

ENWR 210: Advanced Academic Writing

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Bryan 328 MWF 1-1:50pm

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Undergraduate Record states that ENWR 210 "is a course designed for first-year students scoring 740 or above on the SAT II subject test, those who move out of ENWR 110 via portfolio placement, and Echols scholars." There are no prerequisites. ENWR 210 is an elective course that **does not** fulfill the second writing requirement.

Why take it, then? Well, students who are already good writers--students who exempt out of ENWR 110, for instance--are perfectly capable of getting through their college career by writing papers that are very good indeed. This is a course designed to make your papers not just good, but outstanding. It's a course that will give you a major edge in all other courses that require significant amounts of writing--that includes philosophy, sociology, anthropology, history, art history, music, women's studies, advanced foreign language courses, and of course English. Students wishing to major in science, engineering, business, medicine, or law will also find the course helpful, although writing conventions in these fields are different from those in the humanities.

You might also choose to take this course simply because you find the topic interesting. Our topic this semester will be popular culture, a subject sufficiently broad and sufficiently weird to find no comfortable home under any other rubric but English. (*Pace* sociology.) It's one thing to write academic papers about academic subjects; do you feel up to the challenge of writing an academic paper about Forrest Gump? How about The Simpsons? Nirvana? John Grisham? Pornographic websites?

In this course everyone will choose their own primary objects of study; I specify only the genre. Readings will be of two kinds: theoretical pieces on the subject of popular culture, and theoretical pieces on the subject of writing.

GOALS

- To learn a vocabulary of effective writing terms, and to learn to apply the concepts embodied in these terms to our own writing.
- To acquire and practice a writing voice that is both sophisticated and natural.
- To become comfortable the conventions of academic writing.
- To reach a personal understanding of the significance of certain works of popular culture.

TEXTS

Diana Hacker, A Writer's Reference, 4th ed. (Boston: Bedford, 1999).

Selected readings, in xerox or on the website: <http://toolkit.virginia.edu/ENWR210-1>

REQUIREMENTS

6- to 8-page essay on a work of popular fiction.....	10%
6- to 8-page essay on a work of popular film	20%
6- to 8-page essay on a work of popular music	20%
6- to 8-page essay on a work from a popular genre chosen by the student	30%
Other short assignments, including reading aloud.....	20%

ESSAYS

The purpose of every one of the essays you will write is to make an interesting argument, well-supported with evidence, about a work or works of popular culture. The larger aim is to analyze the function of popular culture; how does it work? What desires are expressed by it? What are the dangers, what are the rewards? The papers will be academic in tone, and will be addressed to an academic audience—but that doesn't mean that the essays will be stuffy; on the contrary, one of our primary goals is to achieve a voice that is simultaneously smart and lively.

The essays should be 6-8 pages long, typed and double-spaced in a 10- or 12- point font with 1-inch margins at the top, bottom, and sides. All sources must be cited according to the guidelines of the Modern Language Association (MLA); see section M of A Writer's Reference. Pages should be numbered, but no title pages, please--simply put your name, the date, and my name (Amanda French or Ms. French) on the first page of the essay, single-spaced, in the top left-hand corner.

ATTENDANCE

More than four absences without **written excuse from your dean** will lower your course grade at least 1/3; e.g., from a B to a B-.

PLAGIARISM

If you turn in work that is not your own, you will fail the assignment, you will almost certainly fail the course, and you might well be expelled from the University. Don't risk it.

ESSAY GRADE SHEET

The essay is graded in each category by letter grade. See the "Criteria for Grading Essays" to see how grades are assigned within each category. The average of your scores in the five categories determines your total letter grade for the essay.

Note that each category is worth the same; however, a grade of D or below in the thesis category automatically earns that grade for the whole essay.

LETTER GRADE

A+
A
A-
B+
B
B-
C+
C
C-

NUMERIC GRADE

4.3
4.0
3.7
3.3
3.0
2.7
2.3
2.0
1.7

THESIS

LOGIC

ORGANIZATION

STYLE

MECHANICS.....

NUMERIC AVERAGE

ESSAY LETTER GRADE.....

CRITERIA FOR GRADING ESSAYS

THESIS

A+ to A- The essay is unified around and focused on a significant central idea. This idea is something that might not even have occurred to a sophisticated reader (such as the teacher! The writer has identified an interesting problem with or feature of the text, and the essay is committed to resolving that problem or explaining that feature. The writer understands the text and the topic thoroughly, and has come to an original conclusion that is clearly expressed in the essay.

B+ to B- The essay is mostly on one topic. It has discernible order and some feeling for a central idea, but that idea might not be very sophisticated or original. The writer can state an opinion, but not make an analytical claim. The writer understands the text, but may not have noticed anything unusual or interesting or problematic about it. Alternatively, the writer of the essay may have noticed something interesting or problematic about the text, but can't account for or respond to that feature. The writer may have a split focus, or too many general, vague, non-specific ideas. The essay may suddenly introduce entirely new problems or conclusions in the final paragraph.

C+ to D The essay is all or mostly summary or report. The writer doesn't have any single idea, implied or stated, on which to focus. The writer of the essay may not fully understand the text. If the essay uses secondary sources, the writer may not understand them, or may repeat the arguments of the secondary sources without distinguishing them from her own argument.

LOGIC

A+ to A- The essay makes claims and supports those claims with appropriate evidence. The essay doesn't contradict itself anywhere; it is consistent. If the essay uses secondary sources, the writer can summarize and evaluate these other critical positions, can differentiate them from her own position, and can use them to support her own argument.

The writer assumes that a skeptical reader may not agree with the writer's position, and takes that reader's opposition into account. The essay is objective, unbiased, and open to differing interpretations, yet it is committed to its own position and supports that position with reasoned argument. The essay includes all available relevant information for the problem to be solved, even if it doesn't support the writer's own position. The writer addresses and resolves the most important obstacles to her own argument.

B+ to B- The essay has some sense of an argument, and of the relation between claim and evidence, but it may hide the process of critical thinking from the reader. The writer may contradict herself once or twice. If the essay uses secondary sources, the writer may not be able to apply the positions of other

writers to her own argument.

The writer may assume that any reader would come to the same conclusions she has herself, may assume that the mere presentation of evidence is enough to persuade the reader to think in the same way the writer does. The essay may not include all the relevant information, perhaps neglecting obvious points of support. The writer may recognize opposite points of view, but not resolve them.

C+ to D

The writer may use inappropriate evidence to support claims, or fail to provide any evidence at all. The writer may make overly general (therefore unprovable) assertions and "prove" them with still more general assertions. The writer may argue dogmatically, as though merely saying something repeatedly will convince a reader. The writer may not have any sense of rational opposition. The essay may deliberately or unintentionally exclude relevant information and opposite points of view. If the essay uses secondary sources, the writer may have plagiarized (unintentionally, usually) the ideas of the authors of the secondary sources she's used.

ORGANIZATION

A+ to A-

The main idea is developed logically in coherent, unified paragraphs. The transitions from paragraph to paragraph are effective, and there is an easy and natural movement from the general to the specific, both in ideas and in language. The writer understands how to organize for emphasis; how to emphasize important ideas and subordinate less important ones. Related ideas are kept together. Paragraphs have topic sentences, usually near the beginning.

The writer is familiar with and may use the classic "introduction, body paragraphs, conclusion" structure, but can also adapt that structure for her own purpose. The writer is familiar with the typical "claim, evidence, analysis" structure of paragraphs, but again can adapt that structure for her own purpose.

B+ to B-

Some paragraphs may be insufficiently developed or may lack unity and coherence. Paragraphs may not be linked to each other or to the main idea of the essay. Evidence may be insufficient to support the claim it is meant to support. The essay's structure may be boringly codified, relying too much on a single model of organization rather than subordinating the organization to the ideas of the paper. The essay may arrive at a different conclusion than it began with.

C+ to D

Ideas are fragmented and paragraphing is arbitrary. The writer doesn't stick to one idea per paragraph, and every paragraph has irrelevant generalizations or details. The writer probably repeats points already made. There are few or no transitions between paragraphs, and the essay will probably stop without concluding anything, or have a mechanical conclusion tacked on.

STYLE

A+ to A-

The essay is written in clear standard English. Related words and ideas are

kept together, and all general and abstract terms are defined as soon as possible. The writer uses both simple and complex sentences, and the transitions between sentences and paragraphs are smooth and effective.

The writer maintains a consistent and appropriate tone, one that is neither too colloquial nor too formal. The writer can contextualize her evidence, introducing quotations from the text or from secondary sources in a sentence or a phrase, and can incorporate quotations smoothly into her own sentences.

The writer chooses interesting, varied, and effective vocabulary, is aware of the precise connotations of the words she uses, and can use a variety of punctuation marks correctly to create structure and emphasis in a sentence.

B+ to B-

The style may be monotonous, with little or no variety in sentence structure or in the length of sentences. Alternatively, the style may be erratic, in which case the writer's tone is inconsistent or inappropriate. The writer may fail to place proper emphasis on the main idea of a sentence, fail to combine closely related ideas in successive sentences, or fail to use subordination to achieve emphasis.

The writer has some sense of reader orientation, but sometimes fails to put her quotations in context. The writer can incorporate quotations into her own sentences, but may always do so in the same way.

Such obstacles to reader comprehension as dangling modifiers, misused words, or unclear pronoun referents may occur. The writer may use too many weak verbs and too many passive voice constructions (use of the verb "to be"). The writer may use clichés and colloquialisms, or she may use elevated diction and jargon. The writer probably doesn't use the full range of punctuation marks.

C+ to D

Sentences are often short and choppy or long and incoherent; there are sentence fragments and/or run-on sentences. The writer doesn't seem to know how to create emphasis in a sentence or how to relate clauses in a sentence. The writer cannot make effective transitions between sentences by using the principle that "old information" comes first in a sentence and is followed by "new information." Sentences are often redundant: that is, they repeat a point made earlier.

Because the writer doesn't understand the principles of sentence construction very well, there are problems of faulty parallelism, dangling modifiers, and unclear pronoun referents. Ambiguities abound. The reader is often forced to reread sentences in order to understand what point (if any) the writer is trying to make.

The writer has little or no sense of her reader and is often unsure of her own attitude toward the subject under discussion. The writer may not be able to use appropriate punctuation and "signal phrases" to incorporate quotations smoothly into her own sentences.

Language may be stilted and overly formal, too informal and slangy, too much like unsophisticated speech, or simply unidiomatic. The writer uses a limited vocabulary, or has no sense of the connotations of words used. The writer may rely too heavily on passive voice, clichés, or adjectives.

MECHANICS

- A+ to A- The essay has almost no misspellings or punctuation errors. It is generally free of mechanical errors and grammatical irregularities that would annoy, distract, or mislead the reader. The writer cites and documents sources correctly according to the guidelines outlined in the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, and provides all the information that a reader needs in order to find the same source that the writer has used.
- B+ to B- The essay has a few mechanical problems, but not enough to impede the reader's comprehension. The writer has some knowledge of citing and documenting sources, but makes punctuation errors and leaves out (or adds) information when doing so. The writer may not adhere fully to MLA citation guidelines.
- C+ to D The essay has enough mechanical errors to annoy the reader and to impede comprehension. These errors may include misspellings and typos, problems with verb endings, pronoun reference and agreement, run-on sentences and sentence fragments, comma splices and other misuses of punctuation. The essay may lack a Works Cited page; the author may not cite and document sources.

PROOFREADING MARKS AND ABBREVIATIONS

	Paragraph.
-->	Look on the back of the page for a comment.
^	This is called a "caret." It means, Look above the sentence for a correction.
[]	Remove what's between the brackets.
	Join these two things.
	Separate what's on either side of the line.
?	What?
	Ha ha ha.
agreement	Your pronouns or verb and noun endings don't agree. Examples: "When one looks closely, you can see that this is true." "The emotion of cats and dogs are obvious."
awk	Awkward phrase or sentence.
case	Capitalize or un-capitalize what I've circled.
cliché	This is trite and/or general. Example: "In today's society . . ."
colloq	Colloquial. This word or phrase is too casual; not formal enough for the context. Example: "So then Dr. Faustus was all worried."
dq	Dropped quotation. Quotations should never serve as a single sentence in your paper. Either replace the period of the sentence before the dropped quotation with a colon (:), or integrate the quotation into your own sentence with a signal phrase.
dm	Dangling modifier. The first part of your sentence doesn't refer to the same thing that the second part of your sentence refers to. Example: "Comparing these two things, one is better than the other." See a style manual for further explanation.
ed	Elevated diction. This word or phrase is too fancy: you may not be using it quite right, and there's a simple one that will do just as well or better, and anyway you're only putting it in to show off. Example: "utilize the implements" instead of "use the tools."
frag	Sentence fragment. Your sentence is incomplete; it either has no verb or no subject. Example: "Thus getting rid of all uncertainty."
pron	You've used a pronoun without making it clear what that pronoun refers to. (Also, "unclear referent.") Sometimes, though, this means "use a pronoun here."
punc	Punctuation error. Go look it up or ask what's wrong and how to fix it.
pv	Passive voice. You need to use a verb construction here that does not rely on a form of "to be." Example: "The emotions of King Lear were not controlled."
red	Redundant. You've used an idea or phrase more than once.
run-on	Run-on sentence. Break up this sentence with appropriate punctuation.
sp	Spelling mistake. Also used for typos.
spac	Spacing error. Put in or remove the proper spaces.
tense	Your verb tenses within this sentence don't agree, or the verb tense of this sentence doesn't match the rest of the paper.
trans	Transition. You need to make a connection between these two sentences or paragraphs.
wph	Wrong phrase. You've used an expression or idiom incorrectly.
ww	Wrong word. Go look it up in a dictionary.

CREATING A LIVING ESSAY

The Skeleton: Your Paper's Structure

There are three structural levels to every paper: the general (overall) level, the paragraph level, and the sentence level. Your paper should be well-organized on all levels, so that a reader can follow your thought processes.

GENERAL

Every essay must have a **thesis**. The thesis of your paper is simply your argument, the point you're making-- what, in short, you're saying. You should be able to state it in a single sentence. A good thesis makes a claim that is neither too easy nor too hard to prove convincingly:

Too easy: Beowulf is a hero of great strength and courage.
Drunk driving is a big problem.

Too hard: Shakespeare believed that all women were wicked.
Abortion is wrong.

Just right: In Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, the Wife of Bath tells a story which is actually a hidden way of flirting with the Squire.
In the arguments about whether or not to let women into the Virginia Military Institute, the focus on bathroom facilities for women serves to deflect attention from real issues.

Papers without theses are easy to identify; they tend to rely on summary of the plot or topic. Your essay should make a specific, provable argument, not just state an opinion or summarize. Summarize events or actions only for the purpose of commenting on them or for supporting a claim.

Once you know, in detail, what you're trying to show, the organization of your paper will fall into place. Arrange things in the order that will make things clear to your reader. In general, less important points come before more important points.

PARAGRAPH

Your paragraphs should be structured around your **claim** and your **evidence**. Make your claim early in the paragraph, and then support it with evidence. Explain to the reader exactly how and why your evidence supports your claim. For a literary analysis (especially one without outside research), your evidence will usually be quotations from the text. For a non-literary analysis your evidence might be examples, analogies, statistics, or even personal experience.

SENTENCE

Choose words that are natural to you; do not use inflated diction in an effort to impress the teacher. Avoid the passive voice. Omit unnecessary words. "Set up" quotations so that the reader knows where they're coming from and who or what they're referring to. Sentences should be grammatical, and should follow one another logically. Sentences should flow from old information to new information. Punctuation, spelling, and MLA citation should be correct, so as not to distract the reader from your line of thought.

The Flesh: Steps in the Writing Process

Different people spend different amounts of time on each of these steps, or they do them in a different order, but all good writers go through some version of this process.

1. Read and take notes. Lots of notes. Be sure you understand everything you read. Record your reactions to the reading: things that interest you or that seem unusual, patterns that you notice, things that remind you of other things, definitions of words you don't understand, and everything else that goes through your mind as you read.
2. Figure out a topic that interests you in relation to the work. Often you will see this in your notes. This can be very broad, such as "women" or "flower imagery" or "irony vs. seriousness."
3. Narrow your topic into a concrete thesis. A good way to do this is to do a lot of pre-writing--that is, to brainstorm on paper. Ask yourself questions about the work. Try some different theses and see how they feel.
4. Do any research that may be necessary to help you answer a particular question. Take notes on your research and decide what will and won't be useful.
5. Mark quotations that you will want to use from your reading, so that you can find them easily when you're writing.
6. Make a Works Cited list, if you've done research. Be sure you know how to quote and cite properly.
7. Write a draft of your paper. Reread it to see if you still believe your thesis. If not, something's wrong. If your draft doesn't seem to have a clear thesis, check the last paragraph for interesting ideas that may have sunk to the bottom. (Often we write the most positive and convincing thesis statements when trying to say something "conclusive.")
8. Get someone else to read your paper and make comments. The Writing Center, on the third floor of Bryan Hall, is terrific at this, but they tend to be booked up. Make use of friends and classmates.
9. Revise your paper, incorporating any new ideas. Make sure that it is organized and balanced--that each part of your argument has enough space for full discussion. Be sure that your paper will be clear to any person reading it, that it makes reader-friendly transitions between sentences and paragraphs, and that your tone is appropriate. Combine choppy sentences into longer sentences, and break up too-long sentences into shorter sentences.
10. Make up a title for your paper that completely expresses your thesis, and that contains the title of the work you're writing on, or at least the author's name.
11. Spell-check your document on the computer. Then print out a hard copy and proofread it. Then go back in and make the changes that spell-check didn't catch. Then print out another copy.

The Spark of Life

Be bold. Be original. Take risks. Get excited about your work. Discover what you believe. Argue with passion. Exploit your own intelligence. Play with language.