Scope & Nature of the Course

Every semester, students tell me that they are not good writers. However, when I ask what good writing is, they often say, “It uses good vocabulary” or “It sounds smart.” Neither of these statements is wrong, of course. One result of effective writing is that the author may appear quite intelligent. But that is not what my students mean. Good vocabulary, they believe, is words that they do not hear or speak on a daily basis. Smart means writing that is difficult to understand. One goal of this course is to correct these misconceptions. The essays you will read were originally published in prestigious newspapers and magazines and on Internet blogs. They use a variety of diction and styles, but they all have one thing in common: clarity and purpose. In this class, you will learn to propose and defend an argument in the clearest, most engaging way possible. That is good writing.

To help you learn to develop an argument, you will read unit essays organized around a common question: whether to regulate the consumption of fast food, whether television has positive effects, and whether American citizens really can move from rags to riches. Each essay in a unit takes a different approach to the question. Your job, when writing your own essay, will be to enter the conversation. You will make a new, fresh argument and defend it using the arguments from the essays you read. While this task may seem difficult, you will be given templates and guides for reacting to existing arguments to help build your own.

The same skills will be used when you read and write about a novel. Rather than making a formal argument about the novel, however, you will apply the ideas in the book to a real-world scenario.

By completing these lessons, you should become a competent writer, a critical reader, and a clear thinker. Surveys of the leaders of Fortune 500 companies have shown that the abilities to write effectively, to read critically, and to think clearly are essential to success in the job world. As with any skill, you will become more proficient at reading, thinking, and writing as you learn strategies, practice skills, and receive feedback on your efforts. The activities and assignments included in the six lessons of this course are designed to provide these opportunities. In Lesson One you will find an overview of the writing process. Then in Lessons Two through Five you will apply that process toward the completion of essays. In each lesson you will also learn skills through studying the conventions of Edited American English. Every lesson will ask you to complete writing exercises. These exercises are specifically designed to build upon one another to prepare you to write an essay. If you complete every exercise, you will likely find that you have written a great bulk of the assignment. Lesson Six will prepare you for the final exam.

The writing you will be doing in this course is essay or expository writing—writing to analyze and explain ideas. Your writing will not be “creative” in the sense of being fiction or poetry. Neither will your writing be primarily personal narrative, although you may utilize personal experiences as one way to develop your ideas. In short, your assignments for this course will be the kind of assignments you are likely to encounter in other college courses—assignments that ask you to
explain, apply, analyze, or synthesize ideas. A Sample College Essay is provided in the left menu. Be sure to read it before you write your first essay.

Lessons

Lesson 1: Entering the Conversation
Arguing within the context of what has been said before; summarizing other writers' arguments; using quotations; previewing the writing handbook.

Lesson 2: Is Fast Food the New Tobacco?
Responding to others' opinions and formulating your own; including opposing arguments in your essay; citing quotations; writing works-cited entries; using commas in compound sentences.

Lesson 3: Are 24, Family Guy, and Grand Theft Auto Actually Good for You?
Explaining why the reader should care; using transitions; using commas in complex sentences.

Lesson 4: Is Economic Mobility Just a Dream?
Using semicolons and the em dash.

Lesson 5: The Things They Carried
Analyzing a novel; translating arguments into art; reducing wordiness.

Lesson 6: The Mental War Zone
Comparing the novel The Things They Carried with a film, Triage; preparing for the final exam essay.

Required Materials

The texts required for this course are

- Triage, a film starring Colin Ferrell (can be rented through Netflix or Amazon Instant)
- First-Year English Syllabus (online: http://www.english.txstate.edu/resources/syllabus.html)

All three texts are used on campus, as well as in this correspondence course. In addition to reading the assigned sections, you should use The Scott, Foresman Handbook as a personal reference tool to help you find answers to questions you have as you write and as you review the correction symbols, marginal notes, and final comments offered as feedback to your writing. Lesson One will help you become familiar with the text so that you can use it effectively.

The selections in They Say/I Say will challenge your critical reading and thinking skills because they present ideas that are challenging thinkers and leaders in the world today. In addition to the required texts, you should have a college dictionary.
Course Goals

All papers in the course are documented, with at least one of them requiring the use of several print and/or online sources. After completing English 1320, you should be able to do the following (as stated in the First-Year English Syllabus at Texas State University):

- draft, revise, and edit papers in which you demonstrate the ability to understand and analyze a variety of texts;
- quote, paraphrase, and summarize print and/or online sources to support your ideas; and
- use standard procedures of citation and documentation.

In addition to these, you will also meet these basic objectives of any written essay:

- formulate a thesis or central idea;
- develop that thesis in an orderly way;
- form clear and effective paragraphs and sentences;
- use an appropriate vocabulary;
- apply the grammatical and mechanical conventions of written English; and
- apply critical reading skills to your own writing and to the writing of others.

Course Procedure

The six lessons of this course must be studied in order. You may work ahead, but ideally you will wait to submit any essay until the previous one has been returned to you. However, as it may be necessary to complete the course within a short period of time, you may turn in the essays in groups: Lessons 1 and 2; Lessons 3 and 4; Lesson 5; and Lesson 6, which will be taken as the final exam. If done in order, one essay at a time, it should be possible to complete this course in about five weeks (the length of a typical summer on-campus course). You should not expect to turn in all essays at once.

Reading Assignments

Each lesson incorporates reading assignments from The Scott, Foresman Handbook and They Say/I Say. Although all reading assignments for each lesson are listed at the beginning of the lesson, they should be read at the points indicated in each learning module. You will need to read most of the assignments, especially those from They Say/I Say, at least twice—once to understand the main ideas and at least one more time to examine more closely how the author develops, supports, and organizes the ideas and how the author uses style to make the essay effective and memorable. Reading assignments from The Scott, Foresman Handbook will be of two types. One type will explore the processes of and strategies for drafting, revising, and editing; the other type will review the conventions of usage and mechanics.

In addition to the reading assignments in the lessons, I may recommend in my correspondence to you additional pages and sections that address specific concerns related to your essays.

Assignments

The assignments in this course will be of three types:
exercises that allow you to practice writing strategies and various stages of the writing process and to apply conventions of grammar and mechanics;
• critical thinking questions over the essays in They Say/I Say; and
• four essays, each a minimum 750 words, plus a brief, ungraded, diagnostic essay and a final exam that is also a 750-word essay. A Sample College Essay is provided.

In each lesson, follow the exercises in the order they are given. The exercises are designed to build a body of writing that will be of use in the assigned essays.

Essays, whether drafts or final versions, should be turned in using the following format:

• double spaced;
• 1” side and bottom margins;
• a heading (see sample paper in The Scott, Foresman Handbook);
• do not include a separate title page. Instead, follow the format for name and title found at the beginning of the sample essay on page 703 in The Scott, Foresman Handbook and at the beginning of the sample essay on this website; and
• use a 12-point, standard font.

Instructions for assignment submission are included in the course.

Final Exam

You will take only one “exam,” a final 750-word essay, written during a 2 and 1/2 hour proctored, final exam session. Although you must pass the final exam to pass the course, if you have successfully completed Lessons One through Seven, the final exam should pose no problem for you. The information for the final exam is discussed in the Lesson Six and Final Exam learning modules.

You must earn a C or better on the final exam to pass the course.

Grading Criteria

You must complete all five essays and pass the final exam to pass the course. To acknowledge improvement, later essays will be weighted slightly more than early ones. The assignments will be weighted as follows:

Essay 1: Credit Only
Essay 2: 20%
Essay 3: 20%
Essay 4: 25%
Essay 5: 25%
Final Exam: 10%

Criteria applied to the grading of your written essays will be rigorous, as specified by the Texas State English Department for all students enrolled in English 1320. Departmental standards (as stated in the First-Year English Syllabus) for each grade are as follows:

• A indicates outstanding work. It is clearly a superior performance according to the criteria of clarity of expression and logical development of a central idea. It shows originality of thought and imaginative competence in the development of the material. It
engages and holds the reader’s attention and invites rereading. The style of the writing is consistently fluent, polished, and distinctive.

- **B** demonstrates a higher level of effectiveness in the organization and development of a central idea than the **C** paper. The **B** paper shows greater complexity of thought and development, while sustaining clarity in expression. It has few or none of the common errors in the use of conventional written English. The style of the writing is generally fluent and polished.

- **C** indicates a satisfactory performance. A **C** paper demonstrates positive qualities and avoids serious errors. The positive qualities include the presentation of a central idea that is adequately developed and competently organized. The errors to be avoided include serious flaws in the construction of paragraphs and sentences, in the selection of appropriate words, and in the use of conventional written English. The style of the writing is generally clear.

- **D** indicates an unsatisfactory performance. A **D** paper is flawed by one or more of the following: weakness in establishing or developing a central idea; serious errors in sentence or paragraph construction; serious errors in grammar, spelling, or the mechanics of written expression.

- **F** indicates an unacceptable performance. An **F** paper is flawed by one or more of the following: failure to follow the assigned topic; failure to conceive, state, or develop a central idea; serious repeated errors in sentence construction or paragraph development; serious repeated errors in usage, spelling, or mechanics.

Each paper will be graded using a rubric. A [Sample Grading Rubric](#) is provided.

**Students with Special Needs**

The Office of Distance and Extended Learning is committed to helping students with disabilities achieve their educational goals. A disability is not a barrier to correspondence study, and we strive to provide reasonable accommodations to individuals in coursework and test taking. Students who require special accommodations need to provide verification of their disability to the [Office of Disability Services](#), Suite 5-5.1 LBJ Student Center, 512.245.3451 (voice/TTY). Students should then notify the Office of Distance and Extended Learning of any disability-related accommodation needs as soon as possible to avoid a delay in accommodations.

**Faculty-Student Contact**

According to “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education,” faculty-student contact is very important. Even though this is a correspondence course, I encourage you to contact me if you have any concerns, questions, or problems. You are welcome to e-mail me by using the Mail tool in the left menu bar. (It is important to keep all mail related to this course contained within this TRACS site.) My policy is that during non-holiday breaks or announced away times, any email I receive between Monday morning and Friday at noon will receive a reply within 48 hours. Emails received between Friday at noon and Sunday night will receive a reply on the next business day.

**Free Tutoring Resources**

A variety of free tutoring resources are available for students enrolled in correspondence courses. All correspondence students have access to several hours of free online tutoring from Smarthinking for subjects ranging from grammar and writing to mathematics and Spanish. Free online tutoring for writing-related assignments is also available from the Texas State Writing Center. For information on accessing these resources, please visit the Office of Distance and
Extended Learning’s [Free Tutoring](#) page. Currently-enrolled, degree-seeking students able to visit the Texas State campus are eligible for free in-person tutoring from the [Student Learning Assistance Center (SLAC)](#) on the fourth floor of Alkek Library and from the [Math Lab](#) in Derrick 233.

**TRACS Technical Support**

Texas State’s Information Technology Assistance Center (ITAC) provides phone and LiveChat technical support for TRACS 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. To take advantage of these services, visit [ITAC online](#) or call 512.245.ITAC (4822). Note also that a number of online TRACS tutorials are available from [TRACS Facts](#).

Before beginning this online course, it is recommended that you review the minimum hardware and software requirements and other important information available on the ITS [Course Information page](#).

**Correspondence Course Information**

As a correspondence studies student, it is your responsibility to be familiar with correspondence-related policies and services. To this end, I encourage you to review the [Correspondence Course Information (.pdf)](#) page as well as the [Correspondence Studies Student Handbook](#).

**Academic Integrity**

The [Texas State Academic Honor Code](#) applies to all Texas State students, including correspondence students. The Honor Code serves as an affirmation that the University demands the highest standard of integrity in all actions related to the academic community.

**English 1320 Policy**

As stated in the University’s [Official Student Handbook and Code of Conduct](#), learning and teaching take place best in an atmosphere of intellectual fair-minded openness. All members of the academic community are responsible for supporting freedom and openness through rigorous personal standards of honesty and fairness. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty undermine the very purpose of the University and diminish the value of an education.

Plagiarizing is submitting work that is in any way not your own. Refer to [The Scott, Foresman Handbook](#), pages 623-626. Any cases of verifiable plagiarism, whether deliberate or accidental, will result in a failing grade on the assignment and may result in a failing grade for first-year English. (Note: Consultation with your instructor or a counselor at the Writing Center or with a tutor does not constitute plagiarism and is encouraged.)

**Final Comments**

As you survey the amount of work required for this course, you may feel overwhelmed. However, remember that this is a one-semester, three-hour course and that, as a correspondence student, you have up to a full year to complete it. To make reasonable progress, plan a schedule and set “due dates” for yourself. Use the [Course Study Schedule](#) to set reasonable goals for completing each lesson and to keep track of your grades.