

Syllabus for English 131 Fall 2021

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Course Description

English 131, or Writing Experience, is an introductory course intended to reinforce the skills needed for college work. Its main emphasis is on analytical writing and argumentative essays that college students read and are often expected to write. That this course provides greater familiarity with college writing seems plain enough. Most students would like to enhance their own writing and work on mechanics, organization, and logic. The question remains, how can real progress be achieved in only a few months? In fact, it cannot be achieved--unless you are willing to fully immerse yourself in the work. There is nothing mystical about the process. People improve their reading and writing skills by practicing often.

The successful completion of this course will require a considerable amount of work, something on the order of 40 pages of writing. If that sounds a bit daunting, bear with me. Spread over three months, the work is very manageable, far below the six hours per week (two recommended for every one spent in class) one would expect for homework in a three-credit class.

How will we spend our class meetings for the next 12 weeks? In the early going, we'll read various articles and book excerpts. These will provide the framework for our class discussions and writings and help illustrate effective rhetorical models. You may not choose to emulate the techniques of the sampled writers, but still find their writing compelling as examples of what is possible and permissible in academic writing.

As I pointed out earlier, the class is intended to reinforce argumentative writing skills. What is argumentative? Well, virtually all writing contains some level of argument, whether explicit or not. For our purposes, however, I'd like to begin with the stricter interpretation: essays. All of your writing should have a point and be applicable in a college setting. Simple book reports or summaries aren't going to cut it here. Every paper will need a thesis: a defensible, original, worth-your-while thesis. Outside sources will need to be attributed. The emphasis here will be on talking, reading, and thinking—not just writing.

I'll do my best to foster a sense of community. I'll try to be accessible and supportive, but the effort here must be mutual for you to be successful in the class. We do a lot of role-playing here in college, just as in every other situation in life. My role is sort of reflective of my students. Although I will be a facilitator and moderator, don't always expect me to do everything. The

class is not a lecture, but a discussion. I expect you also to get involved.

Workload

You will each submit five or six **two-page informal writings** that respond to selected readings or class discussions. These should be double-spaced with one-inch margins. (I call these "informals" because they do not receive letter grades (only my comments). You need to submit all of them--on deadline--to receive credit, and they should still be "formal" in terms of diction, academic notation, and general seriousness. These combined, along with **class participation** (split ten and 20 percent, respectively), account for 30 percent of your semester grade.

The three **formal writings** or "majors" will receive letter grades and together will constitute 40 percent of your semester grade. Like the dailies, the formal papers will include complete academic notation where appropriate. After I have given you feedback, you will rewrite them and, while I cannot promise that the grade will improve (although it frequently does), it should serve as a valuable exercise. This is an important part of the writing process, and I highly recommend that you attempt revising all the majors. (Revisions on the majors will have no due dates. They can be turned in at any time before the end of the semester, but I would advise you to begin revising earlier.)

There is a **portfolio** requirement for this and all other Jackson College writing courses. (Please check out the formal portfolio criteria that I am including.) It is important to save and gather together all of your writings for the semester, since it not only documents your work and provides the instructor a chance to see your work as a whole. An incomplete portfolio will result in a failing grade.

There will be a **midterm** and a **final exam**, both worth ten and ten percent. In addition, you will be required to keep an informal academic **journal** during the time you take the course. The journal can be typed or hand-written and should comment on your academic work, your life, or the world-at-large--whatever you are interested in, as long as it represents your best prose. This will provide an additional resource during the composing process. At the end of the semester it should comprise at least 30 pages of prose and will be worth ten percent.

Another important part of the class will be the **colloquium**. Each student will choose specific dates to present materials on the forum--and essentially take an active role in teaching an aspect of the texts or on a relevant topic of your own choice. While your performance here cannot hurt your participation grade, an excellent performance will certainly help. The colloquium is important because it fosters a sense of responsibility that a simple discussion cannot. We are better readers and writers when given the additional task of presenting material or leading discussion.

Finally, the **peer edit** and **workshop** are excellent ways of honing one's skills as writer and critic in a live class. In an online environment, I will ask that you comment on the work of others. (We will discuss the nuts and bolts of this later.) The essential element here is providing commentary,

and the essential learners here are the editors, not the writers. Like the colloquium, it is not graded, but can go a long way toward helping one's participation grade.

Academic journal	10%
Major writings (including rewrites)	40%
Informal writings and participation	30%
Midterm exam	10%
Final exam	10%
Total	100

Course Objectives

While it is often assumed that students entering college have already learned techniques needed for college work (that is, studying how to study, learning how to take tests, write essays, etc.), the fact is that many have not. Even very polished writers can perform poorly in a college writing class if they are inexperienced with these techniques. English 131 is a writing course that also prepares students for other college classroom experiences. We will frequently talk about the techniques and strategies that generally lead to success in this course and other college courses.

By the end of the semester, students should achieve the following outcomes:

- *Writing clearly, concisely, and intelligibly (Associate Degree Outcome #1)
- *Working in small groups (Associate Degree Outcome #9)
- *Analyzing the expectations of different audiences
- *Making explicit choices about form and content in writing
- *Engaging in multiple modes of inquiry, pursuing that inquiry through a research process, and incorporating significant research into written work
- *Locating and critically assessing sources online
- *Experiencing and practicing with recurring processes of invention, revision, reflection and editing that lead to successful models of these processes for their own work
- *Using conventions associated with standardized written English
- *Using citation systems (MLA or APA) in their work
- *Working collaboratively with other students in discussion, preparation for colloquia, and developing and revising formal pieces of writing.
- *Making decisions about editing their own work that account for the expectations of an audience, and the requirements of specific disciplines.
- *Reading more critically and using writing as an instrument of analysis.
- *Specifically determining an area of research and using multiple sources (primary and secondary textual sources, first-hand field work, interviews, etc.) to develop a coherent thesis.

- *Taking control of the form and content of writing, becoming more self-conscious about the process of writing, and talking about this process with classmates and the instructor.
- *Assuming responsibility for your work and utilizing general academic skills.

Student Responsibilities

- *As I've pointed out, *you will be responsible for submitting all assignments on deadline*. I will not be grading late papers. If you cannot attend a class, make sure your paper does.
- **Your attendance in the class is mandatory*. With three weeks' worth of absences, your semester grade will be reduced by one letter grade, and upon reaching four weeks' worth of absences, the equivalent of a month of class, you will receive a failing mark. (See the last page on attendance and participation.)
- *Students are required to submit only their *original* prose written during *this* semester. No help from anyone else. No resurrected pieces from high school. Otherwise, what's the point?
- *Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in the class. Plagiarism or cheating will result in either a failing grade or outright expulsion from the program. We'll discuss this.
- **Every piece of writing is to be saved* for my inspection at the end of the term. (This is what I call the portfolio.) By the end of the term, it will comprise about 60 pages. Save everything. *Without a portfolio, you will not receive a passing grade*.
- *Students must complete all of the assigned work. Even papers not receiving grades (weeklies, late papers, etc.) must be included to constitute a full portfolio.
- *If any problems arise during the semester, please let me know.

Signature Page for ENG 131

I understand that in order to receive a passing mark in this class that I must turn in a portfolio containing the **original first drafts of the three formal papers (with instructor's comments on them)** along with **revised versions**, and also the original drafts of at least four informal papers and the midterm exam. _____

I understand that there is an **attendance policy for this course that permits for two absences**—the equivalent of two weeks' worth of class--without penalty, but that reduces a student's semester grade by one letter grade for a third absence and fails a student for four absences, without exception. _____

I understand what **plagiarism** is and that there is a policy of academic honesty at Jackson College that does not permit plagiarism or cheating of any kind. A breach of this policy can result in a failing mark on a single paper, for the class as a whole, or even expulsion from the college. _____

This syllabus contains information on the policies of the course. I have read it, understand it, and have been duly informed of those actions which directly affect my grade. I understand that without a complete portfolio, without adequate attendance, or by committing a breach in the college policy on academic honesty, I will receive a failing mark. _____

Printed Name _____ Date _____

Signature _____