

First Year Composition Course Rationale

Welcome to your first-year composition course! This course introduces you to college-level composition skills and strategies, with the hope that you will feel inspired to become a lifelong independent writer and researcher. Writing is a skill that is directly tied to your success at this university, but perhaps even more importantly, learning to write well will enable you to become a confident, effective communicator in many other contexts—both in other courses you may take at this school and beyond. To help you build confidence AND your skill set, you will notice that writing instruction might look a little different in this course compared to other classes you have taken. This is a student-centered course that focuses on finding ways to make writing relevant to YOUR world. Not only will the class provide opportunities to practice developing writing and research topics, expressing ideas effectively, and engaging with 21st-century digital composing, but your course work will also teach you about rhetorical concepts, including the relationship between audience, genre, and language use. In short, we want you to be successful in *using writing to meet your goals*. Writing should have a purpose and a clear objective. We will help you fine-tune these elements in each of your writing assignments so that you can use these skills in other courses and contexts beyond this course.

But you should also note that in order to develop the skill to “get what you want by writing well”, you have to be comfortable wrestling with language—brainstorming ideas and collaborating with others, outlining plans and considering new ways to reach your audience, letting your pen wander as you freewrite and discover new ways to express yourself. That is to say, in this course, you will be asked to tap into your creativity to make the words do what you want. Remember: You are in charge of your own self-expression—and finding ways to creatively construct words looks different for each person. We use creative writing exercises in various forms in this class to help you develop comfort and fluency in wordsmithing—so that you can communicate in the way that you want, when you want. You might be thinking, “But I don’t have a knack for creative writing!” That’s o.k. I don’t expect anyone in this class to write the next great American novel—I only ask that you be kind to yourself and just try the activities to practice your ability to construct meaning. Maybe you will use your journal reflections from this class to develop the next great American novel (if so, GREAT! Don’t forget to send me a signed copy!)...but you may also just want to keep these practice writings to yourself. Either way is o.k., but always consider that the story you tell (publicly or not) is an incredibly important writing artifact. Truly. When YOU use words to be authentic, present, and relevant, you find a way to creatively express who YOU are and make the kinds of important connections that really matter in YOUR life.

Hopefully, the focus of this course is obvious: YOU, of course! So our course assignments will focus on ways to help you develop familiarity, strategies, and specific skills for writing that you can employ again and again, whenever you are faced with a writing task or assignment. To frame this strategy, each of your two major course

assignments will be organized according to a process model for writing in which you will invent, research, draft, give and receive feedback, and reflect. This model provides you with quality cognitive time to work on topic and draft invention; discuss ideas and strategies with your instructor, writing mentor, and peers; practice providing quality feedback to peers; and revising your own writing. The following graphic gives you a visual for this process:



Overview of Class Assignments

This class is built on four main assignments:

- (1) **Choose Your Audience Letter:** Given a critical incident (I will provide this in the detailed assignment instructions), I will ask you to write two versions of a letter: one version in a more formal context and the other in a more informal context. You will have to determine how to change your language and style to best appeal to these different audiences. Most students submit a one-page letter for each version.

The purpose of this project is to help you consider rhetorical concepts, including the relationship between audience, genre, and language use.

- (2) **Community Advocacy Project:** You are a member of multiple communities and/or social groups, whether that's a gaming community, your workplace, your town, your sorority/fraternity, etc. Consider one way you think this community could improve. You will create a multimodal artifact that combines research on the issue (primary and secondary sources), an argumentative essay, and a PSA or advocacy ad to make your point. Most students submit this assignment in about 4-5 pages, not including the visual artifact and reference page.

The purpose of this project is to practice developing writing and research topics, expressing your ideas effectively, and engaging with 21st-century digital composing.

- (3) **Self-reflection Essays:** After completing each of the above assignments, you will reflect on the writing process you used to complete the writing artifact. These self-reflections will be added to your website portfolio. Most students submit this assignment in about 2-3 pages, not including any visual elements.

The purpose of this project is to provide space and time in the course for you to reflect on what you are learning and how this impacts your choices as a writer. This is a pass/fail assignment—as long as you turn in an artifact that demonstrates some mode of self-reflection, you receive credit, and many students choose to include images and other media to document their writing journey.

- (4) **Website Portfolio:** You will create a personal portfolio site using the university's online platform. I will provide detailed instructions to help you set up the basic structure of this site. If you would like to develop it further, you are welcome to do so and to use it for other courses and professional purposes. At a minimum, both of your self-reflections will need to be posted on this website.

The purpose of this project is continuing practice with 21st-century digital composing. This portfolio should be a living document that you can continue to update and fine-tune as necessary for your future writing needs.

The 4 Cs: Class Commitment to Compassionate Communication

Communication and mutual respect are essential components for success in any learning scenario, and as such, I strive to create experiences centered on dialogue and developing critical empathy in my classroom. This requires a **mutual commitment from both teacher and students to foster a sense of belonging and inclusivity within our learning environment that values all races, ethnicities, sexualities, and backgrounds**. To effectively build this environment, it is essential that every participant (including me!) commit to active, respectful participation in class activities and assignments. I recognize that this commitment to sharing and communication rests on your ability to feel safe and appreciated in our classroom, and I assure you that I will do my utmost to protect your right to contribute while also protecting the rights of others in the class to feel safe and appreciated.

If at any time you feel our classroom does not uphold a sense of mutual respect and dedication to equitable learning, I encourage you to reach out to me directly so that we can work together to address the issue. I am also

available to direct you to school resources to help you meet your unique needs --physical, mental, emotional, and financial--so that you can successfully navigate your educational journey at this institution.

As we work together to co-construct a compassionate, respectful learning environment, it is important to maintain flexible yet realistic expectations for completing this course. I will work hard to ensure that our institution's mission and values are clearly communicated and consistently reflected within our class expectations. I will also do my utmost to stay on task and to be respectful of balancing assignment requirements, work time, and deadlines. While grades are an ever-present reality within academia, I realize that we each have unique academic strengths and challenges and juggle a multitude of responsibilities outside the classroom. If you need flexibility or accommodations to complete your work for this course, I strongly encourage you to reach out as soon as you realize you may have an issue, so that I can help you troubleshoot solutions. I cannot help if we are not communicating.

Finally, please consider all writing for my classes to be "public." Part of becoming an effective writer is learning to appreciate the ideas and criticisms of others. With that being said, please do not share any writing that involves illegal activity or potentially compromising information, as I am a mandatory reporter and am required to report such activity to authorities.

** All composed materials from projects, including invention assignments, drafts, discussions, and peer review feedback, should be considered when developing the content in your Portfolio. Please note that you will not be required to include any identifiable information in your portfolio that violates FERPA. **

For more information on scholarship and authors who have influenced my design of this course, please explore:

Adler-Kassner, L. (2017). 2017 CCCC Chair's Address: Because writing is never just writing. CCC, 69(2), 317-340.

Gallagher, K. (2011). *Write Like this: Teaching Real-world Writing Through Modeling & Mentor Texts*. Stenhouse Publishers.

Murray, D. M. (2005). *Write to Learn*. Thomson/Wadsworth.

New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1), 60-92.

Serafini, Frank, & Gee, Elisabeth. (2017). *Remixing Multiliteracies: Theory and Practice from New London to New Times*. Teachers College.