a class about writing, reading, literacy, and learning: writing about writing

Students often think one of two ways about writing: (1) “Ugh—I just can’t write,” or (2) “Writing is easy, and I’m planning to write a book when I can just find the time.” Is either attitude right?

At UTRGV, we believe that good writing can be learned: it’s a skill. We also believe that truly amazing writing takes time, conscious effort and purpose, and sweat. Ask any instructor, most of use have been writing for more than a decade. It’s never been easy. But, it has been doable. That brings us to the first rule about this class: you’re writers.

English 1301 is what we call a core curriculum requirement. That means everyone has to take it. It’s also what we call a threshold course—a place somewhere between what came before college and what you’ll eventually accomplish here. Check out p. 5-6, to learn what these classes are and what different groups of people here at the university want you to get out of them. Make sure to ask me any questions you have about it.

So what is this class about?

“In I want to stand as close to the edge as I can without going over. Out on the edge you can see all kinds of things you can’t see from the center.”

—Kurt Vonnegut

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Office Hours: By appointment.
I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it.
-pablo picasso

This class is about **inquiry**. We will read a lot; we will talk all the time; we will write of course; we will conduct writing workshops where we will share our writing; we will revise, revise, revise; finally, we’ll edit.

Many people think that writing is lonely. That’s rarely true. Writing just doesn’t grow well when it is alone. There is a huge social component to sophisticated writing, and we will be exploring that this semester. We will work in groups, writing circles, online. We will read and comment on each other’s work and ideas. The responses and feedback you receive from your peers may show you things about your work that you could not see for yourself. For this to work, though, takes social skills. I expect everyone to take this work seriously and to respect (in all definitions of the word) each other. You can be honest and still be polite. Nobody, especially not the great writers we admire, is good enough to write without the benefit of constructive feedback and talking through his or her ideas.

This course isn’t going to make you an expert writer. No **single** class will. Instead, it’s designed to introduce you to some fundamental ideas, concepts, and skills that will be useful as you develop as a college writer. Starting this now, and continuing to work on your writing throughout your academic career, will help you as you become a more rhetorical and reflective reader, writer, and student.

One last thought: the educator Joseph Chilton Pearce said, “To live a creative life, we must lose our fear of being wrong.” Even Dumbledore said, “In fact, being—forgive me—cleverer than most men, my mistakes tend to be correspondingly huger.” It is totally OK to go out on a limb in this class, to try something new, to be wrong. Because we can learn from that.

I am excited to work with you this semester, to learn with you, to create a unique ENG 1301 space where inquiry and good writing can happen.

FYC FAQ:
The things everyone really wants to know but doesn’t exactly want to ask.

1. **Is this a hard class?**
   I like to call it **challenging**. I’m not interested in frying your brain. But I’m also not interested in an easy A. This class should force you to push your limits.

2. **Will there be a lot of writing?**
   Totally.

3. **Why do I have to take this class?**
   This might be a good line of inquiry to follow this semester. I’m not going to give you an answer in this space, but I encourage you to use our class as a space for figuring that out.

4. **Can I know my grade?**
   Of course. However, with portfolios your grade is “in process” until the very end. That means, if you want an A, you can keep revising until you have one.

5. **Is there a final exam? When?**
   This is a writing class and all I assess is writing. Instead of a final exam, we have a portfolio (a collection of all your work and its progress).
m a t e r i a l s

Bring your materials every day and be prepared to use them.

How much would it suck to come to class but lose out on participation because you didn’t have your stuff?

1. Textbook: *Writing About Writing*, 3rd Ed. by Downs & Wardle
2. We will be using online storage for our work. It will either be Dropbox, Google Drive, OneDrive, or Blackboard. I will let you know which one as soon as I finish assessing each platform.
3. A notebook (the “interactive notebook”) dedicated to this class.
4. A 4-pack of DRY ERASE BOARD MARKERS for our classroom.
5. Regular access to a computer and internet.
6. STUDENT EMAIL: I will email the class – you MUST check your UTRGV email REGULARLY

**PROJECTS, in brief**

**MULTIMODAL LITERACY NARRATIVE (portfolio: 60%)**
How do you feel about writing? Reading? Learning? What ideas do you have about your own literacy? Where did those feelings and ideas come from? In this assignment, you will present a critical moment in your development as writers/readers/learners.

**THEORY OF WRITING (portfolio: 60%)**
This is an extended writing assignment (it will feel like the kind of writing tasks you’ve encountered before). Here, you’ll develop a your own theory of writing. (The articles from our textbook are good examples of the kind of writing you will create.)

**REMIX 3 WAYS (portfolio: 60%)**
Take your theory of writing and “translate” it for another audience into another form/genre. The message/purpose will be about the same as your written argument, but now it will look like something else. You’ll do this in three ways: (1) visually, (2) as a video, (3) as a prototype or blueprint.

**PORTFOLIO STATEMENT (portfolio: 60%)**
This is an argument for your portfolio: why are the projects you chose a part of it? How does the work within demonstrate and describe the knowledge and skills you’ve gained over the last several months?

**REFLECTION (10%)**
What did you learn? How did you learn it? What was important and what proved difficult? What can you take from this class and use later? This brief composition helps us slow down and reflect on our semester.

**DAILY GRIND/PARTICIPATION (30%)**
Class discussion, showing up on time, bringing your work for peer review and feedback days, coming to conferences, doing the reading, putting in the effort to do good work.
I don’t like what grades have become for many people: accomplishments. The thing is, grades are *not* accomplishments in themselves. They *should be* reflections of what you understand and can actually do.

Reflect on what grades mean to you and why, and whether that’s the best view of grades. Are you checking your grade to track your progress? Or to “see if I have an A, yet”?

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**grades**

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**final portfolio**

60%

Your portfolio is a collection of your best work from the semester. It is also our version of the final exam.

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**daily grind**

40%

Anything we do in class, participation-wise, which may include: reading responses, workshops, discussions, drafts, notes, self-assessment and practice. Potentially, Blackboard discussions will also be part of the daily grind. And, of course, attendance.

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**MID-SYLLABUS REFLECTION**

What **GOALS** do you have for yourself this semester? Of course you want to pass/get a good grade…but what else? When you leave this class, what do you want to **KNOW**? What do you want to be able to **DO**? Is there anything you’re interested or excited to get from our time together?
COURSE DESCRIPTIONS, STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES, CORE OBJECTIVES

Background
To ensure consistency in instructional approaches throughout Texas public institutions, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board devised objectives for all courses required in universities’ core curricula. In addition, all UTRGV major programs of study now have Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) which promote consistency and accountability in preparation of majors. Finally, within each program, individual courses have objectives that reflect accepted theories, content, and practice in that discipline. This section of your syllabus also demonstrates how these various sets of goals are implemented in your specific English 1301 course through your instructor’s course objectives.

THECB / University Core Learning Objectives

1. CRITICAL THINKING. The students will demonstrate comprehension of a variety of written texts and other information sources by analyzing and evaluating the logic, validity, and relevance of the information in them to solve challenging problems to arrive at well-reasoned conclusions, and to develop and explore new questions.

2. COMMUNICATION SKILLS. Students will demonstrate the ability to adapt their communications to a particular context, audience, and purpose using language genre conventions, and sources appropriate to a specific discipline and/or communication task.

3. EMPIRICAL & QUANTITATIVE SKILLS. Students will be able to make and communicate informed conclusions and predictions based on the interpretation, manipulation, and analysis of empirical and quantitative data.

4. TEAMWORK. Students will collaborate effectively with others to solve problems and complete projects while demonstrating respect for a diversity of perspectives.

5. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY. Students will recognize and describe cultural diversity, the role of civic engagement in society, and the link between ethics and behavior.

6. PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY. Students will demonstrate an awareness of the range of human values and beliefs that they draw upon to connect choices, actions, and consequences to ethical decision-making.

Student Learning Outcomes for the Writing Program

The following statements describe what we want our students to know, think, value, and do when they finish the First-Year Writing Program and successfully complete 1302 with a C or better.

1. Students use the writing process to compose with purpose, creating multimodal texts for various audiences. (corresponds with THECB Communication Objectives #1, 2, 3)

2. Students productively interact with their peers, often in small groups, in the reiterative processes of feedback, revision, and editing. (corresponds with THECB Communication Objectives #1, 4)

3. Students think critically about their position in the context of a larger ongoing conversation about the issues they are investigating. (corresponds with THECB Communication Objectives #4 and 5)

4. Students find, evaluate, meaningfully integrate, and correctly document appropriate sources for research. (corresponds with THECB Communication Objectives #5 and 6)

5. Students are aware of the choices writers make and gain confidence in their ability to employ that awareness for a variety of future writing tasks. (corresponds with THECB Communication Objectives #1-6)
ENGL 1301 CATALOG DESCRIPTION

English 1301 is designed to help students become more effective and confident writers as well as more active and engaged readers of complex texts. To do this, students will engage in a variety of writing projects which will help them become more reflective writers who are better able to revise their work to meet the needs of a given writing situation. Prerequisites: Satisfactory scores on English portion of ACT test and TSI examination or ENGL 0301.

English 1301 and 1302 are designed to help students:

- See that writing is an opportunity for learning;
- Develop an understanding of writing as an interactive and recursive process;
- Become reflective writers, aware of the rhetorical choices writers make;
- Identify their own purposes for writing;
- Develop their abilities to write in a variety of genres appropriate for their audience and purpose;
- Become actively engaged readers, able to use multiple reading strategies for a variety of complex texts, including their own;
- Learn how to interact productively with their peers throughout the writing process;
- Know how to use various types of feedback (teacher, peer, self-assessment) to revise their texts effectively;
- Gain more confidence in their abilities to engage in future writing tasks successfully;
- Use technology in their writing in rhetorically effective ways;
- Learn about and effectively use the conventions of writing that govern a given writing situation; and
- Understand the rhetorical implications of writing style and grammatical conventions for a given writing situation.

UTRGV POLICY STATEMENTS

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:
We are dedicated to providing accessible learning for all our students, and will take steps to ensure that however possible. Please connect with your instructor so that we can make sure the class and all its spaces are as accessible as possible.

As far as the university is concerned: If you have a documented disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other disability which affects your academic performance) and would like to receive academic accommodations, please inform your instructor and contact Student Accessibility Services to schedule an appointment to initiate services. It is recommended that you schedule an appointment with Student Accessibility Services before classes start. However, accommodations can be provided at any time. Brownsville Campus: Student Accessibility Services is located in Cortez Hall Room 129 and can be contacted by phone at (956) 882-7374 (Voice) or via email at accessibility@utrgv.edu. Edinburg Campus: Student Accessibility Services is located in 108 University Center and can be contacted by phone at (956) 665-7005 (Voice), (956) 665-3840 (Fax), or via email at accessibility@utrgv.edu.

MANDATORY COURSE EVALUATION PERIOD:
Students are required to complete an ONLINE evaluation of this course, accessed through your UTRGV account (http://my.utrgv.edu); you will be contacted through email with further instructions. Online evaluations will be available during the last two to three weeks of class. Students who complete their evaluations will have priority access to their grades.
ATTENDANCE:
Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes and may be dropped from the course for excessive absences. UTRGV’s attendance policy excuses students from attending class if they are participating in officially sponsored university activities, such as athletics; for observance of religious holy days; or for military service. Students should contact the instructor in advance of the excused absence and arrange to make up missed work or examinations.

SCHOLASTIC INTEGRITY:
As members of a community dedicated to Honesty, Integrity and Respect, students are reminded that those who engage in scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and expulsion from the University. Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, plagiarism, and collusion; submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person; taking an examination for another person; any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student; or the attempt to commit such acts. Since scholastic dishonesty harms the individual, all students and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced (Board of Regents Rules and Regulations and UTRGV Academic Integrity Guidelines). All scholastic dishonesty incidents will be reported to the Dean of Students.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT, DISCRIMINATION, and VIOLENCE:
In accordance with UT System regulations, your instructor is a “responsible employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and so must report any instance, occurring during a student’s time in college, of sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, domestic violence, or sexual harassment about which she/he becomes aware during this course through writing, discussion, or personal disclosure. More information can be found at www.utrgv.edu/equity, including confidential resources available on campus. The faculty and staff of UTRGV actively strive to provide a learning, working, and living environment that promotes personal integrity, civility, and mutual respect in an environment free from sexual misconduct and discrimination.

COURSE DROPS:
According to UTRGV policy, students may drop any class without penalty earning a grade of DR until the official drop date. Following that date, students must be assigned a letter grade and can no longer drop the class. Students considering dropping the class should be aware of the “3-peat rule” and the “6-drop” rule so they can recognize how dropped classes may affect their academic success. The 6-drop rule refers to Texas law that dictates that undergraduate students may not drop more than six courses during their undergraduate career. Courses dropped at other Texas public higher education institutions will count toward the six-course drop limit. The 3-peat rule refers to additional fees charged to students who take the same class for the third time.

END-OF-SYLLABUS QUESTIONS
What questions do you have about this course? What questions do you have about your instructor?
What answers do you need to feel comfortable about this class?