In this course we will review and extend our control of contemporary usage. We will work to get rid of the hesitations and uncertainties you may feel when performing usage tasks such as deciding on the placement of a comma, re-writing a sentence, or attempting to understand the passive voice. In order to do this, we will learn some grammar so that we can understand more completely how the various parts of the English language function together. In particular we will pay attention to how Canadian English works, with special attention to Canadian spelling and Canadian dictionaries. As we learn how to sound professional and polished in writing situations such as resumes and essays, we will begin to investigate the link between different kinds of usage and different social situations. We will investigate why the appropriate usage in an email to a friend is so different from that in a cover letter, or a computer manual. We will ask why correct usage might seem so much easier to some writers than others.

This course will consistently embrace some of the underlying questions about contemporary usage: where do the rules and norms of English usage come from? what do they do? and, how are they changing?

What skills will you learn from this class?
• you will be a more confident and informed writer, with a fuller understanding of points of usage and the implications of their use
• you will have a more comprehensive understanding of English grammar
• you will be able to recognise and articulate links between usage and society
Required Texts:
course notes. English 219. Contemporary Usage Readings. (available in bookstore)

Assignments:
Midterm Exam #1 25% June 16
Midterm Exam #2 30% July 14
Final Paper 45% Due August 3 before 4pm in my mailbox HH 229.

Midterm Exams: Both exams are cumulative. They will use a variety of different question types to test your knowledge of and ability to use terms and concepts from the course. The first exam will be entirely in-class. The second exam will have both take-home and in-class components. More specific details about the exams will be provided in class.

Final Essay: The final paper is your opportunity to use your knowledge of contemporary usage issues to make a sustained argument about a particular text. In class I will provide you with examples of how you could approach this task. You are expected to select your own text and to develop your own argument, drawing on what we have learned this term. I will grade your paper based on the clarity and skill with which you present your case, the strength of your evidence and the extent to which you have engaged with the text in the terms of this class. Your usage will also, of course, figure into my evaluation. Papers should be about 2500 words, written in MLA format and, if applicable, should be documented with an attached bibliography.

You will bring a complete draft of your final paper to the last class for a peer editing workshop. Students who do not attend, or who do not bring a draft will automatically forfeit 5% of their term grade. Students who participate will automatically receive 5% of their term grade.

Schedule of Classes and Readings:
* readings from COBUILD are listed under the entry name; read the entire entry

1) May 5 Introduction. What is Usage?

2) May 12 Register – Different Choices for Different Situations
David Crystal “Swearing” Contemporary Usage Readings

3) May 19 Introduction to Word Classes, Verbs and Verbal phrases
Readings: COBUILD verbs, auxiliaries, irregular verbs, tenses, the future, the past, the present, the passive, past participles, -ing forms, continuous tenses.
Crystal, “Word Classes” Contemporary Usage Readings

4) May 26  Dictionaries and More on Verbs and Verbal Phrases
Readings: COBUILD split infinitives, modal verbs, contractions, ellipsis, subjunctive verbs, infinitives, singular and plural verbs, phrasal verbs.
Edward Finegan “The Third as Radical Document” and “Different Dictionaries, Different Linguists: A Rival Lexicon and a New Linguistics” Contemporary Usage Readings

5) June 2 Clauses and Canadian English
Readings: COBUILD subordinate clauses, ‘that’ clauses, verbless clauses, wh- clauses, to infinitive clauses, sentences, subject, imperatives, objects, relative clauses, complements.
T.K. Pratt “The Hobgoblin of Canadian Spelling” Contemporary Usage Readings

6) June 9 Nouns and Noun phrases
Readings: COBUILD, spelling, nouns, noun groups, noun modifiers, qualifiers.
Crystal “Jargon” (174) Contemporary Usage Readings

7) June 16 Some Smaller Word Classes and EXAM
Readings: COBUILD, conjunctions, linking adverbials, determiners, prepositions

8) June 23 Pronouns
Readings: COBUILD Pronouns, male and female, he, he-they, its-it’s, this-that, this-these, who-whom, she, possessive determiners.
Donald Mackinnon “Political Correctness” Contemporary Usage Readings
Rosalie Maggio “A Guide to Nondiscriminatory Language” Contemporary Usage Readings
Globe & Mail, “Anyone can raise an objection themself” Contemporary Usage Readings

9) June 30 Adjectives and Adverbs
Readings: COBUILD adjectives, adverbs, adverbials, -ed adjectives, hopefully, -ing adjectives, comparative and superlative adjective and adverbs, -ly words, broad negatives, modifiers.
Steven Pinker “Grammar Puss” Contemporary Usage Readings

10) July 7 Punctuation 1
Readings: COBUILD Punctuation
Lewis Thomas, “Notes on Punctuation” Contemporary Usage Readings
Crystal, Punctuation, Punctuation Marks, Contemporary Usage Readings

11) July 14 Punctuation 2 and EXAM
Readings: COBUILD, Capital letters, ‘s
“It’s Academic-or is it?” Contemporary Usage Readings

12) July 21 Style
Readings: “The Case for Short Words” Contemporary Usage Readings
Joseph Williams "Plain English: the Remaining Problems" Contemporary Usage Readings

13) July 28  Wrap-up and Peer Drafting Workshop

Course Policies:
Late assignments will have 2% per day deducted, including weekends. Late papers should be signed and dated by one of the English department secretaries. Otherwise, I will assume that it was handed in the day that I pick it up from my mailbox. If you anticipate a problem meeting class deadlines, speak to me as soon as possible. I will consider extensions only for extenuating circumstances, usually medical. Students may also expect reduced feedback on late papers.

Speaking in class is easier for some than others. I urge you all to treat each other with respect. Those who aren’t ready to do this will be asked to leave the class.

A note regarding plagiarism: all use of other people’s ideas or research in your essay must be fully acknowledged. Plagiarism is “the act of presenting the ideas, works, or other intellectual property of another as one’s own”. While in its extreme form this means copying a whole essay or part of an essay, it also means failure to document your sources in general. I encourage you to ask me for an explanation or clarification if you are confused about any aspect of documenting or using other people’s work. Remember, plagiarism is a serious academic offence and will be dealt with according to the University of Waterloo’s disciplinary code. Don’t do it!