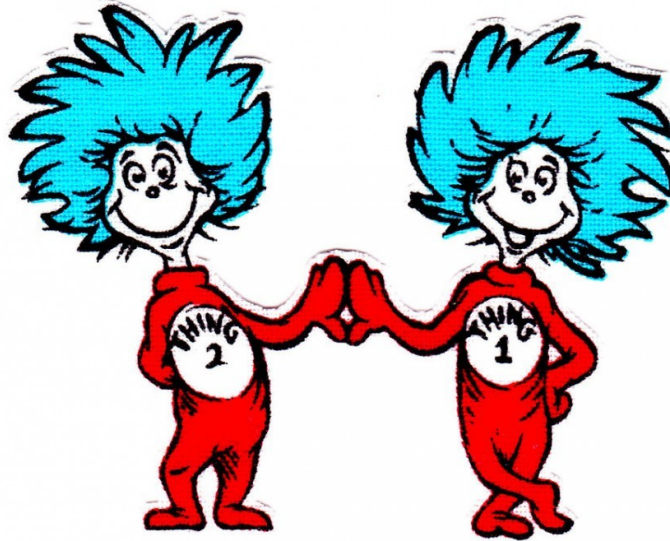


FF: CJVAPS / Academic Writing in English Fall 2019

Dr. Joe Lennon Wed 14:00-15:40 (K2, Room 408)

“These are the preferences of the universe itself: verbs over nouns, actions over states, struggle over hope.” Ta-Nehisi Coates



Course overview

This course is designed to give you a semester-long structured space in which to sharpen your writing and reading skills in English. The main assignment for the class will be a writing project which you design, based on your interests and needs. Assessment will be based on your sharing of various stages of this project, as well as your thoughtful responses to both your classmates' writing and to the reading (and watching, and listening) which we do in (and out) of class.

This will not be a typical language course, in which we practice specific vocab and grammar and do drills or gap-fill exercises. I think of this course instead as a "writing club." I want it to be a conversation between us as readers and writers, where we bounce ideas off each other and see where they land. In the context of this course, the main difference between you and I is that I (likely) have more experience reading and writing in English. Based on that experience, I will offer you some advice and tips for how to develop and express your ideas clearly and powerfully in English. And I will guide you toward a better understanding of English-language academic culture (which might be very different from the academic culture you're used to). But I will NOT tell you "how to write an academic essay." In fact, I want to generate some "creative confusion" in you about what academic writing can be, and what an English class can be.

Some of the questions we'll explore various answers to, in discussion and in writing:

- What do we mean when we say "academic writing"?
- What are some ways English-language writing is different from Central European writing?
- What are some typical mistakes Czech or Slovak writers make in English, and how can I avoid them?
- How do I read a text as a writer, i.e. not just for the information in it, but in order to analyze its formal elements and "steal" them for my own work?
- How do I choose what genre or style to write in?
- Where can I find good models and inspiration for my writing?
- How do I define "good" writing style in English, and what are some practical ways to get better at doing the type of writing I consider good?
- How can I recognize "bad" writing in English, and how can I avoid doing it in my own writing?
- When is it appropriate to use "I" in academic writing?
- What are some typical formal structures used in successful texts, and how do I decide when to use a particular structure?
- What are the different types of punctuation, and when should they be used?
- How can I use summary, paraphrase, and quotation effectively in a paper?
- How can I use citations effectively?
- How can I talk about a piece of writing in English in an analytical and academically acceptable way (not just saying "I like it" or "It's boring")?
- How can I talk about other people's writing in a critical but constructive way?
- What are some techniques for avoiding writer's block and revising my work to make it better?

(and here are some questions added by my students from previous semesters; I'll ask you to add your own to this list):

- What are some useful resources for writers (such as collocation dictionaries)?
- How much does grammar matter?
- How do I know when I have enough sources for my paper?
- How do I develop opinions about others' writing?
- How do I avoid unnecessary repetition / redundancy?
- Can I use phrasal verbs in academic texts?
- How can I avoid plagiarism in my blog posts?
- Should I prioritize my target audience over my own writing style?
- How should I use rhetorical questions?
- How can I write more economically and still say all I want to?
- Should I use long sentences or short ones?

- How much can I rely on grammar-checking apps?
- How can I avoid just using simplistic one-word transitions?
- How can I decide which point of view to use (third person vs. first person)?
- When reading, should I skip words I don't understand, or look up every word?
- Are there some mnemonic devices for learning writing skills?
- How do I use non-English words in an English text?
- How can I evaluate the quality of an article on the internet?
- How can I write a good CV in English?
- What if a reader interprets my writing differently than me?
- Is it really a mistake to end a sentence with a preposition?
- How do I get more variety into my writing?
- Is it useful to use a lot of idioms/nice-sounding expressions in my writing?
- How do I not be boring?
- How can I enjoy this class?

The course is Pass/Fail. If you follow the expectations below, you will pass.

1. Attendance and active participation at the weekly seminars.

For this class to function well, we all need to be here, sharing our work and ideas. You can miss two classes without penalty, and with no excuse needed or wanted (although I would like you to let me know in advance if you plan on being absent). If you miss more classes than that, I'll consider you at risk of failing.

2. Short weekly reading (10-20 pages per week) and writing (+/-1 page per week) assignments which will be submitted to me and/or shared with your classmates.

Every week, we'll do some writing in class, and for homework I'll assign some reading and writing, which we will discuss the following week. Sometimes you'll turn these writing assignments in to me, sometimes you will share them in class, and sometimes both. If you come to each class prepared, you'll get full credit.

3. Short critical review (1-1½ pages).

In the first third of the class, we'll focus on the genre of *review* (very broadly defined). Around Week 4, you'll turn in a first draft of a short critical review. In the review, you'll briefly describe and evaluate a work of your choice (e.g. a painting, a published article, a song, an experience—it could be anything, really). Your review should include detailed and vivid description of the work being reviewed, it should be based on clear evaluative criteria, and it should be aimed at an intelligent audience of non-experts. I'll give you brief feedback on this draft, and you'll revise it for the final portfolio.

4. Metalanguage quizzes (3 quizzes, 20 questions each).

In order to have a conversation about each other's writing, we need to share a common "metalanguage" (words which refer to aspects of language). I've created 3 quizzes which cover helpful vocab related to punctuation, parts of speech, formatting, and

sentence structure. The 3 quizzes are already posted on IS, so they won't be a surprise to you. I will let you know in advance how you will take each quiz (I might let you take it home for HW and turn it in already finished, or I might ask you to study it and then do it in class with/without notes.

5. Three drafts of a longer writing project of your own (3+ pgs).

You'll design your own writing project during the first half of the course. The kind of piece you write is up to you, but it should be something useful and interesting for you, and it should show a serious engagement with a specified target audience. You'll turn in a proposal for your project around Week 6, a rough draft of your project around Week 8, a second draft toward the end of the term, and a third draft as part of your final portfolio in the testing period. You'll get feedback on these drafts from me and your classmates. Instead of meeting as a class in the final week, I will meet with each of you individually to discuss your writing.

6. Final portfolio (several revised pages).

In the testing period, you will turn in a third draft of your course writing project and a second draft of your critical review (or, if your critical review has become part of your larger course project, then you should include a revision/reworking of one of the other shorter HW assignments from the semester). You will write a short (one page max.) reflective introduction to the portfolio, in which you describe the revisions you've made and evaluate your work.

Course workload expectations

Students and teachers sometimes have different understandings about the amount of work which is reasonable to expect students to do—so let's talk about that. According to the MU IS (https://is.muni.cz/napoveda/szr#szr_6), one credit should equal about 25-30 hours of work for students. This course is worth two credits, which means at the very least about 50 hours of work total. There are 13 weeks in the semester, so that comes to about 3.8 hours of work per week. Let's assume we meet in class each week for 1.5 hours (even though some weeks it will be less than that). That's still 2.3 hours of work outside of class per week. Of course, you will be doing some work in the testing period (writing and revising), so we can round that down to two hours of homework per week during the semester. For this class, that means two hours of writing, reading, and creative brainstorming. That seems very reasonable to me.

I know very well that not all courses at MU follow the official IS guidelines. You may have other classes which give a huge number of credits and require no regular weekly work at all. So at first glance, the workload in this class may seem out of proportion to those courses. But this course is not a content-delivery course which is just about memorizing facts and then being tested on them. This is a language and writing course, which means it's a practice and skills-based course. The course, simply put, is the quality time you spend in class, at home, and out in

the world writing, reading, speaking, and listening in English. So please find a way to give yourself this time, mentally and physically.

Computer etiquette

If you have a laptop or tablet, please bring it to class. We won't always use these in class, but a portable computer will come in handy in many lessons—for research, for reading, and for typing exercises/notes.

That said, when I or one of your classmates is speaking, or if we are having a discussion, I expect you to be looking up from your computer, listening, and participating. If you are on social media or doing work for other classes at these times, your participation mark will suffer (not to mention your understanding of what we are talking about).

When I ask you to bring copies of the reading or of your HW, you can bring these in electronic form on your laptop or tablet. But do NOT bring them on your phone—the screen is too small to share texts properly. If you don't have them on a larger screen, then please print them out (and/or find someone to share a copy of the reading with).

Unless I specify one or the other, you are free to do in-class exercises either written by hand or typed on your laptop. For major written assignments, of course, I will require you to type them and submit them online.

Please don't email me assignments directly unless I ask you to. Instead, upload them to the appropriate Homework Vault folder on IS. When you upload HW or assignments to IS, always name the file with your LAST NAME first, so that I can identify it easily.

What will we do each week?

I imagine each weekly seminar as having three essential “ingredients.” Some days we'll spend more time on one or the other, but over the span of the course the balance should be about equal between the parts.

1. **Reading (and talking about reading):** You can't get better at writing in English without reading a lot. Each week I will assign you some reading to do at home, and I will give you some suggestions for what to focus on as you read. When you come to class, I'll ask you for your thoughts about the reading. Our main purpose will be to “steal” the useful words, ideas, and structures we identify in the readings and use them in our own writing.

WARNING #1:

Some of the things I ask you to read will be BEWILDERING. They may seem very strange and difficult. We are not going to read only strictly academic essays; we are

going to read all kinds of pieces, written in many different forms. Some of them may not seem to you like "academic writing." But I will try to show you why I think they are valuable to read and learn from (and I hope you will end up showing me new things to take away from them too).

WARNING #2:

Some students in past courses have complained about the amount of reading I assign. I admit that I assign "too much" reading for a 2-credit course, and I understand if there are some weeks in when you're not able to read EVERYTHING in great detail. But I expect you to at least take a look at the reading, try to read at least a few pages, and come to class with at least ONE thing to say about the reading each week.

2. **Writing (and sharing your writing):** Every week, I will ask you to do some writing in class and/or at home. I will sometimes (though not always) ask you to share your writing with me and your classmates. I will often ask you to read your classmates' work and give each other constructive feedback. A lot of the weekly writing tasks will be work you can use for your longer term writing projects.
3. **"Thing 1/Thing 2" word pairs:** Every week, I will draw your attention to one (or more) pair(s) of words. Each word represents a key concept in English-language writing culture, and I will present them to you in pairs in order to highlight interesting contrasts/frictions/confusions between the two concepts. The word pairs will jump-start our class discussions on the craft of writing (see the schedule below for examples).

Tentative Course Schedule and Outline

Class dates, "Thing 1/Thing 2" word pairs, tentative due dates, metalanguage quizzes, and possible discussion questions and are outlined below (weekly Readings and Writings will be added as we go along, based on your interests and how the class conversation develops). Much of this will change! But this should give you a rough idea of what to expect.

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|---------|--|
| Sept 18 | Thing 1/Thing 2; analysis/unpacking
How do I not be boring?
How can I enjoy this class? |
| Sept 25 | showing/telling; observing/engaging
What do we mean when we say "academic writing"?
How do I tell the difference between "good" and "bad" writing? |
| Oct 2 | writer/reader; form/content; macro/micro
How do I read and analyze a text as a writer?
How can I talk critically and constructively about other people's writing? |

- Oct 9 **genre/family; exigence/audience; Metalanguage Quiz #1**
What are some typical formal structures used in successful texts?
Should I prioritize my target audience over my own writing style?
- Oct 16 **research/curiosity; Short critical review due**
Where can I find good models and inspiration for my writing?
How do I know when I have enough sources for my paper?
- Oct 23 **author/actor; Metalanguage Quiz #2**
When is it appropriate to use "I" in academic writing?
How can I decide which point of view to use?
- Oct 30 **NO CLASS - Writing project proposal due**
- Nov 6 **formal/informal**
How much does grammar matter?
How much should I use idioms/phrasal verbs/"nice-sounding" expressions?
- Nov 13 **abstract/advertisement; First (rough) draft of writing project due**
How can I avoid just using simplistic one-word transitions?
How do I get more variety into my writing?
- Nov 20 **quotation/paraphrase**
How can I use summary, paraphrase, and quotation effectively?
How do I use non-English words in an English text?
- Nov 27 **attribution/citation; Metalanguage Quiz #3**
How can I use citations effectively?
How do I avoid plagiarism?
- Dec 4 **repetition/redundancy; 2nd writing project draft due**
How can I write more economically and still say all I want to?
What are some techniques for avoiding writer's block and revising?
- Dec 11 **NO CLASS; Feedback meetings with me**
- Jan 15 **Final portfolio due**