

ENGL 3754: Advanced Composition
Spring 2011
McBryde 223
TR 12:30-1:45

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Course Materials

On Writing Well: 30th Anniversary Edition by William Zinsser
Writing about Writing: A College Reader by Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle.
PDFs – available on Scholar

Course Overview

Advanced Composition is a writing-intensive course that will help you learn more about the craft of writing, yourselves as writers, and the dynamic, multi-layered, rhetorical nature of every writing situation—from your first *Facebook* status post of the day to your organic chemistry lab report finished just before the midnight deadline.

Unit 1 – Rhetorical Efficacy

The organization of this semester will be divided into three learning units. The first will introduce you to writing and to rhetoric, a way to analyze the writing of others as well as a toolbox for your own writing. This valuable knowledge of rhetorical concepts and writing strategies will arm you with the skills to approach any writing situation and the vocabulary to become a reflective, growing writer. This unit will ask you to read...a lot. It will also ask you to begin to consider your own writing process.

Unit 2 – Multimodal Rhetoric

The second unit will apply the theories of writing we have learned in the first unit and move beyond analysis to authoring your first formally composed argument which will be made in the form of a “Concept in 60” documentary-style video. We will watch documentaries and other exposes in order to understand this genre and this unit will help prepare you to think about the multimodal nature of writing in our modern world.

Unit 3 – Writing as an Expert

The final unit will ask you to apply everything you have learned throughout the semester as you compose a multi-genre advocacy campaign for a community you inhabit. This comprehensive project will demand the most sophisticated skills in research (primary and secondary) as well as in writing (leads and endings, cohesion, concision, transitions, organization) as you work to compose several texts with a variety of voices and rhetorical aims (analytical, critical, expressive, informative, persuasive, etc.).

These are the three major units and the major writing assignments that will act as deliverables. Throughout the semester we will also write small, low-stakes writing which will also receive my continued feedback. And, because rewriting is as important as writing, you are permitted to revise major assignments as many times as you’d like. See my revision policies below.

Lastly, learning is a messy process that requires an active, engaged, and reflective mind. To ensure the course objectives can be achieved and transfer beyond this semester, I will continually ask you to use writing as a way of reflecting upon yourself as a writer and your writings. It is my understanding that this kind of metawriting is key to writing skill transfer.

Course Objectives

As a student in this course, you will find that the teaching and learning achieved throughout the semester:

- Provides advanced training and extensive practice in writing analytical, critical, informative, and expressive texts
- Seeks to develop students' abilities to adapt intermediate-level rhetorical modes and strategies to a broader range of writing situations
- Encourages the development of an individual voice within conventional contexts, and close attention is given to the finer points of writing style
- Emphasizes practice in addressing a wide range of audiences and in using varied styles and organizational patterns

We will use tools to help us approach issues of writing and expand our ideas of the forms in which rhetoric can be employed.

Drafts: I believe that a piece of writing grows and develops best when it is approached in stages and with feedback from other experienced writers. I will comment on your drafts at least once before the final is to be submitted. You will also engage in peer feedback workshops in class at least once before the final is to be submitted. If you are not present for peer review, you must take your paper to the writing center at least 24 hours before the paper is due so that an experienced writer can provide feedback and you can have ample time to revise. A paper which has not received my comments during a draft stage cannot be submitted for a final grade. It must first be submitted as a rough draft and will lose points for being submitted after the due date. You will then have the same amount of time as the rest of the class had to submit the final draft. (Example: The rough draft of a paper is due Tuesday and the final is due Thursday. You do not submit a rough draft on Tuesday, but bring a paper to class on Thursday. I will respond to the draft and then you will have two (2) days to revise and submit the final by Saturday (-10% for being late).

Genre analysis presentations: I will complete the first presentation in week 3 after we have learned about genres and genre analysis. After that, each week two (2) students will begin the class with a brief, 5-minute genre presentation on a genre of their choice. At least 5 samples of the genre and an accompanying handout must be shared with the class no later than 48 hours before the class period so that we may all have a chance to review them. There will be a folder in Scholar to which you can upload the samples and the handout.

Socratic circle discussions: Based loosely on Socrates' dialectical approach to truth-seeking, Socratic circles, when used in the classroom, are exercises in rhetorical savvy. Participation in the circle is mandatory but if you are initially hesitant, you should let me know and actively try to gain confidence in an active role as it will aid in your individual growth, as well as contribute valuable ideas to the class discussion. Each day 5 students will be selected; four will lead discussion and one will provide the class with the day's "takeaway."

Readings:

This course will require you to read quite a bit for each class period. With that in mind, we will begin the semester with some questions to consider before/after reading. Most of these will be provided in the *Writing About Writing* textbook, but I will provide some key questions for

other readings. I do not expect you to write out the answers, but I would like you to consider the questions ahead of class time. I will expect that you will come to class with your notes from the readings. The Socratic circle will test your reading by asking you provide opinions about what we have read so I will expect you to come to class prepared each day.

Writing Groups: At the beginning of the semester, you will be grouped together with 3 or 4 of your classmates. For the purposes of growth and constructive criticism, you will be sharing your writing with them all semester. I encourage you to give your group a name and a tagline/motto to begin establishing a unified identity right away.

Writing journals: Before you turn in each major assignment, you will be asked to complete a writing journal which asks you to focus on a particular aspect of your writing process. This is part of your grade. Then, after each major assignment you will be asked to reflect upon the comments I have given you in a second writing journal. These journals will, over time, help you identify your strengths as a writer and guide you in focusing on areas of improvement. Keep them in anticipation of the final, end-of-term reflection.

Writing tasks: Every week we will be writing much more than this syllabus might initially let on. Your three major assignments are the final products; however, writing is a process and therefore much writing will happen before you submit them for evaluation. As such, these low-stakes writing tasks are key to your reflection. They should be kept for analysis and in anticipation of your final, end-of-term reflection. Submit to your wiki by 12:30 on the due date.

Evaluation

Major Assignments: 65%

Rhetorical Analysis.....	10%
Concept in 60 video (with Director’s Commentary)	15%
Rhetoric in Society Advocacy Campaign.....	20%
Genre Analysis Presentation/Socratic Circle.....	20%

Active Engagement: 35%

Reading Responses (10)/Low-stakes Writing/End-of-Term Reflection	20%
Peer Review	10%
Attendance (You can miss no more than 2 class periods)	5%

Evaluation Guidelines for Composition					
	CONCEPTION	THESIS	SUPPORT	STRUCTURE	LANGUAGE
A	sophisticated analysis; original; shows command of interpretive and conceptual tasks; fulfills, then exceeds the expectations of the assignment in some critical way	essay controlled by clear, precise, well-defined thesis; is sophisticated in both statement and insight; attempts or achieves an innovation of the argument or issue being studied	provides substantial, well-chosen evidence (quotations or specific examples) used strategically; connections between ideas are evident; thesis consistently supported	apt, seemingly inevitable sequence of paragraphs; appropriate, clear and skillful transitions between sentences and paragraphs	precise diction; syntactic variety and sophistication; clear command of Standard English; no or few errors; imaginative but mature use of vocabulary and sentence structure

B	shows good understanding of the texts, ideas, and methods of the assignment; goes beyond the obvious	clear, specific argumentative thesis central to essay; may have minor terms undefined	pursues thesis consistently; clearly develops a main argument with clear major points and appropriate evidence; makes effort to link rather than stack ideas	distinct units of thought in paragraphs; clear transitions between developed, coherently arranged paragraphs	some stylistic difficulties; occasional problematic word choices or awkward syntax; some wordiness (or distractingly pompous diction); few minor errors; some syntactic variety
C	shows an understanding of the basic ideas and information involved; may have some factual or conceptual errors	general central thesis or controlling idea; gives little indication of organization to follow; lacking some specifics	provides some evidence, but not always relevant, sufficient, or integrated into paper; undeveloped ideas or little analysis; limited use of textual evidence	some awkward transitions; some brief, weakly unified, or undeveloped paragraphs; uneven paragraphing	more than a few minor grammatical errors; imprecise diction; awkward syntax; wordiness; over-reliance on passive voice; quotations poorly integrated
D	confuses some significant concepts; does not respond directly to the assignment	vague thesis; mostly factual rather than argumentative; unspecified elements	evidence scant, vague or awkwardly incorporated; digresses without developing ideas; no analysis	tends to narrate or merely summarize; wanders; repetitive; illogical arrangement of ideas	some major grammatical errors (subject-verb agreement; fragments); numerous minor errors; repeated inexact word choice; inappropriate format
F	no clear understanding of reading or concepts; inappropriate response to assignment	no discernable thesis; contradictory or unsustainable thesis	little or no development; evidence simply listed or missing; plagiarizes	arbitrary or no paragraph structure; illogical or no transitions	errors in almost every sentence; several major errors (such as s-v agr., frags, comma splices)

Additional Helpful Policies

Successful professionals:

- 📖 **come to class:** prepared, on time, and drama-free. Preparation, for this class, means you are present, **with a laptop**, and you have done the readings.
- 📖 **participate** often and thoughtfully; the nature of this class requires your daily participation. It will shrivel and die without each of you.
- 📖 help foster an atmosphere of learning and respect; **you are a member of the Hokie Nation**. This includes doing your best to limit the use of electronics (cell phones, laptops) to a manner related to class work only. Identification of any electronic device for personal use will result in dismissal and an absence on my roster.

- ☞ **turn in assignments on time** unless you've spoken to me prior to the due date.
- ☞ **check Scholar and e-mail regularly.**
- ☞ come to me for help. I love to help! I have three **office hours** set aside weekly for the sole purpose of working with you on your writing: Shanks Hall 440 T & F 10:30-12:00.

Revision Policy:

If you are never given a chance to rewrite, lessons in writing are more difficult to achieve. I believe revision is a significant part of the writing process. Each paper can be revised as many times as you'd like as long as you meet with me before and after submitting the revised paper. All revisions must be submitted no later than 2 weeks after the paper was handed back with comments for the revision grade to be factored into the final paper grade. Revisions submitted for the purpose of writing growth without a request for regrading are always welcomed and will be accepted anytime.

Writing Center:

You have very helpful resources available to you, so don't be afraid to ask for help. In addition to my office hours in Shanks Hall 440 T & F 10:30-12:00, the Virginia Tech Writing Center is on the third floor of Shanks Hall, in 340 (M-F 9:00-5:00). They accept walk-ins but I recommend making scheduling an appointment. For more information, visit http://www.composition.english.vt.edu/wc/WC_Home.html.

Honor Code:

The Virginia Tech Honor Code states that "every student has the right to live in an academic environment that is free from the injustices caused by any form of intellectual dishonesty." Certain forms of intellectual dishonesty will subject you to course failure.

All students are expected to abide by VT's Honor System. The Honor Code reads as follows: "I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on this assignment." By turning in an assignment in this class, you are pledging this as true. If you have questions about what "unauthorized assistance" means for a particular assignment, please don't hesitate to ask. See www.honorsystem.vt.edu for more information.

Statement of Understanding:

In addition to my role as your instructor, I am also a graduate student and a human being. My classroom should be welcoming to all students. Please notify me if you need accommodations because of a disability (learning disability, attention deficit disorder, psychological, physical, etc.), medical condition, or for any other social or cultural reason(s). Students with disabilities should also contact the Services for Students with Disabilities Office in 150 Henderson Hall, <http://www.ssd.vt.edu>.

All course requirements, policies, and schedules may be changed by the instructor (with notice) if circumstances require it.