First-Year Writing Seminar Sample Syllabus

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[course_website]

Course Description

We gather together not merely to develop competence at writing “clearly and effectively” to various audiences, but to take strides toward becoming better practitioners of the craft of written language. Yet as soon as we assign ourselves the task of becoming better writers, our project becomes wildly complex: the criteria for writing differs from context to context. What counts as clear and effective writing for the copywriter producing advertisements, the poet composing poems, and the physicist writing peer-reviewed journal articles is radically different. To develop some sense of how to revise our writing for different audiences and different purposes, we cannot merely learn the conventions for writing in specific cases. We must develop an appreciation for how language-usage is continually formed, crystalized, and challenged so we might be able to develop new criteria to consider the “effectiveness” of our language in situations we cannot anticipate. To do that we must go some distance to making ourselves theorists of language. And to theorize about language requires one to think carefully about the cultures in which language occurs. Accordingly, the readings of this course encourage us to explore language-usage through questions about identity, gender, government, education, literacy, machine grading, and more. Particular emphasis will be placed on exploring how various technologies (e.g., the Internet, smart phones, E-readers, social media, etc.) are influencing the manners and metaphors we use to conceptualize both our identities and our world.
We will theorize on how to identify, evaluate, and present arguments in any discourse by careful consideration of the specifics of our rhetorical situation, but will root our practice by a concern for how our writing will be received by other creative and critical researchers in specific discourses. To this end, we’ll discuss and write about the particular rhetorical situation we inhabit, the rhetorical appeals at our disposal, and the specific problems we wish to explore through our writing. These reflections will allow us to develop strategies for revision and to use our own writing to locate strengths and weaknesses in our intellectual positions. By necessity, we will also cultivate skills to locate, identify, and evaluate sources through our investigation of the problems we wish to consider. We will use our research to add our own voices, solutions, and insights to the conversations instigated by the course readings.

Since many of the techniques of academic research writing are common to other forms of writing, we will read widely and deeply from an eclectic variety of texts in addition to research articles, including personal essays, treatises, newspaper articles, manifestos, lectures, textbook excerpts, science writing, letters, tweets, radio program transcripts, and more. Doing so will allow us to identify and extract techniques, styles, and rhetorical devices that we may wish to employ in our own writing. Furthermore, we will also read broadly across a range of disciplines so that we might be better-equipped to identify any aspects of research writing shared by multiple disciplines as well as to remain mindful that our theorizing is always tied to the idiosyncrasies of what we have read.

This course will familiarize you to the grammatical and stylistic conventions of standard written English, but you’ll also have the opportunity to reflect upon, question, and challenge the assumptions and expectations from which grammars and styles are constructed. This will be useful to you as you encounter and assimilate new discipline-specific writing in future college courses.

Course Catalog Description

—University Course Catalog Description—

Course Objectives

Course goals as defined by your instructor:

1. To encourage you to understand your writing practice as a method of discovery, a method to evaluate your own ideas, and a essential com-
ponent to performing research in any discipline. We will pursue our writing as both a means of communicating and as a process to acquire new knowledge and identify new relationships.

2. To help you develop skills for performing close readings of texts allowing you to identify, analyze, and critique arguments from a variety of discourses and disciplines.

3. To foster an awareness of your own rhetorical situation (i.e., the expectations you bring to a text, the expectations your audience(s) bring to a text, etc.) and to use this to revise your writing and your arguments.

4. To introduce you to several models of argumentation (e.g., the Toulmin model, enthymemes, etc.) that can be used to analyze, critique, and revise your own work.

5. To help you develop research practices informed by information literacy (i.e., to become familiar with different ways of locating source material, to appropriately document sources in your writing, and to evaluate such sources for various research applications). This includes being able to:

a) use library & electronic resources to locate academic research;

b) evaluate and identify different types of primary, secondary, and tertiary sources in light of disciplinary expectations;

c) gain experience synthesizing different academic sources into a coherent position/argument;

d) present discipline-specific arguments to general & specialized audiences;

e) and correctly employ MLA, APA, and Chicago citation styles in academic writing.

Course outcomes as defined by the department:

1. —sample course outcome here—

2. —sample course outcome here—

3. —sample course outcome here—
Textbooks & Readings

Required Texts


- (Department Writing Reference Book)

- You will be required to **download and print** all the assigned readings not included in the aforementioned books. You will download these readings from designated online sources identified during class or via the course website.

Useful Information

Important Dates

Last day to drop & have course deleted from academic transcript: —??—
Fall break: —??—
Last day to drop and receive "no credit": —??—

Writing Center

—Info about Writing Center goes here—

Communication Policies

Email

I will check my university email at least once every weekday during the semester, but make no promise to check or respond to email on weekends. Please allow at least 48 hours for me to reply to your message.
Submitting Electronic Files Via Email

When submitting an assignment via email, use one of the following file formats: .doc (Word), .docx (Word), .odt (OpenOffice), .pdf (Acrobat), or .rtf (rich text format).

General Coursework Guidelines

- All written work that you do for this class must be typed in 12 point Times & double spaced unless I explicitly say otherwise.

- Every assignment must have your name, the class, the date, and the name of the assignment on the first page, and your last name and page number for each subsequent page.

- Keep an extra copy of each assignment you submit. Keep all your graded work in a folder until the end of the semester.

Assignments

Homework

I will give many different kinds of homework assignments. Doing these assignments will give you vital practice at employing the techniques we discuss during class. Carefully completing the assigned homework for each reading will give you experience identifying arguments; practice evaluating, analyzing, & writing texts that are mindful of your own rhetorical situation; and greater skill at synthesizing arguments into a cogent and cohesive position for various audiences. There will be approximately 10 homework assignments.

In-Class Writing

We’ll occasionally take 5 to 10 minutes of class to write. The purpose of these informal exercises is to help you become more confident in using your writing to learn something about yourself or your topic.

Quizzes & the Midterm

I may give surprise quizzes to test your understanding of the course material, to ensure that you have a working-knowledge of crucial concepts, and to confirm that you are keeping up with the readings. These quizzes will be short (i.e., about 5 minutes) and will usually be given at the beginning of class.
The midterm will be announced in advance and is worth 3 times a standard quiz. Quizzes cannot be made-up or retaken, but I will drop your lowest 3 quiz grades. **The midterm cannot be dropped or made-up.** Please see me if you will be absent the day of the midterm so that we can make prior arrangements.

**Peer-Review**

We will separate the class into small peer-review groups of 3 or 4 students. You will read, reflect, and comment on early drafts of essays written by your peer-review partners. Likewise, your peer-review partners will read, reflect, and comment on early drafts of your essays. I’ll mix up the peer-review groups throughout the semester so you get to work with different people.

**ESSAY 1: Critical Review [summary / response]**

This essay will give you practice at identifying and summarizing arguments, including greater facility at correctly attributing ideas and quotes from others and employing the aforementioned to guide your own thinking in more sophisticated and nuanced ways. You will use your experiences to explore the veracity of the arguments you summarize and seek out new sources to help you explore questions you pose.

**ESSAY 2: Inquiry Essay & Short Bibliography [analysis]**

This essay will help you to identify and narrow the scope of your research problem and give you practice locating, evaluating, and analyzing research sources. This paper will also give you practice at synthesizing different research sources into a coherent position. Your revised essay draft is expected to contain substantial revisions from your early draft. The purpose of the “short” bibliography is to help you become more familiar with current debatable issues arising from our class readings so that you may be better-positioned to choose a research question that interests you.

**ESSAY 3: Research Proposal [argument / synthesis]**

The research proposal is a tool that researchers use (1) to quickly communicate the conclusions of a longer piece of research writing; (2) to rigorously plan, refined, and organize research objectives; and (3) to contextualize the value of this new research in terms of existing research. This paper will also give you practice at synthesizing different research sources into a coherent position.
You will exchange an early draft of your research proposal with classmates who are working on similar research problems.

**Annotated Bibliography**

Preparing an annotated bibliography will require you evaluate the creditability of sources for use in a particular discipline; summarize the claims, reasons, and evidence presented in articles; and ultimately critique the arguments these sources present. You will also use the sources you select to help you determine your own argument and position in essay 4.

**ESSAY 4: Research Project & Critical Paper [research / argument]**

The research project is the summation of your efforts throughout the semester and will include an abridged research proposal, a research abstract, a critical paper, and an annotated bibliography. The final version of your critical paper (not including citations) is expected to be at least 8 pages.

**Conference**

You must have one 10-minute meeting with me during my office hours or via appointment *BEFORE* the midterm. This mandatory one-on-one conference will count as a single quiz (for which you will receive full credit just for showing up). While I encourage you to visit me during my office hours throughout the semester, credit for this mandatory conference meeting will only be awarded for those that meet with me prior to the midterm. The mandatory conference cannot be counted as one of your “dropped” quiz grades.

**Late Work**

- Assignments are due at the beginning of each class or at the deadlines posted on the course website.

- I do not accept late work. Due date extensions will not be granted after work is already late, but extensions may be requested via email or in-person if the request is made at least 12 hours *before* an assignment is due.

- If you are absent the day an assignment is due, you are still responsible to submit the assignment to me via email by the beginning of class.
Preparation, Participation, & Attendance

Attendance

Attendance is essential and required. Research has suggested that doing small group activities allows students to both “learn more and demonstrate better retention than students taught in other instructional formats”.¹ Furthermore, there are subtle points, perspectives, and methods that will become more clear through our classroom discussions.

- A student will receive an F for the course if the student has more than 3 class absences.
- THERE ARE NO EXCUSED ABSENCES. You do not need to let me know if you’re going to be absent.
- You’re tardy if you arrive after I’ve taken roll for the class. If you’re tardy, you will be counted absent for half the class.
- If you leave class early, you will be counted absent for half the class.

I strongly suggest that you save absences for family emergencies, court dates, illnesses, etc. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to make sure you have the necessary handouts, readings, and assignments for the next class.

Participation

This course depends on everyone keeping up with the assigned readings and actively participating. The quality of our discussion is diminished when anyone is absent or unprepared. Always bring a copy of the assigned readings we’re discussing for class! Electronic devices (e.g., tablets, laptops, etc.) used in place of paper copies may be acceptable, but MUST be approved by me first.

- If a student habitually comes to class without a copy of the assigned readings, I may apply a 1/4 class absence penalty to the student’s attendance for each class the student wasn’t prepared.

Preparation & Expectations

A student who has a fair amount of experience reading, writing, and thinking about academic arguments should expect to spend AT LEAST SIX HOURS a week outside of class on coursework (and considerably more during weeks when essay assignments are given). Expect to read approximately 30 pages a week for this course. Students with less experience may find it necessary to spend significantly more than six hours a week outside of class working toward the objectives of this course.

If you find that you are feeling overwhelmed or are spending more than 12 hours every week on coursework for this class, please arrange to meet me during my office hours or by appointment.

Grading

Homework & In-Class Exercises ........................................... 12%
Midterm, Quizzes, & Conference\(^2\) ................................. 9%
Peer-Editing ................................................................. 9%
ESSAY 1: Critical Review (multiple drafts) ......................... 10%
ESSAY 2: Inquiry Essay & Initial Bibliography (multiple drafts) .... 12%
ESSAY 3: Research Proposal (multiple drafts) ...................... 8%
Total Grade ................................................................. 100%

NOTE: The penalty for missing more than 3 classes (outlined above in “ATTENDANCE”) overrides any other consideration. For example, if you got a 100% on ALL COURSEWORK but missed 4 classes, your final grade would automatically be an F.

Letter Grades (as calculated by “Total Grade”)

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>100% - 97%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>96% - 93%</td>
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<td>A-</td>
<td>92% - 90%</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>89% - 87%</td>
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<td>82% - 80%</td>
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<td>C+</td>
<td>79% - 77%</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>76% - 73%</td>
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<td>C-</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>66% - 63%</td>
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<td>D-</td>
<td>62% - 60%</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>59% or less</td>
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\(^2\)The midterm is worth 3 quiz grades. The mandatory conference is worth 1 quiz grade. Neither the midterm or the conference can be counted as a dropped quiz.
Academic Integrity

—insert plagiarism policy from university student handbook—

The minimum penalty for committing plagiarism in this course is to receive a 0% on the assignment that was plagiarized.

COURSE SCHEDULE

You will have additional assignments and readings not listed here. We may also omit readings or assignments on this schedule based on the needs and interests of the class. Always check the course website for class-to-class instructions.

FIRST ACT: THE BASICS


WEEK 1. ELEMENTARY IDEAS OF RHETORIC

Discussions: assumptions of the 5-paragraph essay; a model of the rhetorical situation; knowledge production in communities; the rhetorical appeals; criteria for evidence in different disciplines; Montaigne’s attempts; ideas of reading

Readings:

1. Michel de Montaigne, “Author to the Reader” & “Of Experience” excerpt (class handout)
2. Wayne Booth’s “Knowledge & Opinion” (download)
3. “The Rhetorical Appeals” Handout (download)

Assignment: summary of argument in W.B.’s “Knowledge & Opinion”
WEEK 2. PURPOSE & AUDIENCE: THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

Discussions: evaluating sources; the idea of standard written English; intro to MLA parenthetical citations; three kinds of research sources; discipline-specific language conventions; on the idea of “rigor” in research

Readings:

2. Wayne Booth’s “The Rhetorical Stance” (download)
3. Paul Robert’s “How to say nothing in 500 words” (download)

Assignments: analyze P.R.’s “500 words” using ideas presented in W.B.’s “Rhetorical Stance”; essay 1 assigned

WEEK 3. ARGUMENTS & APPEALS: THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

Discussion: three kinds of research sources, revisited; writing (toward) knowledge; the rhetorical appeals in different media; some relationships between writing & thinking; sentence-level revisions; some ideas about the relationships between language and thought

Readings:

1. *Craft of Research*, pg 38-58
2. George Orwell’s “Politics & the English Language” (download)
3. *Elements of Style*, excerpts from part 2 based on class needs
4. *They Say / I Say*, Introduction

Assignment: compare and contrast G.O.’s “Politics & the English Language” to P.R.’s “500 words” using the idea of the rhetorical situation

WEEK 4. IDEALIZED ARGUMENTS: THEORY / PRACTICE

Discussion: intro to enthymemes, claims, reasons; classical model of an argument; Toulmin model of an argument; writer/editor relationship; (re)vision; implications of Orwell’s argument for Carr’s argument; relationships between media and language; relationships between media and thinking

Readings & Video:
1. *Craft of Research*, pg. 58-70, 290-294

2. Nicholas Carr’s “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” (website)

3. Microsoft Surface, Microsoft Surface Parody, & X360 Kinect videos (watch in-class)

4. *Elements of Style*, excerpts from part 3 based on class needs

5. *They Say / I Say*, chapter 1 excerpts

**Assignments**: early draft of essay 1 due; peer-review of essay 1

**WEEK 5. USING CLAIMS, REASONS, EXAMPLES, WARRANTS**

**Discussion**: practice with enthymemes; devolving an argument into claims & reasons; hierarchies of nested claims; identifying assumptions; revision & the rhetorical situation; restricting claims; using metaphors & analogies

**Readings**:

1. *Craft of Research*, pg. 70-80

2. Frederick Schmitt’s “What are the Aims of Education?” excerpt (download)

3. *Elements of Style*, excerpts from part 4 based on class needs

4. *They Say / I Say*, chapter 4 excerpts

**Assignment**: final revised draft of essay 1 due

**SECOND ACT: ARGUMENTS**

*Models of arguments: theory & practice, including claims, reasons, & warrants. Some relationships between knowledge production and sources. Using your rhetorical situation to revise arguments.*

**WEEK 6. ARGUING A NONTRIVIAL POSITION, ROUND 1**

**Discussion**: straw men & cherry picking; arguing the best version of your opponent’s position; constructing a nuanced argument; concrete language; the paragraph as organizing structure; locating (implicit or explicit) thesis statements; writing to discover
Readings:

1. Annie Dillard’s “Metamorphosis” (download)
2. Henry David Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience” excerpt (website)
3. *Craft of Research*, pg. 80-100
4. *Elements of Style*, excerpts from part 5 based on class needs
5. *They Say / I Say*, chapter 5 excerpt

Assignment: essay 2 assigned

WEEK 7. ARGUING A NONTRIVIAL POSITION, ROUND 2

Discussions: explicating concepts; organizational structures beyond the paragraph; counter-arguments; counter-examples; anticipating audience objections; “standing on the shoulders of giants”

Readings:

1. *Craft of Research*, pg. 101-118
2. Lawrence Lessig’s *Free Culture* excerpt (website)
4. First half of Lawrence Sanger’s “The Fate of Expertise After Wikipedia” (download)
5. *Elements of Style*, excerpts from part 6 based on class needs
6. *They Say / I Say*, chapter 6 excerpts

Assignments: early draft of essay 2 due; peer-review of essay 2
WEEK 8. LONG FORM ARGUMENTS, PART I

Discussion: writing-to-discover (revisited); rhetorical appeals (revisited); revision using the rhetorical situation (revisited); constructing counter-arguments (revisited); identifying logical contradictions in claims; presenting arguments to audiences via examples; the idea of voice in writing; the idea of authenticity in writing

Readings:

1. *Craft of Research*, pg. 118-129

2. Second half of Lawrence Sanger’s “The Fate of Expertise After Wikipedia” (download)

3. Kurt Vonnegut, “How to Write with Style” (download)

4. *They Say / I Say*, chapter 7 excerpts

Exam: Midterm Exam

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WEEK 9. LONG FORM ARGUMENTS, PART II

Discussion: constructing arguments via language-usage (e.g., repetition and variance at the word, sentence, & paragraph-level); some relationships between form and content; some critiques of the ideas of form & content; trying on positions & beliefs in your writing without accepting those positions & beliefs

Readings:


2. *They Say / I Say*, chapter 8 excerpts

3. Sylvia Scribner & Michael Cole’s “Unpackaging Literacy”

4. Dennis Barron’s “When Machines get Fs...” (website)

5. Inside Higher Ed articles: Scott Jaschik’s “Fooling the College Board” & “Can You Trust Automated Grading?” (website)
Assignments: final revised draft of essay 2 due immediately after break; essay 3 assigned

WEEK 10. NEW WAYS OF ARGUING, PART I

Discussion: strategies for locating organizational principles in writing, revisited; an abridged bestiary of argument-forms; on patience & attention; on originality

Readings & Videos:

1. *Craft of Research*, pg. 145-165
2. *They Say / I Say*, chapter 9 excerpts
3. Tim O’Brien, “How to tell a True War Story” (download)
4. Kirby Ferguson, “Everything is a Remix” Video Series, Episodes 1 - 4. (download)

Assignments: early draft of essay 3 due; peer review of essay 3

WEEK 11. EXPLICATING CONCEPTS

Discussion: discovering contradictions in one’s own beliefs/values/positions; deploying old arguments to make new ones; using metaphors & analogies, revisited; on good and bad examples

Readings:

1. *Craft of Research*, pg. 165 -185
2. Richard Feynman’s “Atoms in Motion” excerpt
3. Benoit Mandelbrot’s “How Long is the Coast of Britain?” excerpt

Assignment: final revised draft of essay 3 due
THIRD ACT: ARGUMENTS AS CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THE LIVING & THE ONCE LIVING, DIALOGUES AS IDEA-GENERATING MACHINES, & NEW KINDS OF ARGUING

Entering the conversation by engaging texts. Building consensus in your writing. Writing towards a new understanding. Using tradition & the rhetorical situation to revise arguments & build new ones. Do new mediums allow for new kinds of arguments? How identify conventions in new mediums? How judge and compare criteria from different language games?

12. WRITING TO DISCOVER / WRITING TO CHANGE MINDS

Discussion: gendering in writing, language, & culture; challenges to the idea of standard written English; gendering in literary tradition

Readings:

1. Craft of Research, pg. 185-200
2. They Say / I Say, chapter 10 excerpt
3. Deborah Tannen’s “Marked Woman” (website)
4. Mary Wollstonecraft, “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” excerpt (download)

Assignments: essay 4 assigned, 1st version of annotated bibliography due

WEEK 13. BUILDING ON EXISTING ARGUMENTS

Discussion: on writing toward moments of genuine crisis (i.e., locating & highlighting inconsistencies in our beliefs), more models of language & language-usage; the conversation between Thoreau & MLK

Readings:

1. OPTIONAL READING: Joseph Williams & Lawerence McEnerney’s “Writing in the Humanities”
2. They Say / I Say, chapter 11excerpt
4. Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
5. First half of Jerome Wiesner & Herbert York’s “National Security and the Nuclear Test Ban”

**Assignment**: 1st version of research abstract due

**WEEK 14. NEW WAYS OF ARGUING, PART II**

**Discussion**: the (changing) conventions in writing, film, radio, and video games; genre: repetition & change in aesthetic forms; some notes on the changing conventions of language; new online venues for peer-reviewed research; do different experiences produce fundamentally different arguments?

**Readings, Audio, and New Media:**

1. *Craft of Research*, pg. 241-269
2. *They Say / I Say*, chapter 12 excerpt
3. Second half of Jerome Wiesner & Herbert York’s “National Security and the Nuclear Test Ban”
4. Radiolab’s “Emergence.” Friday, February 18th, 2005. Audio program. (download)

**Assignments**: early essay 4 due; peer review of essay 4

**WEEK 15. COMBINING IDEAS FROM DIFFERENT SOURCES / FIELDS**

**Discussion**: dangers/advantages of borrowing arguments, conclusions, &/or ideas in one field to make an argument in a different field

**Readings:**

1. Garrett Hardin’s “Tragedy of the Commons” excerpt
WEEK 16. RESEARCH AS A FORM OF ETHICAL CHOICE

Discussion: Booth’s “Knowledge and Opinion,” pluralism, research, and personal agency

Assignments: final revised draft of essay 4 due