Course Objectives

The purpose of this course is to help you to refine skills in communications and critical thinking that will make you an excellent writer and incisive reader. No matter what you choose to study at Penn State and beyond, communication skills will be integral to your success in this classroom and on the job. By reading extensively this term, you will learn to identify and analyze how others attempt to persuade audiences using effective (and sometimes not-so-effective) rhetorical strategies. Writing is the heart of this course, but reading plays a significant role in writing.

Specifically in this course, our readings will focus on the role of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law in American public education.

On January 8, 2002, President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind initiative into law. The law would set higher standards for America’s schoolchildren and schools would thus become accountable for a set of specific results. NCLB’s goals are to provide a solid, rigorous education for every American child, regardless of his/her race, sex, religion, or income level. For example, NCLB requires that only “highly qualified” teachers be in US classrooms. Those highly qualified teachers, in turn, must also ensure that every American child be proficient in reading and mathematics skills for their grade level. Other subject areas, like science, will soon be following along into NCLB’s testing program.

According to Bush, the initiative was created to put an end to “the soft bigotry of low expectations.”

NCLB has since caused quite a commotion, as states and localities try to meet federal expectations set forth by the act. Numerous debates have ensued over the validity of the act; some suggest that NCLB has actually widened the achievement gap, while others champion the good that the act has precipitated.
NCLB was up for renewal in 2007, but faced many obstacles. The Administration had submitted a proposal for strengthening the act, but many advocacy groups, concerned parents, citizens, and even government officials could not reach an agreement about the best way to proceed with NCLB's provisions. It is expected that a decision be made sometime in this current year.

As recent high school graduates, you are in a decidedly exceptional place to let your voices be heard. You've already experienced NCLB in real life. You are the ones who have taken the tests, run the drills during classtimes. You are the ones for whom NCLB is to be making a difference. Moreover, this is an important presidential election year. As the pool of candidates lessens, you can surely bet that education will be a hot topic of debate between each potential leader of the State.

The focus of the readings and writing assignments for this course will address one main concern: does NCLB work?

To answer that question, we'll look at various resources on the issue. Our papers will try to answer some of the questions that NCLB raises. First, we'll write a narrative essay on our classroom experiences in public or private school. Then, we'll look more closely as the act, eventually evaluating its strengths and weaknesses. Third, we'll look at the results of NCLB: what are its effects upon schoolchildren, teachers, maybe even parents? Finally, we'll end the course in a group project proposal, suggesting some potential changes to the initiative to strengthen or improve the law.

**Course Description**

Development, skills, and expertise in reading and writing can never be separated, therefore, English 15 is an intensive, rhetorically based course in reading and writing. In this course, we will consider our reaction to and interpretation of verbal and visual texts as well as our production of such texts always in terms of traditional rhetorical principles.

Even if the term rhetoric isn't familiar to you, the practice of rhetoric is. In fact, you bring a good deal of rhetorical skill to this class: you already know how to gauge the way you perceive and produce language according to the speaker, the intended audience, and purpose. You may not always gauge perfectly, your perception may not always be accurate, and your production may not always be successful—but you often think to interpret and choose language in ways that are appropriate to the rhetorical situation. You already know how to use language to make knowledge. In this course, you will consistently be challenged to write to real audiences, audiences other than just your teacher.
If rhetoric is defined as "purposeful language that leads to knowledge making," you can easily begin to see how we all need to consider our reading and writing experiences in terms of the interrelationships within any rhetorical situation: 1. the writer, 2. the intended audience, 3. the appropriateness of the text itself, and 4. the surrounding context. The goal of English 15, then, is to help you build on what you already know how to do as you become a stronger, more confident, and more flexible reader and writer.

You will become more attuned to your goals as a writer in terms of any exigence for writing about a particular topic in a particular way, the on-going conversation surrounding the topic, the appropriate delivery of your information, the various appeals at your disposal, and the needs and expectations of your audience.

In other words, you’ll write with skill, conviction, and grace—if not immediately, then soon.

**Requirements**

You will be expected to

1. Attend all class meetings, prepared
2. Participate in class discussions
3. Participate in in-class writing exercises
4. Participate in draft workshops and group work. Draft workshops are extremely important—please note that final papers will not be accepted without peer reviews. **Failure to comply with this will result in failure of the assignment.**

5. Propose, draft, and write and possibly revise six documents of various lengths and purposes (Please note: in order for final assignments to be submitted, A.I.I. work must be submitted with final copy. In other words, you must submit all drafts, peer reviews, and other work leading up to the final copy **WITH** the final copy itself. Failure to comply with this will result in an “F” for the assignment—NO EXCEPTIONS!!)
6. Submit all work ON TIME—on the hour/day it is due. Late papers will NOT be accepted. Additionally, I will NOT accept papers as email attachments.

7. Publish all formal papers to a real audience. When submitting each formal assignment, you will be expected to include TWO final copies—one for me to grade and one for me to submit to your chosen audience. You will also need to provide me with a SASE for each paper so that I may mail your paper to the appropriate audience.

Please also note: Passing the course requires COMPLETION of ALL assignments, long and short, in and out of class.

**Attendance**

As noted above, regular attendance is required. Your grade may be lowered for poor attendance, down to and including “F.” This is university policy. Specifically, you are permitted three absences. After that, I reserve the right to reduce your grade as I consider appropriate.

If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get the assignments, class notes, and course changes from a classmate; it is also your responsibility to keep track of and complete missing work. In-class work cannot be made up. Moreover, I will NOT respond to emails concerning “what we did in class today.”

If you miss class on a draft workshop day, you must make arrangements to have a peer tutor from the Writing Center in Boucke review your draft. I will not accept a final paper without a completed review. Please ask the peer tutor to send documentation of your meeting to your instructor. Failure to comply with this will result in an “F” for your final assignment. For hours and locations for the Writing Center, please visit:

http://www.psu.edu/dept/cew/writingcenter/UWC/hours.htm

If you miss class on the day an assignment is due, make arrangements to send it along with a classmate. I will not accept attachments to email without prior approval.
Assignments and Grading

1. **Reading Journal**—a collection of short papers, no more than 10 over the course of the semester; typically in response to some assigned reading or to a particular question asked in class; dates and topics announced in class; journals will be randomly collected twice during the semester — 15%

2. **Narrative** (3-4 pages) — 10%

3. **Evaluation** (3-5 pages) — 15%

4. **Causal Analysis** (4-5 pages) — 20%

5. **Proposal (group project)** (6-8 pages) — 20%

6. **Draft Workshop Participation/Attendance** — 10%

7. **Occasion Papers** (two, one page papers) — 10%

You will receive specific instructions for each of the formal assignments listed above (items 2 thru 5) as they are assigned. **Occasion papers** are explained as follows:

You are required to write and present to the class TWO occasion papers (OP) over the course of the semester. These papers are simple to compose. You choose when you would like to write and read your paper to the class. Basically, an occasion paper is just that—you write a paper about an occasion you’ve experienced, something that happened recently or in the past, something that you would now like to reflect upon. These papers can be about something as simple as to what you had for breakfast to something more compelling such as the state of the nation as you perceive it today.

When writing your OP, keep in mind the basic rhetorical principles: to whom am I writing (audience); what point am I trying to make (purpose), and how will I get that point across (delivery)?

These papers should be relatively short, no more than one single-spaced page, and will be read to your classmates at the beginning of class. After you read your paper, your classmates are free to comment on your work or the content of your work.

Please do not feel threatened by OPs, as the idea is merely to get you writing and to get you understanding how to reach out to an audience of peers. These papers also serve as a way of getting to know your classmates and they’ve proven to be quite a mainstay of this particular section of this course.

PLEASE DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE LAST DAYS OF CLASS TO WRITE AND READ OCCASION PAPERS. WE WILL NOT ALWAYS HAVE TIME AT THE BEGINNING OF EVERY CLASS PERIOD TO READ PAPERS, SO TAKE CARE OF THIS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
Although there is no formal "grading" of these papers, your completion of them does go into the tallying of your final grade. In other words, Sally reads her occasion paper in class on January 12. I mark a check next to her name. A week later, she reads another, thus obtaining another check in the gradebook. For the term, Sally has earned an "A" for occasion papers. Dorothy, on the other hand, reads one occasion paper on March 15 and fails to read any others throughout the term. Dorothy would earn a "C" in this component of the course. And then Thomas. Thomas fails to read or write any occasion papers throughout the semester. Thomas would thus earn an "F" in this component of the course.

**Calculation of Grades.** Calculation of grades will coincide with the English department’s grading standards (please see website—www.engl.la.psu.edu). More specifically, a rubric will be used to help students understand the progress of their writing. Each formal paper will be graded A, A-, etc, with each letter grade coinciding with Penn State’s numerical point value (example: A=4.0, A- = 3.67, etc.).

**Plagiarism**

The department policy on plagiarism is available online and will also be discussed in further detail in an upcoming class session. If you have any questions about plagiarism and its consequences, please ask. Plagiarism demonstrates contempt for ethical standards, your instructor, and your peers. If you are caught plagiarizing, you risk failing the course. You may also be referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs which may recommend academic probation, suspension, or expulsion for academic dishonesty.

**Required Texts and Other Course Materials**


2. Access to LIAS/Course Reserves—several required readings will be made available via Penn State’s Library reserve system.

3. *Penn Statements*—a magazine of Penn State student writing for ENGL 015. Available at the Campus Bookstore.

4. A folder with 3 prongs for your reading journal

5. Several business-sized envelopes
One Final Thought...
Developing one’s critical thinking skills is essential to becoming an informed citizen of this university, of this nation. That development can only occur through candid and frank discussion of issues that are relevant to the class. We can’t really know anything or change anything unless we are willing to talk about issues. So I expect that at times, our discussions in this class might get heated. I’m okay with that. But please, do respect one another’s ideas. This classroom is not a place for hatred or intolerance.

On a related note—the notion of respect...some things you can do to maintain a reasonable level of respect—

Please come to class on time, prepared...

Pay attention...

Turn off your cell phone—I’ll make it a point to embarrass you in front of your classmates if your phone rings while class is in session...

Don’t talk while others are talking...

Clean up after yourself—you don’t leave newspapers and food wrappers on the floor or at your desk...

In sum, revert to everything you were taught in kindergarten regarding appropriate classroom conduct. 😊

Please note: Penn State encourages qualified persons with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell your instructor as soon as possible.