

Semester Syllabus

Context

This course is designed for students whose native language is not English. Though it is geared toward such a population, the course content could easily be adapted for an integrated classroom of native and nonnative speakers. However, many schools have started offering exclusive courses to address the unique needs of multilingual learners. This course is designed for international undergraduate students who are most likely in their first year of academic study in the United States. They will come from varied backgrounds, and it is not possible to predict the extent of their exposure to common American academic practices. While even American undergraduate students have to adapt to university or college environments, it can be even more daunting for an international student. The projected class size for this syllabus is nineteen students.

Goals

At the end of this course, students will be able to

1. Understand and produce expected American academic conventions in writing
2. Conduct research to analyze and synthesize outside sources
3. Analyze importance of academic Vocabulary and formulaic language
4. Use appropriate academic American English Vocabulary
5. Understand the importance of citing outside sources and the processes for doing so
6. Develop strategies for reading and writing
7. Understand and produce expected American academic conventions in writing
8. Understand writing as a continuing process
9. Understand writing as communication
10. Present information in both written and oral format, with appropriate visual aids
11. Work as a member of a group to form a consensus toward a common goal
12. Engage in self-reflection on how they have grown as a writer in American academia and where they hope to go in the future

Graded assignments

- 30% - Academic Writing Project
 - 5% - Presentation
- 15% - Portfolio
- 10% - Grammar/Vocabulary quizzes
- 10% - Grammar/Vocabulary in-depth analysis
 - 5% - Presentation
 - 5% - Report
- 20% - Group Project – Letter
- 10% - Reflective Essay
- 5% - Attendance and participation

Pedagogical Explanation and Justification

It is impossible in one semester-long course to expose students to every skill they will need to use in their academic career. Nonetheless, it is essential that a writing course for L2 students be geared toward increasing these skills as much as possible through explicit instruction. Harris & Silva (2008) explain that ESL students cannot revise or edit by ear or on what sounds right like a native speaker can. This is part of why just being exposed to academic language without explicit instruction cannot work for second language learners. Hinkel (2004) emphasizes that “extensive thorough, and focused instruction in L2 academic Vocabulary, grammar and discourse is essential for developing L2 written proficiency expected in general education courses and studies in the disciplines” (7). Analyses of enrollment data show shortcomings in academic English skills as one of the main reasons nonnative speakers drop out of school as high up as the PhD level of study. Researchers have found that the attitude toward writing in writing classes, while it may help native speakers on a journey of self-discovery and critical thinking, can be detrimental to an L2 learner, when the same skills are not valued in writing for other academic courses. One of the main goals for this course is to prepare these students to succeed throughout their academic careers. Outside of writing courses, the mental process that produces writing is not evaluated as much as the end product. L2 students require explicit instruction. Hinkel (2004) claims that process focused methodologies do not focus enough on formal rhetorical organization and the quality of language, both lexical and grammatical. Hinkel (2004) refers to the Bereiter and Scardamalia model of writing where there is *knowledge telling* and *knowledge transforming*. The knowledge transforming type of writing is what is involved in a student researching on a topic and integrating that new knowledge into their existing knowledge. It is a more cognitively complex process and what is required in most courses outside a writing course. Kroll (2001) explains that there is no evidence that skills learned in personal writing transfer to academic papers. Also, some students come from cultural backgrounds that frown upon sharing personal thoughts and feelings.

A strong reading component is advised for L2 writing classrooms. Kroll (2001) claims that “it is highly unlikely that anyone who is a nonproficient reader can develop into a highly proficient writer” (225). The readings provided to the students are mostly related specifically to student success at the college level and the act of writing. They are encouraged to pick sources related to their interests or major for the other components of the course.

The portfolio project consists of five provided articles from Escholz et al. *Language Awareness* (2000): Roberts’s ‘A Brief History of English,’ Crystal’s ‘The Prescriptive Tradition,’ Flower’s ‘Writing for an Audience,’ Murray’s ‘The maker’s Eye: Revising Your Own Manuscripts,’ and Hairston’s ‘What Happens When People Write?’. The student will also have to use at least five research-based articles that they find themselves on any topic of their choosing. The five articles do not necessarily need to be

related to one another if the student wants to explore. They will have a list of ten activities to practice writing skills that they will need for further classes.

The purpose of the academic writing comparison assignment is to familiarize students with American academic writing styles, both in learning to read them effectively and learning to adopt that particular style. This particular assignment has them focus on the style of the article not specifically the content. Learning to decipher academic articles is crucial to continued success in any academic career and learning to read and produce new style formats is useful in the workforce beyond academic life. The group assignment of composing a letter to address a need or issue they have noticed on campus is also a useful skill beyond academic life. Such an assignment forces students to work on coming to a consensus on the direction and scope of their project with group members of varied backgrounds. They will have to research to whom they should address the letter as well as any data and research they need to make a persuasive argument. They will be given time in class to work together towards the project completion.

The Vocabulary and grammar component will be a backbone for this course. According to Micciche (, “Rhetorical grammar instruction is just as central to composition’s driving commitment to teach critical thinking and cultural critique as is reading rhetorically, understanding the significance of cultural difference, and engaging in community work through service-learning initiatives” (717). It is important for students to learn these constructions but also to understand that there is a reason behind the language choices that are made. Along with presentations of essential academic Vocabulary and grammar, there will be various activities related to incorporating them into writing instruction as suggested by Frodesen (2001). These activities include text conversion (ex. rewriting a text in present tense to past or changing direct speech to indirect speech), revision and editing focused exercises, sentence combining, guided paraphrase, text elicitation, dictation, and text completion such as cloze passages. They will mostly follow but occasionally will come before the presentation of the expected forms. I have not included specific activities for each lesson as it is important to be flexible based on students’ interests and places of need.

The grammar or Vocabulary report and presentation gives students a chance to explore more in depth one specific area of concern that they might have with writing. They pick the topic themselves with a specific date that they must have it approved by. They can also choose to focus on Vocabulary that will specifically be needed in their field of study. It gives them experience using grammars and usage guides to answer language questions that might come up for them in the future. They will also be required to use specific phrases and Vocabulary we have covered in each piece of writing they produce and indicate them in the text.

At the end of the semester, students will be required to submit a course reflection. They will be required to refer to specific examples from their writing. Some of the questions they can answer will be to identify their strengths and weaknesses, how

their writing process has changed, how their attitudes toward writing have changed, etc. I will also ask them to address whether they already have used elements from the course in their other classes or if they think what they learned in the course will be able to be applied to their future coursework.

The main goals of the course are to prepare students for the rest of their academic careers and their careers beyond school. It is more geared towards familiarizing students with academic language and specific constructions that students will be able to utilize in their academic writing in the disciplines. There is evidence that formulaic language is stored and retrieved as a whole lexical chunk in the brain, even by L1 speakers (Wood, 2002). It is not fair to deny second language students of this strategy for communication from a fear of teaching to a formula.

Unit I: Academic Language

Week 1

Tuesday – Syllabus

The first meeting of the class we will go over the syllabus. It is important that students be made aware of the expectations for the class, as well as what the overall goals of the course are (Celce-Murcia, 2001). This is where the students will first be introduced to the two most important overarching threshold concepts from this class:

- ❖ The realization that writing conventions are arbitrary rules, but learning these rules they become tools that wield power for the writer

If they have not internalized this idea by the end of the course, they will at least, hopefully be further on their journey toward empowerment through language.

Thursday – In-class writing & library lecture

I will have students write in response to a prompt to both get an idea of the students personally, as well as exactly where their writing is in a timed writing assignment. The prompt will be something along the lines of asking them to explain about where they come from. This will be the only writing of this personal narrative genre in the course. Most research in L2 writing shows that the personal narrative is of such a different kind of writing that including it in an ESL writing class actually hinders students' progress in academic writing (Hinkel, 2004).

I will then present a library research overview followed by a tour of the library. Some students may be intimidated by going to the library or using online databases without any frame of reference. However, this will be an important skill for the remainder of their academic career.

Week 2

Tuesday – Discuss student writing & explain portfolio assignment; lecture on corpus

I will take some time at the beginning of class to discuss my impressions of the writings they turned in last class. I will ask if anyone would like to share anything about what they wrote.

The portfolio project will consist of five instructor-provided academic articles on the subject of English and writing and five of the student's own choosing. There will be a list of specific activities for the provided articles, but the student will be free to choose which activity to apply to each article. An example of the variety of activities would be to both paraphrase and summarize the same article. This activity would be exercise in the differences between those two words related both to the instructions of their future instructors and also to incorporating outside sources into their own writing.

I intend to show the students how to use the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (Davies, 2008-). The COCA can be used to see the frequencies of certain word choices and combinations and patterns of word choices in academic American English. This is mostly to show them that the Vocabulary and grammar we will cover in the course is based on frequently used language across academic American English. They can use the corpus for a project later in the semester though it is not required. Corpus usage can help students see patterns in their own writing as well as other academic texts (Lee & Swales,

Thursday – Vocabulary/Lecture: Strategies for reading

The first Vocabulary lesson, as previously indicated, will be on verbs such as summarize, paraphrase, analyze, synthesize, etc.

This lecture will include a brief explanation of the peer-review process for journal articles but will focus mainly on how to effectively read a research article, such as focusing on the abstract first. This is a skill that students will need to use for the rest of their academic career.

Activity (Harrington, 2016 p. 24-40) How to read a peer-reviewed research article
This particular research study is related to freshman student success.

Week 3

Tuesday – Grammar/Discuss reading and answers to questions

The full rationale for the emphasis on specific grammar and Vocabulary is at the beginning of this document. As this is the first grammar lesson, I do not want to have too much else planned for the class period. This lesson will focus on contextual functions and uses of verb tenses in academic discourse (Hinkel 2004, Ch 8).

If we managed to finish the article and the questions in the previous class, I will provide another research article for the students to practice using strategies for reading. It is important to continually practice new skills.

Thursday – Free write(read) WC presentation/Lecture: citation styles

I will have a representative from the university's Writing Center give a presentation for the class so that students know about this resource.

The lecture on citation styles will include the basic differences between the most common citation styles, MLA, APA and Chicago/Turabian as well as resources to use when formatting. The explanation of the reasons behind citing, such as so readers know where to locate the information, will aid in reinforcing the importance of avoiding plagiarism in American academia.

The free-writes will sometimes be prompted, sometimes more of an activity, and sometimes just a time set aside for students to work on their assignments for the class. An example of an activity would be writing a summary of a current news article that they are given. This incorporates practicing several skills into one activity.

Week 4

Tuesday – Vocabulary/Discuss articles students found

Common nouns in academic language based on COCA data

Each student will tell the class about the article that they found. The academic writing comparison essay is more related to the style and structure of the article than the content, but this is extra practice in article reading.

Thursday – Free write(read) Lecture: pre-writing strategies

Kroll (2001) emphasizes that experimenting with different forms of pre-writing strategies is important until students figure out which works best for them. The strategies we will focus on are brainstorming, listing, clustering and freewriting.

Assignments due **Portfolio check-up #1** (min 2 entries)

Week 5

Tuesday – Grammar/Close-reading exercise

Functions and uses of the passive voice in academic text (Hinkel, 2004, Ch 7)

A student cannot be expected to become a good writer if they are not yet capable of closely reading a text.

Thursday - Free write(read) Lecture: thesis statements (and organization)

This lecture will come from the Purdue OWL website. I will pull it up for the students. They will have already been exposed to Purdue OWL for the citation styles presentation, but I want them to see how it can be used as a resource for all kinds of writing questions that might come up.

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/588/01/>

Week 6

Tuesday Grammar/Vocabulary quiz & workshop on PowerPoint

The students will have most of the period to do a quiz on the grammar and Vocabulary we will have covered so far. This quiz will be more activity oriented than the quiz later in the semester. It will be in the same format of many of the activities that they will have already completed.

The students will be introduced to the basics of an effective PowerPoint. For example, limiting the amount of information on a slide and not reading directly from it.

Thursday - Free write(read) Lecture: how to do peer review/why peer-reviewed

articles

This lecture will expand on the explanation, from Thursday of week 2, about why peer-reviewed articles are important and what our purposes for peer-review will be. The activity will consist of a practice paper that we will review. Every student will have the same paper and questions to answer about it along with a simplified version of the rubric I will use to grade their projects. They will work individually first, then in smaller groups before coming together for a consensus as a class. As Walls and Kelley (2016) show, peer review can aid students in critically thinking about their own writing. Evidence of proper training in peer review also gives students more confidence in their peers' assessments.

Week 7

Tuesday - Peer review & individual conferences scheduled

Thursday – Presentations 6 students

Presentations are an important, and frequent, element of academic life in America. Not only is the powerpoint important, but the oral delivery is as well. I will record the presentations for the students to be able to listen to them and provide a reflection on how well they think they accomplished the task.

Week 8

Tuesday – Presentations 7 students

Thursday – Presentations 6 students

Assignments due **Portfolio check-up #2** (min 6 entries)

Week 9

Spring Break

Unit II: Persuasive Language

Week 10

Tuesday Grammar/Introduction to rhetorical analyses

The topics that the students decided for their Vocabulary or grammar presentations must be approved by this day. Making dated deadlines for approval of topics forces students to at least start thinking about assignments early.

Functions and uses of hedges (Hinkel, 2004, Ch 12)

All of the lessons in this unit on persuasive language, both analyzing and employing it, will come from *Writing Today* (2000). As this course is oriented toward practical language usage, learning the language of persuasion is crucial both for writing done in the job market as well as academic writing. The group project will use elements of all of the lessons in this unit.

This particular lesson will take parts of chapter 8, how to organize and draft a rhetorical analysis and examples of ad critiques. The students will have been instructed to bring in their own ad for practice. Analyzing advertisements is a good way to present the concepts of ethos, pathos and logos to students. They are generally a little more overt and oftentimes shown through nonlinguistic means. We will go through the examples in the book together and then they will work on their own ads.

Assignments due **Academic writing essay first draft**

Thursday Free write(read) / Introduction to commentaries

Writing Today Chapter 9 – This lesson will focus on how to support and clarify a position and the example will be a letter to the editor, since the group project students

will start work on next class is in a letter format. This is also a skill required in many classes. Students will often be asked to discuss their opinions of certain events or describe a reaction to a reading. Students will have to take stands on issues and defend them as well as consider opposing sides to controversies. We will brainstorm as a class possible starting points of research to determine topics for the letter-writing project.

Week 11

Tuesday Vocabulary/Introduction to arguments

Common adjectives from COCA

Groups assigned for letter-writing project

Writing Today Chapter 10 – This lesson will focus on choosing an appropriate style for arguments and how to figure out what the different sides of an argument might be. The example of this section is also a letter to the editor. Forming a convincing argument is also an important skill for life beyond the classroom. This lesson helps with style suggestions, such as using a plainer style for the opposing side while presenting the side being argued for with more visual language (similes, metaphors and analogies).

Thursday Free write(read)/ Discuss letter project and topics groups have decided upon

This day will also include a class consensus of what doing group work entails and what the expectations are for each member.

Week 12

Tuesday Vocabulary/ Introduction to proposals

Common adverbs from COCA

Writing Today Chapter 11 – This lesson will focus on how to develop a plan for a proposed solution, how to discuss the aspects of a problem, conduct research of the existing problem and ways to fix it. The sample of writing is a pitch. Since the group project includes a proposal element, the students will learn about how to form a detailed step-by-step plan and why it is important to include strategies for how to implement any proposal that they are suggesting.

Thursday Free write(read) Lecture: strategies and techniques for editing

Frodesen (2001) states that students should be encouraged to explore different strategies to figure out which one works best for their learning style. This lecture will include her suggestions of the read-aloud technique, pointing to words one at a time, slow-down techniques (ex. Reading last sentence of paragraph first and going backwards), using word processors with intention (paying attention to whether there is

a pattern of errors and only making changes if the suggestion is understood by the student).

Week 13

Tuesday Grammar/Activity on adverbs and adjectives

Functions of adverbs in pivoting discourse and information flow (Hinkel, 2004, Ch 9)

Thursday Free write(read) Time set aside for group work

Assignments due **Academic writing essay final draft**

Week 14

Tuesday **Grammar/Vocabulary quiz**

This quiz will include a writing portion where the students will be required to produce a text with certain conventions of academic writing. Throughout the course they will have been encouraged to develop what I like to call an arsenal of phrases: a list of their go-to constructions that are appropriate to the English Academic American style. They are allowed to use this list for one part of the quiz, while the second part will be reading-based. There will be a reading with certain phrases that they have not been explicitly taught that they will have to explain what strategies to use to try to decipher the meaning of the text. This relates back to the strategies for reading and close reading exercises, as well as many of the grammar and Vocabulary lessons.

Thursday Free write(read) Time set aside for group work

Assignments due **Final Portfolio** (10 entries total)

** Semester reflection essay* due Friday by midnight

Week 15

Tuesday Grammar/Vocabulary Presentations 10 students

Thursday Grammar/Vocabulary Presentations 9 students

Assignments due **Grammar/Vocabulary Report**

* **Group project** due Friday by midnight

Week 16

Finals and conferences for papers (extra credit for fixing mistakes and errors)

The extra credit offered will be quite labor-intensive. It is not just free points. They must fix their mistakes and errors and for the top three most frequent errors provide a metalinguistic explanation of the correct usage. I don't think it is the most pedagogically helpful use of time or it would be required of all the students. It is more for those students who have really struggled in the class.

Student Resources

Davies, M. (2008-). *The Corpus of Contemporary American English: 520 million words, 1990-present*. Available online at <http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>.

Escholz, P., Rosa, A., Clark, V. (2000). *Language Awareness: Readings for College Writers*. (8th edition) Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's. *

Harrington, C. (2016). *Student Success in College: Doing What Works!* (2nd edition) Boston, MA: Cengage Publishing. *

Johnson-Sheehan, R. & Paine, C. (2013). *Writing Today*. (2nd edition) New York, NY: Pearson. *

Olsen, A. E. (2002). *Academic Vocabulary: Academic Words*. New York, NY: Longman.

*selected readings

References

- Celce-Murcia, M. (ed.) (2001). *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*. (3rd edition) Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
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- Lee, D. & Swales, J. M. (2006). A corpus-based EAP course for NNS doctoral students: moving from available specialized corpora to self-compiled corpora. *English for Specific Purposes*, 25(1), 56-75.
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