

Seminar in Composition Studies

ENGL 259

Fall 2025 Section 01 Hybrid 4 Unit(s) 08/20/2025 to 12/08/2025 Modified 08/27/2025

Class time: T, 7:00-9:45PM

Class location: Faculty Office Bldg. (FOB) 104

Office location: FOB 111

Office hours: T, 5:00-6:00p; W, 11:00a-12:00n; or by appointment

In this course, we will engage with current approaches to studying and teaching writing. Specifically, we will examine perspectives about writing that inform its instruction: what writing is, how it is studied, how it is taught, how it should be taught, and whether or not it even can be taught. Our overarching goal will be to understand writing/composition as a complex, situated act in order to chart possibilities for developing and improving our work as teachers and scholars. The course will focus on situating issues associated with teaching writing in theoretical frameworks of rhetoric, composition, and writing studies, and we will discuss practical teaching issues, as well.

Course Information

English 259 is a graduate seminar in Composition Theory. The main questions guiding our reading and discussions this semester, and some of the fundamental questions motivating research in this field, are:

- How do people write?
- How do people learn how to write?
- How should we teach writing?
- What are the consequences of teaching writing one way versus another?
- What are the consequences of writing and texts in the world? In other words, what do texts “do” in the world? Why are they important?

And by the end of the semester, you will develop tentative answers of your own to these and many other questions.

Course Description and Requisites

Study of current approaches to composition.

Prerequisite: Classified standing or instructor consent.

Letter Graded

* Classroom Protocols

This course can be demanding. The reading load is heavy, the material is challenging, and course requirements are substantial.

That said, COVID times continue to be what COVID times are, so we're going to need manage our expectations appropriately. We're going to try to be like laughing hyenas (*Crocuta crocuta*)—we'll work together as a pack, leave no one behind, occasionally fight a lion (*Panthera leo melanochaita*).

During most class periods, we will discuss readings, do group activities, and hear presentations. I strongly encourage students to visit me in my office hours to discuss course materials and/or assignments throughout the semester—especially in the event that course expectations are overwhelming or confusing.

It's an English course, I know, but let's do some quick math. ENGL 259 is a 4-unit course. That means we are signing up to do a minimum of 12 hours of study per week just for this class. 2½ hours will be class time. The remaining 9½ hours a week, you will work on your own or with your peers to prepare for class and complete assignments. I have designed the work using this math to guide us. I will refer to it often to help you manage this workload over the semester.

Please note:

Sometimes projects and discussions include material that can be contentious and even potentially upsetting. We may encounter materials that differ from and perhaps challenge our ideas, beliefs, and understanding of reality. Students are encouraged to discuss issues about such materials with me. In class, discussion is welcome and encouraged, but comments found to be intentionally offensive, disrespectful, or antagonistic will not be tolerated.

Please also note:

If you have special needs or accommodations requests, see me as soon as possible. Failure to do so may result in forfeiting accommodations to which you're entitled. But even if you're not formally entitled to accommodations, talk to me anyway so we can make this an environment in which you can learn. My priority is a learning environment conducive to everyone's needs.

Other Available SJSU Resources

The University provides all students several resources to help us successfully learn in this course. The services provided include counseling and psychological care, mentoring and tutoring, access to food and housing, to technology, and writing support.

- [Accessible Education Center](#)
- [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#)
- [Peer Connections](#)

- [SJSU Cares](#)
- [Spartan Food Pantry](#)
- [Student Technology Resources](#)
- [Writing Center](#)
- [Other Campus Resources](#)

Course Goals

- 1) explore and evaluate a range of approaches to studying and teaching writing
- 2) situate writing in relation to values and expectations that teachers, students, and outside influences bring to the scene of instruction
- 3) engage in productive discussions about teaching and studying writing
- 4) articulate theoretically informed goals and objectives for writing classrooms
- 5) practice modes of academic inquiry

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

How Does This Work Contribute to Your Graduate Studies in English?

Rhetoric & composition is one of the many sub-disciplines included in English Studies, alongside other prominent sub-disciplines such as literature and creative writing. This course asks us to develop and begin to apply expertise in rhetoric & composition as we contemplate how to teach and study writing. While this course is not explicitly about the content in the rhetoric & composition portion of the MA exam, it will be helpful for studying to pass that section for students who select it.

Looking at the English graduate program learning objectives below, it is worth asking how rhetoric & composition is like, but also not like, other elements of the program.

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi: In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System").

Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance:

- A = excellent;
- B = above average;
- C = average;
- D = below average;
- F = failure.

Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a +(plus) or -(minus) grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

Program Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the MA English program, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate an appropriate level of expertise in literary history, literary theory, and rhetoric.
2. Demonstrate high-level proficiency in literary research and in the synthesis of research
3. Demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the interpretation and evaluation of literary texts.
4. Demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to
 - a. organize and present material in a cogent fashion,
 - b. formulate and defend original arguments,
 - c. employ effectively the language of their discipline and
 - d. write under time constraints.
5. Demonstrate a reading knowledge of at least one foreign language.

Upon successful completion of the MFA in Creative Writing, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a high level of ability to propose and complete a publishable, full-length work of literature in a primary genre concentration (fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, or scriptwriting).
2. Demonstrate high level of proficiency to write works of literature in a secondary genre concentration (fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, or scriptwriting).
3. Demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of literary history, literary theory, and craft and theory of creative writing.
4. Demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the evaluation and interpretation of literary texts.
5. Demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to:
 - a) organize and present material in a cogent fashion;
 - b) formulate and defend original arguments;
 - c) employ effectively the language of their discipline;
 - d) write under time constraints.

Course Materials

Reznizki, Michal and Elizabeth Wardle, eds. *Dynamic Activities for First-Year Composition*. NCTE Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-0814100936.

Bain, Ken. *What the Best College Students Do*. Belknap Press, 2012. ISBN: 978-0674066649.

Course Requirements and Assignments

Assignment	Learning Outcomes
Teaching Portfolio	2, 3, 4

Professional Development Activities (5 total)	1, 2, 3, 5
Class Observation Report	1, 3, 5
Presentation/Dynamic Teaching Showcase	3, 5
Reading responses (12 total)	1, 3, 4, 5
Participation / daily writing / in-class work	1, 3, 5
Final Reflection	2, 3, 4, 5

Participation / daily writing / in-class work

For a class like this one, much of the learning happens in class. Therefore, it is imperative you be in class every week and participate. Class participation entails: (1) demonstrating that you've completed the readings/assignments, (2) contributing to class discussions, and (3) completing in-class activities and assignments

Reading Responses

Your reading responses are primarily reflective writing. The prompt is simple: "What value did you get from the readings and/or what did the reading(s) echo for you?" Addressing this question could take an infinite number of forms, but the goal is to think with writers, scholars, and/or class community members in order for you to put yourself and your experiences in relation to the course materials, including those you might feel little to no interest in.

Please post your responses on Canvas by **11:59pm on Monday evening**. You will earn full credit for a good faith effort submitted by the deadline. By "good-faith effort," I mean the submission responds appropriately to the assignment and does not violate the academic integrity policy. A post that I judge to not be a "good-faith effort" may receive partial or no credit.

Professional development activities

There are 5 professional development activities that you'll be asked to complete:

1. [Generative AI activity \(https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/assignments/7479525\)](https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/assignments/7479525)
2. [Two microlessons for Early Start \(https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/modules\)](https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/modules)
3. [Midterm evaluation \(https://sjsu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3k3HQ2wLoOWAfr0\)](https://sjsu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3k3HQ2wLoOWAfr0)
4. [Re-mediation activity \(https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/assignments/7479535\)](https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/assignments/7479535)
5. [Final reflection \(https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/assignments/7479530\)](https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/assignments/7479530)

We'll talk more about the rationales and goals for each in class.

Presentation/Teaching Activity

At the end of the semester, you will all be doing a partner presentation using principles from the course text, *What the Best College Students Do*, in combination with activities from Reznizki & Coad's, *Dynamic Activities for First-Year Composition*. We'll figure out partners and chapters in class. The goal here is to teach a class activity that helps to support and encourage the kinds of behaviors and habits of successful students, including and especially for students who are just beginning to "be best."

In order to fulfill the expectations of the assignment, you will need to do TWO things:

1. Complete a **joint presentation** of your chapter. It should (1) provide your classmates with an overview of the principle from Bain's book that you've decided to focus on, and (2) explain why you chose this principle.
2. You will need to choose an activity from *Dynamic Activities for First-Year Composition* to teach with a particular focus on moving in the direction of your key principle. You can adapt the activities, combine more than one, or develop an activity "in the spirit of" something from the text. But keep in mind, this should be AN ACTIVITY! In other words, you're not standing at the front of the room telling us about the activity--you're actually leading students through it.

NOTE: I don't know if or how well this is going to work. If you have trouble identifying a good principle, trouble finding a suitable activity, or other concerns, I strongly encourage you to visit me in office hours. I promise you we can figure something out.

Your presentation should be approximately 25-30 minutes long.

Teaching Portfolio

The major project in this class will be a teaching portfolio. It will include: (1) a teaching philosophy, (2) a teaching CV, and (3) an active learning lesson plan. It may optionally include other materials, such as a writing assignment prompt, activity descriptions, or a daily class plan. We'll talk more about each of these components during class.

Final Examination or Evaluation

Faculty members are required to have a culminating activity for their courses, which can include a final examination, a final research paper or project, a final creative work or performance, a final portfolio of work, or other appropriate assignment. The culminating activity for ENGL 259 is a [Final Reflection \(https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/assignments/7479530\)](https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/assignments/7479530).

Prompt: How did your work in English 259 reflect (or not reflect) the learning goals for the course as outlined on the syllabus? Please use specific evidence from your assignments, class activities, and/or extracurricular activities.

This assignment is **not** an invitation to tell me how great the class was or how amazing I am. Rather, your job is to demonstrate that you understand and have achieved the learning goals associated with the course. It's an argument about you and your learning.

Your final reflection can be NO LONGER than 600 words!

✓ Grading Information

In this class, we'll be using a modified form of labor-based contract grading that draw on research in rhetoric and writing studies, grading and assessment, and the scholarship of teaching and learning. In short, the argument for labor-based contracts is that grades based primarily on "quality," particularly in process-focused classes (like writing and pedagogy), are not reflective of the learning goals--i.e., ongoing development over time. I'm persuaded by this research, which is why we're going this route, though I am open to discussion about it.

You are guaranteed a B if you:

1. attend class typically—generally arriving on time and not missing more than three weeks' worth of class participation (exceptions may be made in extenuating circumstance *if* students communicate with the professor);
2. meet criteria and due dates for all major assignments (i.e., Professional Development Activities, Class Observation Report, Presentation/Dynamic Teaching Showcase, Teaching Portfolio);
3. complete most discussion board assignments—not missing more than two—at least a baseline level of engagement;
4. generally participate in class exercises and activities;
5. give thoughtful peer feedback during workshops and work faithfully with your group on other collaborative tasks (e.g., sharing papers, commenting on drafts, peer editing, on-line discussion boards, answering peer questions);
6. make substantive revisions when the assignment is to revise—extending or changing the thinking or organization—not just editing or touching up;
7. copy-edit revisions of main assignments to generally conform to the conventions appropriate to the purpose, genre, and audience;
8. submit your Final Reflection.

In this system, you can earn the grade of B entirely on the basis of what you do—on your conscientious effort and participation. The grade of B does not derive from my judgment about the quality of your work with the exception that your work must meet my expectations for the quality of "baseline" engagement. Grades higher than B, however, do rest on my judgment of quality. To earn higher grades you must complete the assignments at both a higher level of (1) effort and participation and (2) quality.

NOTE: I reserve the right to increase a grade based on my professional judgement, but I will never lower a grade that meets the above criteria.

You are guaranteed an A if you:

1. attend class reliably—consistently arriving on time and not missing more than two weeks' worth of class participation (exceptions may be made in extenuating circumstance *if* students communicate with the professor);
2. meet criteria and due dates for all major assignments (i.e., Professional Development Activities, Class Observation Report, Presentation/Dynamic Teaching Showcase, Teaching Portfolio) at a high level of quality;
3. consistently participate in class exercises and activities;
4. complete all discussion board assignments at a high level of engagement;
5. give thoughtful peer feedback during workshops and work faithfully with your group on other collaborative tasks (e.g., sharing papers, commenting on drafts, peer editing, on-line discussion boards, answering peer questions);
6. make substantive revisions when the assignment is to revise—extending or changing the thinking or organization—not just editing or touching up;
7. copy-edit revisions of main assignments to generally conform to the conventions appropriate to the purpose, genre, and audience;
8. submit your Final Reflection at a high level of quality.

You may earn a B+ if you meet all the criteria for a B at a level of quality that I judge in sum to be high, but you do not meet the criteria for an A. You may earn an A- if you meet all the criteria for an A but do so at a level of quality that I judge in sum to be not high.

NOTE: I reserve the right to increase a grade based on my professional judgement, but I will never lower a grade that meets the above criteria.

As an instructor, I commit to:

1. providing formative feedback on all assignments where revision is expected and providing feedback upon request for assignments where revision is not expected;
2. engaging with and responding thoughtfully to student work in a timely manner, especially when revision is required;
3. providing clear and reasonable criteria for major assignments;
4. providing oral or written feedback to explain judgments of quality as necessary;
5. seriously reconsidering judgements of quality if requested as part of a one-on-one meeting (i.e., office hours or arranged meeting [in-person or Zoom]);
6. creating availability for meetings with individual students who want to confer with me;
7. considering upon request extenuating circumstances to raise (but never lower) grades that do not meet students' expectations based on the above contracts
8. re-evaluating contract criteria in consultation with class members, if requested.

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Course Schedule

Calendar subject to change with fair warning

Readings listed should be read BEFORE class

Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are on Canvas

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	8/26	<p>Due: Bring an object to introduce yourself</p> <p>During Class: Introductions, syllabus/grading contracts, defining our intellectual task, what we bring to the task [literacy mixtape/playlist (https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/assignments/7479532)]]</p>

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
2	9/2	<p>Before class: Read Bain, <i>What the Best College Students Do</i> (https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/external_tools/71748).</p> <p>Chapters: 2. What Makes an Expert?</p> <p>5. Messy Problems</p> <p>6. Encouragement</p> <p>Epilogue</p> <p>[this reading can be located for free through the library (linked title above)]</p> <p>Due: Respond to Canvas Discussion Board #1 by 11:59PM the day before class</p> <p>During Class: Kids these days; introduce Class Observation Reports (https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/assignments/7479528); Visit availability form (https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/assignments/7479527).</p>
3	9/9	<p>Before class: Read Hart-Davidson, "Have We Ever Done A Good Job Teaching Writing?"</p> <p>Hesse, "We Know What Works in Teaching Composition"</p> <p>Wardle, "You Can Learn to Write in General"</p> <p>[these readings can be located in the "Readings" page (https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/pages/readings)]</p> <p>Due: Respond to Canvas Discussion Board #2 by 11:59PM the day before class</p> <p>During Class: What are we doing? Why are we doing it?</p>

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
4	9/16	<p>Before class: Read Babb, "America is Facing a Literacy Crisis"</p> <p>Branson, "First-Year Composition Prepares Students for Academic Writing"</p> <p>Parrott, "Some People are Just Born Good Writers"</p> <p>Pattanayak, "There is One Correct Way of Writing and Speaking"</p> <p>[these readings can be located in the "Readings" page]</p> <p>Due: Respond to Canvas Discussion Board #3 by 11:59PM the day before class</p> <p>During Class Time: What we know, and what we think we know; professional development [Microlessons for Early Start]; introduce Generative AI Evaluation</p>
5	9/23	<p>Before class: Read Parker, "Where English Departments Came From"</p> <p>Matsuda, "Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity"</p> <p>[these readings can be located in the "Readings" page]</p> <p>Due: Respond to Canvas Discussion Board #4 by 11:59PM the day before class</p> <p>During Class: Some history, some deeply held assumptions</p>

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
6	9/30	<p>Before class: Read Laflen, "Rebuilding Pedagogical Trust in the Age of AI"</p> <p>Hart-Davidson, "Writing with Robots and other Curiosities of the Age of Machine Rhetorics"</p> <p>[these readings can be located in the "Readings (https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/pages/readings)." page]</p> <p>Due: Respond to Canvas Discussion Board #5 by 11:59PM the day before class</p> <p>During Class: Oh yeah, teh robotz; presentation sign-ups</p>
7	10/7	<p>Before class: Read Royster, "When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own"</p> <p>Bloom, "Freshman Composition as a Middle-Class Enterprise"</p> <p>[these readings can be located in the "Readings (https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/pages/readings)." page]</p> <p>Due: Gen AI Evaluation (https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/assignments/7479525); Respond to Canvas Discussion Board #6 by 11:59PM the day before class</p> <p>During Class: I got problems, you got 'em too; introduce Mid-Semester Evaluation (https://sjsu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9RHddqKluMTiTX0).</p>

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
8	10/14	<p>Before class: Read Bain, "How Do They Conduct Class?"</p> <p>Powell, "Learning (Teaching) to Teach (Learn)"</p> <p>[all these readings can be located in the "Readings (https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/pages/readings)." page]</p> <p>Due: Respond to Canvas Discussion Board #7 by 11:59PM the day before class</p> <p>During Class: What do?</p>
9	10/21	<p>Before class: Read Williams, "Phenomenology of Error"</p> <p>Rose, "Language of Exclusion"</p> <p>[these readings can be located in the "Readings (https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/pages/readings)." page]</p> <p>Due: Mid-Semester Evaluation (https://sjsu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9RHddqKluMTiTX0); Respond to Canvas Discussion Board #8 by 11:59PM the day before class</p> <p>During Class: How we respond to writers: teachers are weird edition</p>

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
10	10/28	<p>Before class: Read Oleksiak, "Queer Praxis for Peer Review"</p> <p>Meeks, "Givers Gain Teaching Philosophy"</p> <p>Meeks, "3 Feedback Design Lessons" (link)</p> <p>Hart-Davidson, "Describe-Evaluate-Suggest video" (link)</p> <p>Paul, "Promising Approaches: Grading Scales and Equity in Physics" video (link (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsO_mWE-7ZE))</p> <p>[these readings can be located in the "Readings" (https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/pages/readings)." page]</p> <p>Due: Respond to Canvas Discussion Board #9 by 11:59PM the day before class</p> <p>During Class: How we respond to writers: revision in practice? edition; Re/mediation Activity (https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/assignments/7479535/)</p>
11	11/4	<p>Before class: Read Alvarez, "Translanguaging Tareas"</p> <p>Cedillo and Bratta, "Relating Our Experiences"</p> <p>Young, "Should Writers Use They Own English?"</p> <p>[these readings can be located in the "Readings" (https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/pages/readings)." page]</p> <p>Due: Respond to Canvas Discussion Board #10 by 11:59PM the day before class</p> <p>During Class: Writers and teachers be like that sometimes; feedback on Re/mediation</p>

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
12	11/11	<p>NO CLASS: Veteran's Day</p> <p>Due: Re/mediation Activity</p>
13	11/18	<p>Before class: Read Corder, "Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love" Brooke, "Underlife and Writing Instruction"</p> <p>[these readings can be located in the "Readings" page]</p> <p>Due: Respond to Canvas Discussion Board #11 by 11:59PM the day before class</p> <p>During Class: Rock the boat, don't tip the boat over!; introduce Teaching Portfolio</p>
14	11/25	<p>Due: Respond to Canvas Discussion Board #12 by 11:59PM the day before class</p> <p>During Class: CV, teaching statement, etc.; introduce Final Reflection</p>
15	12/2	<p>Due: Class Observation Reports</p> <p>During Class: PRESENTATIONS! (potluck?)</p>

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
Final Exam	WED, 12/16 7:45- 9:45pm	Due: Final Reflection (https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/assignments/7479530/) & Teaching Portfolio (https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1611377/assignments/7479537/) During Class: PRESENTATIONS! (potluck?)