it? This class introduces students to the genres of poetry, fiction, and drama while reinforcing the writing concepts taught in ENG 1010.

Who takes it? Students who have completed 1010 take this class or ENG 1040.

ENG 1040 COMPOSITION AND RHETORIC:
What is it? This course focuses on the art of argumentation while reinforcing the writing concepts taught in ENG 1010.

Who takes it? Students who have completed 1010 take this class or ENG 1020.

ENG 2070 REVIEWING WRITING:
What is it? This course is much like 1010 but pitched to a slightly higher level. It is an unusual course that confuses many MU advisors. See below.

Who takes it? When students come to MU having taken a basic composition class (comparable to our 1010) at another institution, we are not necessarily confident that they have mastered the material of our 1010. Therefore, we require them to take our English Placement Test. If they fail it, they must take ENG 2070.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Keep this page handy and refer to it when advising. (We’re having too many advising errors related to 2070. We’re also having too many advising errors related to the 1020/1040 choice.)
- Use Appendix B: Advisors’ Flow Chart for Composition Classes to determine how to advise transfer students and students who don’t have SAT or ACT scores.
- Although 2070 was designed for transfer students, any student may take this class. If you encounter a student who needs writing review, encourage him or her to take 2070!
MU’s Writing Across the Campus program builds upon the skills developed in composition classes. There are two basic elements to our WAC program: the Director and WAC plans, which include writing-enrichment courses.

The WAC Director

The Director of Writing Across the Campus is available to:

- meet with individuals and small groups to address any concerns faculty may have about writing.
- organize Writing Matters Learning Communities, in which faculty meet monthly to discuss light readings about how to incorporate writing effectively in content classes.
- organize summer reading groups, in which faculty read 2-3 short articles on a topic related to writing and meet once at the end of the summer to discuss them.
- make PowerPoint presentations to interested parties on the following topics.
  - Writing Writing Prompts
  - Coaching the Writing Process
  - Managing Peer Reviews
  - How to Grade Papers
  - Rubrics, Rubrics, Rubrics!
  - Revision
  - Writing to Learn

The current WAC Director is Emily Wright, who can be reached at ewright@methodist.edu or extension 7551.

Departmental WAC Plans

Every major has a Writing Across the Campus plan on file at www.methodist.edu/wac-plans. The plans describe (a) what good writing looks like in the discipline in question; (b) a list of courses in which writing skills are developed, including page counts and grade percentages; and, optionally, (c) one or more rubrics used to assess student writing.

Most departments also have designated writing-enrichment courses, in which writing is especially emphasized. These courses are listed in the university catalog.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Make use of your WAC Director!
- Help make sure your departmental WAC plan is up to date. (Many composition instructors are requiring students to examine the WAC plans in their prospective majors, and the students need up-to-date information.)
- Have on hand a standard e-mail response to queries from students about writing in your discipline. (Many composition instructors are asking students to make such queries; too often, students receive no response. Your friendly WAC Director would be happy to work up a standard departmental response for your department.)
THE WRITING CENTER

Assisting both students and faculty in all writing-related efforts is MU’s outstanding Writing Center. The Writing Center offers free individual writing instruction and feedback to all students, staff, and faculty. Consultants offer four appointment formats for providing services:

- Face-to-face
- Online (synchronous)
- E-tutoring (asynchronous)
- Walk-in (face-to-face)

Face-to-face, Online, and E-tutoring appointments are made through WCOntline, a 24/7 scheduling program: www.methodist.edu/writing-center.

Walk-in appointments are conducted face-to-face by well-trained student consultants and are best secured by walking into the Writing Center on the morning that an appointment is needed and signing up for an appointment time later that day. Clients can also stop by the Writing Center at any time to check whether a consultant is available.

The Writing Center is located in Davis Memorial Library, Room 111, and can be reached by calling 630-7264 or emailing writingcenter@methodist.edu.

Most semesters, the Writing Center is open

Monday-Thursday | 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.
Friday | 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Saturday and Sunday closed

Additionally, the Writing Center offers

- The Dirty Dozen Grammar Workshop Series every fall semester
- Spring panel discussion on a writing-related topic
- Class presentations (in support of writing assignments) at the Writing Center or in classrooms; to arrange for these, call or e-mail Writing Center

Consultation Agreement
To understand best practices and what to expect during a consultation, please read the Consultation Agreement at www.methodist.edu/writing-center-student-consultation-agreement

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- E-mail your writing assignments or syllabus to the Writing Center.
- Request or require that your students come to the Writing Center.
- Come to a weekly staff meeting (Mondays from 3-4 p.m.) to discuss an assignment. (Please call or e-mail ahead so that you can be on the agenda.)
- Send your students to the fall semester’s Dirty Dozen Grammar Workshop Series.
- Sign up for a consultation for help with your own professional writing. (The Writing Center helps with tenure and promotion portfolios, dissertations, and other professional writing.)
THE DIRTY DOZEN

For many years now, composition classes, the Writing Center, and a few instructors outside the English Department have emphasized twelve grammar errors that are especially common and especially egregious. Composition instructors mark these errors on student papers, and Writing Center consultants work with students on them, as well as presenting Dirty Dozen workshops every fall semester.

On the following two pages is a list of the Dirty Dozen errors. For each error, an abbreviation, a brief definition, and an example are given. The abbreviation is used by instructors to mark these errors.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

 neoliberal one or two Dirty Dozen errors every year. Using the resources listed below, make sure you understand the errors, work on identifying and eliminating them in your own writing, and mark them on student papers.

 Resources: All of the following are available under the heading “Student Resources” at www.methodist.edu/writing-resources.

 PowerPoint presentations for the Dirty Dozen workshops. These workshops are presented by Writing Center consultants every fall semester, and you are welcome to attend them. Schedules come out early in the fall semester.

 Quick and Dirty Dozen videos. These are short, 3-4-minute videos, each one of which explains one or two Dirty Dozen errors.

 Dirty Dozen Exercises with Answers

 Dirty Dozen Quiz Series

 You can also make appointments with the Writing Center or the WAC Director for help with the Dirty Dozen.
THE DIRTY DOZEN

1. **(frag) fragment:** A fragment occurs when a group of words is punctuated as if it were a sentence, but it is not a sentence because (1) it needs a subject, (2) it needs a verb, (3) it needs both a subject and a verb, (4) it is a dependent clause.

   **Fragment example:** Runs down the street. (This fragment needs a subject.)

   **Fragment example:** The teacher writing on the board. (This fragment needs a helping verb—is, was, has been.).

   **Fragment example:** I found my keys. On the table. (On the table is a prepositional phrase and needs both a subject and a verb.)

   **Fragment example:** Because it is too wet and cold. (This fragment is a dependent clause.)

2. **(fs) fused sentence:** (also called a run-on sentence): A fused sentence occurs when two independent clauses (complete sentences) are joined with no punctuation.

   **Fused sentence example:** It is a dark and cloudy day I will go home and take a nap. (The two independent clauses are run together, creating a fused sentence.)

3. **(cs) comma splice:** A comma splice occurs when two independent clauses (complete sentences) are joined with only a comma between them.

   **Comma splice example:** It is a dark and cloudy day, I will go home and take a nap. (The two independent clauses are joined with a comma, creating a comma splice.)

4. **(s/v) subject-verb agreement error:** A subject-verb agreement error occurs when a singular subject is matched with a plural verb and vice versa. Subjects and verbs must agree in number.

   **Subject-verb agreement error example:** I likes apples.

   **Subject-verb agreement error example:** The boys in the band is out of practice.

5. **(p/a) pronoun-antecedent agreement error:** A pronoun-antecedent agreement error occurs when a singular pronoun is matched by a plural antecedent and vice versa. (The antecedent is the word, phrase, or clause to which the pronoun refers.)

   **Pronoun-antecedent agreement error example:** A high school senior should research their college options carefully. (Senior is singular, but their is plural)

6. **(pro) vague or unclear pronoun reference:** A vague or unclear pronoun reference occurs (1) when it is not clear to which noun a pronoun refers, (2) when a pronoun refers to a concept rather than to a previous noun, or (3) when the reference of the pronoun is indefinite.

   **Unclear pronoun reference example:** The teacher gave the girl her book. (It is unclear whether her refers to teacher or girl.)

   **Vague pronoun reference example:** Bob spent the entire day fishing, but he didn’t catch a single one. (One refers to fish, but the noun fish is not in the sentence. One cannot refer to fishing.)

7. **(mm) misplaced modifier:** A misplaced modifier occurs when a modifier is placed too far away from the word it modifies. (A modifier is a word or phrase that modifies or describes, another word.)

   **Misplaced modifier example:** The robber was described as a six-foot-tall man with brown hair and a mustache weighing 150 pounds. (The misplaced modifier is weighing 150 pounds.) Obviously, the man, not the mustache weighed 150 pounds.
8. *(dm)* dangling modifier: A dangling modifier is a modifier that does not relate sensibly to any word in the sentence.

   **Dangling modifier example:** While reading a magazine, my cat sat with me on the porch swing. (Was the cat reading the magazine?)

9. *(//)* lack of parallel structure: A lack of parallel structure occurs when two or more parts of a sentence should be worded in the same grammatical way but are not. Faulty parallelism occurs especially in lists.

   **Lack of parallel structure example:** I like apples, oranges, and pears are tasty too. (Apples and oranges are nouns. Are tasty too is a phrase, so the items are not parallel. To maintain parallel structure, the third item should be pears.)

10. *(shift)* inappropriate shift in person or tense: A shift occurs when a writer changes from one person or tense to another person or tense without a logical reason.

    **Shift in person example:** I hate to go to the mall because you can never find a parking place. (There is a shift from first person—I—to second person—you.)

    **Shift in tense example:** The server took our order but then disappears for an hour. (There is a shift from past tense—took—to present tense—disappears.)

11. *(apos)* error in the use of an apostrophe: An error in the use of an apostrophe occurs (1) when an apostrophe is used for no reason, (2) when an apostrophe is needed but is not used, or (3) when an apostrophe is misplaced.

    **Error in the use of an apostrophe example:** The girl’s are having a lot of fun at summer camp. (Girl’s should be girls.)

    **Error in the use of an apostrophe example:** Its hot today. (Its should be It’s.)

    **Error in the use of an apostrophe example:** The girls shoe is untied. (Girls should be girl’s.)

    **Error in the use of apostrophe example:** The three girl’s shoes are all alike. (Girl’s should be girls’.)

12. *(fp)* faulty predication: Faulty predication occurs when a subject does not work grammatically with its predicate (verb).

    **Faulty predication example:** The most valued trait in a friend is a person who is loyal. (Because a person is not a trait, the sentence should read “The most valued trait in a friend is loyalty.”)

    Avoid constructions such as “the reason… is because,” “is when,” and “is where.”

**(ISS)** illogical sentence structure: Some sentences students write do not conform to any of the Dirty Dozen errors: they’re just grammatically off-kilter, out of whack, illogical. We will label such sentences as “illogical sentence structure,” and we’ll mark these errors “iss.”
OUR WRITING QEP

Our Writing QEP focuses on helping students learn how to integrate ideas on two levels: the micro-level and the macro-level. On both levels, the QEP encourages students to make intellectual connections through writing.

The Micro-Level: Sentence Combining
This part of the QEP helps students make connections on the sentence level.

It is a simple, easy-to-use method of sentence combining that improves students’ grasp of sentence structure while also helping them master the material of any class that adopts the method.

For a short PowerPoint presentation describing this approach and how it can be integrated into any class, go to www.methodist.edu/wac.

The Macro-Level: The Passion Project*
While sentence combining is designed for students to make linguistic and intellectual connections on the sentence level, the Passion Project is designed to help students make such connections on the macro-level, in a personally meaningful way.

The Passion Project begins with MUJ 1100. In this course students select a topic about which they are truly passionate. This topic may be nonacademic or academic; it’s entirely up to the student.

Students explore their passion through the following two years. In their sophomore year, they take MUJ 2200, which engages them in focusing and researching their topics. In the fall of their junior year (normally), they take MUJ 3300, in which they finalize the project.

*As of this writing, the Passion Project part of the QEP is undergoing review and possible revision.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Volunteer to use the sentence-combining method in one or more of your classes. Training and mini-grants are available!

- Even if you don’t volunteer, find out more about sentence combining. Read the PowerPoint mentioned above and talk to professors you know who are using it.

- Use the sentence combining method. Even if you don’t volunteer to use the method consistently, try it out in your classes. You may find you like the results, not only in terms of student writing but also in terms of improved student understanding of your course content.

- Volunteer to teach MUJ 2200 or MUJ 3300. Learn what our students are passionate about, and help them develop their Passion Projects.*

- Even if you don’t teach a Passion Project course, talk to students about their projects. Express interest! Offer advice and guidance!*
CONCLUSION

The ability to communicate effectively in writing is a premier intellectual skill that has traditionally been the hallmark of a college-educated person. However, according to the writing assessments we have conducted for the past four years, our graduating seniors are not meeting our expectations when it comes to writing.

Blame for this reality is often placed on the English Department. However, if a student hasn’t learned at least the basics of sentence, paragraph, and essay structure after twelve years of instruction, then 2-3 composition classes are probably not going to do the trick—especially if the skills taught in those classes are not reinforced by other instructors.

Now we have a Writing QEP that, hopefully, will expand upon instructor efforts to improve student writing. However, the Writing QEP won’t do the trick either, unless there is buy-in and support from the entire faculty.

This booklet has offered a variety of suggestions for things you can do to provide this buy-in and support. Some of these things take a little time; some take a lot. Some of the things you can do will have a little impact, and others will have a lot of impact. The hope is that you will do something.
APPENDIX A

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT SYNCHRONIZATION
FOR COMPOSITION CLASSES

ENGLISH 1000: SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN ENGLISH
Course Description: A course in grammar and Computer-Assisted Composition (CAC) to meet the needs of students with skill deficiencies in English. Students who place into English 1000 must pass the course before taking English 1010.

Requirements:
• All of the Dirty Dozen are covered.
• Students write at least five essays, including essay exams.
• Students write at least ten pages, including essay exams but not including revisions.
• At least 50 percent of the grade should be on essay writing (including essay exams).

ENGLISH 1010: COMPOSITION
Course Description: Introduces students to basic rhetorical conventions and critical reading strategies. Students review grammar and mechanics, produce texts in several different genres, and practice integrating their own ideas with those from appropriate sources.

Requirements:
• Students should produce 16 pages of writing.
• At least three 3-5-page papers should be written and carefully graded, and in at least 2 of these the students must integrate sources.
• Writing should count for at least 80% of the grade.
• Students should learn how to incorporate quotations, paraphrases, and summaries from secondary sources, including:
  • the difference between paraphrase, summary, and quotation;
  • how to paraphrase;
  • effective integration of secondary material into the writer’s own text (brackets, ellipses, signal phrases, etc.);
  • APA style for parenthetical source citations and bibliographies.
ENGLISH 1020: COMPOSITION AND INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE
Course Description: Develops students’ ability to produce logical, persuasive arguments about literature; to critically examine their own and others’ ideas; to locate appropriate sources and integrate these effectively in their writing; to understand the concept of intellectual property; and to practice applying the citation conventions governed by that concept.

Requirements:

- Students should produce approximately 20 pages of writing.
- Students should produce at least three researched argumentative essays, at least one of which should be 6-10 pages in length.
- Writing should count for at least 75% of the grade.
- The course’s research component should include instruction on the following:
  - how to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate sources;
  - how to locate appropriate sources;
  - how to create a Works Cited page per MLA format;
  - how to create a parenthetical source citation, when and how to use them;
  - how to incorporate quotations, paraphrases, and summaries into papers (including describing a source’s credentials, using signal phrases, clarifying the relevance of the citation to the writer’s train of thought, etc.);
  - how to avoid plagiarism.

ENGLISH 1040: COMPOSITION: RESEARCH & ARGUMENT
Course Description:
Develops students’ ability to produce logical, persuasive arguments; to critically examine their own and others’ ideas; to locate appropriate sources and integrate these effectively in their writing; to understand the concept of intellectual property; and to practice applying the citation conventions governed by that concept.

Requirements:

- Students should produce approximately 20 pages of writing.
- Students should produce at least three researched argumentative essays, at least one of which should be 6-10 pages in length.
- Writing should count for at least 75% of the grade.
- The course’s research component should include instruction on the following:
  - how to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate sources;
  - how to locate appropriate sources;
  - how to create a Works Cited page per APA format;
  - how to create a parenthetical source citation, when and how to use them;
  - how to incorporate quotations, paraphrases, and summaries into papers (including describing a source’s credentials, using signal phrases, clarifying the relevance of the citation to the writer’s train of thought, etc.);
  - how to avoid plagiarism.
ADVISORS’ FLOW CHART FOR COMPOSITION CLASSES

- Does the student have SAT/ACT scores?
  - NO
  - Yes, follow admissions guidelines.

- Is the student transferring credits to MU?
  - NO
  - Yes, take ENG 1010.

- Is the student transferring ENG 1010?
  - NO
  - Take the EPT.
    - Does the student score 66 or above?
      - NO
      - Take 2070
      - NO
      - Take 1020/1040
      - YES
      - Congratulations! You have completed MU’s composition sequence!
    - YES
      - Take 1010
      - then
      - Take 1000
      - then
      - Take 1020/1040