Writing, Reading, and Rhetoric
in the Professions

English 3840j

Instructor
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Introduction & Course Goals

Welcome to English 3840j - *Writing, Reading and Rhetoric in the Professions*. I look forward to working with you this semester as you attempt to learn more about how writing works in general and in your chosen profession. I designed this course with the understanding that texts are very much influenced by the social, material, political, and economic conditions of the environments in which they emerge. The psychological assessment written by a mental health counselor, for example, has very different goals and appears within a different set of circumstances—as defined by the professional community— than does the patient report written by an E.R. nurse. This makes it difficult to talk about what makes all forms or instances of professional writing "good" because "good" can change from profession to profession and situation to situation. Accordingly, instead of studying arbitrary rules about good writing in general, in this course you will study how writing actually works and what you need to know about your profession to be a successful writer in that particular community. This process entails studying some writing theory— through which you'll gain the terminology and metaknowledge to understand how writing works and how to transfer that writing knowledge to different writing tasks. In particular we'll be focusing a lot of time and energy on concepts of genre and discourse community, concepts which will help you understand how writing is always influenced by environmental factors. We'll also do some more practical work, like creating a resume and cover letter. I will ask you to read and write quite a bit in this course, but I also expect that you'll gain some valuable knowledge about writing in your field.

Required Texts and Course Resources:

Course Text: *Readings in Professional Writing,* English 3840j: available from Copy Catz (13 W. Union St.)

Course Blog: www.eng3840j.wordpress.com

Style Guide: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/

Course Work: Major Projects

This course is divided into 4 units with major assignments for each. Over the course of the semester, you'll produce:

A **Genre Analysis** essay in which you utilize rhetorical genre theory to analyze textual artifacts from your chosen profession to learn more about how genres help to create knowledge and social structures in your field;

A **Professional Profile Package** including a resume and cover letter targeting a specific job opening in your field, a linkedin profile created from your resume, and a reflective essay;

An **Ethnography** of your Professional Community which makes claim(s) about how writing works in your profession and how it influences and is influenced by social, economic, political, and material factors;

A **Web Portfolio** which showcases the work you've done over the course of the semester and which can later be used as a professional presence. It should include one major revision of Project 1 or 3 and a **Reflective Essay** that makes an argument about what you've learned in the course.

Course Blogs and Informal Writing Assignments

At the beginning of the semester, each of you will create an individual course blog using Wordpress. Think of this blog as a class journal accessible not only to you, but to your classmates and the instructor (me) as well. Throughout the course, you'll compose numerous posts on the blog in the form of reading responses and other informal writing assignments (IWAs). For the most part, every time we have a reading, you'll also have some kind of reading response due. You'll also post proposals and other process work for your major projects on the blog. Everyone's individual blog will be listed on the main course blog (eng3840j.wordpress.com) where I'll also post informal writing assignment prompts, course information, major project assignments and announcements. At the end of the course, you'll turn your blog into a Web Portfolio where you showcase your writing projects to create a professional presence online.

Grades

Grades are problematic, especially in writing courses. Traditional ways of grading lead to a lot of stress and anxiety, for both teacher and student. But grades can also hinder learning when we become so focused on assessment that we lose sight of our main objectives: practicing, discussing, and learning about writing. My own approach to grades is to value effort rather than skill. I believe that all students should have an equal opportunity to succeed in my course, regardless of the literacies they bring with them. As a teacher, I'm trying to level the playing field but I'm also trying to get you to work through multiple difficult tasks because that, I believe, is the best way to challenge you to learn. The most practical way (that I've found) to accomplish all of this is to use what's called a grading contract.
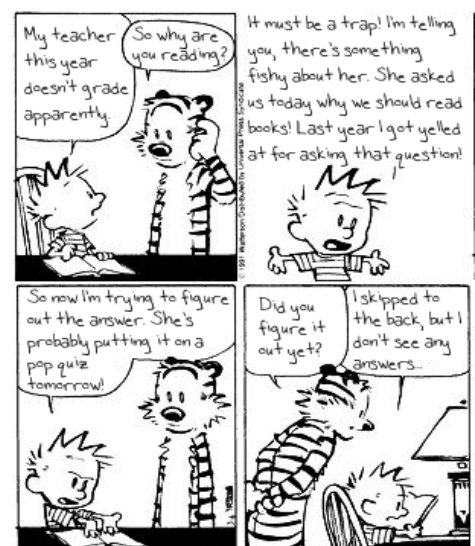
Grading Contract

This course utilizes a grading contract to maximize learning and facilitate productive discussion about the essays you write. The gist of the contract is that I guarantee a grade of at least a B to everyone who meets the terms of the contract, and in return, you promise to fulfill your side of that contract with an emphasis on doing your best to learn what we are trying to learn. Students who violate the contract (1 major violation or 3 minor violations) will see their promised grade reduced by a full letter grade. At the end of the course, you will have the opportunity to raise your grade by a full letter by producing a superior portfolio of writing gathered from the work you accomplished all semester. If you have violated the contract, superior writing can still raise your grade (if you're down to a C, you could still get a B). The grading contract, then, largely makes grading automatic, up-front, and, I hope, less stressful, which should allow us to worry less about grades and more

Course Policies

*I use **e-mail** to communicate important information about the class. You are responsible for checking your school account regularly. You should also check the **course blog** often for announcement and informal writing assignments.

*Your work in this class is **always public**. Don't submit writing you can't let other students see. Drafts of papers must be polished and ready for classmates' feedback on the assigned dates to get Credit.

***Plagiarism**: Cheating—whether by claiming another's ideas or work as your own (fraud) or making up or falsifying info. (fabrication)- will result in a course grade of F and a report to Community Standards. You are at all times responsible for handling sources ethically by acknowledging the author and source of directly borrowed ideas and language in your writing.

*ADA: **Class Accessibility**: Please let me know as soon as possible if you need an accommodation in order to work successfully in this class. This classroom strives for full accessibility, and it is not necessary for you to have an official accommodation letter from Disability Services in order to request changes to the classroom that will better serve your needs as a student, although you are encouraged to explore the possible supports they can offer if you are a student with a disability. Both able bodied students and students with disabilities are encouraged to suggest any improvements to the learning environment. We're all in this together!

*Everyone in our class, including me, must remain **civil and courteous** at all times. We will often have opportunity to share our opinions and beliefs, but no racist, sexist, heterosexist, or any other negative communication harmful to an individual or group will be tolerated. Whether something

Materials

*Flashdrive to save and organize your work. (Remember that you'll be collecting everything for your final portfolio. I'll ask you to bring these on days when we meet in the lab.)

*Notebook to take notes and do in-class writing in. (Bring to class every day.)

The Grading Contract

The grading contract allows us to focus less on a quantitative judgment of your writing, and more on qualitative feedback. It might seem strange at first to not receive a grade on your essay, but remember that one of the goals of this course is to have a complex discussion about your writing and that we'll accomplish that goal through meta-commentary about how each of your projects succeeds and what you can work on in the future. I'll spend a lot of time thinking about and commenting on your work, and I expect you engage equally with my comments and to be constantly reflecting on your growth as a writer. I'll use Microsoft Word's comment feature to provide feedback and will also write a short letter at the end of your essay discussing what could be improved. I'll use a blue highlight for sentences/passages that are really well-written and a yellow highlight for sentences/passages that need some work. Furthermore, because this is a course focused on professional writing, I'll highlight what I determine to be grammatical errors in yellow. If errors are numerous/distracting, I may ask you to rewrite the essay for credit. Furthermore, if your essay is not meeting the criteria of the assignment in terms of content, length, etc, I may ask you to rewrite the essay. For the first 3 essays, you will also be responsible for a review of a peer's project. I expect a high level of critical review here, one that earnestly attempts to help improve your partner's writing. If you fail to offer substantial advice, you won't receive credit for these (major) obligations.

Attendance & Participation

Absences in this course will result in a minor violation. 3 minor violations = reduction of final course grade by a full letter. I will consider, but not guarantee, excusing absences with written documentation, but they must be legitimate, e.g. severe illness. Participation is required in this course as well. We'll do a lot of small group work and frequent class discussions. Please come to class prepared to discuss the reading for that day. Bring your textbook and any notes that will benefit our discussion. Do the reading and be prepared to contribute, but not dominate, the discussion.

Learning Outcomes for English 3840j

-understand rhetorical situations as they emerge in professional discourses

-practice writing professional genres, i.e. resume, application letter, linkedin profile, professional portfolio

-gain an understanding of texts as socially, materially, politically, and economically situated

-practice recognizing and analyzing genre's influence on discourse and genres material and social effects on professional communities

-practice studying discourse of a particular profession through ethnographic research

-learn to recognize effective design principles for both print and digital documents

-understand and practice the role of collaboration in the creation of professional documents

-understand the ethical obligations involved in professional writing and recognize that texts are never objective or ideologically neutral

Learning Outcomes for all English J Courses

Read:

-read a variety of texts and genres, such as articles from academic journals and popular magazines, visual texts or film, creative writing (e.g. poetry, memoir, literary journalism) and student texts);
-differentiate between primary and secondary sources;
-analyze and/or evaluate texts according to the audience, purposes, and writing situations;
-understand and use a variety of concepts or theories to analyze different texts (i.e. use use rhetorical theories of composing or classical rhetorical appeals, feminist theory, use of literary elements such as, metaphor or symbolism; when appropriate, use concepts from film studies, and visual analysis, etc.
-understand and use rhetorical concepts (ethos, logos, pathos, kairos) to analyze texts;
-read own texts reflectively to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas needing improvement;
-respond to peers' texts constructively at both global and local levels.

Research:

-search a variety of academic databases using appropriate and effective strategies;
-evaluate the quality and validity of sources using clear criteria (e.g. online sources, journal articles, books, etc.);
-understand what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it;
-document sources correctly using an assigned documentation style or a documentation style from the students' field (i.e. MLA, APA, Chicago);
-demonstrate ability to develop a good question for research (i.e. open-ended, current or relevant, focused, etc.).

Write:

-write for specific purposes, audiences and situations;
-show ability to quote, paraphrase, summarize, analyze, synthesize, and critique;
-compose original arguments using rhetorical strategies, such as appeals to ethos, logos, pathos;
-show ability to utilize and/or analyze visual texts along with alphabetic texts; (visual text
-analysis is not required but highly recommended).
-practice writing in a variety of genres (e.g.. researched arguments, thesis-driven essays, literary
-analyses, memoir, memos, reports, proposals, etc.);
-approach writing as a recursive process;
-use various activities to generate ideas for writing, including class discussion, group work, debates, focused learning logs, freewriting, etc.
-use informal writing as a tool for developing critical thinking (e.g. enacting Elbow's believing
-and doubting game, focused journal assignments, dialogue journals, double-sided research logs, etc.);
-revise at both global and local levels;
-use correct documentation, grammar, spelling, and punctuation;
-compose a minimum of 20 pages of formal, graded writing, not including revised writing.
- allow students to revise some of their work based on feedback from their peers, tutors, or their instructors