

Course Title	Academic Writing in English for Undergraduate Students
Language	English Instruction and Assessment
Instructors	Sarka Gmitterkova Ph.D. and Richard Nowell Ph.D.
Contacts	gmitterkova@phil.muni.cz; 516779@mail.muni.cz
Structure	Weekly Seminars
Semester	Fall 2024
Time	Thursdays, 16:00–17:40
Location	C34, Lecture Theater, Department of Film & Audiovisual Culture
Office Hours	Online, by appointment, at a time of mutual convenience.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

It can feel a little intimidating when we first encounter the demands of producing assessed work at continental European Universities. “Academic Writing in English for Undergraduate Students” therefore aims to equip incoming students with practical and transferable skills needed to excel in this challenging but rewarding aspect of University life. The course is organized into three parts that cover core aspects of producing academic work: 1) developing a viable project, 2) executing the project with scholarly rigor, and 3) presenting it according to academic protocols. In order to facilitate their competency in these areas, students will devise, research, and submit a short research paper on a topic of their choosing relevant to their degree program. In so doing, it is hoped that this course will help students develop core competencies that will empower them to produce top-draw academic work across their University careers.

COURSE AIMS

This course provides students with the core competencies needed to produce high-quality academic work based on the protocols and expectations of the Humanities and Social Sciences in Continental European Universities. Such an approach is intended to promote a combination of critical and structured thinking, and pragmatic approaches, to assessments. By the end of the course, students are expected to show growing competencies in these areas by way of an original research paper built around the qualities introduced on this course;. These qualities are intended to be transferable to other assessment formats students will encounter in their studies, such as responses to written prompts and delivering presentations. Students will therefore be equipped with the skills needed to produce work that is:

- academically and practically viable
- derived from engagement with primary and secondary courses;
- analytical, argument-driven, and well organized
- clearly expressed and suitably referenced.

TEACHING METHODS

This course is built around 12 weekly seminars to be held in-person (unless COVID restrictions dictate otherwise). The sessions centralize seminar discussions and practical exercises, and are supported by concise instructor-delivered content (framing, summarizing, and contextual “lecturettes”). Each session is intended to equip students with a skill needed to develop or research or execute an original paper, thereby laying a firm foundation for their degree courses as a whole. Preparation is kept to a minimum to allow students to focus on their research projects.

ASSESSMENT

At the end of the course, students are to submit an original research paper that they have developed across the course.

Value: 100% of Final Grade

Due Date: Midnight CET Sunday 12 January 2025.

Length: 6-8 pages of 12-font double-spaced, using a standard font like Times New Roman.

Areas of Assessment:

1. A topic of appropriate breadth to showcase original analysis within the advised length.
2. Evidence of a suitable number of well-chosen primary sources for the advised length.
3. Evidence of a suitable number of well-chosen secondary (i.e. scholarly) sources for the advised length.
4. Evidence of original thinking and critical analysis.
5. Evidence of a clear argumentation.
6. Evidence of argument/evidence based organization of the paper.
7. Evidence of reader-friendly writing.
8. Evidence of thorough and accurate referencing.

All Essays are to be submitted in PDF or word format to MS TEAMS and to gmiterkova@phil.muni.cz and 516779@mail.muni.cz.

Please include your name and the course title in the name of the file.

NB: Extensions can be arranged in advance, based on health, humanitarian, and other grounds. Please reach out as soon as it is possible to discuss any potential extensions.

Tutorials

Students may arrange one-on-one tutorials to discuss any issues arising from the course, including its assessment. Meetings can be arranged by email and will take place either in-person or online and at a time of mutual convenience.

Feedback

In addition to receiving ongoing feedback across the course by way of two “Work-in-Progress” Seminars, students also receive detailed personal feedback on their paper upon final submission. All feedback is designed to be constructive, so will spotlight strengths, shortcomings, and suggestions on how the project might have been elevated.

Plagiarism Information

It is the duty of every student to ensure that they have familiarized themselves with the following details pertaining to plagiarism.

(A) Any use of quoted texts in seminar papers and theses must be acknowledged. Such use must meet the following conditions: (1) the beginning and end of the quoted passage must be shown with quotation marks; (2) when quoting from periodicals or books, the name(s) of author(s), book or article titles, the year of publication, and page from which the passage is quoted must all be stated in footnotes or endnotes; (3) internet sourcing must include a full web address where the text can be found as well as the date the web page was visited by the author.

(B) In case the use of any texts other than those written by the author is established without proper acknowledgement as defined in (A), the paper or thesis will be deemed plagiarized and handed over to the Head of School.

General Evaluation: Grades from A-F will be awarded based on the following general criteria. Please note appropriate leeway is afforded to students using a second language.

	Argumentation/Understanding	Sources/Evidence	Communication
A 90<	Insightful, vigorous, and demonstrating considerable depth of understanding and a significant amount of original thought; a wholly coherent synthesis of ideas; demonstrating a degree of mastery over subject; demonstrating a deep and thorough understanding of key concepts.	Full range of set resources consulted; sources employed with significant discrimination and sound judgment; thorough assessment of evidence; use of a broad range of examples.	Near-Faultless typography and layout; near-flawless turns of phrase and expression; sophisticated and precise vocabulary; clear structure; exemplary citation and bibliography.
B 80 – 89.99	Perceptive and insightful; some evidence of original thought; mainly coherent synthesis of ideas; thorough and somewhat critical understanding of key concepts.	A fairly wide range of set resources consulted; solid assessment of evidence; sophisticated use of a fairly broad range of examples.	Very Solid typography and layout; few errors in grammar; mainly sophisticated turns of phrase and expression; mostly clear structure; strong citation and bibliography.
C 70 – 79.99	Solid understanding; good synthesis of ideas; reasonably solid understanding of key concepts; evidence of key gaps in knowledge and some minor misunderstandings of key concepts.	Some sources consulted; evidence of some assessment of evidence; use of mostly workable examples.	Good typography and layout; comprehensible and largely error-free grammar, turns of phrase, and expression; reasonable clearly structured; some attempt to provide citation and bibliography.

D 60 – 69.99	No real synthesis of ideas; mainly descriptive rather than analytical; patchy understanding of key concepts; significant gaps in knowledge.	Restricted range of sources consulted; superficial understanding of evidence; limited range of examples, many of which are inappropriate.	Poor typography and layout; numerous errors of grammar; limited vocabulary; ambiguous or inaccurate turns of phrase; weak or missing citations and bibliography.
E 50 – 59.99	Largely disconnected series of points; poor understanding of key concepts; major gaps in knowledge.	No sources consulted; poor understanding of evidence; few useful examples.	Poor typography and layout; numerous errors of grammar; limited vocabulary; ambiguous or inaccurate turns of phrase; no citations or bibliography.
F <50	Largely incoherent; little evidence of an understanding of key concepts; demonstrating little knowledge of subject.	No sources consulted; poor understanding of evidence; no useful examples.	Poor typography and layout; numerous errors of grammar; limited vocabulary; ambiguous or inaccurate turns of phrase; no citations or bibliography.
ZERO	No paper submitted		

COURSE OUTLINE

At a glance breakdown (see below for full breakdown)

Week	Date	Topic	Instructor
1	19.09.24	NO CLASS – UNIVERSITY CLOSURE	
2	26.09.24	Introduction	Richard
3	03.10.24	Project Development Seminar I: Topics	Richard
4	10.10.24	Project Development Seminar II: Primary Sources	Sarka

This session is the first of three Project Development Seminars focused on the nuts-and-bolts of academic projects generally, and the personal project each student will work on across the course. This particular session invites students to consider two areas central to starting such projects: academic viability and manageability. In particular, students will be encouraged to marshal their energies in ways that promise to generate projects of an analytical nature that can be successfully realized within constraints related to sourcing materials, managing time, and working within preset page-counts.

Targeted Learning Outcome

An academically viable and manageable research topic

Preparation

Think of a topic relevant to your degree program that interests you, which may form the basis of your research paper.

Week 4 **Project Development Seminar II: Primary Sources** **10.10.2024**

Instructor: Sarka

Without primary sources – principal objects of analysis like films, news media, marketing materials, plays, and so on – we have no research projects. Accordingly, the second of the three Project Development Seminars introduces students to the practicalities of securing suitable objects of analysis that will form the basis of their projects. In particular, students will be encouraged to take account of the importance of time-management, language competency, and availability, whether working with physical sources or online ones.

Targeted Learning Outcome

Identifying and securing suitable primary sources

Preparation

What are the primary sources required for the topic of your interest and how and where would you secure them?

Week 5 **Project Development Seminar III: Secondary Sources** **17.10.2024**

Instructor: Sarka

Concluding the series of Project Development Seminars, this session focuses on secondary sources; academic books and articles, and other types of literature, that can be used to elevate our work. Accordingly, the session invites students to consider the different ways they use these essential texts, and how they can go about securing them either in physical form or from online databases available from the University library and elsewhere.

Targeted Learning Outcome

Securing and using secondary sources.

Preparation

Open the portal of electronic information resources and try to find at least secondary sources for your project.

<https://ezdroje.muni.cz/index.php?lang=en>

Week 6

Analysis Refresher Seminar I

24.10.2024

Instructor: Richard

Given students are required to analyze, rather than merely describe, their primary sources, this week hosts one of two sessions devoted to encouraging students to apply critical thinking to primary sources. Notice will be given in advance of precisely what students will be examining, based as far as possible on object and topics that compliment at least some of the students' research projects.

Targeted Learning Outcomes

Sharpening our critical analysis skills.

Preparation

To Be Confirmed.

Week 7

Work-in-Progress Seminar I

31.10.2024

Instructor: Sarka

This week hosts the first of two Work-in-Progress Seminars included on this course to help students gauge how their projects are shaping up. Students will each briefly discuss how they have incorporated aspects of the Project Development Seminars into their projects. This will provide them with the opportunity to unpack their thinking and consider the feedback of the other students and the instructor.

Targeted Learning Outcomes

The strengths and potential issues of our provisional research projects.

Preparation

Prepare a **brief** overview, to be delivered in class, of the current state of your research project, detailing:

1. The focus of the research project.
2. Potential primary sources to be used.
3. Potential secondary sources to be used
4. Provisional thoughts about what you might say in the paper.

Week 8

Project Execution Seminar I: Arguments

07.11.2024

Instructor: Richard

The first of two Project Execution Seminars, this week focuses on arguably the single most important aspect of producing academic work: arguments. After all, academic work is not expected to be encyclopedic but rather offer a position on a topic, one that is characterized by clear assertion and convincing evidence. In this session, students will consider how to produce this type of argument-driven work, by appreciating that argumentation is a key part of everyday life that can be transferred to academic life.

Targeted Learning Outcomes

Argument-driven work

Preparation

Think about something from everyday life that you hold strong opinions about, and be prepared to talk about it in class.

Week 9 **Project Execution Seminar II: Organization** **14.11.2024**

Instructor: Richard

The greatest ideas can only go so far if they are not presented in a coherent fashion, and this – the second of the two Project Execution Seminars – aims to help students organize their arguments in accessible and impactful ways. In particular, students will be invited to consider how best to arrange their work into argument-supporting sections, and those sections into powerful evidence-based paragraphs.

Targeted Learning Outcomes

Argument-driven paragraphs and evidence-based sections.

Preparation

Think about how to break down your paper into 3-4 sections.

Week 10 **NO CLASS (READING WEEK)** **21.11.2024**

Week 11 **Analysis Refresher Seminar II** **28.11.2024**

Instructor: Sarka

This week hosts the second of the two Analysis Refresher Seminars included on this course to help sharpen students' critical analysis skills. In order to provide a degree of plurality in light of Richard Nowell hosting the first, Sarka Gmitterkova will host this one. Again, students will be notified in good time of the topic, one that will be chosen to complement at least some student research projects.

Targeted Learning Outcomes

Targeted Learning Outcomes

Responding to earlier feedback, and signposting arguments and organization.

Preparation

Prepare a **brief** overview, to be delivered in class, of the current state of your research project, detailing:

1. Any changes you have implemented since the first Work-in-Progress Seminar feedback.
2. What you plan to argue in your paper.
3. How you may wish to organize the paper into sections.

Week 14

Project Presentation Seminar II: Referencing

19.12.2024

Instructor: Sarka

Let's be real for a moment: you would be hard pressed to find a student or in fact a professor who really enjoys referencing their work. But, the truth of the matter is that it is our responsibility to appropriately cite our sources. This, the second Project Presentation Seminar, communicates to students the protocols of academic citation, its systems, and the reasons why it is so important we do it.

Targeted Learning Outcomes

How and why we reference our work.

Preparation:

How would you reference your primary and secondary resources? Prepare two examples of each with the assistance of provided faculty referencing style.

Recommended Readings

BECKER, Howard. Writing for Social Scientists. How to start and finish your thesis, book or article. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986.

SWALES, John a Christine B. FEAK. Academic writing for graduate students: essential tasks and skills. 3rd ed. Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2012. xiv, 418. ISBN 9780472034758.

BELCHER, Wendy Laura. Writing your journal article in 12 weeks: a guide to academic publishing success. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009. xxi, 351. ISBN 9781412957014.

SEAL, Bernard. Academic encounters: reading, study skills, and writing : content focus, human behavior. 1st pub. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. xii, 88. ISBN 9780521476607.