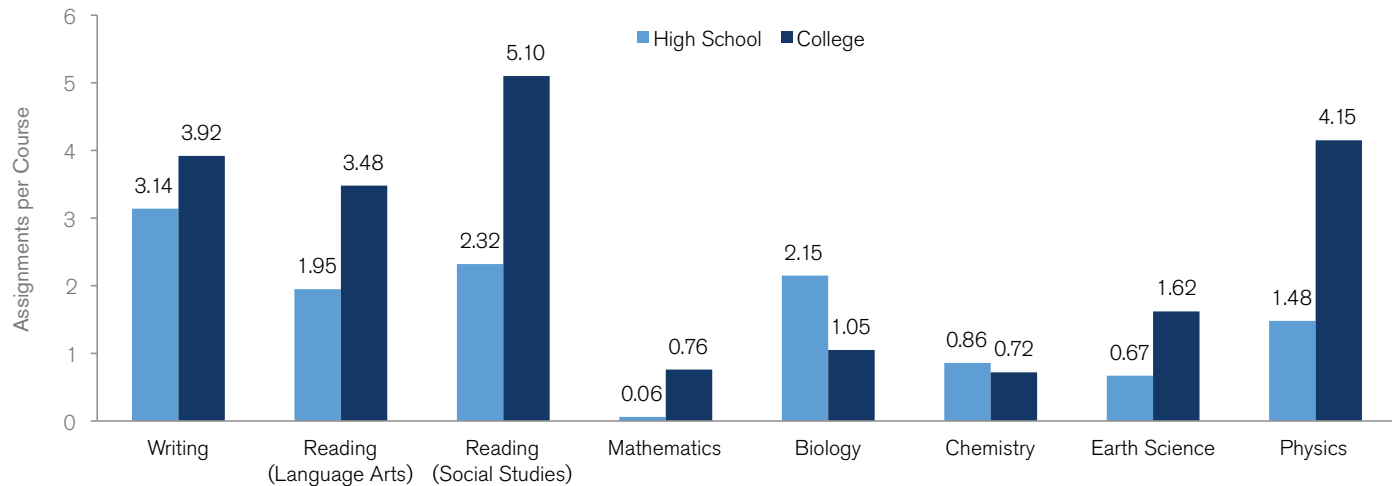


ACT National Curriculum Survey®: High School and College Educators' Estimates of the Number of Long Writing Assignments in Their Courses

Average Number of Long Writing Assignments (>5 Pages) Given in Various High School and College Courses by Course Subject Area



Note: Average results from all subject areas were summed and statistically adjusted to account for the relative representation of various types of courses within each subject area.

In the aggregate, high school teachers surveyed in the 2012 ACT National Curriculum Survey reported assigning relatively few writing tasks longer than five pages.¹ As shown in the figure, most of these long assignments occurred in English language arts, social studies, and biology. Further, that some of the high school averages are below 1 indicates that in some high school subject areas, especially mathematics, students are almost never asked to write at length.

By contrast, instructors of credit-bearing first-year college courses reported assigning long writing tasks with greater average frequency in more subject areas than did the high school teachers. (This

contrast may be even more pronounced given that college courses are typically about half as long as high school courses.) The most dramatic increases are seen in social studies, physics, reading, and Earth science, but even the very small average in college mathematics represents a more than twelvefold increase over the high school average. Overall, these results suggest that some first-year college students may be encountering long writing assignments for the first time in their academic careers. ■

¹ ACT, Inc., *ACT National Curriculum Survey 2012: English Language Arts* (Iowa City, IA: Author, 2013). <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/NCS-EnglishLangArts.pdf>.

Across subject areas, writing assignments longer than five pages are generally given more frequently by college instructors than by high school teachers.

Every three to five years, the ACT National Curriculum Survey asks educators about what they teach (or don't teach) in their courses and how important they feel various topics in their discipline are for students to know to be successful in future coursework. The survey also asks educators for their opinions on educational topics of current interest, such as the college readiness of their students or the implementation of improved standards like the ACT College and Career Readiness Standards or the Common Core State Standards.

This brief highlights a finding from the 2012 *English Language Arts* survey.