

# Writing Conventions across Communities

Fall 2015  
TTH: 3:30-4:50  
Elson Hall 241  
Dr. Matthew Vetter  
Office Hrs: MW 11-1:30  
TTH 9:30-12; 1-3:30

## English d150 | Basic Writing Skills

### Overview

Welcome to English d150! This course is designed to help you gain an understanding of how writing “rules” change across different situations and communities. Throughout the term, you will get the opportunity to study writing in at least two communities, one representative of academic writing, and one others community you choose yourself (which could be recreational, professional, social, etc.). By studying how the fundamental functions of writing (including mechanics, form, and conventions for borrowing) appear among these communities, you’ll also develop a knowledge of their conventions and the capability to be more effective in different writing situations.

### Materials

- \*flash drive (recommended)
- \*journal/notebook (required)
- \*computer & Internet access

### Major Projects

#### 1 Writing Your Life

A personal essay reflecting on the role of writing in your life. How might writing help you accomplish specific goals or ambitions? This project will ask you to reflect on at least one community or profession you want to join and to think about how writing might be a tool to help you become a member of that community.

#### 2 Conventions Across Communities

For this project, you’ll write a short essay comparing two communities (one academic, one of your choosing) and analyzing how conventions, genres, and forms of writing differ between them.

#### 3 Guide for College Writing – Group Project

In the third project, you will create a “how to” guide for college (academic) writing directed to a peer- someone new to college writing or coming back to it after a long time.

#### 4 Portfolio and Reflection

As a culmination of the course, you will write a reflective essay that looks back on course readings, projects, and discussions and makes realization about what you’ve learned in the course. You will also put together a Box portfolio of all your major work.

### Course Texts & Resources

Course Texts: *Writing Spaces* (Parlour Press); Other Selected Essays Available via Blackboard

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

## Assignments

Every student is expected to purchase and keep a journal in which to complete informal writing assignments (IWAs). Typically, whenever we have a reading, you'll also be expected to complete some kind of reading response. These assignments will vary depending on the readings and upcoming course projects. IWAs may also include proposals or other process-oriented pieces that will help you complete major projects. You should bring your journals to class every day. On days where you have written a reading response, I will check to make sure you have completed the assignment and I may ask you to share something you wrote to inform our discussion. You should also use your journal to take notes and record class activities. I'll collect your journals at three points in the semester to assess and give minimal feedback. It is your responsibility to keep up with IWAs. Late or missing IWAs will result in a minor violation.

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. The contract is meant 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 its terms and in return, you promise to fulfill your side of that contract by doing your best to learn what we are trying to learn. Students who violate the contract (1 major violation or 4 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 about learning how to best take advantage of writing in school, work, and life.

## Assessing Your Writing

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. 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 some of the 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.

## 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 Blackboard often for announcements and readings.

Work on major projects 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 for peer review. Journals are semi-private. I will never ask you to share with classmates if you are not comfortable doing so. Journals will be assessed and read by the instructor, however.

Plagiarism: Cheating—whether by claiming another's ideas or work as your own (fraud) or making up or falsifying information (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.

## Attendance & Participation

Absences in this course will result in a minor violation. 4 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

To introduce students to the conventions and foundational skills of academic writing, this course will emphasize:

- learning to recognize and practice academic conventions for argumentative, comparative, and reflective writing
- the practice of writing processes and skills related to composing, revising, and editing
- the variability of conventions and values of writing based on community and context
- foundational rhetorical knowledge of audience, genre, purpose, author, etc.
- practical skills of reviewing, analyzing, synthesizing, contrasting,
- understanding the academic treatment of sources and practicing summary, paraphrase, and quoting



## Schedule, English d150 TTH

Week/day	Class Focus	Reading (read before class)	Assignments (due that day)
1 8/25	Intro to Course; Syllabus and Grading Contract Review; Icebreaker; Introduction Letters		
8/27	How to Write a Good IWA; Reading Strategies	Syllabus; Grading Contract; Mike Bunn: "How to Read Like a Writer"	IWA on Bunn; Signed Contract
2 9/1	Writing as Life-Changing Force; Assign Project 1	Anya Kamenetz: "The Writing Assignment that Changes Lives"	IWA on Kamenetz
9/3	Literacy and Culture, Access, Sponsorship; Literacy as Life-Changing	Sherman Alexie: "The Joy of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me";	IWA on Alexie
3 9/8	Return Introductory Letters; Short Lesson on Grammar; Reflection on Writing and Your Goals (in-class)		
9/10	Writer's Block; Audience Awareness, Description Box Tutorial and Video	Shelley Reid: "Ten Ways to Think About Writing"	IWA on Reid
4 9/15	Workshop Introductions; Lesson on Style: Sentence Structures	Writing Commons Reading: Style: Voice	Introductions due for Workshop
9/17	Lab Day. Writing Process; In-class Writing;	Anne LaMott: "Shitty First Drafts"	IWA on LaMott
5 9/22	Project 1 Peer Review: Box Review		Project 1 Rough Draft due for Workshop
9/24	Academic Writing vs. Personal Writing; Introduce Project 2	Gitanjali Dasbender: "Critical Thinking in College Writing: From the Personal to the Academic"	Project 1 Final due
6 9/29	Argument as Conversation; Academic Writing	Lennie Irvin: "What is Academic Writing?"	IWA on Irvin
10/1	Exploring Other Communities; Practice Comparison and Analysis		Bring in a reading or artifact from another community

7 10/6	Documentation in academic writing	Janice Walker: "Everything Changes: or Why MLA Isn't (Always) Right"	IWA on Walker
10/8	Open skills/grammar day	tbd	tbd
8 10/13	Peer Review		Rough Draft of Project 2 due
10/15	Midsemester Conferences	Midsemester Conferences	Midsemester Conferences
9 10/20	Midesemester Conferences	Midsemester Conferences	Midsemester Conferences
10/22	Academic Writing; Argument	Stuart Greene: "Argument as Conversation"	IWA on Greene
10 10/27	Academic Argument Example	TBD	IWA on
10/29	Academic Argument Example	TBD	IWA on
11 11/3	Document Design: Headings, Lists, White Space	Michael Klein and Kristi Shackelford: "Beyond Black on White: Document Design and Formatting in the Writing Classroom"	IWA on Klein and Shackelford
11/5	Lab Day - Drafting Guides		Bring draft "so far"
12 11/10	Project 3 Peer Review		Rough Draft of Project 3 due
11/12	Revision	Nancy Sommers: "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers"	IWA on Sommers
13 11/17	End of Semester Conferences	End of Semester Conferences	End of Semester Conferences
11/19	End of Semester Conferences	End of Semester Conferences	End of Semester Conferences
14 11/24	End of Semester Conferences	End of Semester Conferences	End of Semester Conferences
11/26	HOLIDAY	HOLIDAY	HOLIDAY
15 12/1	Assign Project 4; Course Readings Review: Quoting/ Using Sources in Reflection	Kyle Stedman: "Annoying Ways People Use Sources"	Project 3 due
12/2	Lab Day - Drafting Reflection		Bring draft "so far"
Final	Portfolio and Reflection due by Finals date		Portfolio and Reflection due by Finals date

