ENGL 109: Introduction to Academic Writing

Instructor: Chris Lawrence
Lecture Location: HH 1104
Lecture Time: Monday, Wednesday, & Friday 10:30-11:20 AM
Office Hours: PAS 2213, Monday & Wednesday 11:30-12:30 or by appointment
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Required Texts:
(Additional assigned readings will be available on reserve, via LEARN, or distributed in class.)

Course Description:
Critical reading and critical writing are specialized academic skills that you have developed and will continue to develop throughout your educational and professional life. Honing and applying these skills at the university level, however, doesn’t need to be scary. After all, you already know how to read and you already know how to write--and if you’ve made it this far in your education, you’re probably accomplished at both. This course will help you refine these basic skillsets in an academic context and is intended for students who are already comfortable with their English-language reading and writing skills and wish to learn how apply these skills to various genres.

The assignments in this course are accordingly structured to build upon one another; each one will teach students how to apply a vital component of essay writing, culminating in a final research paper which will demonstrate the sum of their learning throughout the course. Because critical writing is not possible in the absence of critical reading, the course has also been constructed around the critical theme of Reading Practices in a Digital Future. We’ll be reading works of speculative fiction along with critical essays by academics centering on this theme, with the aim of informing a thoughtful argument on the topic for a final research essay.

Additionally, because writing critically and writing well are not synonymous, attention will also be given to important grammatical concepts, tonal and stylistic conventions of academic writing, and the development of your personal writing style. We will learn the rules so that we may know when and how best to break them. Students will have the opportunity to demonstrate their narrative voice in a non-academic creative writing assignment prior to the final essay.

Assessment:
Attendance and Participation: 10%
Personal Narrative Assignment: 5%
Summary Assignment: 10%
Comparison Assignment: 15%
Creative Writing Assignment: 10%
Annotated Bibliography: 10%
Final Research Essay: 40%
Assignment Descriptions:

*Attendance and Participation: 10%*

These should be the easiest ten marks you earn all semester, because they are directly proportional to effort. To earn a high participation grade, you need to show up on time for class, participate in the in-class activities, and make an effort to join in on the conversation. If you miss a lot of classes or are chronically late without adequate documentation, or if you never have your readings done or participate in activities or discussion, you won’t get as many participation marks. It’s that simple.

*Personal Narrative Assignment: 5%, 2 pages, due Jan 16*

When the muse finally arrives the night before your final paper is due and you sit down to write (hopefully not in this class), it’s easy to get bogged down with research, citations, points, and counterpoints, and wake up the next morning to discover that you’ve written ten pages of indecipherable information with no way in and no way out. The personal narrative offers you a chance to familiarize yourself with the organizational structure and elements of the academic essay while focusing on one subject that you should already know inside out: yourself.

A narrative is a story, and a narrative essay conveys a story on a specific topic - in this case yourself. You should start with a thesis: some overarching point you want to make with your story. This point could be about your personal identity, why you are in your chosen program of study, your back-up plan to become a pirate if school doesn’t work out, or some other personal topic you can write about at length.

Regardless of what you choose, make sure everything you say reaffirms that point in some way. You could choose three (or two, or four; the first thing you need to understand for this class is that the five-paragraph essay is dead) defining moments that have shaped who you are today, you could discuss a few reasons why you are in the program that you are, or you could evaluate your personal pros and cons for a career of swashbuckling and pillaging on the high seas. No matter what your subject matter, your individual points (your subtopics, if you will) should shape the organizational structure of your essay.

This assignment is not meant to be researched. You don’t need to provide external sources, and you don’t need to quote Edward Teach, or Marshall D. Teach for that matter, but if you do, make sure you cite accordingly and save yourself the academic integrity violation (see the back of this syllabus for more on that).

**Learning Goals:**
- Establish (and stick to) a thesis while discussing a personal topic.
- Identify subtopics relevant to the thesis,
- and structure the paragraphs accordingly.
- Hone and develop your own narrative voice.

*Summary Assignment: 10%, 2-3 pages, no secondary sources, due Jan 30*

When somebody else reads your work, you can’t depend on the assumption that they will have already read every text you are citing. Half the battle in academic writing is making sure that your reader has an understanding of the texts you are discussing, without having to spend the entire length of your own work describing what happens in somebody else’s work.

Summarizing means taking an existing work and conveying the important information in less space than the original author used--usually a lot less space. To summarize a text effectively, you need to read the text carefully to understand what parts of it are important.
When summarizing an article, essay, or other critical work, the most important thing is to tell your audience what the main argument of the text is; in other words, identify the thesis statement. If you have room (and in this assignment you do), you should then follow up this main argument with a brief rundown of the subtopics of the text. When summarizing a work of fiction, the process is identical, but you may be more comfortable calling the thesis a theme and the calling the subtopics plot points.

Once you’ve conveyed this information, it’s usually helpful to offer some kind of commentary to help your reader make sense of what you’ve presented. As such, you should dedicate one or two paragraphs at the end of your assignment to rhetorical analysis. In other words, explain why the text was or was not persuasive, insightful, informative, and/or entertaining.

Your task for this assignment is to summarize and comment on the argument and main ideas of one of the first two readings scheduled in this course (Carr or Vonnegut). Since both of these options entail texts which are significantly longer than the allotted length for this assignment, you’ll have to think carefully about what to include and what to jettison. When deciding what’s important, it helps to know who your audience will be, so in this case, imagine for your audience a peer in your class who hasn’t read these works and needs to be brought up to speed.

Learning Goals:
- Identify the main argument in somebody else’s text.
- Identify the subtopics around which the text is structured.
- Convey this information to an uninitiated audience within a limited space.

Comparative Assignment: 15%, 3-4 pages, no secondary sources, due Feb 13

Knowing how to critically relate one text to another as well as evaluate the critical and rhetorical strengths of different texts is crucial to developing your own arguments.

All too often the comparative exercise is reductively described as identifying the similarities and differences between two texts. While both of these are important things to establish in a good comparative essay, there needs to be something more, a “so what” element. For example, how can one of your texts be positioned to serve as an affirmation (or a refutation) of the points in your other text? What is your critical takeaway on the topic, having considered the arguments of both texts? In consideration for your reader, why is it useful to consider these two particular texts in relation to one another? These are the sort of questions you want to address in your comparative assignment.

Start with an introduction of both texts and their respective authors. You’ll want to anchor your introduction with a thesis statement that will frame the critical angle of your discussion (i.e.: x is more persuasive than y because z; x says this and y says that, and the conclusion is z; etc.). It’s up to you how to structure the assignment from there, but there will be a few common ingredients that you should have no matter what. You should equip your audience with a solid understanding of the arguments of both texts; in other words, make use of your summarizing skills. You will probably want to identify similarities and differences between the texts (especially if you are comparing two essays or two novels), but make sure those common points aren’t arbitrary - you should be pointing them out with the overarching goal of reaffirming your thesis. You’ll also want to include some comments on the rhetorical persuasiveness of your authors. As previously stated, the exact ordering of these components is up to you, but make sure the structure of your argument is easy for your reader to follow, and make sure your paragraphs are focused on specific, identifiable subtopics.
Your task for this assignment is to compare one of the first four texts scheduled in this course (Carr, Vonnegut, Rosen, or Forster) in any combination – you can compare two essays, two stories, or one of each. The particular kind of argument you are advancing will vary depending on which texts you select (ie, a comparison of two essays will likely involve an argument of which author is more persuasive, while a comparison of an essay with a story may involve how the story affirms or rejects the ideas advanced in the essay).

Learning Goals:
- Develop a thesis that argues for a specific critical takeaway that emerges from the reading of your two selected texts.
- Identify points of convergence and divergence between texts.
- Argue for the rhetorical persuasiveness of one text over the other.

Creative Writing Assignment: 10%, At least 3 pages, no secondary sources, due Mar 6

The stylistic conventions of academic writing often confound students and prevent them from writing at their fullest technical and stylistic ability. Let’s face it: when you’re writing an academic essay, you’re very likely discussing some weighty technical stuff (at least some of which you probably had to teach yourself in order to write the paper), and juggling all those critical ingredients in an articulate fashion isn’t the easiest thing in the world.

Before we delve into the final essay, this assignment is your chance to sharpen your writing skills without these restrictions and have fun in the process. This is a less structured assignment than the personal narrative, but the creative demands are higher. By this point you will have read a number of works by authors speculating in one way or another how the relationships between reading, attention, media, and cognition are changing and will continue to change. Your task is to write in some way, shape, or form about what you think reading and/or communication in general will be like in 20 years.

Your composition may be narrative, non-narrative, implied narrative; whatever you want. This could entail a speculative essay, short fiction, or other creative work--feel free to do something as different as you like. You won’t have a thesis in the traditional sense, but keep in mind that any critically provocative work--creative or otherwise--will still have a specific thematic argument. The organization of your work is up to you, but make sure your reader can understand it. Go ahead and be profound, but don’t go out of your way to confound. There will be class time for workshopping, and some courageous students will have the opportunity to present their work to the class.

Learning Goals:
- Practice your writing skills and continue to hone your narrative voice.
- Apply critical thinking in a creative context.
- Have fun.

Annotated Bibliography: 10%, 2-3 pages, 3 secondary sources, due Mar 20

It’s much easier to define the scope of your own argument once you have a sense of what other people have said on the same topic. On the subject of reading practices in the digital era, there’s far more scholarship available than appears in this course. Your final research essay will involve you advancing your own argument on this topic. This assignment is intended to ease you into the research aspect of that assignment, while helping you shape the argument you will eventually use for your essay.

In the lead-up to the bibliography, we will learn about the basics of academic research: when, where, and how to conduct it, the resources available to you at UW, peer-reviewed and
non peer-reviewed sources, etc. Once you’ve got your bearings, your job will be to utilize those resources and select three external sources that you feel would be valuable and relevant texts to cite in your own forthcoming research essay.

There’s no trick reasoning as to why this is called an annotated bibliography. Your end product will look very much like an MLA Works Cited, with extra bits added. Those extra bits for each entry should include a brief summary of the argument (you should be able to do this in a short paragraph), as well as an explanation of why source x is a relevant source to consult for your final research essay.

Learning Goals:  
- Learn the basics of academic research  
- Familiarize yourself with the research resources available to you at UW.  
- Conduct research and compose a list of texts relevant to your topic

**Final Research Essay: 40%, 6 pages, 3 secondary sources, due Apr. 6**

With your research in hand, it’s time to be bold and make your claim. Throughout this class you will have read a wealth of fiction and criticism speculating on how reading practices are evolving in the digital era. You must now advance your own argument weighing in on this topic.

If you’ve done all of the assignments properly throughout the course, most of your work for this essay will already be done. For this assignment, you will need to construct and defend an original argument about reading in the digital era, supported by three external scholarly sources with proper citation and formatting.

This paper will have a narrative structure, as it focuses on a specific argument and should move in a clear direction with respect to that argument. It will involve summary as you cannot expect your audience (your instructor, in this case), to have read all the sources you will have consulted. It will involve comparison as you will be contemplating several different texts and trying to make sense of them as a whole. It will require you to flex your stylistic, creative, and rhetorical muscles as you attempt not only to convey information to your reader, but persuade your reader into agreeing with your critical argument. And since there is an external research component, the annotated bibliography will of course help you to shape the organizational structure and critical direction of the paper.

You will be given in-class time to workshop your rough draft both with peers and your instructor. Your thesis should be submitted for instructor approval and feedback by March 23rd.

Learning Goals:  
- Apply various genres of academic writing to produce a comprehensive research paper.  
- Leverage your rhetorical skills and narrative voice to defend your claims persuasively.

**Schedule:**

Week 1: Introductions

Readings – None

Jan 5: Introduction and syllabus

Jan 7: Audience, Purpose, Context

Jan 8: Introduction to personal narrative assignment
Week 2: Reading Critically
   Jan 12: Subject/verb agreement, pronouns, adjectives/adverbs
   Jan 14: Lecture/discussion on Carr
   Jan 16: Carr cont., **personal narrative assignment due**, introduction to summary

Week 3: Welcome to Dystopia
   Jan 19: Adjectives/adverbs, sentence fragments, run-on sentences
   Jan 21: Lecture/discussion on Vonnegut
   Jan 23: Vonnegut cont., Intro to MLA

Week 4: Literary and Technological Devices
Readings: *PSM* 57-77, Christine Rosen: “People of the Screen,” Hunter College RWC: “Guidelines for Writing a Summary”
   Jan 26: Punctuation
   Jan 28: Lecture/discussion on Rosen
   Jan 30: Rosen cont., **summary assignment due**, introduction to comparison

Week 5: Arguing and Defending
   Feb 2: Designing a thesis, organizing your paper, and integrating your sources
   Feb 4: Lecture/discussion on Forster
   Feb 6: Forster cont., citing your sources

*Feb 14-22: Reading Week; no class*

Week 6: Working with your peers
   Feb 9: In-class editing of comparison assignment
   Feb 11: Lecture/discussion on Prensky
   Feb 13: **Comparison assignment due**, into to creative assignment

Week 7: Contemporary Dystopia
   Feb 23: Lecture/discussion on Sargent
   Feb 25: Lecture/discussion on Valentine
   Feb 27: Workshop time for creative writing assignment

Week 8: Fine-Tuning your Work
Readings: *PSM* 4-28, Ian Bogost: “Reading to Have Read”
   Mar 2: Discussion of Bogost
   Mar 4: How to break the rules
Mar 6: Creative writing assignment due, student readings

Week 9: Research at UW
Readings: PSM 91-105, OWL Purdue: “Annotated Bibliographies”
https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/01/
   Mar 9: The basics of research
   Mar 11: Library field trip
   Mar 13: Citation, quoting, and plagiarism

Week 10: Fine-Tuning your Work
Readings: None
   Mar 16: Bibliography workshopping
   Mar 18: Cleaning up your prose
   Mar 20: Annotated Bibliography due

Week 11: Meeting Week
   Mar 23: Outlining and drafting
   Mar 25: The revision process
   Mar 27: Draft workshopping

Week 12: The End
   Mar 30: Draft workshopping
   Apr. 1: Workshopping & closing remarks.
   Apr. 3: No class; Good Friday

Week 13: Postscript
   April 6: Final Essay due in-class.

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline.

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4.
**Appeals:** A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read [Policy 72 - Student Appeals](#).

Other sources of information for students
[Academic integrity (Arts)](#) [Academic Integrity Office (uWaterloo)](#)

**Accommodation for Students with Disabilities**

Note for students with disabilities: The AccessAbility Services office, located in Needles Hall Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.