The people I meet often think about writing in one of two ways: (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.” I don’t think either of these attitudes is right. I believe that good writing can be learned: it’s a skill, like tying your shoe or computing integral calculus. I also believe that truly amazing writing takes time, conscious effort and purpose, and sweat. Ask any writing program instructor, most of use have been writing for more than a decade. It’s never been easy. But, it has been doable. The thing about writing is this: it is shallow enough that anybody can do it, it’s learnable; and it is deep enough that we will spend our entire careers learning and improving, and we’ll never be bored. And that brings us to the first rule about this class: you’re writers.

English 1302 is what we call a core curriculum requirement. That means everyone has to take it. It’s also what we sometimes call a threshold course—a place somewhere between what came before college and what you’ll eventually accomplish here. On p. 3-4, you’ll find a lot of information about what these classes are and what different groups of people here at the university want you to get out of them. You should read through that info, see what you think, and ask me any questions you have about it.

So what is this class about?

contents
philosophy, schedule, info  
goals, SLOs  
materials, projects  
grades, UTRGV policy statements  

“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
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).

Simply put, this class is about inquiry. We will read a lot (yes, writing classes involve a good amount of reading; prepare yourselves for that); we will talk all the time (it’s important that we say out loud what we’re thinking in our heads); we will write of course; we will conduct writing workshops where we will share our writing (you need to be ready for this: I will not be the only person reading your writing); we will revise, revise, revise; finally, we’ll edit (the distinction between revising and editing is a big one, an important one; you’ll need to take notes).

Many people think that writing and research is done in the dark and dank confines of some writing closet, that the great researchers are pasty creatures stuck in a laboratory. Well, that’s rarely true. (There are always exceptions, but these prove the rule…) Research just doesn’t grow well when it is alone. There is a huge social component to sophisticated research. We will be exploring that social component 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. I know I got all serious in the last couple of sentences, but that’s because I had to use my teacher register to set an expectation. I actually think that you’ll enjoy this social component of writing, and will use it beyond this class.

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 rhetorically savvy 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.” Dumbledore (yes…) 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.

I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it.

-pablo picasso

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Interrelated Goals for English 1302

Background
To ensure consistency in instructional approaches throughout Texas public institutions, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board devised in 1998 exemplary objectives for all courses required in universities’ core curricula. Institutions throughout the state, including UTPA, have used the THECB exemplary objectives to define objectives for required core curriculum courses. In addition, all UTPA 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.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Exemplary Objectives for Communication

1. To understand and demonstrate writing and speaking processes through invention, organization, drafting, revision, editing, and presentation.

2. To understand the importance of specifying audience and purpose and to select appropriate communication choices.

3. To understand and appropriately apply modes of expression, i.e., descriptive, expository, narrative, scientific, and self-expressive in written, visual, and oral communication.

4. To participate effectively in groups with emphasis on listening, critical and reflective thinking, and responding.

5. To understand and apply basic principles of critical thinking, problem solving, and technical proficiency in the development of exposition and argument.

6. To develop the ability to research and write a documented paper and/or to give an oral presentation.

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 iterative 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)
English 1302 Undergraduate Catalog Description

English 1302 is designed to teach students how to initiate inquiry, engage in meaningful research, and produce effective researched arguments. To do this, students will get experience with primary and secondary research methods, engage in a variety of writing projects, and create at least one major research project.

Course Goals for English 1302 (not necessarily in order of importance)

English 1302 is designed to help students:
1. See that writing is an opportunity for learning (THECB 1-6; WPSLO 1-5);
2. Develop an understanding of writing as an interactive and recursive process (THECB 1, 4; WPSLO 1, 3);
3. Become reflective writers, aware of the rhetorical choices writers make (THECB 1-3, 5, 6; WPSLO 1-5);
4. Identify their own purposes for writing (THECB 2; WPSLO 1, 3);
5. Develop their abilities to write in a variety of genres appropriate for their audience and purpose (THECB 2, 3; WPSLO 1);
6. Become actively engaged readers, able to use multiple reading strategies for a variety of complex texts, including their own (THECB 5, 6; WPSLO 2-4);
7. Learn how to interact productively with their peers throughout the writing process (THECB 4; WPSLO 2);
8. Know how to use various types of feedback (teacher, peer, self-assessment) to revise their texts effectively (THECB 1, 4; WPSLO 2);
9. Gain more confidence in their abilities to engage in future writing tasks successfully (THECB 5; WPSLO 5);
10. Use technology in their writing in rhetorically effective ways (THECB 1, 3, 5, 6; WPSLO 1-5);
11. Learn about and effectively use the conventions of writing that govern a given writing situation (THECB 2, 3, 5; WPSLO 1, 4); and
12. Understand the rhetorical implications of writing style and grammatical conventions for a given writing situation (THECB 1; WPSLO 1, 4).

My English 1302 Goals

Through your work in this class, you should begin doing the following things:

1. Develop and build confidence in your abilities to create, interpret, and evaluate texts in all types of media (THECB 1, 2, 3; WPSLO 1-8; English SLO 1-4).
2. Develop knowledge and inspire new ideas through writing (THECB 3, 5; WPSLO 1-4, 6-8; English SLO 1-4).
3. Become a rhetorically effective writer who can respond credibly and accurately to a variety of writing situations (THECB 1, 2, 3, 5; WPSLO 1-8; English SLO 1-4).
4. Learn to write with a purpose (THECB 2; WPSLO 1-3, 5; English SLO 2-4).
5. Develop an awareness of how and why you revise your writing (THECB 1, 2; WPSLO 1-3, 5, 8; English SLO 1-4).
6. Develop an understanding of the importance of getting feedback from others when writing (THECB 1, 4; WPSLO 1, 3, 5; English SLO 2-4).
7. Develop habits for thoughtful and effective questioning (THECB 4, 5; WPSLO 1, 3-4; English SLO 1-4).
8. Develop reading strategies for analyzing texts (your peers’ papers as well as the readings you’ll be working with) (THECB 4, 5; WPSLO 1, 3-4, 6-7; English SLO 1-4).
9. Learn how to work constructively with each other through group work (THECB 4, 5; WPSLO 3; English SLO 1-4).
10. Learn how to creatively take risks (THECB 1, 2, 3, 4; WPSLO 1-3, 5, 8; English SLO 2-4).
11. Become familiar with appropriate style guidelines for class projects (THECB 1, 6; WPSLO 1, 7; SLO 2-4).

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?
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

6. STUDENT EMAIL: I will email the class – you MUST check your UTRGV email REGULARLY

PROJECTS, in brief

As the semester progresses, I will formally introduce each project and assignment. Here, though, is a summary of what we will doing.

RESEARCH PAPER (portfolio: 40%)
This is an extended writing assignment (it will feel the most like the kind of writing tasks you’ve had to deal with before). Here, you’ll develop an argument using secondary and primary source material. The audience is “expert” (you can imagine your instructor to fill this role).

CONFERENCE PRESENTATION (portfolio: 40%)
This is a “translation” of your research paper into a 3-5 minute presentation for your peers. Take that whole paper and turn it into a short talk.

PUBLIC DOCUMENT (portfolio: 40%)
Take your researched argument 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. A podcast? Comic? Campaign of memes? Board game? Video? Protest? It’s up to you.

ACTIVITY DESIGN & PRESENTATION (15%)
You and your group (yes, this is a collaborative project) will research, develop, and present to the class an activity that will help us in our own writing, reading, and learning.

FINAL 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 (35%)
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 reflect 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"?

Your portfolio is the collection of ALL the ROUGH and FINAL drafts this semester. Several distinct projects comprise this major project: (1) research paper, (2) conference presentation, (3) public document.

**the conference presentation is a live performance, but the planning and presentation documents can go in the portfolio.**

**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.

**35%**

This is the activity you and your group will be presenting. Do not miss this presentation! This is the only time in the semester that we can't guarantee a revision or a do-over for.

**15%**

At the end of the semester, you will compose a brief statement of what you learned and how you learned it and, perhaps, what the next steps are to continue moving forward.

**10%**

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; 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?