

English 125.068: College Writing
3 September to 10 December, 2003
M W 8:30-10:00am
4211 Angell Hall

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This Dark Coast: Writing as Communication

Course Goals

English 125 is constructed to give you an introduction to writing at the college level. We all come to this course with expertise in writing, and our goal is to refine that expertise into an efficient tool for use in the college setting.

Writing is a great many things. By turns, scholars of the written word have called it a technology, a poison, a craft, a disguise, an “aid against forgetting.” Here we are concerned with writing in one of its fundamental states: as communication. This course will help you hone the written communication skills so esteemed by employers, professors, graduate school panels, grant administrators, and so on. All of us, from engineers to classics scholars to musicians to economists, need this skill. This course is practical, intensive, workshop-driven, and structured to help you get the most out of your writing in a very short time.

Writing is a skill learned best by doing. You won’t find a lot of theory in this course, nor will you find a great amount of reading. You will, however, find a great deal to write about. Writing is best learned when two things fall into place: first, the writer cares about the subject; and second, the writer has a network of supportive peers helping with his or her work. To address the first, in this class it will be you, not me, picking the subjects. To address the second, this course will be structured as a workshop and seminar rather than as a lecture.

Workshops will be fairly intensive, and will be conducted both in small group (3 students) and large group (entire class) settings. These sessions will help your writing both when you are receiving advice and when you are giving it.

Required Texts

Required text, available at Shaman Drum:

[The Elements of Style, 4th Ed.](#)
by William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White

Optional text, available pretty much anywhere:

[MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 6th Ed.](#)
by Joseph Gibaldi and Phyllis Franklin

Course Requirements

In this course, you will be required to complete two projects: one sequence of four essays on a topic of your choice, and one style manual describing your approach to writing. These projects will take you through the entire semester. We'll work on them in an environment that is part seminar and part workshop.

Essay Sequence

The essay collection will be done on a theme of your choice over the course of the semester, and will be made up of four essays, each five pages in length. You will do one essay of each of the following types:

1. Personal Narrative
2. Description
3. Persuasion
4. Synthesis

You will turn in each essay twice, first as a draft and second as a polished piece of work. You may elect to revise one of these essays an additional time over the course of this semester, in which case your final grade will be the average of the original and new marks.

During the first two weeks of classes, you will meet with me to discuss your theme. You will be asked to prepare a short paper describing your choice. Your theme cannot be changed once you have turned in the first of the above essays, so please make your choice carefully. Nearly any topic is fair game, with the exception of hot-button political issues with two entrenched points of view (I'm looking at *you*, gun control, abortion, affirmative action, drug legalization, prayer in schools, you and your friends. Nothing personal, but you make lousy teaching material. Door's to your left). We will discuss what makes a good theme in class before you have to make a selection.

Essay Guidelines and Personal Reflections

All essays should be set in 12 point Times New Roman, double spaced, with one inch margins. They should be stapled. When drafts are due, please bring enough copies for yourself, your workshop group, and me (this usually means a total of five). All final versions should be given to me in duplicate, and should be accompanied by rough drafts and your peers's workshop comments. Additionally, for each final copy you turn in to me, I ask you to attach a personal reflection for that piece.

Personal Reflections

With each work you turn in to me for a grade (that is, everything that is not a rough draft), you will attach a typewritten personal reflection, detailing what you think is working well, what has challenged you, how your revision went, and any questions you would like me to address in my comments. This must be at least one page long, though there is no upper length limit. These help me attune my comments to your specific concerns.

Extensions

I realize that life happens. You will be allowed to turn one final draft up to one week late without penalty. You do not have to clear this with me in advance, though I appreciate notice if possible. This extension policy does not apply to the style manual, which is due the last day of class without exception. It also does not apply to drafts; if you do not get drafts to your peers on time, they are not obligated to provide you with feedback. I cannot stress enough how important it is to get drafts to your peers by deadline.

Style Manual

I encourage you to keep notes on your writing throughout the semester, detailing what works and what doesn't, both in the general case and in your particular project. Toward the end of the semester, you will take these notes and write up a brief style guide, eight pages in length, which serves as your personal writing manifesto. Though they will never be collected, your notes will make this style guide much easier to write.

Workshop

You will engage in weekly small group workshops, exchanging drafts, ideas, edits, and helpful criticism. Additionally, you will sign up for one large group workshop during the course of the semester, and will have the opportunity to receive feedback on your work from the entire class. You will be expected to come to each workshop having read and provided comments on all drafts. Your comments will be turned in to me. Active, thoughtful involvement in workshop is the determining factor in your participation grade. We are all here as both students and instructors. As students, we work to hone our writing. As instructors, we work to help others do the same. All of you know a great deal about what makes good writing. Workshop is a chance for you to pool, test, and refine that knowledge.

Your responsibility in workshop is to each other. I do not comment on drafts, so your work with each other is decidedly important. Writers must take care to get their materials to their peer reviewers by deadline, and reviewers in turn must provide read and comment on those materials in a timely fashion. We will talk more about the specific requirements of workshop early in the semester.

Conferences

I very much value face to face time with each of you. It provides me with an opportunity to visit your ideas and writing in a very focused manner, and it provides you with an opportunity to let me know how the class is going for you. Each of you will meet with me for two twenty minute sessions over the course of the semester. The first will be at the start of the course, to help you select your theme. The second will be held around midterms, and will give you a chance to go over your work so far. These conferences provide you with an opportunity to voice your concerns to me, both about your writing and about the course in general. If you wish to discuss a certain piece of writing, get a copy to me at least 24 hours before your conference. Class will be cancelled to accommodate these conferences; for this reason missing your conference is equivalent to missing one class meeting.

Final Examination

None. If you're looking forward to nothing else, look forward to this.

Attendance & Grading

This is the bad cop section, so let's get it over with.

Attendance

Since the large majority of this course is structured as a workshop, attendance is essential. You may miss up to two class sessions, no questions asked. There are, however, no excused absences in this course barring emergency (death or illness in the family, hospitalization with doctor's note) or days taken off for religious observance. Except in these cases, students will be docked a third of a grade (A to A-, for example) for each day missed beyond two. Be reminded that missing a conference is the same as missing a class. Your work suffers when you are gone, and so does the work of your classmates. Be here.

Each tardy counts as one half an absence, and all the above rules apply.

Except for your one extension, all work is due by its deadline (even if you are not in class that day. The only exceptions are detailed in the previous paragraph). Late work will only be accepted if permission from the instructor is obtained in advance, and in most cases will be docked a full grade per class session late.

Incompletes will be given at the instructor's discretion, and only in cases of emergency.

Grading

I am a hard grader, and English 125 is a difficult course. Your marks are determined thus:

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Percentile</i>
Personal Narrative	10 %
Description Essay	10 %
Persuasive Essay	15 %
Synthesis Essay	15 %
Style Manual	20 %
Peer Reviews & Personal Reflections	15 %
Participation	15 %

Grading Standards

The grading of written work is inevitably partly subjective, but not nearly as much as you may think. Be assured that I am not grading you on your opinions or personality. I do have standards that can be clearly defined. The following set of descriptions may help you understand how I evaluate your writing.

The "E" paper fails to successfully complete the assignment. It shows little thought, and is constructed in such a confusing way that I am unable to follow the sequence of ideas. "E" papers are also those which are so carelessly written that errors in mechanics and syntax make the content difficult or impossible to decipher. There is either no discernable argument, or the paper is off-topic. Papers containing plagiarized material fall into this section, as they show little thought.

The "D" paper is weak; it relates to the assignment but shows little evidence of real engagement with the topic. This paper lacks an argument, or is marred by enough errors that I am seriously distracted as I read it. Diction may be vague or ambiguous, and the phrasing makes the paper's content difficult to follow.

The “C” paper is acceptable; it carries out the assignment, though in a routine way. It shows evidence of engagement with the topic and makes at least a minimum response to it. While mechanical errors may be present, they do not make the paper difficult to read. The paper is devoid of glaring platitudes. I can follow and understand the argument and its support without difficulty, but also without much pleasure. The writing is not vigorous, nor are the ideas fresh.

The “B” paper is very good, and does more than simply fulfill the assignment. It goes beyond a routine response and shows evidence of extensive thought and planning. It contains no major distracting errors in usage or mechanics, and is replete with good supporting material and transitions. The argument is deftly articulated, and the writing is clear and free of unnecessary jargon.

The “A” paper is outstanding; it goes considerably beyond a merely adequate response and addresses the topic intelligently, perceptively, and thoughtfully. It contains only minor mechanical errors, if any, and no significant lapses in diction or organization. The argument is handled expertly, and supporting evidence is compelling. The writing is smooth, cohesive, vigorous, taut, and fresh.

(Adapted from Maxine Hairston, Instructor’s Manual for Contemporary Composition, 4th Ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1986.)

Plagiarism

Worse cop time. I’m sorry to be so hard line here, but a vague warning is nobody’s friend.

Do not do this. Ever. Plagiarism is among the most serious of offences within the academic community. Students caught plagiarizing an assignment, in whole or in part, will automatically receive a failing grade. They will then be remanded to the Dean of Student Affairs and their case will be examined. Consequences of plagiarism may include failing a course, being placed on academic probation, and expulsion from the University. Plagiarists have a very difficult time obtaining admission elsewhere.

It is your responsibility to learn what plagiarism is and refrain from doing it, and I am here to help. If you have any questions about when to cite, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you have any questions about how to cite, pick up a copy of The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, which is available from many online and local booksellers, including Shaman Drum. It is a resource that will serve you well in your undergraduate careers, especially for your work in the humanities.

According to the English Department’s Director of Undergraduate Studies (online at <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/english/undergraduate/plag.htm>), plagiarism occurs when a student submitting a paper for a course:

1. Does not properly attribute words or ideas to a source. That is, even if you're not quoting directly from a book you've read on "Macbeth"—a book that's helped you formulate ideas for your paper—you should nevertheless footnote that book at the point in the text where that other author's ideas helped shape your own essay. It is also important, if you've had a conversation with a peer or a professor who has helped you substantially in establishing your ideas on a given text, that you cite that conversation at the appropriate point in your essay. (e.g. "My ideas about Macbeth derive in part from a conversation with Professor Jones." The citation can be more specific than this, depending on the level of detailed assistance you received.)

The point that even ideas should receive citation raises some alarm among students since, of course, virtually all of our ideas might be said to grow out of conversations with others. Whether citation in a given instance is required is something that you will each have to decide on a case-by-case basis. The phrase I used in the preceding paragraph—"helped you substantially"—suggests

that if pivotal / key / crucial terms or turns in your argument derive to a significant extent from a conversation with a colleague or a point made in class, you should cite that conversation or class. If you look in the "Acknowledgements" section of almost any academic book (or in the footnotes of many academic articles), you will find models for occasions when this kind of citation is required. Acknowledgements sections themselves signal that our ideas grow from our work within a community. To fail to acknowledge the context for our ideas is in part to weaken that community.

2. Quotes from another author's writing without citing that author's work. This, of course, includes failing to cite material you take from the World Wide Web, as well as copying material from library books or your peer's papers.

3. Cites, with quotation marks, portions of another author's work, but uses more of that work without quotation marks and without attribution. This instance is the most common kind of plagiarism I've been seeing. A student essay quotes, say, four or five words from a World Wide Web page (or an essay in a printed collection) on W. B. Yeats and cites them. That same essay contains other sentences that lift material directly from the Web page, but the student does not surround that quoted material with quotation marks nor does s/he give the citation at the end of his/her sentence. Note that if you're taking material from a source and rehashing it slightly, but not giving a citation for that rephrased material, you're still plagiarizing the work you're representing as your own, since the ideas, the argument derive in fact from another's writing. If you cite and surround with quotation marks only some of the words you've taken from a source, you also commit plagiarism, since you're taking words from another without fully acknowledging the extent of your borrowing.

Some have pointed out to me that, in an era of computer communities (on the internet and the World Wide Web), the whole idea of intellectual property is changing: cutting and pasting without acknowledgement may be more the norm than the exception within a computer-based, internet community. I realize, too, that one of the first things a great many students do when given an assignment is to search the Web for pertinent entries. Nor do I want to prohibit such search, since they can constitute important research.

I do want to emphasize that turning to an electronic rather than a printed source does not change the rules of citation and acknowledgement when you are submitting an essay for a course. When you turn in a paper written for someone in the English department, you are entering a research community that is still quite strict about attribution and use of material and ideas from others.

For those of you who are doing substantial work on the Web or in email discussion groups for your courses, it would be a good idea to bring up with your professor any questions you might have about intellectual property and attribution, since my general message may not address the nuances of a particular course and a specific situation.

4. Takes a paper, in whole or in part, from a site on the Web or a "library" of already-written papers.

5. Steals a paper from another student and then submits that paper as coursework.

6. Submits the same paper twice for two different assignments.

7. Takes the results of another's research and attempts to pass those results off as his or her own work. This includes "citing" material from sources that have been gathered by another author. You can, of course, cite materials that you have found in another published text, but you need to make it quite clear that you are availing yourself of another author's research: your citation should specify where you found the material, rather than simply giving that material's original source.

Course Schedule

Please note that not all readings appear on this schedule. They will be announced later in the semester.

Wednesday, 3 September	Introduction to English 125: what is good writing?
Monday, 8 September	Go over syllabus questions and theme selection. Conference and Large Group Workshop (LGW) signup.
Wednesday, 10 September	Bring in one sample of writing you think is good. Plato, "Allegory of the Cave."
Monday, 15 September	Writing as process. Conferences begin.
Wednesday, 17 September	<i>No class (conferences).</i>
Monday, 22 September	Entr'acte: personal narrative. Discuss selections from Dillard. Personal narrative assignment given.
Wednesday, 24 September	Select Small Group Workshop (SGW) coteries. Selections from Strunk & White. Style and grammar.
Monday, 29 September	Personal narrative rough due. LGW demo with sample paper.
Wednesday, 1 October	Personal narrative SGW.
Monday, 6 October	Personal narrative final due. LGW.
Wednesday, 8 October	Entr'acte: description. Discuss selections from Marx and Engels.
Monday, 13 October	<i>No class. Fall study break.</i>
Wednesday, 15 October	Description rough due. LGW.
Monday, 20 October	Description SGW.
Wednesday, 22 October	Description final due. LGW.
Monday, 27 October	Entr'acte: Persuasion.
Wednesday, 29 October	<i>No class (conferences).</i>
Monday, 3 November	Entr'acte: Logic. Midterm class discussion.
Wednesday, 5 November	Persuasive rough due. LGW.
Monday, 10 November	Persuasive SGW.
Wednesday, 12 November	Persuasive final due. LGW.
Monday, 17 November	Entr'acte: synthesis.
Wednesday, 19 November	Synthesis rough due. LGW.
Monday, 24 November	Synthesis SGW.
Wednesday, 26 November	Synthesis final due. LGW cleanup session.
Monday, 1 December	Style seminar.
Wednesday, 3 December	Style guide rough due. Cleanup session.
Monday, 8 December	Style guide SGW.
Wednesday, 10 December	Style guide final due. Wrap up and celebration.