Syllabus

Course Overview

> Imagine you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion has begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that have gone on before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument, then you put in your oar. Someone answers, you answer [her]; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you ... The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (110-11)
> -- Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1973.

English Composition I provides an introduction to and foundation for the academic reading and writing characteristic of college. You will learn to read critically, write effective arguments, understand the writing process, and craft powerful prose that meets readers' expectations.

You will gain writing expertise by exploring questions about expertise itself: What factors impact expert achievement? What does it take to succeed? Who determines success? Since personal investment yields better writing, you can select an area of expertise meaningful to you (a hobby, trade, profession, discipline, etc.) for your four major writing projects (see below), which will be drafted and revised in sequenced stages.Your writing will be central to the course as we create a seminar/workshop structure with peer response and selected instructor feedback.

Three overarching assumptions about academic writing will shape our work: 1) it is transferable; 2) it is learnable; and 3) it is valuable. Being an effective academic writer involves asking meaningful questions and engaging in complex dialogue with texts and ideas. These abilities are useful across virtually all academic disciplines and they provide a valuable means for making sense of non-academic experiences as well. Perhaps even more important, though, is that learning how to write effectively does not require inspiration or genius, but hard work, reflection, and feedback. This means that, with practice, dedication, and working with others, you can be an effective academic writer. Most importantly, academic writing offers you a means of contributing your ideas to important, ongoing conversations, the kind of conversations Burke describes in the epigraph above.

Learning Objectives

- Summarize, analyze, question, and evaluate written and visual texts
- Argue and support a position
- Recognize audience and disciplinary expectations
- Identify and use the stages of the writing process
- Identify characteristics of effective sentence and paragraph-level prose
- Apply proper citation practices
- Discuss how to transfer and apply your writing knowledge to other writing occasions

Admin Help

Thematic Overview

This course invites you to gain writing expertise by examining expertise itself. You will get to choose an area of expertise of interest to you (a hobby, sport, art, discipline, career, etc.). The texts with which we engage explore broadly interesting kinds of expertise (in sport, performance art, technology, etc.), and also offer models for our thinking about writing expertise. The driving questions of the course enable you to gain acumen about your chosen area of expertise, but also sponsor our collective inquiry into writing expertise: What factors engender achievement? What does it take to succeed? Who gets to determine success? Our inquiry works twofold as a means of encouraging you to think about expertise in an area or field of interest to you, but also about writing itself. These questions are central to our work as writers: what does expert writing look like? How does it vary across fields and contexts? What is at stake in defining writing as more or less effective?

In the course's first unit, you will ponder debates surrounding talent and achievement by writing a 2-page critical review of Daniel Coyle's "The Sweet Spot." In the second unit, you will build on these critical reading and writing skills by analyzing a visual image depicting your chosen area of expertise. The third unit offers you the opportunity to conduct research into how a particular expert in your chosen area of inquiry gained his or her expertise; you will be able to situate your case study alongside and/or against the other theories of expertise we will read together. Our fourth project invites you to make your ideas public by writing an op-ed (an opinion piece that appears opposite the editorial page in print and online newspapers) about a meaningful aspect of your chosen area of expertise. Throughout the course, we will focus on peer feedback, as well as the writing process, which includes pre-writing, researching, drafting, feedback, revision, editing, and proofreading. To complement instructional videos, we ask that students regularly participate in forums, post smaller assignments as instructed, provide substantial peer review, and consider participating in the optional live writing workshops (see below).

Writing Projects

- **Project One: Critical Review**

The Uses and Limits of Daniel Coyle's "The Sweet Spot."
In this project, I will ask you to write a 600-800 word critical review of Coyle's article, summarizing the project in his terms, quoting and analyzing key words and passages from the text, and assessing the limits and uses of his argument and approach.

- **Project Two: Analyzing a Visual Image**
  In your second project, I will ask you to develop a 600-800 word analysis of a visual representation of your chosen field of expertise. I will ask you to apply Coyle's and Colvin's ideas, and the forum conversations by classmates, to examine how expertise in your chosen area is represented and how it reflects, modifies, and/or challenges ideas about expertise: How is expertise represented visually? What does the image suggest about what it takes to be an expert in this field? How is expertise being defined in this image?

- **Project Three: Case Study**
  In this project, I will ask you to extend your work with Projects One and Two by researching additional scholarship about expertise in your chosen area, reading more texts about expertise theory through a crowd-sourced annotated bibliography (a collection of resources, with summaries, posted by all students), and applying those to a particular case study (example) of an expert or expertise in your field. I will ask you to extend these scholarly conversations through a 1000-1250 word case study in which you can articulate a position about expertise or an expert in the area of inquiry you have chosen.

- **Project Four: Op-Ed**
  Since the academic ideas are often made public (and arguably should be), I will ask you to write a two-page Op-Ed about a meaningful aspect of your chosen area of expertise: What aspects are important for others to consider? What advice would you have for people desiring to become an expert in this area? What are the politics and cultures involved with establishing and defining expertise in this particular area?

Writing Workshops

Successful writers regularly discuss their ongoing projects with other writers and readers. We have arranged the opportunity for you to do this through peer response, but we also invite you to do so in one of the following ways: participating in the optional, live writing workshops; volunteering your writing to be provided as an example in our instructional videos or to be given audio feedback by one of our consultants as a model for feedback; and/or asking others in your life to provide you feedback on drafts in progress. Student writing should be treated with respect and generosity, even as we offer strategies for revision.

Participation

Our work this term depends on the exchange of ideas and the cooperative effort of each member of the class. Reading and responding to others' work helps you become a stronger writer.

How Will Feedback Work in this Course?

Your four writing projects will be assured feedback because they are to be posted through "Writing Projects and Peer Feedback," which is an official Peer Assessment Tool from Coursera. Those of you unfamiliar with this aspect of the Coursera platform will see that once you submit an assignment, the system assigns every person's essay to other specific students in the class, who then respond to that particular essay.

There are other smaller writing assignments that take place in the Forums. We depend on you as a community to try to comment on others' work. Please note that these assignments are desiged to prepare you for the writing projects, so they are worth completing even if you don't get immediate feedback.

Keeping a Writing Portfolio

I strongly recommend that you create a portfolio of your writing for this course. Include in it copies of your writing projects (drafts and final versions), self-reflections, feedback you have received, and a sampling of your comments to other writers and your discussion-forum contributions. This material will provide evidence of your accomplishments and help you grow as a writer. It will also serve as an archive of your work since your work may not continue to be available through Coursera after the course ends. To set up a portfolio, consider using an online space such as Google Docs or Dropbox in case you should ever want to share your portfolio more easily with others.

Grading

The first three writing projects are designed to allow you to improve your writing through peer feedback before the final evaluation. First, you will submit a draft of your work. Then during the feedback stage, you will read the writing of three colleagues and give written feedback. The third step is to incorporate the feedback and create the final version. You and your colleagues will then use a rubric to score four other projects. After you receive this score, you will submit a short self-reflection to think about how to improve your writing moving forward. The final project has a compressed schedule (quick turnarounds are a priority in public forms of writing such as Op-Eds). In this fourth unit I invite you to take responsibility for securing feedback on a draft and reading others' drafts before submitting the final version.

The grading breakdown is designed to give you credit for all of these steps and not just a grade for the final product. Your grade will be determined using the following percentages (70% is a passing grade):

- Project Drafts 20%
- Peer Feedback 20%
- Project One Final Version 10%
- Project Two Final Version 10%
- Project Three Final Version 15%
- Project Four Final Version 10%
- Self-Reflections 15%

You have 10 late days that you can apply to the Self-Reflections if needed. The writing projects and peer feedback cannot be submitted late. Please note, if you do not complete the peer feedback stage you will receive an automatic 20% penalty on your writing project.

Citing Sources, Academic Honesty, and Avoiding Plagiarism

The process of academic writing often requires us to draw upon the ideas, interpretations, and words of other writers. Done properly, with appropriate citation and recognition of an author's work, employing others' ideas serves as an essential ingredient in crafting our own arguments. For specifics on citing sources, please visit OWL. Appropriating the work of others without sufficient acknowledgement—a practice known as plagiarism—seriously undermines the community of discourse in which we participate as scholars. Students found to have committed acts of plagiarism or other academic dishonesty in the conduct of their work in this class will be immediately assigned a failing grade for the course.

Prerequisites for This Course

This course has no prerequisites, but students enrolling in the course should have exposure to secondary-level English education, and at least an introductory level of proficiency with reading and writing in English.

Why This Course is Not about Grammar and Syntax

Grammar and syntax are important, but writing is about much more than these elements. Effective writing involves learning how to articulate strong arguments, read closely and critically, engage with the work of others, integrate evidence, and address reader expectations and disciplinary contexts. This course focuses primarily on these elements of writing. When I do consider grammar and syntax, I do so by thinking about it as meaning-centered: Does the grammar and syntax interfere with what the writer is trying to communicate? How can grammar and syntax (and other features of document design or punctuation) help a writer communicate his or her ideas more effectively? You can, however, find resources that can help you improve your grammar and syntax under the "Readings and Resources" page.

A Note about Credit for This Course

This course is not a for-credit composition course. However, you may be wondering if a Statement of Accomplishment could help you earn college transfer credit. Every college has a policy for acceptance of transfer or examination credit. You should create a portfolio of your writing for this course, including the assignments, comments and evaluations you have received, as evidence of your accomplishments. Ask the Office of Admissions at a college you have applied to for its policy and procedure on MOOC courses, stressing that you have a portfolio they may wish to evaluate. Since MOOC courses are so new, you may need to inform that office, or the writing program administrator, about this course and the content of your portfolio in order to have it evaluated.

Accessibility

The following is Coursera's statement on accessibility: "We strive to make our content accessible to everyone, including those with disabilities. Towards this end, we continually strive to make our web platform even friendlier to screen readers and other accessibility-related software, and also provide closed captioning on all of our lecture videos. If you have any accessibility questions or needs, please contact accessibility@coursera.org."

For more information on Coursera policies, please visit: https://www.coursera.org/about/contact

Technical Skills Needed

The following technical skills are needed for this course:

- using a word processor (changing font, spell check, etc.)
- browsing to locate files to upload
- navigating the internet
- using an internet search engine
- using the discussion forums

Additional Thoughts

Much of our work in this course will revolve around the collaborative practices of peer feedback and discussion, which will create the opportunity for us to develop meaningful intellectual relationships. Respect for each other's ideas, contributions, and writing will be a vital element in creating a classroom community in which every class member can express themselves and grow intellectually. One of my principal roles as a professor is to foster this process—a role I am eager to begin. I and our team of instructional consultants are sincerely looking forward to working with you this semester.

Acknowledgements

Teaching, like writing, is a collaborative process. The ideas you see in this course bear the influence of many past and current colleagues, as well as the many gifted scholars in writing studies who publish their arguments and ideas. I am especially grateful to faculty, staff, and students at the University of South Carolina Department of English 1995-2000, Chico State University Department of English, 1998-99, and the Thompson Writing Program at Duke University, 2000-2013. Wherever I have drawn more specifically from a colleague or text, I have done my best to acknowledge it directly. If you see an acknowledgement I may have inadvertently overlooked, please post it to the "Course Material Feedback" forum so I can review it and, if needed, make the correction. This course was funded in part with a generous grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. I designed earlier versions of this course with colleagues at Duke as part of a different course; I would particularly like to acknowledge Joseph Harris, Marcia Rego, Michael Ennis, Erik Harms, Danielle Kane, and Kimberly Wine for their collaboration in shaping and reshaping earlier versions of this syllabus, as well as earlier versions of the first and third writing projects. The current version of the course has been reworked and adapted in particularly valuable ways with the input of our strong instructional team of consultants, guests, and support staff: Kendra Atkin, Yvonne Belanger, Greta Boers, Maral Erol, David Font-Navarette, Paul Kei Matsuda, Shawn Miller, Elise Mueller, Marcia Rego, Rebecca Vidra, and Ed White. I am grateful for the generous expertise of our guest lecturers, Daniel Coyle and David Jarmul. Special gratitude also goes to our colleagues at Writing Commons, especially Joe Moxley and Katelin Kaiser. I also appreciate the ongoing support of Kristen Neuschel and Lynne O'Brien, as well as other members of the administration of Duke University. My wonderful family and friends have been exceptionally helpful with informal consultations and fun distractions along the way.

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