

**ESL: Workshop in Composition**  
**ENGCOMP 0152 #26750**

**T/Th 4:00-5:15pm**  
**314 Cathedral of Learning**

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## The Language of Culture

American academic essays often investigate dilemmas or problems. We call this “critical inquiry.” Critical inquiry essays don’t necessarily try to solve problems. Instead, writers dig deeply, unearthing the particular nature, roots, effects, and implications—hidden, related meanings—of a specific problem, and posing questions that others have not considered.

In this class, we will read and write essays, and each one will probe a problem about unity or harmony: the disharmony within a nation, a culture, a family, or one’s self. From the outside, from a distance, a group or a person may seem unified, like a perfect sphere. But if scrutinized, that community or individual can manifest serious divisions. As we examine divisions or disharmonies, we will pay attention in our reading and our writing to language—the vocabulary, clichés, metaphors, and commonplaces that a nation, culture, or people use to imagine themselves and their experiences. We will ask: how does language—the words we use to describe ourselves or the culture around us—bind people together or blind people to the diverse perspectives that surround them?

The problems that you choose to explore in your essays should be illustrated by your own personal experience and should matter to you. They should also be specific, not general. If a topic is broad, it is nearly impossible to analyze it in interesting detail and depth in only 5-6 pages (the length of each of your essays). As we will see in our readings, often it is the most discrete, everyday happening—something small that we hardly notice—which is most worth analyzing. Our readings offer you models of critical inquiry about such specific issues.

Reading is as important in this class as writing. In fact, teachers at Pitt believe that a good writer is a good reader of his or her own writing! Our ways of reading—questioning, interpreting, challenging texts and having a strong voice in our class conversations may be new to you. And quite honestly, the published essays that we read and discuss are not easy. You will need to reread them and to take time to dwell on their layers of meaning and dissect their significant details. Because they are powerful, these readings offer theories and examples for you to challenge, extend and test in your own essays. They also provide a rich source of new vocabulary, idioms, and grammatical structures, which you should add to your *active* language supply and experiment with in your writing. (How many new words or sentence structures do you encounter, for example, on this page? Make them your own!)

The final component of our course is revision: All of these writing accomplishments—building ideas, crafting beautiful, tightly woven sentences—will develop through revision: we revise and extend our essays over the course of several drafts. As we share our drafts-in-progress, responses from readers—your classmates and me—will also give you directions and ideas for revision.

## GOALS FOR FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION COURSES

### at the University of Pittsburgh

Workshop in Composition is followed by Seminar in Composition—the course that most undergraduates take to fulfill the first of three writing-intensive requirements in the School of Arts and Science. While the readings and assignments in different sections of the Workshop course may vary, your section, like all the others, consists of a sequence of assignments that will require you to work on these goals:

**1. Engage in writing as a creative, disciplined form of critical inquiry.**

In this course, you'll be asked to use writing to generate ideas as well as explain them. You'll form questions, explore problems, and examine your own experiences, thoughts, and observations. Investigating a multifaceted subject, you'll be expected to make productive use of uncertainty as you participate in sustained scrutiny of the issues at hand.

**2. Compose thoughtfully crafted essays that position your ideas among other views.**

In response to reading and discussing challenging texts, you'll write essays in which you develop informed positions that engage with the positions of others. You'll analyze as well as summarize the texts you read, and you'll compose essays that pay close attention both to the ideas voiced by other writers and to specific choices they make with language and form.

**3. Write with precision, nuance, and awareness of textual conventions.**

You'll work on crafting clear, precise prose that uses a variety of sentence and paragraph structures. You'll be required to learn the conventions for quoting and paraphrasing responsibly and adeptly, and you'll be assisted with editing and proofreading strategies that reflect attention to the relation between style and meaning. You'll also have opportunities to consider when and how to challenge conventions as well as follow them.

**4. Revise your writing by rethinking the assumptions, aims, and effects of prior drafts.**

This course approaches the essay as a flexible genre that takes on different forms in different contexts—not as a thesis-driven argument that adheres to a rigid structure. Much class time will be devoted to considering the purpose, logic, and design of your own writing, and you'll be given opportunities to revise your work in light of response from your teacher and peers, with the aim of making more attentive decisions as you write.

You must earn a “C-minus” in order to pass Workshop in Composition, and those who earn a “C” or above will have made progress toward fulfilling the goals described above.

## COURSE GOALS, in practical language

All that flowery language on the previous page really means that you'll be doing a lot of work in this class. Here are the course objectives in an easier language.

### During this Course You Should Learn to WRITE ESSAYS that do the following:

- ✍ Explore your own ideas
- ✍ Demonstrate in-depth thinking
- ✍ Develop specific ideas through a cohesive structure
- ✍ Persuade readers with detailed, qualitative evidence from your own experience
- ✍ Consider other authors' perspectives in relation to your own
- ✍ Use rules of citation to acknowledge other authors' ideas and language
- ✍ Communicate clearly and effectively through
  - ◆ Varied sentence structures
  - ◆ Proficient grammar conventions
  - ◆ Nuanced vocabulary
  - ◆ Effective punctuation

### During this Course You Should Learn to Do the Following:

- ✍ Engage in careful, critical reading of other authors' essays and your own
- ✍ Analyze ideas, writing strategies, and significant details in the essays that we read
- ✍ Pose challenging questions and problems about essays, including your own
- ✍ Reflect on, discuss, and meaningfully revise your essay drafts
- ✍ Contribute regularly and substantively to class discussions
- ✍ Listen and respond to classmates' oral and written ideas

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### What You Need for this Course:

- A NOTEBOOK to bring to every class and write in!
- *They Say I Say with readings* by Graff, Birkenstein, and Durst
- *Rules of Thumb, 9<sup>th</sup> ed.*, by Silverman, Hughes, and Wienbroer
- A good, extensive English dictionary: Longman's online dictionary
- A folder to hold all drafts of your writing. Save all of your drafts!
- Access to a computer, printer, a PITT e-mail account, and course web <http://courseweb.pitt.edu/>

## Evaluation

### Workshop in Composition Rubric

*Whether or not you pass this class will be determined by your FINAL PORTFOLIO, which will contain samples of your polished writing and your in-class writing.*

*IF YOU PASS, your grade will be determined by this rubric.*

Categories	Participation 15%	Responsibility 5%	Assignments 20%	Essays 60%
<b>A</b> Superior	<u>Always / Often:</u> Speaks in discussion Is helpful in group work Brings materials to class Tries the task at hand Engages mentally in class	All assignments and essays turned in on time.	Mostly Check-Plus	<i>Essays will average the grades of the Revised Essays.</i>
<b>B</b> Meritorious	<u>Mostly:</u> Speaks in discussion Is helpful in group work Brings materials to class Tries the task at hand Engages mentally in class	1-2 assignments late (not essays)	Average of Check-Plus And Check	<i>Please see rubrics handed out in class for how essays</i>
<b>C</b> Adequate	<u>Sometimes:</u> Speaks in discussion Is helpful in group work Brings materials to class Tries the task at hand Engages mentally in class	3-4 assignments late or 1 essay late	Mostly Checks	<i>will be evaluated.</i>
<b>D</b> Minimal	<u>Rarely:</u> Speaks in discussion Is helpful in group work Brings materials to class Tries the task at hand Engages mentally in class	4-5 assignments late or 3-4 assignments late and 1 essay late	Average of Checks and Check-Minus	
<b>F</b> Failure	<u>Never:</u> Speaks in discussion Is helpful in group work Brings materials to class Tries the task at hand Engages mentally in class	More than 5 assignments late. And/or More than 1 Essay late.	Mostly Check-Minus	

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**Attendance:** Since this seminar focuses primarily on the work of you and your classmates, whose writing and responses to the reading are central to class discussion, attendance is mandatory. Come to class on time, prepared to take part in conversation about the materials under study. You are allowed two absences during the term for whatever reason, though it is strongly recommended that you strive for perfect attendance. ***If you do miss a class, you must arrange for your assignment that day to be submitted on time, either via email (to prof.prymus@gmail.com) or by placing it in my mailbox in CL-501. Beyond the allotted two, each absence without a documented excuse (such as a doctor's note) will result in a full one-grade (10%) penalty to your final grade; more than three unexcused absences can be grounds for failure.*** Students in this situation may want to consider withdrawing from the course and taking it again under better circumstances.

**Participation (15% of the grade):** To pass this class, you must participate. Participation means a lot of different things: coming to class on time, bringing the assignments and readings for the day, contributing to class discussion, participating in small group exercises, paying attention to the conversation, attempting the assignment in front of you, and asking questions if you do not understand. Participation does NOT mean coming without something to write with, staring at the attractive person next to you, or texting with your friends. If you text during class, you will lose participation points for that day. Please see the rubric for more information.

**Responsibility (5% of the grade):** Students in this class tend to have difficulties being responsible. This portion of the grade is to encourage you to learn to be responsible in turning in your assignments on time. If your assignments are consistently late, not only will your assignment grade go down, but you will lose this portion of your final grade as well.

## WRITING

**Short Assignments (20% of the grade):** We will write a number of short assignments to practice writing skills and respond to essays we read. These assignments should be at least one-page long. They are not formal and not essays, but they do require rigorous thought and attention. The degree of thought that you put into these assignments will inevitably affect your contributions to class discussion. *Assignments submitted late will automatically be downgraded, unless you are absent due to documented illness.*

**How to format your assignments:** Use 12 pointtype, Times New Roman type only; double-space with 1 inch margins on top, bottom and sides. Please TYPE your name and heading of the assignment and date at the top of the assignment. Edit and proofread your work carefully for your readers.

**How to submit your assignments:** SAs should be finished and emailed to Pr. Renee at [prof.prymus@gmail.com](mailto:prof.prymus@gmail.com) by NOON on the DATE DUE. Then print a copy to take to class and work with during class discussion.

**Sentence Finder:** This activity will help us to build a more extensive understanding and repertoire of sentences. Once during the term, you will select a sentence from our reading—a sentence that strikes you as unusual, arresting, or experimental because of how its structure affects you—and you will share the sentence and your thoughts about it with the class.

**Reading:** WRITE AS YOU READ! Stop at the end of a sentence or paragraph that grabs your attention and note your questions, reactions of surprise, confusion, amusement, initial opinions, and elegant sentences or new words in your notebook. Writers find seeds for essay ideas in their reactions to readings, so keep a record.

### ESSAYS(60% of the grade)

There are three graded essays to write and revise. Each of these essays will develop your own ideas, which will grow out of your responses to the readings, your informal writing, and weeks of thinking and discussion. Essay 1: Expectations (20%); Essay 2: Imperfect Union (20%); Essay 3: Multilingual Selves (20%).

**How to Format Your Essays:** Final essay drafts should be a minimum of **five to six full pages**, in 12 pointtype—Times New Roman only; double-spaced with **1 inch** margins on top, bottom and sides; and **paginated**. Revisions may be longer. Headings should include only a title, your name, the draft number, and the date. Each essay should have a **unique title** that reflects what the essay says and/or does. Avoid generic titles like “Essay 1” or “Language Essay.” **Proofread** essays; eliminate errors in wording, punctuation and spelling. **Essay drafts must be handed in on time and only absence due to documented illness will excuse you.**

**How to Submit Your Essays:** Essays should be finished and emailed to [prof.prymus@gmail.com](mailto:prof.prymus@gmail.com) by NOON on the DATE DUE. You must also print TWO paper copies for class. We will usually work on our essays in class or share them with a partner, so it is essential that you bring two paper copies. Failure to either email or print two copies will result in the essay being marked “Late.”

**Revision:** I will ask you to revise each essay. Revising means rethinking and rewriting your essay’s development of ideas, evidence, analysis, structure, tone and style, and, in later drafts, varying word choice, sentence structure, and polishing grammar and punctuation. Your responses to peer essays and conversations in class and in conferences will help you begin the rethinking and revising process. My comments on your drafts will also shape your revisions. **Each revised grade will replace the original grade.** After draft two is turned in, you may continue to revise your essay and turn in a final draft with your final portfolio.

### OTHER REQUIREMENTS

**Exit Essay:** At the end of the semester, you will write an essay in class in response to an assignment distributed the same day. ***This essay will become part of your final portfolio and will be assessed alongside your polished writing by a committee of instructors. Together, the***

*writing you do in-class combined with the writing you can polish (revised essays) will determine whether you can pass the course.* We will practice composing essays in class on the second day of class and in the middle of the semester. The feedback you receive on the second practice essay will tell you what you need to work on for the final Exit Essay. You can also meet with me to clarify your questions on this essay.

**Grammar:** We will spend multiple classes reviewing or learning grammar conventions and creative ways to stretch them. So please bring your grammar handbook, *Rules of Thumb*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., to each class. Please, also bring grammar questions to any and every class. You might bring a question about a correction that I made on one of your compositions; you might bring a question about a sentence or about a phrase in one of our readings. *Sharing your grammar or vocabulary questions will help you earn your participation grade.*

**Conferences:** We will meet for one required conferences (and in some cases more) to discuss your drafts—during office hours and by appointment. I will schedule one conference, and you will arrange with me for any others. Feel free to contact me by email at [raa54@pitt.edu](mailto:raa54@pitt.edu). Schedule your conferences a week in advance. Please do NOT schedule to meet with me at the Writing Center—because you are in my class this semester, I cannot meet you during those hours.

**Writing Workshops:** You will meet in small and full class groups to read and discuss classmates' writing. These exchanges will help you to find out what your readers notice, appreciate, and would be interested in seeing you develop. You will need to be a careful reader, able to talk about how you understand a piece of writing and to give useful, specific feedback to others. For these workshops, you will need to bring either 2 or 3 copies of your essay (see assignment schedule)

**Course Website:** All writing assignments and other class resources are online at the University's Blackboard website <http://courseweb.pitt.edu>. Log in using your university computer account username and password; then click on the link to this course. If you have trouble, contact (412) 624-HELP. Note also that Blackboard now has a free mobile app for Pitt users. **Please check your Pitt email account once a day for messages concerning our class.** Beware! often forwarding your Pitt email to another email does not work; *saying that you did not receive the email* is not an excuse.

**Academic Integrity:** ALL WRITING FOR THIS CLASS MUST BE YOURS. PLEASE DO NOT GET HELP ON YOUR WRITING from any source or person other than me, your classmate, or a Writing Center consultant. Please do not ask roommates or other friends to "fix" your errors. If others work on your writing, it will receive no credit. If you copy part or all of someone else's writing from the internet or elsewhere and present it as your own, you risk failing the class. This rule is law according to Pitt's Senate Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom (February 1974), which says: "the integrity of the academic process requires fair and impartial evaluation on the part of faculty and honest academic conduct on the part of students." There are serious consequences for plagiarism, beyond a failing grade, including expulsion from the university. We will discuss in detail how you document the words and ideas of others in your writing.





## ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE

**Writing Help:** The Writing Center Located in 317B of the O'Hara Student Center, the Writing Center is an excellent resource for working on your writing with an experienced writer. Although you should not expect consultants to “correct” or “edit” your papers for you, they can assist you in learning to organize, edit, and revise your essays. Consultants can work with you on a one-time basis, or they can work with you throughout the term. In some cases, I may require that you go to the Writing Center for help on a particular problem; otherwise, you can decide on your own to seek assistance. Their services are free, but you need to make an appointment online at [www.english.pitt.edu/writingcenter/](http://www.english.pitt.edu/writingcenter/) or call (412) 624-6556. Seriously consider this resource as an option – the Writing Center people are amazing!

**Workshop Tutorial** (a two-credit course *requiring the instructor's recommendation*): If your writing requires practice beyond our course requirements, then I will advise you to take this two credit course; do not enroll on your own. The course gives you the opportunity to meet weekly with a Writing Center consultant to work intensively on your writing and address problems with structure, grammar, and punctuation.

**Disability Resources:** Pitt offers a number of services to help students who are struggling either academically or personally. If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both me and Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890 / (412) 383-7355 (TTY), as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

**Academic Resources:** The Academic Resource Center is available to help you with general study skills: G-1 Gardner Steel Conference Center, (412) 648-7920.

**Psychological Resources:** Pitt also offers *free* counseling at the Counseling Center, located in 334 William Pitt Union (412-648-7930), for students who are experiencing personal or emotional difficulties.