English 004—Basic Writing
What's Happening... Subject to change

Summer 2005
M thru F 9:35-10:50
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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about ENGL 004

What do I need to buy for this course?
Please purchase the textbook, A Community of Writers: A workshop course in writing by Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff. This book is available at the on-campus bookstore as well as the Student Bookstore downtown. Additionally, please have a 1-2” thick three-ring binder and bring it to class everyday. Load it up with some loose-leaf notebook paper—we’ll be writing in the binders everyday. A three-ring hole punch would also be useful, as we’ll be collecting ALL of our writing, formal and informal assignments, in these binders.

Why am I taking this course?
ENGL 004 is a suggested course for students who merely lack writing experience. In this course, we’ll do a lot of writing to give you some practice at it. Think of yourself as a writing apprentice—taking this course to learn the tricks of the writing trade so that you can move on in your college career with some handy tools in your toolbox.

What are we gonna do?
Write. And write some more. In between that, we’re gonna read. A lot. Be prepared to be busy for the next six weeks. We’ll do a lot of in-class writing, draft workshopping, four formal assignments, lots of reading—both in and out of class, and lots of talking.

But I hate writing. Will I hate this course?
Maybe. But that’s not my objective. I approach my classes in a laid-back fashion and I try to discuss topics that are relevant to you, the student. My goal is to not make you love writing, nor is it my goal to make you the most eloquent writer on the University Park campus (after all, I’m only a teacher, not a magician), but I do want to give you the opportunity to figure out how to best express your thoughts and ideas—in writing and sometimes even the spoken word.

So if it isn’t your objective to make me love writing, what IS your objective?
I thought you’d never ask. © Actually, I have quite a few objectives. Here’s what I want to have happen in the short six weeks that we’re together:
1. To get as much practice with writing as possible
2. To understand how sources can make and break your writing
3. To understand how audience and purpose relates to writing
4. To create a portfolio of writing
5. To value revision and response as a helpful tool for academic writing
6. To understand how to participate effectively in a draft workshop
7. To begin thinking about voice and finding your own writing voice
8. TO GAIN CONFIDENCE AS A WRITER AND A READER!!
How many assignments are there?

Five. If you do the math, that's almost one assignment due every week. Ouch. Like I said, we're going to be very busy this semester.

Assignment One: The Warm-Up Essay
Assignment Two: Description
Assignment Three: Focusing and Supporting a Thesis
Assignment Four: Narrative
Assignment Five: Argument

These, however, are just the formal assignments, which will be worth 50% of your grade. The other 50% comes from your participation in draft workshops and class (get over your shyness—you'll have to do some talking in this class), in-class writing, responses to readings, and your evaluation of your own portfolio (the binder that you collect all your writing).

Does attendance "count"?

The university's policy states that you can fail a course for failure to attend a certain number of classes. In a regular semester, that's typically three classes. However, because of the intensity of the summer session, that number is reduced to two. In other words, if you miss more than two classes, you risk failing the course. This is a high-stakes course. It hurts you and your classmates if you miss class on a regular basis. I do not take attendance on a regular basis; after all, you are in college now—you're supposed to be adults; but if I notice that students are slacking, I will take it everyday and I will initiate the university policy. Consider this your first and last warning.

If you do miss class (and there are a variety of reasonable excuses for doing so), it is your responsibility to figure out what you missed. And please—do NOT email me with your wonderings. I will not respond to any email which asks "What did I miss today?" I teach it once and only once. If you miss it, find out what was taught from a classmate.

Can I get away with ANYTHING in this course???

Not really. And I get really angry with folks who want to cheat their way through college. I'm talking about plagiarism here, cats and kittens. Don't do it. You will immediately fail the course. No joke. Please read your Penn State handbooks regarding plagiarism. It is a big deal. And you can get in lots of trouble. Please don't think you can get away with it. In our digital world, it is very tempting to use the work of someone else and pass it off as our own, however teachers also have access to this technology—we now have access to media that finds plagiarized student work. Don't do it. It's not worth it. Trust me.

Are you one of those anal teachers that I'll end up hating by the end of the semester?

Well, I suppose it's possible that you could end up hating me, but that's neither here nor there. But I do have some requirements that make my life and yours a bit easier. Here they are:

1. All papers must be completed and handed in on time. I will not accept late papers. If your paper is not turned in on the day/time it is due, you will fail that assignment. No excuses.
2. Complete and typed rough drafts (one tiny paragraph does not count as a complete draft) must be presented on draft workshop days. Doing so reflects on your participation in the course.
3. Complete all homework and readings and hand in all materials on time.
4. Participate in class discussion. Talk. Please. Do not be shy. I want to hear your voice!
5. Hand in your final portfolio at the end of the semester with ALL of your writing. Save all your work!
6. Formal paper assignment format as follows: 1.25" margins. Arial or Times New Roman font—10 or 12 point. Double spaced. Number pages. Stapled. Typed. Write your name, the assignment, my name, and the date in the upper right hand corner. No spaces between paragraphs—use only your tab marker to begin a new paragraph.

Can I come talk to you about my progress in the course?
Absolutely. I’ll let you know what my office hours are as soon as I figure that out. We can meet then, or we can meet at a better time if my hours don’t suit your schedule. Additionally, at mid-term and finals week, I would like to speak to each of you individually to discuss your writing.

Is there anyone else I can talk to on this campus about writing?
Yep. The Undergraduate Writing Center (219 Boucke). Trained peer tutors are at your service to consult with you regarding your writing. Early in the semester, a representative from the center will be in to speak to the class about opportunities at the center.

So what will life look like over the next couple of weeks?
Here’s a rough estimate of what you’ll need to read and write over the next few weeks. I may make changes, so make sure you stay up-to-date. At the beginning of class, I’ll put the next day’s assignment on the board, so you’ll always know exact due dates. The due dates listed below for the formal assignments are merely guidelines—I’ll always tell you well-ahead of time if those dates are “for real” or not.

Week One—Writing Process
We’ll be reading chapters 1, 2, and 6 this week. Also complete Mini-Workshop A in your textbook. Assignment One DUE—July 6.

Week Two—Knowing what to say and how to say it
Read chapters 4, 5, and 7 this week. Assignment two DUE—July 15

Week Three—Focusing and Supporting a Thesis
Mini-workshop D. Assignment three due—July 22

Week Four—Writing about life: The Narrative
Review chapters 4 and 5. Assignment four due—July 29

Week Five and Six—Argument
Read chapters 11, 12, and 16. Complete mini-workshop F. Assignment five due—August 10.
"Finals" – August 11 and 12. Plan on scheduling an appointment to meet with me to turn in your portfolio and discuss your progress in the course as well as your final grade.

Is there anything else I should know?
Relax. This is a college course, indeed, but please do not get all stressed out about it. Our main goal this semester is to get you more comfortable with writing. Try not to get worked up over grades, but concentrate on the process of learning. I know—that's easier said than done, but my intention is that you build on what you already know and don't know about writing. You are in control of your own destiny in this course. You have an "A" right now. It is up to you to keep it. All you have to do is try. Work your ass off—that's what I'm asking of you for this next six weeks. 😊