

Department of Literacies and Composition

Curriculum Document

Department Mission:

The Department of Literacies and Composition understands that all students bring with them rich and diverse histories, knowledge, skills, and literacies that can be applied to the literacy work they will take part in as college students at UVU. We are committed to providing opportunities for students to recognize their own oral, written, and visual literacies as relevant to the academic setting and to helping them develop these literacies for the work they will do in the academy, in the workplace, and in their personal lives.

Department Philosophy:

The theoretical framework that best reflects the primary goals and preferred pedagogies of the UVU Department of Literacies and Composition are rooted in and have evolved from social constructionism. This philosophy of teaching a first year composition course assumes that our program exists to help students function more effectively as members of the academic society and society in general by understanding the socially-dependent and socially-influenced nature of writing. Specifically, a social constructivist philosophy

- assumes a rhetorical approach (awareness of audience & context) to writing,
- assumes that writing [and literacy] is a social act affected not only by a consideration of audience & context but by circulating/conventional social discourses, historical events, and the material realities of the context in which a text is created,
- assumes that the impact of and intent of writing goes beyond personal education and professional goals to goals of community and (local and global) citizenship.

In line with the social constructivist philosophy, the preferred curriculum and pedagogy reflect a foundational theory of the writing space that underscores writing as assemblage. A theory of assemblage applied to the writing space

- defines the writing space as a complex dialectical space of overlap and intersection, a gathering into one context, of not merely words, sentences and paragraphs, but more importantly, histories, acquired literacies, experiences, events, people, and visions of the future, recycled, revised, and repurposed, to meet the needs of a new rhetorical context.
- treats the writing space as the time and place within which transfer is performed and intoned.
- underscores multiple functions of writing, acknowledging the important work beyond the representation of ideas, including the circulation and production of individual and group identities, culture as well as new literacies.

Despite its focus on the social nature of writing and the treatment of the writing space as a collective assemblage, this philosophy and theory of the writing space does not preclude pedagogies and approaches to writing that foster personal empowerment or personal expression. Nor does it preclude the teaching of those language and essayist conventions privileged by the academy. However, it may mean that teachers take a *critical* approach (rather than a conservative or current-traditional one) to the teaching of these conventions and that these conventions are viewed rhetorically, as a particular register within a particular discourse context.

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Department Goals:

The overall goals of the department are to foster in students

- a recognition that the histories, acquired literacies, and experiences that students bring with them to the classroom are assets and in no way deficits to learning.
- a clear understanding of how newly acquired literacies and burgeoning academic identities link to previously acquired literacies and out-of-school identities.
- **applicable, well-developed critical thinking skills** (i.e. the ability to problematize, the ability to analyze a text rhetorically, the ability to respond to the texts of others, the ability to synthesize the texts of multiple authors, the ability to see how their own texts and the texts of others are influenced by prevalent social discourses, etc.)
- **meta-composition skills** (i.e. an understanding of the “hows and whys” of the choices an author makes during the writing process)
- **the ability to perform an expected “skill set” appropriate to the academic and/or professional setting** (i.e. skills required for the successful reading and writing of academic essays and the application of grammar, usage, punctuation, mechanics and style conventions)
- **increased confidence** (psychological comfort) **in their abilities to perform to the expectations of a particular audience within a particular context**

See ENGH 0890 and 1000 course Learning Outcomes for specific student outcomes

Literacies and Composition Curriculum Requirements

Writing Requirements: The Department requires that students in both ENGH 0890 and ENGH 1000 write by the end of the semester, 9-12 pages of revised, out-of-class composition assignments (essays, short stories, annotated bibliographies, letters, proposals, multi-modal compositions, etc.). While individual instructors have considerable freedom in designing these composition assignments, the assignments should emphasize the rhetorical purposes, genres and activities of academic and professional writing to acknowledge the contextual nature of writing rather than particular modes or themes. The majority of assignments should require writing from multiple genres and for a variety of mediums across the curriculum and for “real world” contexts; they should not have a primarily literary or essayist focus. Instructors are encouraged to provide opportunities for students to take risks and practice writing in genres and mediums with which they are unfamiliar, the aim of which is to prepare students to meet the challenges of writing in contexts new to them. These assignments should also reflect the writing process, particularly the pre-writing, drafting, revision and editing components of the process, helping students to recognize the importance of locating second readers and allowing time for revision. The grades on the final drafts of these assignments should make up *a minimum of 50%* of a student’s course grade. The weighting of non-composition or complete/incomplete assignments should not be such that a student can receive an average grade on the formal composition assignments of below a C- and still pass the course. The Department requires that composition assignments in both courses consider reading as an integral component of the writing process. [See the description of course reading requirements below.]

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The Department recommends that assignments in paragraph development and construction be undertaken in the context of larger full-text assignments. The Department encourages teachers to introduce students to a variety of academic and professional writing activities, purposes and organizational strategies. The Department encourages teachers to use multiple kinds of informal writing activities, including journaling, freewriting, blogging, in-class writing, etc. The Department also encourages teachers to involve students in collaborative writing projects, including peer review, threaded on-line journaling, group authored essays, group empirical research projects and other group activities

0890: The composition assignments in 0890 should help students “bridge the gap” between personal and academic writing and practice ways in which their personal literacies, experiences, opinions and observations can be used to extend particular academic, social or professional conversations. While narrative and descriptive writing allow students to use literacy skills they are more familiar with or may already possess, assignments in 0890 should be designed to show students how these types of writing are commonly integrated into academic assignments. The composition assignments 0890 students write should reflect their introduction to the ideas of textual (broadly defined) summary, analysis and synthesis as interrelated writing activities informed by context. As is characteristic of an assemblage/project-based model, writing assignments should build on and support one another in service to an identified writing project. Teachers are encouraged to use materials from the “You and UVU” 0890 curriculum which helps students engage with the university and introduces students to project-based reading, writing and digital literacy assignments.

1000 :

The composition assignments in 1000, should provide students opportunities to recognize and practice summary, analysis, and synthesis as interrelated academic writing activities informed by context. Teachers are encouraged to avoid assignments that would isolate or treat such activities as non-contextual. As is characteristic of an assemblage/project-based model, writing assignments should build on and support one another in service to an identified writing project. Composition assignments in this class should rely heavily for their content on both assigned and student-choice readings. While it is possible that all formal composition assignments for this course will contain argumentative thesis statements (opinionated statements that require evidence to support), at least one of the assignments in 1000 must use the elements of traditional argumentation (taking a position, considerations of logos, pathos, ethos, and opposing viewpoints, etc.). Teachers of 1000 are strongly encouraged to incorporate some or all of the materials and/or assignments in the project-based curriculum (available on the Inservice Canvas course).

Reading Requirements: The Department requires that both 0890 and 1000 be reading-based writing (reading-to-write) courses. Extensive reading should be assigned and discussed throughout the semester. Readings should be used not only as models for organization and style but as primary sources for classroom discussions and writing content. Instruction in both courses must include early and sustained discussions of *critical reading* strategies, including the annotation, summarizing, analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing of texts. Instructors should find multiple ways to hold students accountable for their reading, including reading quizzes, vocabulary exercises, critical thinking questions, journaling, and—most importantly—reading-based composition assignments. Instructors are strongly encouraged to assign a variety of kinds of reading including readings from across the curriculum, readings from current events and social issues, and topics relevant to literacies and Composition

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students. The Program believes that all students, particularly 0890 students, may benefit from readings that emphasize education, literacy and language use. Whenever possible and appropriate, particularly when conducting research, students should be encouraged to choose their own reading and writing topics.

Grammar, Usage and Mechanics Requirements: The Department supports the teaching of grammar in the Literacies and Composition classroom for the following reasons:

- **Clarity**—In very real ways, standardized grammar (as well as standardized usage, punctuation, mechanics, and spelling) enables us to convey meaning; standardization allows other users of English to understand us. If clearly communicating meaning to a reader is a primary goal of academic writing, then the teaching of standardized grammar may help students achieve clarity in their writing.
- **Appropriateness**—Language use is inseparable from issues of context and identity. Using Standard Written English within *certain* academic contexts is an important part of the rhetorical act of considering one’s audience. Students need to know that their acceptance as full members within *any* discourse community depends, at least to some degree, on their ability to use the particular language conventions privileged by that community.
- **Student Confidence**—While various studies over the last several decades warn that traditional grammar instruction may not readily or permanently “translate” into students’ increased ability to edit their own writing effectively, other studies (including our own in-house research) recognize that students’ confidence in their writing abilities often increases after low-order skills instruction. While students’ increased confidence may be based largely on their mistaken ideas about what “good writing” is, the psychic impact of editing instruction should not be minimized.

Although the Department recognizes that there are valid reasons to teach grammar in the writing classroom, it requires that grammar be taught in *responsible* ways. Instruction should be

- **Respectful**—Responsible grammar instruction openly acknowledges the appropriateness of particular “non-standard” varieties of English (regional and ethnic accents and dialects as well as “social” languages such as texting) *within particular contexts*. Responsible grammar instruction respects students’ home and social languages as essential, valued elements of their identities and markers of their membership within important groups and communities. Grammar instruction should *never* be used to make students feel intellectually or socially inferior.
- **Truthful**—Responsible grammar instruction acknowledges the historical truths of “Standard” English: its arbitrariness, its evolving nature, its controversies, and its grounding in concerns over class distinctions and exclusivity. Truthful grammar instruction also admits its own limits: while essential to clarity and contextual appropriateness, knowing and applying the rules of Standard Written English does not necessarily improve the development of our ideas, the quality of our support, or the unity and coherence of our paragraphs.

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This discussion of reasons and responsible ways to teach grammar was authored by Dr. Deborah Marrott and is part of a larger article (in progress) on the teaching of grammar in the writing classroom.

- **Informed**—Responsible grammar instruction is based on informed decisions about *how* to teach Standard Written English. Responsible grammar instruction balances the study of language *structure* with the study of language *in use*. Responsible grammar instructors are familiar with current usage norms and continuing usage controversies. They are familiar with

past and current scholarship within composition, literacy and linguistic studies, particularly that scholarship which focuses on best practices in grammar instruction.

- **Selective**—Due to the complexity of our course objectives (to introduce students to academic reading and writing, critical thinking, digital literacy, research and documentation, etc.), responsible grammar instruction in this program also includes being selective about *what* we teach. Principally, our instructional choices should be guided by the actual needs of our students as exhibited in their own writing. We may also give special consideration to highly stigmatized and recognized errors (e.g., fragments, comma splices, commonly confused words) and to those errors that are likely to detract from or confuse meaning.

The Department does not encourage the teaching of discrete editing skills separated from the writing process or from a particular writing context. While the Department recommends that instructors use a variety of methods to teach the conventions of standardized English and editing, students' own writing should be the primary texts for teaching surface-level accuracy. Appropriate practice exercises, proofreading activities, sentence-combining exercises, computer/internet activities, etc. may be used to augment that instruction. While teachers may employ quizzes and exams as they deem necessary, the Department requires that students' abilities to apply editing rules to their own writing be the *primary* means by which sentence-level accuracy is assessed in both Basic Writing classes. The Department requires that the combined weighting of all assessments of editing skills (grammar, usage, mechanics and style) be no more than 30% of the students' final grade in either course. The Department requires that the weighting of editing issues in the grading of students' revised compositions be no more than 30% and that, when evaluating students' texts, teachers focus primarily on those editing problems which actually and significantly detract from students' meaning.

Style Instruction: Style is a crucial component of a composition, helping to generate voice and maintain its tone. Style helps students to make their writing clear (readable), concise (brief), and coherent (logical), while allowing creativity and some flexibility through embellishment or ornamentation. Style pertains to several facets of language which are not necessarily considered grammatical concerns, including kinds of diction, use of diction, kinds of sentences, lengths of sentences, articulation of sentences, use of sentences, figurative language, paragraphing, conventional tropes and schemes, and rhythmic/spatial elements of the text. Moreover, style instruction helps students to observe traditional and intrinsic codes of academic writing. The department requires that students in our courses engage in classroom discussion and activities in relation to style. Instructors may use any quizzes, exercises, and stylistic analyses, which help students to understand and retain elements of style. The department requires that style be assessed but that the combined weighting of all assessments of style be included with the measurement of editing instruction and be no more than 30% of the students' final grade in either course. Furthermore, the department requires that the weighting of sentence-level issues (both stylistic and

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grammatical) in the grading of student's revised compositions be no more than 30% and that, when evaluating students' texts, teachers focus primarily on stylistic problems which actually and significantly detract from the students ability to deliver writing which is clear, concise, coherent, and conscious of the needs of the audience/reader.

Research Requirements: The Department requires 0890 and 1000 students be *introduced* to research writing and documentation conventions. While it is unlikely that teachers will have adequate time in either course to walk students through the entire research process, instruction should emphasize the evaluation of sources (particularly on-line or data-base sources); the appropriate integration of quotes, summaries and paraphrases from sources; and the appropriate documentation of all sources. Teachers are required to teach either MLA or APA documentation style (while MLA may be slightly easier to teach and learn, instructors may wish to consider that a larger number of their students will probably find themselves writing in social science courses and majors than humanities courses and majors). The Department requires that students in 1000 include in-text parenthetical citations and a bibliography page in at least one of their composition assignments. If 0890 teachers choose to introduce students to academic research, they should do so carefully and minimally. Writing assignments that allow for empirical or ethnographic research (such as interviewing, surveying, participant observation, etc.) rather than textual research may be especially appropriate for 0890 students. The Department strongly discourages faculty from teaching students simplified or non- standard forms of documentation.

Reflection Requirements: In keeping with research on transfer, which suggests that students may not always be cognizant of what skills and knowledge are transferrable, the Department requires all students in both courses to complete and submit a Reflective Cover Essay or Letter in their final portfolio. The Reflective Essay assignment for 1000 follows Ed White's "Phase II" portfolio requirements, which asks students to write an argument essay explaining and citing evidence of how they have met the required outcomes of the class, and how they might apply these outcomes in new and unfamiliar contexts. The Reflective Letter assignment for 0890 has the same major goal but is less formally structured. Teachers are also required to provide multiple opportunities throughout the semester for students to reflect on their writing process as well as on the products they are producing. These opportunities may take the form of letters, journal entries or freewrites.

Final Exams: The department requires that each student submit a final portfolio (or a combination of unit portfolios) as the culminating activity of the semester and appropriate evidence of a student's critical reading and writing skills. Therefore, the Department will not create nor mandate other forms of final exams. Because the university requires that all courses hold worthwhile activities of some kind during the scheduled final exam period, teachers within the Department may decide how best to use that time. Regardless, students should be given up until the scheduled final exam period to submit the final portfolio of the course.

Bringing Current Research into the Composition Classroom:

The Department strongly recommends that faculty bring current literacy and composition studies research into the classroom when possible and appropriate. According to recent scholars, discussing and writing about current composition research has many benefits for students. Bringing current composition research into the composition classroom allows students to participate in the conversation about what they're learning in composition classes and why, it helps students

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understand the history of academic literacy conventions/expectations (particularly in relation to other forms of literacy), and it emphasizes the evolutionary (living) nature of the English language and its use. Furthermore, bringing current research results and active scholarly debates into the classroom also illustrates to students our own currency in and engagement with our discipline.

Possible topics/debates for classroom discussion and writing assignments:

- The effects of instant messaging/texting on literacy (e.g., although many educators and media “watchdogs” are lamenting/predicting the negative effects of texting, according to a 2008 study, individuals who were *proficient* in texting consistently scored better on traditional literacy exams than non-texters and poor texters [as cited by D. Crystal, Dec. 2, 2008, *Talk of the Nation*, NPR—have your students listen to the full 32 minute interview at www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97700573])
- Debates regarding current or past literacy “crises” (e.g., according to Lunsford and Lunsford [2008], despite numerous anecdotal suggestions that current college students are less literate than students of earlier generations, multiple studies indicate that students today are actually more literate in some ways than their earlier counterparts and that they make approximately the same number of errors in their college essays as students did 20, 50 and 90 years ago)
- Changes in the types of errors made by students as a result of current technologies (e.g., according to Lunsford and Lunsford [2008], as a result of word processing spell checkers, students today make far fewer spelling errors in their papers but many more “word choice” errors)
- Changes in usage expectations/rules over the last 50 years (e.g., debates regarding who/whom, using plural pronouns with singular antecedents, etc.)
- Changes in academic literacy expectations over the last 20 (or 100) years (e.g., the Lunsford & Lunsford study also found that the essays assigned to first-year composition students are significantly longer than they were 20 years ago and that the assignments are more likely to involve argumentation and analysis)
- Debates about what is and should be privileged in academic writing (Content over accuracy? Logos over pathos? “Scholarly” sources over personal/communal/religious sources?)
- The relationship between power and language (particularly “official” languages like SWE)
- Social languages (home/community languages): their purposes, values and limitations
- The relationship between identity (individual and communal) and literacy

Selected Sources:

Collins, J., & Blot, R. (2003). *Literacy and literacies: Texts, power and identity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

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Downs, D. & Wardle, E. (2007). Teaching about writing, righting misconceptions: (Re)Envisioning FYC as intro to writing studies. *College Composition and Communication* 58: 552-84.

Gee, J. P. (1996). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses*. London: Flamer Press.

Ivani1, R. (1998). *Writing and identity: The discursal construction of identity in academic writing*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.

Lunsford, A. A. & Lunsford, K. J. (2008). Mistakes are a fact of life: A national comparative study. *College Composition and Communication* 59:781-806.

(See D. Hacker’s *Rules for Writer* for various usage related debates.)