

## College Writing I

42.101, sec. 220

MWF 10-10:50

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UMass Lowell

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& by appointment

This course is focused on essay writing. Our goal is to learn how to write essays (rather than, say, analyze essays by professional writers or outline the history of the essay as genre, although we will do a little of both of those things). There are many kinds of essays – personal, biographical, academic, and editorial, to name only a few. There are just as many reasons for writing essays – to persuade, to reflect, to notify your audience of a problem, to solve a problem, to better define the terms of an argument, to outline the causes of an event, etc. These genres of essay and these various reasons for writing essays often overlap and are not completely distinct, but they are worth keeping in mind. In this class we will be focusing mainly on the academic essay, although this is a very large category that often intersects with, say, the personal and the editorial essay.

As we will see, the academic essay is almost always interested in solving problems and answering questions. Those questions can range from tangible ones like “Will the surge in Iraq enable or undermine democracy in the Middle East?” or “How much time do we have before the entire Antarctic ice shelf melts?” to conceptual ones like “Is the idea of democracy so abstract that it is easily bent to propagandistic ends?” or “How does Apocalypse Now participate in a colonial project even as it attempts to critique just such a project?” Often academic essays are simultaneously concerned with both kinds of questions. We begin in this course writing about tangible problems and move to writing about conceptual problems simply because I find that students are usually a little more at ease with tangible, pragmatic problems. One of the basic assumptions of the course is that if you master the form of this kind of academic, problem essay, you can write great essays in any discipline. In other words, the skills you learn in this course are portable to your biology class, your business management class, your history course, your psychology course, and beyond. I also hope these skills will help you in the world beyond the university, both in your future job and also as members of a participatory community. Indeed, our ultimate goal here extends far beyond the academic essay: it is to teach you how to think critically and express yourself powerfully. These are important resources in any democracy.

Let me list some of the key objectives of the course:

By the end of the course, students will be able to write academic essays that address tangible and conceptual problems. To achieve this ultimate course goal, students will be able to *define*, *identify* in professional academic essays, and *put into use* an array of concepts including

### Global Concepts (argument and general essay form)

- essay genre and audience
- tangible problems
- conceptual problems
- distinction between topic and argument
- manageable object of study
- conventional wisdom/context (implied and explicit)
- destabilizing main claim
- difference between reasons and evidence
- different kinds of evidence: statistical, first person, quotational, expert, etc
- motivation of argument
- warrants
- form of introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusions
- acknowledgement and response

### Local Concepts (sentence and paragraph form, as well as revision)

- character/action : subject/verb
- the grammar/information hierarchy
- information management: old info to new info

short to long  
emphasis at end  
key terms  
topic string test

Of course, this list of concepts for mastery isn't complete, but it does offer a helpful overview. In addition, the course will also review some critical grammar and require that students demonstrate basic library and citation skills.

Please don't fear if all of this is a little overwhelming. We begin slowly; in fact we begin with an essay form that I find that students are often quite familiar with – the personal essay. This genre of essay actually has a great deal to teach us about the academic essay. It is also worth mentioning that we treat essay writing in this class as a process. Essays do not simply spring forth from the human head; they are constructed through a multi-step process. I will help you learn these steps.

There are a few more things that you need to know:

#### **Required Texts:**

Joseph M. Williams. Style: Toward Clarity and Grace. Chicago: University of Chicago  
Grammatically Correct. Writer's Digest Books, 1997

The Fall 2007 Common Text:

Howard Mansfield. The Bones of the Earth. Shoemaker and Hoard, 2004. (this book will be provided by the University)

<b>Important Dates:</b>	Tues., September 11	Last day to add without permission
	Tues., September 18	Last day to add, drop, or change enrollment status
	Thurs., November 15	Last day to withdraw with W grade

#### **Course Rules and Requirements**

1. **Class participation** makes possible a dynamic, collaborative learning community -- the possibility that we as a community produce knowledge. For this reason, class participation is part of your final grade. In order to participate you must, of course, come to class well prepared. Don't just do the reading, but write down questions you have and begin to develop opinions about the reading. Always bring the assigned texts and materials with you to class: every class discussion will involve us in some close analysis of specific passages and images. I will often provide handouts with study questions, and you should come to class having considered those questions in depth. You should also come to each class with at least one marked passage or image and/or one well-considered question or observation to launch discussion. The less assertive need not fear: class participation is not measured by how much you talk; rather, it is the degree of your involvement with and attentiveness in the class, your ability to listen to and respond to your peers, your willingness to share your thoughts in a constructive way.
2. There are **seven (7) major assignments** in this course (as well as daily quizzes). Some of the major assignments are essays and some are tests. I will distribute a handout detailing requirements, due dates, and procedures. The assignments are due **AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS** and must be typed. Late assignments lose half a letter grade for each class period late. **You will submit two copies of work – one on TurnItIn.com and one in hardcopy.**
3. **Plagiarism or cheating** of any sort will result in failure of the course. For a discussion of plagiarism see the plagiarism handout.
4. This course has two **tests**. Tests may only be taken late only under extraordinary circumstances, and the student must provide a note from a doctor or a dean. In such situations, the request to take the test late must be made at least 24 hours in advance. Failure to follow these rules will result in a zero on the test.
5. **You are required to attend class**. Also, you must have prepared whatever material the assignment requires and you must bring the necessary books to class. No book, no record of class attendance. An absence will affect your participation grade. And prolonged absences will lead to failure of the course. If you miss class more than three times I will expect you to see me in my office to discuss your future in the course and possible withdrawal. If you miss five classes you will fail the course.

6. If you come to class **excessively or repeatedly late**, it will affect your grade. Also, please refrain from getting up and leaving the room during class unless it's an emergency. You are free to drink in class, but please **do not eat**.
7. Your **final grade** is comprised of your grades on the essays, your grades on the two tests, and your grade on daily quizzes and class participation. Each of these eight elements counts roughly the same toward your final grade.
8. In the event of a **class cancellation** because of snow or my absence, please stay current with the syllabus.
9. Please feel free to drop by my office hours to discuss the class or the reading/writing assignments. Of course, I will be happy to make appointments at other times if my office hours conflict with your schedule. **You can best reach me by email**. Please do not leave messages on my office phone; it may take me 48 hours to return your call because I do not come into the office everyday.
10. You are responsible for checking your **UNIVERSITY email account**.

## SYLLABUS

### Week (1) of 9/5

- W: Diagnostic
- F: Course Introduction  
Homework due: Handout on Audience and Genres

### Week (2) of 9/10

- M: Homework due: Bring to class examples of an introduction from three different genres: academic essay, editorial/opinion/policy essay, and personal/memoir essay.

#### PERSONAL ESSAY: PLACE

- W: Homework due: Example reading and questions: Mansfield, "The Flaneur of the Strip," 73-85  
In-class discussion: Mansfield's essay and first writing assignment
- F: Homework due: Example reading and questions: Mansfield, "The Walking Stick . . .," 11-18, and "The Bottom of the Lake," 87-94  
In-class: Mansfield's essays and brainstorming/drafting first essay

### Week (3) of 9/17

- M: Homework due: Example reading and questions: Mansfield, "The Grief Police," 51-69  
Homework due: First half of first draft due in class  
In-class discussion: Mansfield's essay and essay draft
- W: Homework due: Second half of draft due in class  
In-class discussion of drafts (and formatting)
- F: **Major Assignment due: *Personal Essay Due (approximately five pages)***  
In-class discussion: A little grammar: bring your grammar book

### Week (4) of 9/23

#### PARTS OF ARGUMENT and INTRODUCTIONS ESSAY TOPIC: Higher Ed

- M: Homework due: grammar assignment  
Homework due: Mark Edmundson, "The Uses of the Liberal Arts," Harper's, Sept. 1997

(available through the library web site)

In-class discussion: Parts of Argument – the fairy tale structure of argument

In-class discussion: What's NOT an argument

- W: Homework due: analysis of intro paragraphs for parts of argument  
Homework due: Read Earl Shorris, "As a Weapon in the Hands of the Restless Poor," Harper's (Sept. 1997) 50-60 (available from the library web site)  
In-class discussion: Parts of Argument, cont.: Claims, Reasons, and Evidence  
Who's your worst teacher ever?
- F: Homework due: analysis of intro paragraphs for parts of argument  
Homework due: Read "Grand Theft Education," Harper's, Sept. 2006 (available through the library)  
In-class discussion: Argument Introductions: Problems, Solutions, Stable Context, Destabilizing Element, and the So-What Question  
In-class discussion: Introduction of next major assignment: Three intro paragraphs  
In-class discussion: Planning your argument

#### Week (5) of 10/1

- M: Homework due: analysis of intro paragraphs for parts of argument  
Homework due: Read Derek Bok, "Are Colleges Failing," Boston Globe, Dec. 18 2005 (available on the web)  
In-class discussion: continued from Friday class
- W: Homework due: draft of two intro paragraphs  
In-class: discussion of drafts
- F: NO CLASS but you must attend the Kerouac conference; schedule to follow  
See [www.uml.edu/college/arts\\_sciences/kerouac\\_center/Jack\\_Kerouac\\_Conference\\_on\\_Beat\\_Literature.html](http://www.uml.edu/college/arts_sciences/kerouac_center/Jack_Kerouac_Conference_on_Beat_Literature.html)

#### Week (6) of 10/8

- M: NO CLASS – Columbus Day (University Closed)
- W: **Homework due: *Second major assignment due: three different intro paragraphs on the same subject***  
In class: Grammar day; bring your grammar books
- F: NO CLASS: I'm out of town for an academic conference, but you do have double homework for Monday (so use your time well)  
Homework due: Grammar

#### Week (7) of 10/15

##### **BODY PARAGRAPHS, EVIDENCE, and CONCLUSIONS**

- M: Homework Assignment #1 due: complete handout on the structure of body paragraphs  
Homework Assignment #2 due: complete handout on use of evidence – quotations  
In-class: discussion of body paragraph structure and use of quotational evidence  
In-class discussion of students' intro paragraphs  
In-class discussion of next major assignment
- W: Homework due: complete handout on the structure of body paragraphs (cont.)  
In class: discussion of body paragraph structure and evidence – statistical  
In class discussion: structures your paper shouldn't follow: 5-paragraph structure, summary-of-sources structure, narrative-of-your-thinking structure
- F: Homework due: complete handout on structure of conclusions  
In class: Acknowledgement and Response  
In class: discussion of conclusion structure and forms of evidence

**Week (8) of 10/22**

- M: Homework due: draft of five-page argument paper due  
In-class discussion of student drafts
- W: **Homework due: *Third Major Assignment: 5-page argument paper developed from one of your intro paragraphs***  
In-class discussion: Grammar (bring your books to class)

**ACADEMIC ARGUMENTS  
ESSAY TOPIC: TBA**

- F: Homework due: Grammar assignment  
Homework due: Complete handout on academic argument  
In-class discussion: The Common difference between academic arguments and policy/op-ed arguments: conceptual problems vs tangible/pragmatic problems

**Week (9) of 10/29**

- M: Homework due: Read essay: TBA  
Homework due: complete second handout on academic argument  
In class: discussion of academic argument form  
and discussion of essay
- W: Homework due: Read essay: TBA  
In class: Introduce Fourth Major Assignment (5-page essay)  
and discussion of essay
- F: NO CLASS: I'm out of town for a conference (New England American Studies Conference)  
Homework due: Read essay: TBA

**Week (10) of 11/5**

- M: Homework due: Read essay: TBA  
Homework: paper proposal due  
In class: discussion of essay and paper proposals
- W: Homework due: draft of introduction  
In class: discussion of introductions
- F: Homework due: Draft of 5-page academic argument essay  
In class: discussion of drafts

**Week (11) of 11/12**

PLEASE NOTE: We have class on THURSDAY this week, but no class on Monday.

ALSO PLEASE NOTE: On Thurs and Fri we will meet in the O'Leary Library

- M: NO CLASS: Veterans' Day (University Closed)
- W: **Homework Due: *4<sup>th</sup> Major Assignment Due: Academic Argument Essay (5 pages)***  
In-class: Grammar
- TH: Homework due: grammar assignment  
Library Orientation
- F: Homework due: Library Assignment  
In-class: Library Scavenger Hunt

**Week (12) of 11/19**

M: **Homework Due: 5<sup>th</sup> Major Assignment: Test on Grammar and Essay Structure**

**LOCAL and STYLE CONCEPTS**

W: Homework due: Read Williams, Style, 17-29  
Homework due: handout  
In-class discussion: Character and Actors,

F: NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Break

**Week (13) of 11/26**

M: Homework due: Read Williams, 29-43  
Homework due: handout  
In-class discussion: Characters and Actors continued; nominalizations

W: Homework due: Read Williams, 45-65  
Homework due: handout  
In-class discussion: Information Flow: Old to New

F: Homework due: Read Williams, 67-79  
Homework due: handout  
In-class discussion: Information Flow, continued (emphasis at end)

**Week of (14) of 12/3**

M: Homework due: Read Williams, 81-95  
In-class discussion: Keywords and Topic Strings  
In class: introduction of final paper  
In class: final assignment discussed

W: **Homework due: 6<sup>th</sup> Major Assignment: Test on Local Concepts**

F: Homework due: Read Williams 115-133  
In-class discussion: concision and final paper

**Week (15) of 12/10**

M: Homework due: Assignment

W: LAST DAY OF CLASS

Final Paper Assignment due at final exam