

**ENGLISH 210: WIP: METHODS FOR ENGLISH MAJORS, 3 cr.**

FALL 2009  
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This course is a required Writing Intensive course for English majors. It is designed as an introduction to the methods of the major, and will provide a foundation in critical thinking, reading, and writing.

Catalog description: Writing Intensive course designed as first course for English majors. Provides solid and practical foundation in the methods essential to English Studies: active reading, critical thinking, and purposeful writing. Skills such as note taking, quoting, using MLA style, summarizing arguments, and synthesizing and documenting others' opinions will be emphasized. With guest faculty, course will also explore multiple perspectives on controversial topics relevant to the discipline. Coursework aims to develop strategies of effective critique, argument, and analysis, and will consist of informal writing, review essays, and thesis-driven analyses of rhetorical and literary texts. Open discussion and critical thinking required. (WIP)

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

The following books, available for purchase at Beck's Books, make up the skills-based manuals that we will make use of throughout the term. Recent students of English 101 and 102 will likely already own them.

(Additional readings will vary with the instructor of record.)

1. Sylvan Barnet and Hugo Bedau, *From Critical Thinking to Argument: A Portable Guide*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Bedford/St. Martin's 2008)—on the schedule as *FCTA*.
2. Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* (W. W. Norton 2006).
3. Diana Hacker, *Rules for Writers*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Bedford/St. Martin's 2008).

Additional readings and course materials, available on Blackboard (Bb), will make up the primary rhetorical and literary focus of the course. Individual readings, themes, issues, and perspectives will vary with the instructor of record.

## COURSE GOALS & OUTCOMES

English 210 fulfills a primary goal of the English curriculum by providing a foundation in the critical methods essential to English Studies. By the end of the course, students will be able to demonstrate the following critical skills needed by English majors:

- Explain the difference between description/observation and analysis/argument, and provide examples.
- Explain what a thesis argument is, including elements that contribute to a strong thesis argument.
- Read actively to recognize a writer's rhetorical strategies and to extrapolate and summarize the main thesis and sub-arguments of essays and other short texts.
- Critique the effectiveness of various rhetorical and literary texts.
- Recognize that texts are often trying to change our view of something, and discuss the ways that various kinds of literary and rhetorical texts do this.
- Recognize and explain the differences between various textual forms, both literary and rhetorical, and be able to discuss in detail those forms most important to English Studies.
- Make accurate and appropriate use of disciplinary vocabulary.
- Write purposefully to make and support an argument of your own, or to summarize and/or critique an argument of someone else.

English 210 provides multiple perspectives in literary and rhetorical studies; following this course, English majors can:

- Identify and discuss broader, sometimes controversial issues that are shared within English Studies by both literature and composition/rhetoric departments.
- Provide examples of ways in which multiple perspectives can shape multiple understandings of literary and rhetorical texts.

Finally, English 210 reinforces the academic conventions of English Studies:

- Students will produce written work that adheres to the mechanical and academic conventions of English studies by accurately using quotations and paraphrase, referencing secondary sources, and employing MLA style.
- Students will produce written essays that are structured and organized with purpose, and that clearly and responsibly credit all sources of ideas and perspectives.

## COURSE WORK

From time to time short, informal, non-graded writing (“minute writes” or “muddiest point” writes) will start or conclude class discussion. These exercises are not part of the evaluated/graded work of the course.

1. Participation and Preparation (10%): Reading and thinking in advance, and coming to class prepared to contribute to dynamic discussions are expected and required. Absence, ill preparedness, and/or silence will cause this grade to suffer.

2. Guided Reading Journal (10%): In connection with our investigation of four separate controversial topics relevant to English studies, you will write entries in an informal reading journal responding to pre-distributed questions about assigned readings. These journal entries will be a starting point in a process that will lead to your formal written essays. Journal topics will be available in advance on Bb. Credit is received for timely completion of each guided journal entry. Details on Bb, in Assignments.

3. Regular Participation in Bb Course Discussion Board (10%): The purpose here is two-fold: to have another forum for informal writing on the course topics, and also to build an intellectually curious and mutually respectful course community that extends beyond the classroom. Credit is received for regular participation. Details on Bb.

4. Four (4) Formal Critical Essays, 2-3 pp, each with graded draft & graded revision (60%): These critical exercises build on journal entries and discussions to turn observations and points of interest into organized arguments. They also focus on developing the formal written skills you need as an English major, and learning disciplinary conventions is another aspect of these critical exercises: not only will you practice and improve the way you build a thesis argument, you will also learn “the art of quoting,” the standards of citation and documentation, and the basic mechanics of paper writing such as format and punctuation. To emphasize the *process* of formal writing, each of these essays will be revised. Essay assignment sheets will be distributed in advance. See below for narrative description of grading criteria for formal writing.

5a. Review of rhetorical essay (draft, 5% + revision, 10% = 15%)

5b. Critical essay (draft, 5% + revision, 10% = 15%)

5c. Review of literary essay (draft, 5% + revision, 10% = 15%)

5d. Literary analysis (draft, 5% + revision, 10% = 15%)

5. Final Exam (10%): Essay exam to conceptualize and think critically about the larger themes of the course, and to practice writing extemporaneously within set time limits.

### **NARRATIVE CRITERIA FOR FORMAL WRITTEN WORK**

I will always evaluate your formal written work in terms of both content and style/mechanics. By content, I mean the quality of your critical thinking, the clarity of your summary or argument, the depth of your analysis, and your use of textual evidence to support your ideas. By style, I mean your overall organization as well as the way you craft paragraphs and sentences, your phrasing, word choice, and strength of transitions. Sound and carefully proof-read mechanics (grammar, syntax, punctuation), and overall conventional usage of English are also expected in your formal written work.

The following are rough grade definitions (+ and – grades are located in between).

**A:** In terms of content, an “A” essay has immediate and specific purpose (perhaps to summarize and evaluate a rhetorical work, or to analyze a literary work). It demonstrates a critical understanding of the text and/or topic and shows awareness of context. If applicable, its summary fairly and accurately presents the key points of an author’s work, and/or it develops a compelling, original argument that pays careful and illuminating attention to textual detail. If applicable, its thesis is extremely well articulated, developed, and supported. Stylistically, an “A” paper is clearly and persuasively organized at the overall level as at the levels of paragraph and sentence; the argument develops over the course of the paper, and the reader has no problem perceiving the logic and purpose of its structure. The paper reads well, is written with a conscious attention to word choice, with economic yet expressive sentence structure. It is editorially neat and is virtually free of grammatical or spelling errors. Critically curious thinking about concepts and contexts, rigorous attention to primary text, and patient, careful editing are key elements that distinguish an “A” paper.

**B:** A “B” essay is a good, solid performance in both content and style. A purpose may be stated, but it is not as clear or coherent as it could be. The essay’s summary or argument may need more specificity and additional textual support to be as concise and well developed as an “A” paper, and overall the style may need some revision and polish, but a “B” paper basically gets everything right—solid understanding of text and/or topic, critical thinking, clear argument, no major errors. Work can yet be done, however: summary can be more specific, thesis can perhaps delve deeper or contextualize more clearly; terms may require clearer or more elaborate definition; word-choice and ideas might require specificity; more forceful textual evidence might greatly improve overall effectiveness; additional complexity might render the essay that much more interesting and persuasive. In terms of style, organization may need improvement; grammatical or spelling errors, though they do not prevent your reader from understanding your overall purpose, may nonetheless hold the paper from a higher grade. This is strong, capable work, with room for improvement. Generally, a careful revision can result in significant improvement.

**C:** Average work that needs attention. A “C” essay fulfills the minimum required for a passing grade: summary might be partly accurate while also raising questions of reading comprehension. There may be the hint of an argument, but it is not yet specific or clearly developed, and it may not yet be substantiated by textual support. Plot summary rather than interpretation may form the basis of the essay—the “C” essay likely has not yet stated its purpose, and as a result it may be general, overly descriptive, or repetitive. Aspects of the text and/or topic may not be clearly understood, which may suggest the need for more careful and critical reading. Core ideas may be very strong, but they are not yet clearly presented or developed into a coherent argument, and they may be difficult to discern. Style and mechanics are sloppy: perhaps structure is unclear and hard to follow, an over-reliance on dead verbs or passive verbal constructions may be generalizing your ideas, or perhaps there are numerous grammatical and spelling errors. Though by no means disastrous, a “C” indicates that you have substantial room for improvement in your major field of study. A visit to the Writers Lab may be in order. This work passes, but calls for more practice.

**D:** Unacceptable in both content and style, and a strong warning that your work is not fulfilling the requirements of the assignment. Weaknesses may include: misunderstanding of the assignment, inaccurate summary, lack of argument, and/or general lack of critical purpose and overall coherence. Style and grammar in the “D” essay are flawed to the extent that smooth reading is impeded and perhaps impossible in places. When course materials are reference, they may be

quoted in ways that indicate that the material is not clearly understood, or might be patently misunderstood. In content and in style this essay raises serious questions about comprehension. This could simply be the product of last-minute hastiness. Or more seriously, the “D” may indicate that your abilities to read closely and critically and to manipulate the English language need significant attention and improvement in order to succeed in this course. Make sure that you understand the essay’s weaknesses in various areas of content and style—understand the causes of the “D” and see me for help improving on those areas. It is important that you see me about this work and visit the Writers Lab repeatedly over the course of the semester.

**F:** An “F” paper either does not meet the requirements for the assignment, does not meet the expectations for college-level written expression, or both. There is no stronger academic warning, and you should take this evaluation as a call for urgent and dramatic changes in your study habits. An “F” may indicate a significant misunderstanding of the assignment and its requirements; it may also indicate that reading, comprehension, and writing skills are not yet at the level required to succeed in this course or as an English major. See me immediately so that we can over this work together and make a plan for improvement.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

1. A detailed description of the course grading policy is on Bb, in Course Information. This document provides definitions of ‘A’ work, ‘B’ work, ‘C’ work, etc. These are the criteria that will be used to assess your formal written essays. It is your responsibility to read this document and to ask any questions you may have before submitting formal essays for a grade.
2. **Academic Integrity** is an ethical issue integral to the university community as a whole. Familiarize yourself with NEIU’s policy on plagiarism, which can be found in the NEIU Student Conduct Code (available on our Bb site, in Course Information). See also Dr. Erick Howenstein’s plagiarism page: [www.neiu.edu/~ejhowens/plagiarism/](http://www.neiu.edu/~ejhowens/plagiarism/). Work plagiarized in any way will result in zero points and a failing grade in the course. If you have questions about proper citation and documentation, it is your responsibility to get answers before submitting work for a grade.
3. Grades are non competitive. All written work will be returned with guidance for revision and/or comments as well as numerical and letter grades. Keep all returned work. Final grades are non-negotiable: 90-100 = A; 80-89 = B; 70-79 = C; 60-69 = D; 0-59 = F.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change)**

### Week 1

Introduction to course goals and requirements; Blackboard; the English major at NEIU.

*FCTA*, ch 1: *critical thinking v. being critical*

Exploring a controversial topic *critically*: IWF’s “Take Back the Campus” campaign

### Week 2

Active reading, finding thesis and argument; summary and Paraphrase; strategies for drafting and generating ideas

*FCTA*, ch 2, 25-37; ch 3, 45-54

Rhetorical essay on controversial topic:

— “Combat the Radical Feminist Assault on Truth,” IWF poster campaign (on Bb).

**Essay #1 assigned: review of rhetorical essay**

### Week 3

Reading and evaluating the arguments of others, cont.: more discussion of IWF poster campaign; developing and organizing drafts with purpose

*FCTA*, ch 3, 54-70; 74-80

*FCTA*, ch 5, 116-122

**Essay #1 Due**

### Week 4

More critical thinking on controversial topic with faculty guest: campus conservatism

**Revising strategies**, with targeted help as needed from *They Say I Say* and *Rules for Writers* (chapters to be determined, based on essays)

### Week 5

Exploring controversial topic #2: thinking about gender identity

— Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” *Theater Journal* 40:4 (1988) 519-531.

Reading for arguments (not descriptions); *making* rhetorical arguments

**Revised Essay #1 Due**

**Essay #2 Assigned: critical essay on topic**

### Week 6

Controversial topic investigated further with faculty guest: Utube: ‘Journey of a Pregnant Man—Thomas Beatie’ (Parts 1-4), links on Bb.

Formulating and Organizing rhetorical argument

**Essay #2 Due**

### Week 7

**Revising**, with targeted help as needed from *They Say I Say* and *Rules for Writers* (chapters to be determined, based on essays)

### Week 8

**Revising**, cont.—with targeted help as needed from selected chapters of *They Say I Say* and *Rules for Writers*

**Revised Essay #2 Due**

### Week 9

Exploring controversial topic #3: “just literature” or something more? Revising the canon:

— Mike Helprin, “The Canon Under Siege,” *New Criterion* 7:1 (1988);

- Chinua Achebe, “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*,” in Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Norton, 1988).

Both readings on Bb.

**Essay #3 Assigned: Review of literary essay**

Week 10

Controversial topic investigated further with faculty guests: multiple perspectives on Conrad  
Formulating and organizing critical review of literary essay

**Essay #3 Due**

Week 11

**Revising**, with targeted help as needed from *They Say I Say* and *Rules for Writers* (chapters to be determined, based on essays)

Week 12

Exploring controversial topic #4: women writers: revising the canon

- Gilbert and Gubar, “Infection in the Sentence,” in *Feminisms* (Rutgers 1991)
- Adrienne Rich, “Diving in the Wreck” (Norton 1973).

Both readings on Bb.

Analyzing literature (*writing* literary criticism); formulating ideas

**Revised Essay #3 Due**

**Essay #4 Assigned: literary analysis**

Week 13

Controversial topic investigated further with faculty guest: “revising” western literary tradition  
Honing literary arguments

**Essay #4 Due**

Week 14

**Revising**, with targeted help as needed from *They Say I Say* and *Rules for Writers* (chapters to be determined, based on essays)

Week 15

**Revised Essay #4 Due**

Week 16

wrapping up

**Final Exam, in class (10%)**