ENGL 109: Introduction to Academic Writing

Instructor: Chris Lawrence
Lecture Location: EV3 3406
Lecture Time: Tuesday & Thursday 11:30-1:00 PM
Office Hours: PAS 2213, time to be agreed upon in class
Email: c5lawren@uwaterloo.ca

Required Texts:
(Additional assigned readings will be available via LEARN.)

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 can initially seem challenging—but also rewarding. 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 broaden your understanding of academic writing as an active critical process 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 you how to apply a vital component of essay writing, culminating in a final research paper which will demonstrate the sum of your 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 the development of your personal writing style. This will include some concrete concepts like common grammatical bottlenecks, but will also focus on some of the basic principles of rhetoric and argumentation. We will learn the rules and conventions of genres so that we may know when and how best to break them. You will have the opportunity to demonstrate your narrative voice in a non-academic creative writing assignment prior to the final essay.

Learning Goals:
To help you to think critically and communicate effectively
To learn and practice a variety of strategies for inventing, drafting, and editing texts
To learn and practice writing in a variety of academic genres
To learn to read critically
To learn to write persuasively by effectively employing elements of formal argumentation
To help you give and receive useful feedback on writing for the purposes of revision
To learn and practice communicating to a variety of academic audiences

**Assessment:**
- Participation: 10%
- Personal Narrative Assignment: 5%
- Summary Assignment: 15%
- Comparison Assignment: 20%
- Creative Writing Assignment: 20%
- Annotated Bibliography: 5%
- Final Research Essay: 25%

**Course Policies:**
Electronic Devices - Laptops are welcomed and indeed encouraged in this class. We’re going to be doing a fair amount of in-class writing, and bringing something with you that you can type on/post things to LEARN on will be of great help. That being said, remember that if you’re on Reddit or playing *League of Legends* in-class, it’s not your own distraction that you need to worry about; it’s the distraction you’re causing for the people around you who can see your screen. Be respectful to your peers.

Late Policy - 5% per day, not counting weekends and holidays, unless you have an extension.

Extension Policy - Ask, and be reasonable.

Submissions and Resubmissions - Major assignments in this course are due every other Thursday at 11:59 PM in the appropriate LEARN Dropbox. **Submissions must be uploaded in .doc format;** Microsoft Word uses this format natively and all other major word processors can export your work to this format with ease. **Do not submit paper copies**--I will lose them.

Grades and feedback will always be made available by the time of the next class (the following Tuesday). All assignments will receive individualized feedback with the specific intent of helping you improve your work. If you are unsatisfied with your grade, you have the opportunity to resubmit **any and all** assignments within **one week** of receiving feedback (the following, following Tuesday). This draft process is mandatory for the final assignment and is built into the schedule.

**Assignment Descriptions:**

**Participation: 10%**

There is no attendance grade in this class. That being said, in order to earn these ten marks, you’re going to need to show up and participate in weekly writing exercises. At the end of the day, no matter how writing is learned or taught, there is exactly one way to get better at it, and that’s by doing it--a lot. The exercises will be varied in length and genre, but are all designed to be completed in class. That means no homework and no make-up assignments! Assignments will be evaluated for completeness, adherence to weekly constraints, creativity, and student improvement.
Personal Narrative Assignment: 5%, 2 pages, due Sep 24

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 backup 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 Oct 8

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: 20%, 3-4 pages, no secondary sources, due Oct 22

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: 15%, At least 3 pages, no secondary sources, due Nov 5

The stylistic conventions of academic writing often disarm 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 pages, 3 secondary sources, due Nov 19

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, draft due Nov 26, final due Dec 8**

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
  - Sep 15: Introduction and syllabus
  - Sep 17: Audience, Purpose, Context, introduction to personal narrative assignment

**Week 2: Reading Critically**
  - Sep 22: Common grammar troubles part 1, begin Carr
  - Sep 24: Carr cont., **personal narrative assignment due**, introduction to summary
Week 3: Welcome to Dystopia
Sep 29: Common grammar troubles part 2, style and tone, lecture/discussion on Suvin
Oct 1: Lecture/discussion on Vonnegut, 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”
Oct 6: Punctuation, rhetoric and content
Oct 8: Lecture/discussion on Rosen, summary assignment due, introduction to comparison

Week 5: Arguing and Defending
Oct 15: Lecture/discussion on Forster, citing your sources

Week 6: Working with your peers
Oct 20: Peer editing intro, in-class editing of comparison assignment
Oct 22: Prensky cont., Comparison assignment due, intro to creative assignment

Week 7: Contemporary Dystopia
Readings: Genevieve Valentine: “Is this Your Day to Join the Revolution?”
Oct 27: Lecture/discussion on Valentine
Oct 29: Workshop time for creative writing assignment

Week 8: Fine-Tuning your Work
Readings: PSM 4-28, Ian Bogost: “Reading to Have Read”
Nov 3: Lecture/discussion on Bogost
Nov 5: Creative writing assignment due, student readings

Week 9: Research at UW
Readings: PSM 91-105, OWL Purdue: “Annotated Bibliographies”
Nov 10: Library field trip
Nov 12: Citation, quoting, and plagiarism

Week 10: Fine-Tuning your Work
Nov 17: Bibliography workshopping, evaluating sources
Nov 19: Annotated Bibliography due, cleaning up your prose

Week 11: Meeting Week
Nov 24: Outlining and drafting
Nov 26: The revision process, **first draft due**

Week 12: The End
Dec 1: Final writing activity, draft status report
Dec 3: Workshopping & closing remarks

**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 on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (NH 1401), 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.