

Writing Plan for English Majors
Literary Studies Faculty
Department of English and Creative Writing
Updated, Spring 2017

I. RATIONALE

It's often assumed that English majors will be strong writers -- and for good reason. Literary Studies takes written language in a variety of forms as its primary object of study, calling readers to understand texts in terms at once aesthetic, rhetorical, and ideological. Good literary critics write not only with insight and power, but also with a felt sense of language as a shared cultural resource for meaning-making and an appreciation for the effects well-composed texts can have on their readers. English majors should bring this rich understanding of language, which they develop as literary readers, to bear on their own writing practices and projects. They should be thoughtful, effective, practiced writers, cognizant of writing's potential as both a tool for reflective thinking (a way to explore and discover ideas) and a vehicle of rhetorical action (a way to make something happen in the world). The Department of English and Creative Writing believes that these skills are not only vital to a healthy intellectual life but a fundamental part of what English majors bring to whatever sort of life's work they choose to pursue.

II. GOALS

By the time they graduate, English majors writing effectively should be able to:

1. Conceive and compose critical prose studies of literary texts from a range of formal, historical, and theoretical perspectives.
2. Situate those studies in relevant scholarly discussions.
3. Develop meaningful, arguable claims, citing both primary and secondary sources effectively to support them.
4. Work at close range with the language of both literary and theoretical texts to generate evidence for claims.
5. Use informal writing and the drafting process to generate ideas, understanding writing as a technique of visible thinking, an ongoing process rather than a single discrete event.
6. Plan, draft, and revise their work in ways that deepen and refine their ideas, incorporating the responses of informed test readers into the process.
7. Compose in a range of media and expressive forms.
8. Appropriate and deploy styles/voices/genres to which they are exposed as literary readers in their own writing, using them in appropriate contexts.
9. Demonstrate an evolving command over the technical features of writing, including the conventions of Edited American English and the conventions of MLA forms of documentation.

III. OBJECTIVES

1. PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES

Required

All courses that satisfy the Writing Plan for English majors should include:

- significant opportunities for drafting and revision, whenever possible in response to instructors' comments;
- opportunities for student-instructor conferencing, which can be helpful at a range of moments in the writing process – for example, as students develop ideas, begin to write, finish a full working draft, etc.
- an opportunity for students to use one another as informed in-process readers;
- at least two formal^{*} writing projects;
- some measure of exploratory informal writing like course journals, blogs, etc; and,
- meaningful and regular formative feedback on written work.

The Writing Plan's gateway course, ENG 204, should include a research exercise that requires not only that students understand the mechanics of citation, but also that they become acclimated to the purposes citation serves in Literary Studies, entering into conversations with secondary sources rather than referring to them as simple authorities.

Recommended

The Literary Studies recommends that gateway and capstone courses in ENG provide students with opportunities to think critically about their own education and development as literary critics, and about the types of arguments they are making in their writing, both within the English major, and in the world beyond. These opportunities could be formal assignments, or could include other metacritical practices that call for students to reflect on writing they have done in the past. These opportunities should invite students to think about their reading practices and intellectual commitments, where those practices and commitments come from, and where they might lead in the future.

2. RESOURCES

Acknowledging the range of scholarly and theoretical approaches in the field, the English and Creative Writing Department neither requires nor recommends any common handbook or rubric for writing in Literary Studies courses. But it recognizes that students should be able to consult the college's common handbook, *Rules for Writers*, as a reference, and it strongly encourages instructors to provide students with rhetorical models of the sorts of writing they expect students to do. It also encourages instructors to take advantage of support provided by the college's Writing Center, which offers tutoring services, as well as the Writing Fellows, who are available not only to tutor students but also to assist in classes.

IV. COURSES

Each course offered by the Department of English & Creative Writing demands significant writing, and at least half the overall grade in all Writing Plan courses in ENG should be based on formal writing projects. That said, the amount of writing, the kinds of writing required, the ways in which that writing is used, and

^{*} By *formal* writing, we mean texts prepared for an audience after some opportunity for reflective revision – as opposed to *informal* writing, by which we mean exploratory writing done for oneself, as a way to develop and refine ideas. *Formal* is *not* meant to suggest anything like a seriousness of tone, style, register, or form.

the attention given to the writing process will vary among the courses. ENG Writing Plan courses can broadly be described as falling into two categories:

- (1) Gateway and capstone seminars (ENG 204, ENG 465, ENG 485), in which practicing or applying writing skills in the forms characteristic of the discipline is the primary focus. In a nutshell, ENG 204 introduces students to the conventions of writing in Literary Studies; ENG 465 invites students to practice those conventions on a higher level, finding a place for themselves somewhere in the range of approaches to literary studies; and ENG 485 asks students to think about how the writing skills and intellectual commitments they have developed as literary critics might be enlisted in work outside academia. (These skills are reinforced by the core of writing-intensive seminars throughout the curriculum, which includes ENG 265 and ENG 365.)
- (2) Writing-to-learn courses in which students use writing, both formal and informal, to discover and articulate their thoughts about what they have read. Such courses give them extensive practice in developing and expressing ideas through writing. All 300- and 400-level courses are writing-to-learn courses that satisfy the Writing Plan requirement in English.

English Department Writing Plan Sequence for English majors

- (1) ENG 204 Writing about Literature (writing seminar)
- (2) ENG 304 Literary Criticism
- (3) ENG 3XX/4XX any 300- or 400-level Literary Studies course
- (4) ENG 3XX/4XX any 300- or 400-level Literary Studies course
- (5) ENG 465 Advanced Literary Seminar or ENG 485 Words in the World
(writing seminars)

ENG 204 Writing about Literature (enrollment 22/section; 5-8 sections/semester). An introduction to the conventions and purposes of literary criticism, this course is required of majors in both English and Creative Writing as well as concentrates in English for the School of Education. Currently three sections/year are designated for the Honors Program, and the course is used by those students to fulfill the General Education Basic Writing requirement. At least two formal papers are required, and most formal writing assignments are carried through revisions. Final course grades are based primarily on the essays written for class.

ENG 304 Literary Criticism (enrollment 22-25/section; 2-3 sections/semester). This course, which involves writing from the perspectives of different theoretical approaches to literature, is required of majors in both English and Creative Writing as well as minors in English. At least two formal papers are required, and most formal writing assignments are carried through revisions. Final course grades are based primarily on the essays written for class.

ENG 465 Seminar in Advanced Literary Studies (enrollment 15-20/section; 1-2 sections/semester). This course is one of two possible capstone seminar courses required of the English major. The course requires an extensive formal research project centered on an idea conceived, researched, drafted, and revised across the course of the semester. Frequently, it includes several supporting projects, including such things as reviews, précis, critiques, capsules, and oral presentation. Conferencing and in-class workshop are typically involved in the process of developing and refining ideas. Majors usually take this in their senior year sometime after they have completed ENG 304. Non-majors are discouraged from enrolling in this course.

ENG 485 Words in the World (enrollment 14/section; 1 section/semester) This course is one of two possible capstone seminar courses required of the English major. It requires the composition of various professional documents (like resumes, cover letters, writing samples) and considerable writing for a “partner” agency (a local business, nonprofit, government office, etc). Frequently, it includes a portfolio inviting students to reflect on the challenges of the writing they’ve done for partners and a reflective paper connecting students’ work in Literary Studies with whatever professional lives they’re likely to pursue in the future.

ENG 3XX any 300-level Literary Studies course or ENG 302 Advanced Composition (enrollment will vary from 15-50 with most courses capped at 35; typically the department offers approximately 20 such courses/semester plus 5 sections of ENG 302). Majors begin taking these courses usually in the second semester of their sophomore year and will take 8-13 of these courses in the completion of the major. Non-majors are welcomed if they meet the prerequisites, and many do enroll each semester. At least two formal papers are required, and most formal writing assignments are carried through revisions. Final course grades are based primarily on the essays written for class.

ENG 4XX any 400-level Literary Studies course (enrollment will vary from 15-35; typically the department will offer 2-3 such courses/semester). These courses meet the WAC Guidelines for *Writing Courses* (see sec. II above). Majors begin taking these courses in the second semester of their junior year or the first semester of their senior year and may take more than one of these courses in the completion of the major. These courses frequently will be dual-listed as undergraduate-graduate courses. Non-majors are welcomed if they meet the prerequisites. A few, mostly education concentrates, will enroll. At least two formal papers are required, and most formal writing assignments are carried through revisions. Final course grades are based primarily on the essays written for class.

V. TRANSFER STUDENTS

Transfer credit for ENG 204 will satisfy the gateway writing requirement.