

Spring 2015
RHE 310: Rhetoric & Prose Style
(Intermediate Expository Writing)
Syllabus

Instructor: Kendall J. Gerdes

Unique Number: 43740

Time and Place: 9:30 – 10:45 in FAC 7

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Office: FAC 16

Office hours: T 1:30-3:30 and Th 11-12, and by appointment

I. THE GIST

COURSE DESCRIPTION

RHE 310, Intermediate Expository Prose, is a writing-intensive workshop focused on rhetoric and prose style. Expository prose is a kind of writing (not in verse) that exposes something. The focus of this class is not on the *what* that gets exposed, but on the *how* writing exposes it. In this class, you will practice sharing your work-in-progress with classmates, practice giving effective feedback focused on rhetorical issues, and practice responding to feedback on your writing through revision. RHE 310 carries a Writing Flag. Its prerequisite is Rhetoric & Writing 306 or 306Q.

Our class will learn to pay attention to the variables that effect rhetorical style, including (but not limited to) word choice, sentence structure, rhythm, punctuation, grammar, usage, & more. We will observe how style shapes what can be said and to whom; we will imagine how differences in style effect different audiences. You will experiment with your writing not only in text but also in new media (including images, video, and sound); you'll experiment not only on your own, but by collaborating with your classmates. Together we will develop keener senses of rhetorical force in prose style.

READINGS

1. *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, Joseph Williams, 11th edition
2. *Rhetorical Grammar*, Martha Kolln, 7th edition

In addition, we will also read and discuss the following:

1. David Foster Wallace, "Authority and American Usage"
2. Geoff Dyer, "My Literary Allergy" *Prospect*
3. Steven Pinker, from *The Sense of Style*
4. Nathan Heller, "Steven Pinker's Bad Grammar" *The New Yorker*
5. George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language" *Horizon*
6. Will Self, "Orwell Was a Literary Mediocrity" *BBC News*
7. Laura Miller, "Orwell Was Not a Language Fascist" *Salon*
8. David Gelernter, "Back to Basics, Please" *WSJ*
9. Catherine Prendergast, "Fighting Style" *College English*
10. Denis Dutton, "Language Crimes" *WSJ*

11. Judith Butler, "A Bad Writer Bites Back" *NYT*
12. Jordana Rosenberg, "Gender Trouble on Mother's Day" *LARB*
13. Plato, from *The Phaedrus*
14. Avital Ronell, from *Stupidity*, "Expository Prose"
15. Richard Lanham, from *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*
16. Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa"
17. Diane Davis, from *Breaking Up [at] Totality*

A schedule of these readings is available on our class website.

ACCESSIBILITY

Universal design is an accessibility principle by which expanding access to a space (like a classroom) or a conversation (like a curriculum) benefits everyone. (Think of curb cuts, kneeling buses, or ramps to a building.) I aim for universal design in my courses, and at the same time, I assume that each student learns differently. If you are facing a barrier to access in my class, I invite you to talk with me about it by email or in my office hours.

In addition the university offers many kinds of support services that are available to all students.

- **Services for Students with Disabilities** is online at ddce.utexas.edu/disability and on Facebook. You can also reach them at 512-471-6259 (voice) or 512-410-6445 (video phone). SSD is the office that handles requests for accommodations (ddce.utexas.edu/disability/accommodations-and-services). Their office is in the Student Services Building (4.206).
- **Student Veteran Services** is online at deanofstudents.utexas.edu/veterans, and they also have offices in the Student Services Building (4.104).
- **The Multicultural Engagement Center** is online at ddce.utexas.edu/multiculturalengagement and on Facebook. They are located in the Student Activity Center (1.102).
- **The Gender and Sexuality Center** is online at ddce.utexas.edu/genderandsexuality and on Facebook. The GSC offers mentoring, walk-in advising, & more. They are also located in the Student Activity Center (2.112).
- **The Counseling and Mental Health Center** is online at cmhc.utexas.edu; their services are inexpensive and confidential. They can be reached at 512-471-3515 for appointments. Their crisis line is open 24/7/365: 512-471-2255 or for Deaf/HH students, 711 + 512-471-2255. They are on the fifth floor of the Student Services Building.
- **University Health Services** is online at healthyhorns.utexas.edu. In addition to general medicine, they also have a women's health clinic, nutrition services, & more. Appointments can be made online, or you can call their 24/7 Nurse Advice Line at 512 475 6877.
- **The Undergraduate Writing Center**, online at uwc.utexas.edu, offers consultations about student writing. They're not line editors, they're way better: trained writing instructors who can help you at any point in your writing process.

LEARNING RECORD

Grades for the course are determined by a portfolio-style, evidence-based model called the Learning Record (LR). Once at the midterm and once at the final, you will compose a persuasive essay that documents your improvement as a student by explaining both what you learned and how you learned it. You will base your assessment on your other coursework, including writing, revision, and class participation, as documented in your LR reflections. You will argue for the grade you think is fair. I will review your argument and either agree with or revise your request. We will discuss the Learning Record in more detail throughout the semester.

COURSE GOALS

The goals for this course are described in more detail in section IV. on the Learning Record (and on the class website). The goals are: Rhetoric, Versatility, Revision, and Conversation.

CLASS WEBSITE

Because we have the privilege of meeting in a Digital Writing and Research Lab (DWRL) classroom, we will make frequent use of our technological resources. Our class website will house this syllabus, our schedule, electronic copies of readings, assignment sheets, &c.

II. THE RULES

EXPECTATIONS

I expect each of you to come to class prepared, having read any assigned readings and completed any assignments that are due. Since grades in this class depend on the basic theory that you are responsible for your own education, I expect you to anticipate when you will need help, ask for help when you need it, and ask early enough for help to be useful to you.

ATTENDANCE

You are allowed a maximum of 4 absences. There is no difference between "excused" or "unexcused" absences, meaning you need never prove to me you saw a doctor, or whatever. (In fact, please stay home if you are feeling sick!) You may use your 4 absences however you see fit. **However**, if you miss 5+ classes, you will fail (see the Department policy, sub.). You are responsible for making up all missed class activities.

TARDINESS

If you know you will be late, please let me know why in advance of class. If you are 15+ minutes late, you'll be docked 1/2 an absence (that is, two tardies count as one absence).

DISTRACTIONS

Turn off your phones when you walk in the door. When we use computers during class, do not check your email, facebook, twitter, tumblr, etc. unless I asked you to do so.

*** If I see you fooling around, texting, or otherwise tuning out, I will mark you absent. ***

LATE WORK

If think you need a deadline extended, you must propose and *get me to agree* to an alternative deadline at least 24 hours in advance of the original. Your proposal must include the reason for your request.

PLAGIARISM

All work submitted for this class must be composed by you for this class. If you represent someone else's work as your own, you will fail my class and be reported to the Dean of Students.

BACK UP YOUR DATA

All hard drives fail. They get old and hot and they fail. It's a matter of when, not if. Drive failure is not a valid reason for late work. You should regularly back up all the data that's important to you. Back up your work to multiple sites: email it to yourself; save it to a free Dropbox account; put it on a USB drive; etc. You can get a free Dropbox account here: db.tt/vXYWu6He

EMAIL

You should use your @utexas.edu email address for official university communication, including this class. You can get a free UTMail address here: utexas.edu/its/email You should make sure your email address of record is correct here: utdirect.utexas.edu/apps/utd/all_my_addresses

III. SCHEDULE

Because much of our class time will be devoted to writing exercises and discussion, the day to day schedule is subject to change at the instructor's discretion. An up to date schedule will be maintained on the class website.

A preliminary list of topics we will cover includes: the paramedic method, parts of sentences, coordination & subordination, coherence & cohesion, verbs, kickers, characters, flow, emphasis, rhythm, voice, lively predicates, structures, adverbials, class, elegance, figures & tropes, and punctuation.

Deadlines for essays, papers, & projects:

1/22	Learning Record Self Assessment
2/11	Paper 1
2/25	Paper 2
3/11	LR Midterm
4/22	Paper 3
Finals weeks	LR Final
ongoing	LR Reflections
ongoing	Commonplace books

IV. LEARNING RECORD

The Learning Record documents for RHE 310: Rhetoric & Prose Style were adapted from the originals, published online at learningrecord.org.

COURSE GOALS

These goals describe specific learning objectives established for our course. You should expect to deepen your knowledge, acquire new skills, and become more confident and creative in each of these areas over the course of the semester.

When you compose your Learning Record essays, you will analyze how and how much you have learned in each area or Course Goal. Read and re-read these descriptions carefully (especially while you write your evaluations): you will likely cite from these descriptions as you craft your argument.

1. RHETORIC

Rhetoric is an ancient art with a rich tradition. Of rhetoric's five canons, this course focuses the most on style, but students should also make connections between style and rhetoric's four other canons (invention, arrangement, memory, and delivery), as well as other key concepts from ancient rhetorics as we discuss them (including commonplaces, kairos, ethos, pathos, and logos).

This course goal also encompasses rhetorical skills that students can use to craft an argument. Students should demonstrate the ability to argue persuasively for a position or claim, including the ability to select and incorporate evidence, to analyze and explain evidence, and to connect evidence to claims. Students should also demonstrate the ability to responsibly appeal to emotions, and to solicit trust and to demonstrate goodwill.

2. VERSATILITY

A rhetorical orientation to style prizes versatility over the mastery of any one single style (including Standard Written English). Students should understand "style" to describe a range of styles, which can be cultivated (and experimented with) by changing such variables as word choice, sentence structure, rhythm, punctuation, grammar, and usage. Students should demonstrate the ability to articulate the rhetorical effects such variables produce. This ability also demands that students think about how style shapes and constrains what can be said and to whom.

3. REVISION

Writing is a process that involves much more than the final product you turn in when the deadline arrives. The writing process includes a range of activity that often begins with research and reading and continues from planning (perhaps through brainstorming, note-taking, outlining, etc.) through drafting to revision. Revision is a crucial part of the writing process in which writers evaluate their work, identify changes they wish to make in their argument and its structure, and even reconceptualize their argument in response to new information or circumstances.

Much of what we do in class will be revising our own (and even other writers') work, making changes and inventing permutations in order to experiment with style. Students should demonstrate creativity in their revisions, as well as insight in their evaluative comments for their peers. Students should also demonstrate the ability to plan, draft, and revise their own papers & projects.

4. CONVERSATION

Conversation represents something like a souped-up version of class participation. In addition to in-class writing exercises and peer review, we will also be doing and discussing readings related to the politics of style. Conversation can mean joining these discussions, but it will also mean coming to see relationships between these readings, that is, arranging them into a conversation. Students should demonstrate the ability to identify an author's or rhetor's position, conjecture about what may be at stake, and imagine the possible consequences.

Conversation is also a research & citation practice. Research is a process of discovering useful sources of argument or information, which may be thought of as nodes, networked together by citation. Citation, beyond simply a set of conventions (such as MLA), also has rhetorical, ethical, and stylistic concerns. Students should demonstrate the ability to cite others effectively, not only through conventions but also through direct quotation, summary, and paraphrase, and even imitation.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

Learning is an organic process that unfolds in complex ways according to its own pace and rhythm. All students learn in different ways, and any course will accommodate each student differently. The Learning Record requires students to pay attention to their own learning styles, and it enables students to document evidence of their own development in multiple areas. We'll call these areas the Dimensions of Learning.

The six dimensions that follow can't really be separated out from one another; rather, these dimensions cut across one another. Our Course Goals are designed to encourage student development across multiple dimensions. Using the Learning Record helps you measure your progress throughout the semester, picturing your learning as a trajectory across the course.

When you compose your Learning Record evaluations, you will use the Dimensions of Learning to help you analyze how and what you have learned. Read and re-read these descriptions carefully (especially while you write your evaluations): you will likely cite from these descriptions as you craft your argument.

1. CONFIDENCE AND INDEPENDENCE

Learning should make you feel more confident, but more confidence alone is not necessarily a sign of deeper learning. Too much confidence and independence can keep you from seeking help when facing an obstacle; it can force you to rely on faulty or underdeveloped skills and strategies. Learning requires you to extend yourself beyond your existing comfort zone, but that zone should also expand along with your abilities,

knowledge, experience, and reflectiveness, preparing you to meet new challenges on your own.

2. SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

Skills and strategies are ways of approaching problems or topics, and they should help you respond successfully to challenges. Some students might start their work with research, casting a wide net and taking in possibilities. Others might talk things through with peers, friends, or teachers, coming up with questions about an assignment. You probably have skills and strategies that work well for you in lots of learning environments, but you should try out alternatives and evaluate how well they work for you.

3. KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Knowledge and understanding describes what you probably already think of as the object of learning. What do you know now that you didn't know before our class? This "content knowledge" is usually specific to the discipline of a learning environment, including topics; research methods; disciplinary theories, concepts, and practices; and so on.

4. USE OF PRIOR AND EMERGING EXPERIENCE

What can you draw on from your own experience and how can you connect it to your current work? Making use of your prior experience (or of your emerging/ongoing experiences) is a crucial dimension of learning. It's important to think about how you use your experience in the context of time (say, over the course of a semester). Prior experience can help you scaffold your way to developing new skills or deepening your understanding.

5. REFLECTION

Reflection is at the heart of the Learning Record. College students especially should develop the ability to step back and consider their situations critically and analytically, drawing on insights into their own learning processes. Learning theorists call this metacognition, or thinking about your thinking. In order to use what you are learning in other contexts than our classroom, you'll need to practice reflecting on how you learn. maximize

6. CREATIVITY AND IMAGINATION

Building on the above dimensions of learning, engaged students often become more playful, experimental, and creative in their work. The value of creativity and imagination in a class like ours is hard to overstate: students who take pleasure in their learning can often spread their enthusiasm to others. Imagination requires you to connect your coursework to other issues and insights. Even when the final result of a creative risk you take may not turn out as you'd hoped, it may still pay off in what you learn from it.

GRADE CRITERIA

These criteria describe the performance that must be evidenced by your Learning Record evaluations in order for you to justify a request for the grade described. Read and re-read these descriptions carefully (especially while you write your evaluations): you must cite from these descriptions when you explain your grade request.

A Continual participation in all course activities, perfect or near perfect attendance, and all assigned work completed on time. Excellent quality in work produced for the course along all dimensions of learning and in all Course Goals. LR reflections cite explicit and accurate evidence for quality of work. LR demonstrates both an awareness of student's place along the dimensions of learning and development along the dimensions throughout the semester, showing an awareness of both strengths and areas to work on in the future.

B Almost continual participation in all course activities, near perfect attendance, and all assigned work completed on time. Good quality in work produced for the course along all dimensions of learning and in all Course Goals. LR reflections cite explicit and accurate evidence for quality of work, but do not provide the most appropriate evidence or fail to connect some claims about quality of work and development to evidence in the LR. LR demonstrates both an awareness of student's place along the dimensions of learning and development along the dimensions throughout the semester, showing an awareness of both strengths and areas to work on in the future.

C Varied participation in all course activities, minimal absences, and all assigned work completed on time. Average quality in work produced for the course along all dimensions of learning and in all Course Goals. LR reflections cite explicit and accurate evidence for quality of work, but do not always provide appropriate evidence or fail to connect some claims about quality of work and development to evidence in the LR. LR demonstrates some awareness of student's place along the dimensions of learning and development along the dimensions throughout the semester, but does not describe development fully.

D Intermittent participation in course activities, poor attendance, some late, incomplete or missing assignments, and/or below-average quality of work produced according to the Course Goals. LR provides little evidence of awareness of development along the dimensions of learning, not discussing one or more dimensions and/or Goals.

F Minimal or no participation in course activities, poor attendance, several late, incomplete or missing assignments and/or well below average quality of work produced according to the Course Goals. Evidence of development across the dimensions of learning is not given or does not support claims made in the LR reflection, and LR does not discuss multiple dimensions and/or Goals.

Plus and minus grades will be awarded where LR evidence falls between the criteria for two whole letter grades.