ENGLISH 219: CONTEMPORARY USAGE
Spring 1998

(Note: Keep this syllabus in your binder because it contains important class information.)

Instructor: Tracy Whalen
Class time: Wednesday 7:00-10:00
Room: AL 202 (please note change)
Office: PAS 1061
Phone: 888-4567 (x2685); or call the undergraduate secretary (x. 2634) and leave a message for me
Email: tawhalen@watarts.uwaterloo.ca
Office Hours: Monday, 12:00-1:00; Wednesday, 5:30-6:30 (or by appointment)

Required Texts:

What is this course about?
Over the next twelve weeks, we will examine our tendency, just by virtue of living, to muddle things up. Language (like our kitchen counters and office space) can be a disordered place. Messiness makes some of us anxious, however; we see all around us the desire to tidy things up. Hence we have vacuum cleaners, appointment books, and, most important for our purposes, rules of grammatical and lexical usage. Rules of usage do more than simply clean up our writing, however. Grammar enables us to communicate with each other in various contexts. It is a tool, not only for speaking and writing, but for analysing language constructions in the world around us. Grammar, we will see, is a rhetorical event. That is to say, grammatical resources enable us to address a listener or reader in particular ways. Word choice, sentence structure, and cohesion do not occur in a vacuum but always involve an audience. We cannot forget, finally, that usage is a political event. We will talk about power, self-censorship and grammatical unease and how we feel about the institutions that dictate and safeguard these rules in the first place.

What skills will you have after you’ve taken this class?

* you will be more familiar with grammatical and lexical usage, and will have tools to write texts that are interesting, cohesive, and audience-aware
* you will be able to recognise and articulate some of the links between usage and society
Course Work:
Learning Journal 15%
In-class quizzes (best three out of four) 30%
Midterm exam (June 24) 25%
Final Essay (due Friday, July 31) 30%

1. The Learning Journal (15%)
The journal is your opportunity to develop ideas about assigned readings, class discussion, and tidbits you hear in conversations or read in newspapers. The journal will help you prepare comments for the upcoming class and to discern patterns between readings. Each week, I will assign a question or two for you to explore in your journal. You can use this space to summarise an essay and to respond (I’ll expect about 500/600 words a week). In class, you will exchange journals and will have the chance to comment on each other’s responses. As you can see, the journal is an important in-class resource, so be sure to always bring it to class. I will collect the journals every two weeks and will mark them for completion and punctuality (not for composition and grammar).

2. In-class quizzes (30%)
We will have four quizzes during the term, three of which will count towards your final grade. Because of the ‘bonus’ quiz, I don’t allow students to reschedule a missed quiz.

3. Midterm (25%)
The class midterm will consist of two parts:
Part one will be a take-home. The week before the midterm, we will have a workshop on usage and advertising. You will take one of the ads we discuss in that workshop and write a 750-word analysis and that both integrates and extends the work we did on these texts in class. You’ll bring this paper in on the day of the midterm and will hand it in with your in-class exam work. You will forfeit half the marks for your midterm if you do not hand in this component on time.
Part two will be completed in class. You will answer one essay question based on our readings and discussions during the term. I will distribute possible essay questions the week before the exam so that you can study with some sense of direction.

5. Paper (30%)
This will be a paper of 2,500 words that treats some area of usage. I will provide possible questions but invite you to explore your own (upon consultation with me). You may want to analyse a particular text or you may want to explore some contemporary issue. This is a research paper; in other words, you will be required to do some reading in the library to learn more about your topic. You also will be required to attach a bibliography. On class twelve (July 29), bring two double-spaced copies of your draft to class. We will do a workshop during which your peers will read and review your draft. You will lose 5% if you do not bring in a draft on this day. You automatically get 5% for bringing in your draft for peer review. The reworked paper is due on Friday, July 31 in the English dept. Mailroom (HH229).

My policy on extensions
In order to get your assignments back promptly, you must turn them in on time. I will grant extensions, given reasonable circumstances, but you must come talk to me, and, if possible, at least a week before the announced due date. If an extension has not been granted, I deduct two percent per day, including weekends. I do not accept assignments after the others have been returned to the class. I reschedule missed midterms only if you have relevant documentation.
COURSE SCHEDULE

May 6 – Introduction: Why do things get in a Muddle?

May 13 – Grammar and the Rhetoric of Sentences
Hacker, B1-B3
Eschholz, 46-49 (“Writing for an Audience”) p.79-83 (“English Belongs to Everybody”)

May 20 – A Sticky Subject: Cohesion and Clarity
Hacker, C3-d; E1, E2, E5

May 27 – Some Ways with Words
Hacker, W1-W3; W4f
Eschholz, p. 56 (“The Case for Short Words”) p. 155 (“Politics and the English Language”)
QUIZ #1

June 3 – Nouns as Event
Hacker, G1; W4-b; T1; E3; S3a
Eschholz, p.103 (“What’s in a Name?”) p.108 (“Giving Things Names”) p. 177 (“Selection, Slanting, and Charged Language”)

June 10 – Pronouns and Use
Hacker, B1-b; G3; S2
Eschholz, p. 258 (“I'll Explain it to You”: Lecturing and Listening); p. 245 (“A Guide to Nondiscriminatory Language”)
QUIZ #2

June 17 – Let's do Verbs!
Hacker, E4; G2; W4-c
ADVERTISING WORKSHOP/MIDTERM PREP.

June 24 – Midterm Exam

July 1 – CANADA DAY HOLIDAY!

July 8 – Up with adverbials!
Hacker G4; E6
**July 15 — Pause for thought: the Rhetoric of Punctuation**
Hacker, P1-P7
(no Eschholz reading)
QUIZ #3

**July 22 — The Long and Short of Sentences**
Hacker, G5-G6; E7; B3-c;
Eschholz, p. 389 ("Into the Electronic Millennium"); p. 400 ("Return to Sender")
BONUS QUIZ #4

**July 29 — Peer Review and Wrap-up**