



UNIVERSITY OF
ALASKA
FAIRBANKS

University
Writing
Program
Guidebook
2014-2015

Summer 2014

Dear Teacher of First Year Writing at UAF,

Welcome to a fresh semester of teaching, meeting new people, and developing your knowledge through new experiences in a classroom.

This guidebook is intended as a resource for you, and it includes information outlining the first-year writing curriculum, its objectives, philosophy, and other tools that you can use to build a successful course. We organized this guidebook so that we begin with the big ideas of the culture for which we are all responsible, in our offices and classrooms. To do so, we have included sections about essential knowledge and practices students should know before they complete our writing courses. The guidebook also contains resources to help you think about the pedagogy and practices behind the courses you create. At the back of the guidebook, we have provided some important practical aspects of teaching “First Year Writing” at UAF, including long-held policies, responsibilities, and expectations of your job as an instructor. You are expected to know these policies and procedures, and to address any questions or concerns around them as soon as possible with the Director of the University Writing Program.

Practice framing.

What’s the difference between a guidebook and a manual?

Be deliberate.

How should students and teachers be represented in the classroom?

Our curriculum reflects the value of diversity, and because it reflects diversity, it also reflects UAF—an open-admission, research institution. The average age of our students is 27-years old. Our students are eager, intellectually curious, and often motivated to learn from their experiences. We must keep our students at the center of what we do. As a teacher, don’t neglect your role as a student of your students. Learn about the students’ linguistic resources to help draw them out in their writing. Learn about where you teach, UAF, and the conditions of living in our climate and culture. We hope you find this guidebook helpful on your own journey as a teacher.

This guidebook is just the beginning. As you teach, you will continue to learn what practices work best for you and your students. Utilize the community of teachers around you for ideas and support. Don’t forget that any time you need inspiration or you want to share something that worked particularly well in your class, you can head over to WriteAlaska.org. Put your own stamp on your course section and get excited: this is a chance for you and your students to explore reading, writing, and literacy in a whole new way!

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This edition was a product of collaboration between graduate students Kendell Newman Sadiik and Jaclyn Bergamino.

Table of Contents

Theoretical Notes on Academic Literacy	6
Our Mission	9
Student-Centered Classrooms	9
Rhetorically-Based Inquiry	10
Critical Awareness	10
More on the Rhetorical Situation.....	12
More Important Concepts	15
Institutional Context for the University Writing Program	20
Curricular Sequences and Teaching Guidelines	24
English 111X: Introduction to Academic Writing	25
English 111x Suggested Curricular Sequence	29
English 211X/213X: Academic Writing about Literature/Social and Natural Sciences	30
English 211x/213x Suggested Curricular Sequence.....	33
Policies, Procedures, and Resources for Writing Program Teachers.....	34
Participatory Culture at UAF	34
Before Class Begins: What should you know about UA Online?	35
Planning your Course: Communicating and Scheduling your Syllabus.....	36
Running your Course: Communicating and Working with Students.....	37
Grading and Providing Feedback.....	39
*Contractual Obligations and Responsibilities of GTAs	40

Theoretical Notes on Academic Literacy

Literacy can mean different things, and placing the modifier *academic* before it certainly does not lighten this concern. Presented below are our Writing Program's beliefs about academic literacy, intended to respond to assumptions about literacy as well as attitudes about students and their learning that are counter-productive to the aims of writing development at UAF.

There have been several turns in the study of teaching writing and the latest is a turn to the social and public. First-year writing courses are required in a majority of higher education programs; they are at once a gate-keeping mechanism and an opportunity to reach students during a transformative period in their lives. At UAF English 111x and 211x or 213x are required core classes that are opportunities to introduce habits of mind to the student population, recognizing that we play a role in fostering active citizens and future contributors to our communities. Though this guidebook is not intended to provide an historical perspective to a field that has shifted and grown, we believe that it is important to situate First Year Writing, literacy, and our curriculum as a social project and an asset to continuing education here at UAF. In general, our Writing Program shares traits with those across the Lower 48, where programs have shifted emphasis from an individual's or author's perspective on writing to a social perspective of texts and writers.

This social turn emphasizes no one genre of writing over another. For example, our curriculum does not value argument over narrative or narrative over argument. This refusal is based in our belief that writing occurs in contexts that constantly change and always differ—contexts that

Schooling is tied to either social reproduction or social transformation, and we should make every attempt to work along this spectrum of social change in our work with writers acquiring academic literacy. No one writes in no-place or no-situation. What writers write and how they write is inherited from, and also contributes to, their particular scenes of writing as well as their understanding of themselves and the world.

Writing at UAF should challenge students to apply this rhetorical knowledge of how and why various writing/texts are produced, received, distributed, and circulated to aid students in practicing writing texts more deliberately, effectively, and precisely. This take on process creates a social writing process rather than a cognitive process for an individual writer.

Did you know that the oldest complaint about student writing was written by an ancient teacher who “agonized” about the decline of student writing ability on a Sumerian clay tablet?

For more on how “reports of the death of the English language have been greatly exaggerated” see *Famous Last Words: The American Language Crisis* Reconsidered by Harvey A. Daniels.

involve multiple genres for multiple audiences and purposes. This kind of understanding about language and texts is a rhetorical perspective, and in this guidebook this perspective will often be referred to as the “rhetorical situation.” The rhetorical situation takes into account audience, purpose, writer, and context to consider how and why a text acts in the world – whether that text is an ad in a magazine or a critical academic article.

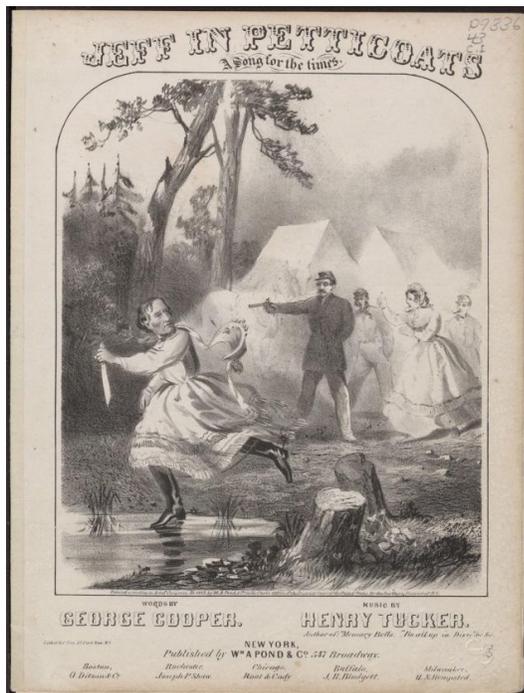
Oftentimes, literacy is understood as a skill whose presence or absence defines an individual as either literate or illiterate. New Literacy Studies has expanded this definition. Literacy, researchers argue, is far more social than an individual decoding words from a page, writing them down, and having an authority decide that this practice deems the person literate. So, rather than framing literacy as a skill; instead, literacy has been found to be made up of a series of social material practices aimed toward action in given contexts. In our teaching of academic literacy, we should attempt to help our students acquire it based on how literacy practices *actually* work in the material context of people’s lives, which include but are not limited to academic study. Decontextualizing literacy will not help students develop as informed, deliberate communicators. A teacher cannot remove literacy teaching from its social effects, i.e. literacy is ideological.

“Meaning is primarily the result of social interactions, negotiations, contestations and agreements among people. It is inherently variable and social.”

For more on the ideological nature of literacy, see James Paul Gee’s [Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses](#).

Because literacy involves the mutually constitutive practices of reading and writing, we strive to design our writing courses to encourage interplay among the assignments. We select difficult readings to engage our students in considerations of complex academic/public issues, and we try to design problem-posing prompts, which require students to consider these readings from various angles. Some instructors assume that, for a text to be difficult, it must be linguistically challenging, stylistically dense, and/or thematically complex. Others assume that such texts must

be “literary.” Think William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Nature,” or Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. We believe that the definition of difficult texts should be expanded, because we have found that they come in various forms—they may even be multimodal!—and fall into different generic categories. We also believe that texts which might seem simple at first glance often contain complicated ideas that require careful analytical attention. Examples might include: the Civil War-era parlor song “Jeff in Petticoats”; Charles Brower’s personal narrative *Fifty Years Below Zero*; or Frederic Remington’s painting *Coming to the Call*. Albeit in different ways, all of these texts (because we consider paintings and songs to be textual) demand that readers confront difficult questions about history, politics, and/or identity. They ask readers to adopt different perspectives and think about the world in unconventional ways. All texts have features that can be analyzed and drawn on in regard to their social



function (what, how, and to whom they communicate).

Oftentimes, what makes academic literacy difficult to teach is that this process of learning happens for students over time, and is acquired through practice in rhetorical situations. Sometimes we teach the same thing, again and again. This doesn't mean we are failing. Returning again to previous material provides opportunity for synthesis. Teaching academic literacy does not involve taking a prescriptive orientation to a writer's language use or social conventions. The features of academic genres change as writers respond to disciplinary and social context. This means that teaching academic literacy is a process of helping students recognize and respond to these changing contexts.

At the same time, as writing teachers we meet students during a period of transition, which means we have a responsibility not only to ground students in the university's changing

“At its essence, the Framework suggests that writing activities and assignments should be designed with genuine purposes and audiences in mind (from teachers and other students to community groups, local or national officials, commercial interests, students’ friends and relatives, and other potential readers) in order to foster flexibility and rhetorical versatility.”

For more on the roots of these strategies, see the [Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing](#), published by the Council of Writing Program Administrators.

expectations of their written communication but also to expose them to new knowledge and practices for their continued writing improvement. We aim to help students distinguish between choices and errors. That is, language and writing function as mirrors and tools and what appears to be an error may actually be a reflection of the context in which something is written or said. Alternatively, an error may be a choice that intends to reshape that context in some way. Knowledge about academic literacy and its practices can transfer to contexts outside of writing classrooms because the writer learns the reasons behind what they are doing when they write. Students acquire this knowledge as they gain more exposure to the genres of their discipline. Students learn in first-year

writing the tools, questions, and habits of mind that are critical for success in college. As such, we draw on strategies advocated by research into undergraduate education at research universities.

Our Mission

Mission Statement: The Writing Program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks promotes creative and critical thinking in service of student success in their future written coursework. We contribute to students building a foundation for lifelong learning and civic engagement. Our **student-centered classrooms** use **rhetorically-based inquiry** in order to foster **critical language awareness**.

Student-Centered Classrooms

Student writing constitutes the principal activity of our courses.

A student-centered classroom calls us to listen to our students, learn from their readings of texts, and pay attention to misunderstandings that might come up. Oftentimes these misunderstandings (wait you thought the author was a man—it was really a woman!) lead the entire classroom to a learning experience. In general, taking the time to slow things down, and ask students to articulate the reasons behind their positions, including the “errors” or choices in their writing, can produce exciting learning moments in a classroom, for both the student and the teacher.

It is important to note that this is very different than the view of education that sees students as repositories into which knowledge is dumped by teachers and institutions, or as Paulo Freire puts it, “the banking concept of education.” Our students come to the classroom not as empty receptacles to be filled, but as individuals with their own knowledge and background that can be drawn on to foster better writing practices.

Our writing classrooms provide a space for writers to approach their writing and their own and peers’ choices in writing as intellectual projects. We encourage students to experience how their own written work happens in a material, historical context that not only shapes that work, but limits it. This is the reason why the most important course texts are those authored and peer-reviewed by the students.

“From the outset, [the teacher’s] efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. His efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of the students. In their relations to with them.”

For more on this, see Paulo Freire’s [“The Banking Concept”](#) from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Rhetorically-Based Inquiry

Our classrooms pose rhetorical problems for writers to solve or complicate.

Rhetoric as a concept, at times, is used pejoratively. People may say “empty rhetoric” or “*just rhetoric.*” IA Richards’, a 20th Century American Rhetorician, in *Philosophy of Rhetoric* defines it as the study of misunderstandings and its remedies. Rhetoric *is* language and how language shifts and changes in different contexts because of how people *use* language. The study of rhetoric is more than persuasive techniques or strategies—rhetoric is how people enact identity and meaning. In our classroom, we aim to study rhetorical problems and the ways that rhetorical choices come to bear on the lives of real people.

In one teacher’s classroom, Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” was discussed. Before the activity, the teacher asked her students to translate a previous journal entry they wrote to a text message to someone particular. In another classroom, a teacher had cut up paragraphs from an essay, assigned students to groups, and asked each group to rearrange the paragraphs. When the time came for groups to share what they found, his students were engaged in discussing the decisions they made about the arrangement, why there were differences, and how it got them thinking about their own paragraph order differently. In yet another classroom, a teacher brought in a wide sample of texts, ranging from an NBA history told by former players, the Culinary Institute’s *Book of Soups*, the *9/11 Commission Report*, and David Macaulay’s *The Way Things Work*. He then asked students to determine in groups what makes each of these texts successful and effective.

Critical Awareness

We foster with our students awareness of risk taking in their daily writing lives.

In *How We Think*, education scholar John Dewey presents educators with a forked road situation as a metaphor for critical thinking. For Dewey, being critical is an active position, a choice that comes out of a process of observation and analysis. He calls us to recognize that to be critical, one has to consider more than one route and understand the important differences between routes, as well as have a reason for choosing one over another. Additionally, we must be able to recognize that on another day, with different circumstances, another route may have been chosen.

“Reflective thinking is always more or less troublesome because it involves overcoming the inertia that inclines one to accept suggestions at their face value; it involves willingness to endure a condition of mental unrest and disturbance. Thinking, in short, means judgment suspended during further inquiry.”

For more on John Dewey’s educational philosophies, see [How We Think](#).

As a writing center tutor, I was working with a student studying to become an engineer. He was also an ESL writer who wanted help with precise language, as he was very excited about an equation he had discovered for “projectile accuracy.” I asked him what that meant—was he talking about bombs? His face fell, and I could tell the application of his formula upset him. Our session changed from correcting language to using it as a resource. Together, we located an appropriate place in his professional paper where he could address the application of his formula

in a manner that affirmed his values about war. This interaction was very different than what was expected. Instead of discussing formulas, accuracy, and the organization of his paper, we looked at another problem, a more macro problem, which was the application of the ideas presented. As a writing program, we aim to challenge students to think critically not only about the grammar and organization of their writing, but the relevance and consequences of what they are writing in a larger context.

In the “Banking Concept of Education,” scholar and activist Paulo Freire presents this distinction in terms of the difference it makes between memorizing “the capital of Pará is Belim” versus perceiving “what Belim means for Pará and what Pará means for Brazil.” This is the difference between a student memorizing a rule and a student engaging deeply with their learning to make and perceive meaning. It is this latter sort of critical thinking and meaning making that our program values.

More on the Rhetorical Situation

Below, we have used the concept of a rhetorical situation to highlight some key concepts when it comes to teaching writing to university students. Like any attempt at definition, this is simplified and static. A rhetorical situation is anything but simple! However, these terms and concepts are ones that students should be aware of and comfortable using when examining their own writing and the writing of others.

Rhetorical Situation

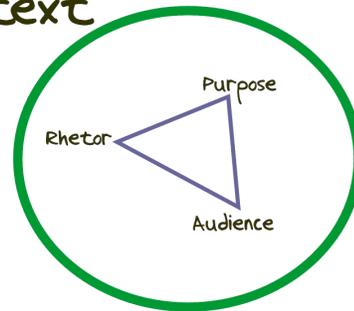
Writing is more complicated than a writer thinking about what to say, putting thought to page/screen, and then having someone else read it. One major reason why writing is more complicated than the description above is because of the rhetorical situation, and how the rhetorical situation presents writers with opportunities as well as constraints or limits on what they *can* write, to whom, and in what form. We promote a rhetorical perspective for posing and solving writing problems. We teach through the rhetorical situation, where a myriad of influences will affect our writing. What we

mean (purpose/text), where and when the text is written and read (context), who means it (rhetor), and to whom we are communicating (audience) are all key factors in the rhetorical

“The situation dictates the sorts of observations to be made; it dictates the significant physical and verbal responses; and, we must admit, it constrains the words which are uttered.”

For more on the exigency that creates a rhetorical situation, see Lloyd Bitzer’s [“The Rhetorical Situation.”](#)

Context



situation. It is important that writers understand the underlying players in the rhetorical situation enough that they can articulate them and respond to them in order to create texts that are appropriate to the genre and the situation. The appropriate grammar, tone, voice, and mechanics of a text will change as each of these aspects of the rhetorical situation changes and to be an effective writer, one must be able to respond accordingly to the rhetorical situation.

Audience

An audience is to whom the rhetor's purpose is directed. Who is the text intended to effect? Our expectations and assumptions about who our audience is and how our audience will read our text influences how we write. Writing is a social activity, a conversation. Both the writer and the reader influence how a text is read and received. Because of this, we as writers must be purposeful and explicit about our assumptions regarding our audiences. Who are they? What expectations do we think they will be bringing to the text? How are we as writers responding to these expectations? These kinds of questions about audience can be very specific textual concerns, such as, what will the implications be for my audience if I use slang terms in this text? They can also be very broad discursive questions, like what kind of reaction will the readers have to the text's underlying assumptions about race, gender, or identity.

“A fully elaborated view of audience, then, must balance the creativity of the writer with the different, but equally important, creativity of the reader. It must account for a wide and shifting range of roles for both addressed and invoked audiences. And, finally, it must relate the matrix created by the intricate relationship of writer and audience to all elements in the rhetorical situation.”

For more on audience, see Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford's articles [“Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked”](#) and [“Representing Audience.”](#)

Additionally, we as teachers must also be aware of our audience. What assumptions are underlying our lessons and our prompts? What expectations do we have of our students? How are our students receiving the texts that we produce?

Rhetor

The rhetor is the author or authors behind a given purpose. A rhetor is always aligned in some way with given paradigms or ideologies and carries them to the rhetorical situation. Gender, race, class, and other identity markers all shape the texts we create. How do aspects of our backgrounds and identities dictate the kinds of vocabulary we use and our styles of wording? It is important to be aware of how we place ourselves and represent ourselves our writing. Can we be explicit about the assumptions and ideologies that we hold? Can we attempt to be transparent about the beliefs we hold that come to bear on our writing?

As teachers, we are also rhetors, delivering certain messages in the context of our classroom. We should be aware of ourselves as rhetors and how we portray ourselves. How does our role as university teacher affect the way that our messages and our words are perceived? Where do we stand in the classroom and how are we representing our position, our authority?

Purpose

The purpose of the text is the goal. What is the text meant to convey? How do the choices that we make relate to the purpose of our writing? Often in writing and English classes, the import of purpose may be downplayed. The mechanics of writing may be emphasized over the purpose and its relation to the rhetorical situation. However, as a program, we are concerned with thinking deeply about the purpose of writing and how the text relates to a larger context. How do the choices we make on a textual level, like word choice or tone, relate to the purpose of the piece? How does the purpose of the text relate to the discourse that it is engaged in?

As teachers, we must be cognizant of the purpose behind each discussion, each class, each assignment. The content of our classrooms can shape a writer's purposes because of the texts we choose to teach from or the questions we ask. For which purposes will you design your readings, your prompts, your activities?

Context

Context is the larger discourse in which the text is situated. Context can include the time, the place, the genre, and other texts with which the work is in conversation. Context is perhaps the most difficult of the components of the rhetorical situation to pin down because it encompasses everything that comes to bear on the text. How is the text distributed? What other texts in the genre relate to it? What is the historical context that brought this text into being?

In the classroom, context is incredibly important. When our students write, they are writing in a very specific academic context. We as teachers can bring to light the assumptions, genres, and conventions that are at play in this specific context and encourage our students to be aware of and respond in kind. In pointing out this context, we also shed light on other contexts which may have different assumptions, genres, and conventions. A well-versed writer should be able to negotiate between and respond to a variety of contexts.

“But literate repertoires do not move as static, fully formed resources with writers. Instead, writers call on or create literate resources in the process of making do, asserting themselves, or communicating on the fly in specific rhetorical situations.”

For more on writer flexibility and attunement to rhetorical situations, see Rebecca Lorimer’s [“Multilingual Writing as Rhetorical Attunement.”](#)

More Important Concepts

Below are more concepts that you should be familiar with and thinking about as your design your course. Many of these terms are paired here to demonstrate the ways that they are defined in relation to or against each other. You may want to present some of these concepts to your students so that together you can explore and discuss the ways that these terms come to bear on writing, reading, and rhetoric.

Argument

For many students, the term “argument” may connote debate, fighting, and winning. However, for our purposes, argument is defined as a process of responsible and mutual inquiry aimed at finding the best solutions to a problem or issue. In order for students to develop well-reasoned positions, they must seek out and carefully examine multiple sides of an issue, including those ideas that agree with their positions and those that differ. This inquiry process should include a complex blend of skills such as critical reading, critical thinking, reflection, analysis, and synthesis.

To assist students in understanding the social nature of argument, teachers should emphasize the importance of audience and dialogue through class discussions. In addition, they should introduce students to the concept of discourse communities and to collaborative activities, such as peer workshops. Student participation and peer workshops should be central to the course.

Assumptions

Each text embodies certain ideas and biases concerning how the world works or how it ought to work. Some are explicit; others are implicit. Texts and consumers of text both carry assumptions. By contrasting and exploring the self and texts through language in varying situations and contexts, we recalibrate how the world works or ought to work. To uncover assumptions and interrogate them with other assumptions is worthwhile ideological work.

Errors and Choices

Conventionally understood, choices are conscious selections from a given set of conscious options. However, in this conventional view, choices are reduced to a conscious understanding. With so much of thinking and decisions being made on an unconscious basis, its not surprise that a mistakes should occur. Our goal is to increase the quantity of deliberate choices writers make in their design, just as we also hope to reduce the amount of “mistakes” in writers’ designs. This distinction is at once existential and pragmatic; each choice will have a consequence and, regardless of whether they are "good" (choices) or "bad" (mistakes), there are results. Understanding correlation or causation in these results allows writers to make informed decisions in their composition. There is more to be said here but keep in mind differences between choice, error, mistake, and misunderstanding when it comes to communication.

An example of an error may be the lack of an article in a student’s writing which slows down your reading; however, the fact that you notice (perhaps even marking it with a red pen) can at

the same time also open up a conversation about differing language standards and styles, a conversation that may lead to this “error” becoming a choice for the writer which deepens their and your own understanding about language and how it works and changes to suit our purposes.

Frame and Set up

Throughout this guidebook you’ll see these verbs: frame and set up. When framing is used, it means something specific in relation to rhetoric, and often encourages you to think about *how you put something* matters to *how people understand* the nature of the problem. One example of this distinction can be seen in Dan O’Neill’s *Firecracker Boys*, which is a nonfiction book about postwar nuclear expansion in Alaska. As UAF scientists wrote about the consequences of blowing up land in order to make a more efficient Northern Passage, they wrote that “an entire village” would be removed. An editor later crosses out “entire village” and replaced it with “25 households.” These are two different frames for the same reality.

Set up, on the other hand, refers to a different kind of conscious action involved in education. Note that throughout the curricular resources in this guidebook, the verb “set up” is used a lot. “Set up” is one way we invoke a concept from educational learning theory, Vygotsky’s concept of scaffolding and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Picture a building with scaffolds helping it along as it is being built—this is the image metaphor of your job as a teacher. We are carefully sequencing our assignments so that the distance between what our students can do independently and what our students can do with guided instruction helps them continually develop as writers. One example of a scaffolding sequence in the classroom is an “I do, we do, you do” activity. In this type of sequence, the teacher demonstrates what is expected of the students. Then, the class does the activity together with the teacher leading. Then the students do the activity on their own.

Genre

In both literary and rhetorical study, genres are of current research interest. Certainly distinctions on what features of text correspond to generic categories are endlessly fascinating. A question we often hear in our graduate program is a timeless one regarding how different artists draw the line between non-fiction and fiction. Similar questions can be applied and considered in relation to other texts and their creation as well. For instance, you can think about creating your own writing prompts as learning a new genre of writing. Genres in this curriculum refer to text types that have developed a stability of features over time which reflect the purposes, audiences, and contexts of their social use. In this way, genres are commonly referred to as social responses to recurring, stable-for-now “rhetorical situations.” Genres are constructed and helping students see this construction will also help them with reconstruction.

It is important for both teachers and students to recognize that academic writing is not one stable genre with right and wrong ways of approaching every text. The conventions for different disciplines vary, even within those disciplines. Genres are not static; they change with the needs of a rhetorical situation. Often these conventions are also not fully conscious in the teachers of the genres. Students may be asked in one course to perform a rhetorical analysis of an argument and the assumptions of what should be in that analysis will vary from discipline to discipline.

Students will have to navigate these various expectations throughout their time at university and beyond. The more we can help students be cognizant of the differences between genres, the easier this navigation will be. As a teacher the more precise you are with sharing your expectations and reasoning, the more likely you are to support their success as a writer.

Literacy

Literacy is not the simple decoding of symbols on a page into words. Literacy is a way of making meaning in certain contexts. Literacies are social practices that grow and change based on the particular needs of a group of people, their purposes for communicating, and the situations of their lives. Literacy is not an individual skill set that you either have or don't have. There are degrees of fluency in each kind of literacy. For example, one can learn to become "literate" in punk rock culture or in tourism at National Parks. Academic literacy is another type of literacy. Like all literacies, it involves more than decoding or creating alphabetic equations, complete sentences, and thesis-driven papers. In fact, academic literacy implicates everyone from the graduate teaching assistant to the developmental instructor to the chemistry lab teacher to the sociology professor: we all have a responsibility to recognize the rhetorical nature of academic language (verbal, written, behavioral, etc.), and help students use it as informed, deliberate and precise communicators.

Peer Editing and Peer Review

With peer review, we are teaching writers how to be diligent, careful, and critical readers of academic texts, including the writer's own and the writer's peers'. We believe this awareness is essential for success at UAF and for life as a citizen. Peer review centers around the reflective process; students analyze the choices that they and their peers make in regard to their text. By asking questions, considering answers, or challenging assumptions (such as whether the questions asked are the right questions), writers at any stage in their process benefit from the awareness of the choices they are consciously or unconsciously pursuing. There are multiple ways to approach this process. Two people trading essays to comment and discuss the writing or a class discussing particular sentences as a group are two examples. When students approach their peers' writing, and their own, with the sole intent of evaluating usage and spelling, as in the practice of "peer editing," the activity neglects our curricular objectives. Distinctions of choice v. error, framing v. set up, and textual assumptions are negated when the only concern is the difference between student work and its connection to an idealized, standardized English.

Prescriptive and Descriptive

Prescribing a single, "correct" method for writing is counter to our Writing Program's goals, objectives, and outcomes. Prescribing exactly how an essay should perform and function, aside from effectively working within and against a rhetorical situation, will not lead to a student transferring knowledge about language and meaning-making to other contexts. Describing the goals of your assignment and the reasons behind it, however, is a best practice. In addition, making assignments engaging allows students to explore different paths and investigate different choices. Descriptive practices and assignments allow students to develop an internalized

prescription—a realization that I do this for these reasons. These are practices that writers adopt or create for themselves where they are aware of the choices they are making.

For example, sharing an essay for the purposes of a model can be taken up as a prescriptive protocol for “how to write” for some students. Recall the five-paragraph essay. For some, it is a restrictive form that prescribes; for others it is helpful in that it is a kind of tool for organization. It all depends on how the five-paragraph form is being understood. In general, description involves an in-depth look at the features of a text and how they are functional for the text’s purposes and audiences and contexts; whereas a prescriptive orientation defines these features in terms of correctness or right and wrong.

This is about having an attitude of “should” (prescriptive—think a prescription for a kind of behavior) v. an attitude of “could” (descriptive—this a description of the kind of behavior you are looking for but there are multiple ways of getting there).

We can come to each activity with the same point of view. Instead of having a set expectation about how students should respond to the texts we assign or the activities we do, there is room for much more learning and discussion if we come to class ready to see what the students bring. It is important to remember that each reader is bringing her own experiences to the text, so we should not assume that our interpretation of a text is the right one.

Social Rhetoric

In recent years, there has been a change in the way that writing is understood. In the past, writing has been understood through the lens of cognitive rhetoric, which sees writing as a formula to be mastered, or expressionistic rhetoric, which understands writing as only the self-expression of the writer. More recently, many rhetoricians have come to think of writing as a social process. In this school of thought, writing is not an activity that is removed from its specific time and place and involves only the writer. Instead, texts are seen as being a product of their specific historical context, including the material and social forces that come to bear on the writing. All texts are part of a discourse, they respond to other texts and situations. Texts are not stand-alone objects that are disconnected from the world around them. In the same vein, the

“When we teachers enter classrooms with particular poems or stories in hand, we also enter with expectations about the kind of student responses that would be most fruitful, and these expectations have been shaped, for the most part in literature departments in American universities. We value some readings more than others – even, in our experience, those teachers who advocate a reader’s free plat. One inevitable result of this situation is that there will be moments of mismatch between what a teacher expects and what students do. What interests us about this mismatch is the possibility that our particular orientations and readings might blind us to the logic of a student’s interpretation and the ways that interpretations might be sensibly influenced by the student’s history.”

For more on teacher expectations and student interpretations, see Glynda Hull and Mike Rose’s [“This Wooden Shack Place: The Logic of an Unconventional Reading.”](#)

writer and the reader also come from a specific context, are affected by the historical, material, and social circumstances that surround them.

“In studying rhetoric-the ways discourse is generated-we are studying the ways in which knowledge comes into existence.”

For more on the social nature of rhetoric, see James Berlin’s [“Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class.”](#)

Because of this, we see writing as a social process and our classes should reflect this philosophy. This is part of the reason that attendance in class is required. Responding to difficult texts and problem-posing prompts challenges students to develop their ideas and share them with their instructors and classmates.

In our experience, students often improve their papers immensely through a process of collaborative discussion and revision. Many times, first drafts contain the seeds of generative thoughts, but those seeds only germinate when students test their ideas in collaboration with others, get feedback on those ideas, and expand upon them in subsequent revisions.

Texts and Difficult Texts

A text can be a book, an article, a television commercial, a poster, a radio program, etc. Sometimes it is useful to consider everyday objects as texts. Texts tell viewers things about themselves and the rhetorical situation which contributed to the text's distribution, production, reception, and circulation. Difficult texts are ones that unsettle readers because they refuse to allow them to rely on easy answers. Sometimes, they require readers to think about controversial issues and/or confront unpleasant aspects of history and culture. Always, they are texts that open up interpretive possibilities rather than foreclose them. We choose difficult texts that will be difficult for all students. In this way, students who are more comfortable with dense prose, complicated vocabulary, or academic discourse are not necessarily at an advantage when examining these texts. We choose texts that are challenging for all students.

Difficult texts often contain dense prose, lengthy paragraphs, elevated diction, and complex themes. This is not always the case, however. Sometimes, apparently simple texts contain complicated ideas that require careful analytical attention. They can appear in multifarious and multimodal forms: novels, short stories, poems, plays, songs, letters, journals, biographies, histories, paintings, sermons, cartoons, sculptures, photographs, films, maps, websites, advertisements, posters, scrapbooks, collages, personal narratives, government documents, magazine/newspaper articles, and/or museum exhibits.

Institutional Context for the University Writing Program



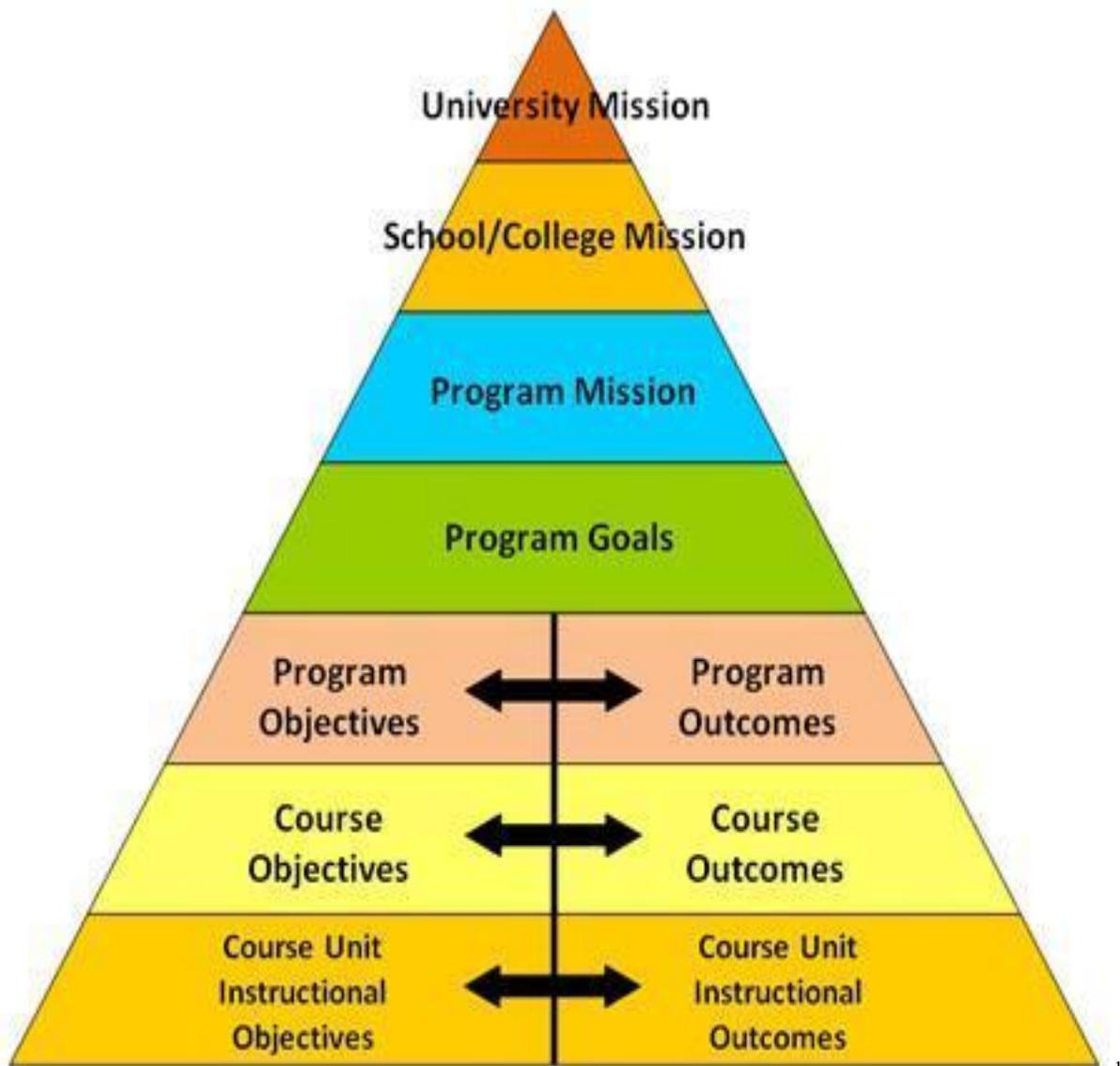
Currently at UAF, the Undergraduate Core Curriculum is being revitalized. A university's core curriculum is essentially the series of courses that are required in order for a student to earn a degree. But these courses are also important because they address the mission statement of the University. English 111x and either English 211x or 213x fulfill the "written communication" graduation requirement for students; these courses must also address certain core outcomes of UAF General Education. At this time, we have reviewed the current, under-review, core outcomes, and have aligned our University Writing Program with the three of these outcomes that pertain to writing.

- Develop intellectual and practical skills across the curriculum, including inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, problem solving.
- Acquire tools for effective civic engagement in local through global contexts, including ethical reasoning, intercultural competence.
- Integrate and apply learning, including synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies, adapting them to new settings, questions, and responsibilities, and forming a foundation for lifelong learning.



The English Department is funded by the budget of the College of Liberal Arts (CLA). This is the college that handles your hiring paperwork, timesheets, and can occasionally fund travel or projects for your own scholarship or creative activities.

In the graphic section which follows, we outline our institutional understanding of writing at UAF, in the English Department, in the Writing Program, and finally in specific classrooms. There is a general to specific progression. We have found the figure of a pyramid to be helpful, keeping in mind these relationships.



In what follows, we populate each level of this pyramid with the official university and department statements about writing at UAF. Our intention here is to give you the “big picture” and help you feel more comfortable in your role as an instructor of the course.

¹ A graphic, taken from the University of Connecticut’s Assessment materials, available at <http://www.assessment.uconn.edu/primer/goals1.html>



University of Alaska Fairbanks Mission Statement

*The University of Alaska Fairbanks is a Land, Sea, and Space Grant university and an international center for research, education, and the arts, emphasizing the circumpolar North and its diverse peoples. UAF integrates teaching, research, and public service as it educates students for **active citizenship** and prepares them for lifelong learning and careers.*



English Department Mission Statement

*A B.A. in English at UAF provides training in **rhetorical dexterity**, critical acumen, and creative ingenuity—habits of mind that develop alongside intellectual inquiries concerning the production and reception of literary (and nonliterary) texts. As effective creators and thoughtful consumers of print and digital information, students learn how to identify critical methods, analyze language in varying historical, cultural, and institutional contexts, and employ research in writing and speaking for a professional audience in the humanities.*



University Writing Program Mission

The Writing Program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks promotes creative and critical thinking in service of student success in their future written coursework and their lives. We contribute to students building a foundation for lifelong learning and civic engagement. Our **student-centered classrooms** use **rhetorically-based inquiry** in order to foster **critical language awareness**.

Program Goals

- To develop rhetorical knowledge about texts, language, and writing in varying situations.
- To develop effective writing in response to a variety of audiences, purposes, and contexts.
- To develop intellectual curiosity about language, including the language(s) a student brings with him or her to the classroom and future writing situations.

Program Objectives

- Training in rhetorical situation and argument.
- Training in research-led inquiry.
- Training in peer review and revision.

Program Outcomes

- Critical reading, writing and thinking.
- Informational literacy and critical language awareness
- Transfer about academic knowledge practices

211/3X Course Objectives

- Instruction in extended written argument.
- Emphasis on research methods and techniques for public and academic audiences.
- Practice multimodal revision.

211/3X Course Outcomes

- Negotiate feedback and approach revision.
- Interact with texts, including referencing, paraphrase, and contextualization.
- Use language in an effective and communicative manner.

211/3X Learning/Instructional Objectives

- Why do features of texts in relation to audience change?
- How does audience impact the writing situation?
- What rhetorical strategies are present in my argument?

211/3X Learning/Instructional Outcomes

- Select and synthesize information from multiple perspectives, rhetorical genres, and audiences.
- Design effective texts in response to changing audiences and purposes.
- Assess their choices as writers.

111X Course Objectives

- Instruction and practice in written inquiry and critical reading.
- Emphasis on how writers observe, analyze, synthesize, and reflect ideas.
- Practice recursive writing processes.

111X Course Outcomes

- Negotiate feedback and approach revision.
- Interact with texts, including referencing, paraphrase, and contextualization.
- Use language in an effective and communicative manner.

111X Learning/Instructional Objectives

- Why do features of texts change?
- How does information become knowledge?
- What options were available for this writing and what choices were made?

111X Learning/Instructional Outcomes

- Identify and explain how features of a text reflect audience, context, and purpose.
- Select and analyze relevant, credible evidence for a specific purpose.
- Reflect on his or her own past writing to identify its constraints.

Objectives: The things you plan to do as the teacher of the course to help your students learn.

Outcomes: The things you intend for the students to be able to do by the end of the course.

Curricular Sequences and Teaching Guidelines

Our reading-writing-thinking curriculum draws on John Dewey's image-metaphor of a "forked road" situation. Dewey uses the idea of being at a crossroads and the decision making that occurs at a crossroads as a metaphor for the cognitive processes that form a critical thinking process. First, the traveler/writer must recognize that there is a choice to be made. That is, they have to *observe* that there is in fact a choice in this situation because there exist multiple possibilities (observation). Once the traveler/writer recognizes the forked situation, it is appropriate to then

The Road Not Taken (1915)

By Robert Frost

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth.*

*Then took the other, as just as fair
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.*

*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

investigate the options of each possibility (analysis). The process of analyzing options often results in recognizing the consequences of each option that helps to place the traveler/writer in a position to exercise judgment to make a choice (synthesis). Now our traveler/writer understands that the decisions made on the trail were because of a culmination of reasons and circumstances that may possibly change on another day. Another traveler might make a different choice, just as they might also use the forked road experience for their own future situations (reflection). The metaphor presents decision making as a constructed process, located in a specific time and place under certain conditions. Embedded in the metaphor is the fact that we also are a result of past decisions that lead to the "forked road" situation—and in order to improve our journeys we should learn from our past experiences.

What we've done is e-x-t-e-n-d that metaphor for our curriculum, and although students are always generating options, analyzing them, synthesizing them, and reflecting on their reasons, each unit highlights one of these processes.

In the tables that follow, you'll notice how our writing courses are divided up into units, and then for each unit we have created writing, reading, and thinking guidelines. These guidelines form the scaffolding structure for your course; however, the "content" of your course is completely up to you. The readings you chose should be in service of the writing project anchoring each unit. While planning your class, keep in mind what your writing project will be and make sure that you chose readings and activities that will ultimately help the students excel at these projects. It might be helpful to think of the writing projects or papers the "capstone" of each unit. Your readings and activities should be the scaffolding for your papers, helping students develop their skills so that they can create the best possible writing for that unit.

It's helpful to plan your activities and course around the due dates of the projects. As you do so, consider how much time students will need with feedback on the various parts leading up to the final submission. It's also important to keep in mind the academic calendar and other activities that might be going on outside your classroom. For instance, do you think it makes sense to have the research-based writing project due the day after the Thanksgiving Holiday?

English 111X: Introduction to Academic Writing

Catalog Description

This course provides instruction and practice in written inquiry and critical reading. It introduces writing as a way of developing, exploring, and testing ideas. The course also orients students to informational literacy, the writing center, and writing technologies. (See placement in catalog.)

General Description for Syllabus

This student-centered, inquiry-based writing course is designed to help students throughout their college careers and as they enter communities beyond the university. Inquiry-based writing is designed to engage the student in both problem posing and problem solving. Drawing on the rhetorical situation—specifically, audience, purpose, and context—instruction emphasizes the social nature of inquiry and how writers test ideas to discover the reasons for discursive choices. Students practice recursive writing processes, such as peer review, in order to help them adapt to changing demands of writing within the university and their lives.

By the end of first semester writing (English 111x), students should be able to have evidence of the following skills by composing texts which do the following:

Critical Reading	Identify and explain how features of a text reflect audience, context, and purpose.
Critical Writing	Select and analyze evidence for a specific purpose.
Critical Thinking	Reflect on their own past writing to identify its constraints.

Scheduling Sequences for English 111X

In the first few days of class, assign, as a take home essay the diagnostic prompt for Program Assessment. This prompt is written to elicit important information about who your students are as language users and learners. Share with students that the audience of the writing is for Program Assessment. We read their responses to learn about how well they are at being aware of how they learn and what they think. Students should write for 45-minutes and type up their response. They should retain the digital copy because it will be collected for Program assessment.

Schedule individual or small group conferences with your students at least once per semester. Encourage students to work with tutors in the UAF Writing Center as part of their writing process.

Provide students with guidance and practice in a variety of writing processes. Through systematic design of class activities and assignments, emphasize revision and reflection in your students' writing processes.

Schedule a visit to the library, discuss how to pose inquiry-based questions to scholarship, and how to engage in ethically-based research.

At the end of the semester, students should prepare a typed (also digital copy) for Program Assessment. They should take 45-minutes for this writing outside of class. It should be based on the

signature prompt that all classes will use.

Require a final during the University final exam period; this is a university policy. This period may be individual conferences with students in which you offer them feedback on their writing development or it might be a whole class period devoted to reflecting on what your students learned about writing in your course. See the Director of the University Writing Program for specifics on how this might be done.

Curricular Sequences

Assign and discuss unit-based texts from a rhetorical reader or anthology of your choosing. Challenge your students by selecting difficult, but rewarding, texts. Build discussions around analysis of a text's purpose, audience, and context. Remember that this is not a literature course. Discussions, readings, and writing assignments should be geared toward helping students identify the choices that writers make and the opportunities available to them as writers. The units' goals and paper specifics should ground these discussions by highlighting linguistic and multimodal design choices of writing.

Assign additional writing inside and outside of class which may include the following: reading response papers, focused free writes, reading journals, in-class writing, weekly writing, and research memos.

Combine thinking-reading-writing in your classroom in four separate units—each unit-paper must draw on inductive analysis and one of these papers must be over 1000 words.

- **Unit 1: Observation**

In the first unit, you will be responsible for crafting an inductive assignment that asks students to write from an experience, grounded by an assignment based on a particular scene of inquiry (a place, a person, a thing, a word). The goal here is to get students to observe in a critical, self-aware way. If we return to John Dewey's forked road analogy, we are starting at the point of observing the road they are on and the choices they have. The writing a student will produce should evidence that the student has gained insight about the choices that they have in writing about what they observe and how they portray their observations. See Director or other teachers for examples. You may also find examples at www.WriteAlaska.org.

Critical reflection and critical revision (the reasons behind what we do when we write and how we re-think writing decisions) are an essential part of the course. Emphasize these practices throughout your course in both your course assignments and related writing activities.

- **Unit 2: Analysis**

In the second unit, you will be responsible for selecting several challenging texts (between two and four) that will ground student writing that explores text-based inquiry for an academic audience. The student writing should take a form that is appropriate to the writer's discovered purpose and evidence a clear understanding of audience. Classroom activities may involve discussions of how to engage in critical reading practices and how to use reading for intellectual discovery. The student writing should develop the significance behind the analysis, and teachers should encourage class discussion on thesis statements and organization in the context of the rhetorical situation. The goal here is not to teach the five-paragraph essay, but rather to ask what purpose and audience a five-paragraph essay might address, and then push students to find a form appropriate to their rhetorical situation.

Provide prompt, constructive, honest feedback on students' writing-thinking. All papers should receive feedback within one week. Do not hold onto student writing without feedback for longer than two weeks. Think about the impact of the "red pen." Dialogue with your students in the margins and end comments of their papers—motivate them to take risks and help them understand the consequences of their writing choices. All instructors must comment on one set of rough drafts to prompt and support evermore complex and effective writing from students. It might be useful to ask questions about choices made in rough drafts and give suggestions about how to go further in subsequent drafts.

- **Unit 3: Synthesis**

In the third unit, you will be responsible for working with your students to engage in informational literacy. You may assign a 1500- to 2000-word inquiry-based paper that evidences the use of academic paraphrase, citation and citation styles, summary, and analysis. Or you may break these components down into

manageable practices, which culminate in an audience-based research project. The outcome of this unit is to work with students on synthesizing information and using their own lens to communicate it effectively to a specified audience. Classroom activities may involve practicing summary and paraphrasing as well as discussions about a writer's purpose in presenting research-based inquiry.

- **Unit 4: Reflection or Teacher's Choice**

In the fourth unit, you will be responsible for designing a creative-critical assignment that builds on the work of your classroom. You might choose a reflective/revision paper assignment as the fourth unit; you may also choose an alternative unit based on your own particular expertise as a teacher and your students' interests.

The last unit, for example, might be a study of a particular genre or a site of public writing (such as film reviews, a blog, Facebook, etc.). Some teachers require a "portfolio" that collects all the student's major assignments from the semester as well as a revision and/or reflective essay.

Emphasize the social nature of the writing process though the academic practice of peer review. Do not assume writers know how to engage in peer review before they arrive in your class. Modeling this process with students is a beneficial method to teach this technique, as is scaffolding the practice with specific questions/aims for the reviewer to consider. In fact, there are many ways of developing a classroom culture of peer review such as whole-class workshops, sentence workshops, paragraph workshops, partner exchanges, developing goals and rubrics as a class, etc.

English 111x Suggested Curricular Sequence

	Writing Assignment	Reading Guidelines	Critical Thinking Questions
Diagnostic Assignment (For Program Assessment)	Signature diagnostic prompt. To be assigned in the first few days of class. See Program Assessment criteria.		
Unit 1: Observation	Observational/Narrative writing to an unknowing audience drawing on the skills of being a close observer of a context.	0-2 texts: Choose texts that model observation in writing.	What details are important to your observation? Why?
Unit 2: Analysis	Analytical/Close Reading interactive writing to an audience familiar with a difficult text.	2-3 texts: Choose texts that meet our definition of “difficult.”	What’s the difference between saying it this way and saying it that way? Why?
Unit 3: Synthesis	Research-based, citational papers/projects/presentations to class as audience.	Multiple and diverse: Texts emerge out of student’s research process. You may decide to assign some class texts for parallel processes.	What/How are you going to <i>say</i> that?
Unit 4: Reflection	Up to instructor. Assignments should stress revision such as turning a previous text into one with images, etc.	2-3 texts: Revisit a text from earlier in the term; have students select a group of readings; etc.	Why did you put it the way you did?
Signature Assignment	Signature reflective prompt. To be assigned at the end of the semester. See Program Assessment criteria.		

English 211X/213X: Academic Writing about Literature/Social and Natural Sciences

Catalog Description

The course provides instruction in critical reading and writing by examining academic questions from the perspective of rhetorical situations. Concentrates on the research methods and techniques necessary to create extended written arguments and multimodal texts for a variety of audiences. (Prerequisite: Completion of ENG 111x or its equivalent)

Relationship to 111X

This course continues student development of critical reading, writing, and thinking. The course builds on the knowledge and practices of English 111x as students develop their inquiry through deductive writing techniques such as micro writing, research reports, and thesis-driven arguments. Readings in the course are selected by the instructor and organized around a topic or theme. These readings are diverse in terms of genre, perspective, and language. In addition, the course concentrates on how its participants can build mastery in both academic and public rhetorical situations.

Remember that though most students enrolled in 211/213 courses have gone through the 111 sequence, it is sometimes important to repeat and re-emphasize concepts from that course. Essay organization, for example, remains relevant, and it is always important to guide students toward thinking of writing as a choice.

General Description for Syllabus

This student-centered, audience-based writing course is designed to help students develop rhetorical strategies for active citizenship in the classroom and out of the classroom. [Further description written by instructor and provides 1-2 sentences on the course theme/topic.]

By the end of second semester writing (English 211X or 213X), students should be able to have evidence of the following skills by composing texts which do the following:

Critical Reading	Select and synthesize information from multiple perspectives, genres, and audiences.
Critical Writing	Design effective texts in response to changing audiences, contexts, and purposes.
Critical Thinking	Assess their choices as writers.

Scheduling Sequences for English 211X/213X

In the first few days of class, assign, as a take-home essay the diagnostic prompt for Program Assessment. This prompt is written to elicit important information about who your students are as language users and learners. Share with students that the audience of the writing is for Program Assessment. We read their responses to learn about how well they are at being aware of how they learn and what they think. Students should write for 45-minutes and type up their response. They should retain the digital copy because it will be collected for Program assessment.

Schedule individual or small group conferences with your students at least once each semester. Encourage students to work with tutors in the UAF Writing Center as part of their writing process.

Schedule a visit to Rasmuson Library, and introduce students to the major collections and online resources relevant to your course and theme. Help students learn how to predict which sources will best meet their needs, and show them how to devise a plan for locating, surveying, and evaluating these sources. Show students how they might integrate their research into their writing in order to participate in broader academic and public conversations.

At the end of the semester, students should prepare a typed (also digital copy) for Program Assessment. They should take 45-minutes for this writing outside of class. It should be based on the signature prompt that all classes will use.

Familiarize students with the discourse and conventions of academic and public writing communities by collectively developing a working vocabulary, a language particular to your classroom that describes how these modes of writing operate. Encourage students to draw on this vocabulary as they engage in the work of the course.

Keep in mind that you are preparing students to meet the writing requirements they will face in their major and other upper division courses. Not only are we preparing students for these requirements but we are also helping them discover the nature of academic ideas and disciplinary conversations that interest them.

Require a final during the University final exam period; this is a university policy. This period may be individual conferences with students in which you offer them feedback on their writing development or it might be a whole class period devoted to reflecting on what your students learned about writing in your course. See the Director of the University Writing Program for specifics on how this might be done.

Curricular Sequences

Develop a topic and a theme for the course and select appropriate readings. Challenge students by choosing a handful of difficult, but rewarding, texts. Because 211X/213X are writing courses not literature courses, comprehensive coverage of topics and themes should not be a primary concern. Rather, the focus should be on exposing students to a few key texts—as few as four and as many as eight—that allow them to interrogate the chosen topic and theme from various perspectives and genres. Be wary of texts that address well-worn political issues, for these kinds of readings invite boilerplate responses. Instead, select thought-provoking, multifaceted texts that engage students in important, ongoing academic and public conversations.

Provide students with guidance and practice in a variety of micro writing, short writing assignments that are very intentionally focused on a particular skill/task: answer a question, define a term, respond to a quotation, analyze a passage, solve a problem, support a thesis statement, summarize an issue, etc. This micro writing is anchored by the research-based writing project for each unit.

- **Unit 1: Writing for an Academic Audience**

Combine reading-thinking-writing in your classroom in two major units.

Each major unit is anchored by a research-based writing project, each project differs in terms of audience. One should challenge students to write (minimum of 2,000 words) a report or paper which contributes to an academic conversation on the topic of the course. This paper should engage in conventions and language appropriate to the audience. Class activities during this unit may involve a discussion of writing conventions in a variety of academic disciplines or small group work that explores organizational strategies for a long, research-based essay.

- **Unit 2: Writing for a Public Audience**

The second unit and project should challenge students to consider the same or a related topic for a different audience, a public audience. This project may be multimodal and be

equivalent in terms of scope to the first. Some teachers may even choose for this project to be collaborative. For example, students may practice grant proposals or public service announcements related to the topic or theme of the course. This unit may offer an opportunity to discuss authority and power in writing. It should also involve discussions about what changes when the audience changes, and about writing as dialogue, as entering one's voice into a conversation – whether academic or public.

Emphasize critical reflection in course assignments and activities. You might assign a reflective essay as part of this process, asking that students look back on and analyze their learning and writing process.

Provide prompt, constructive, honest feedback on students' writing-thinking. All papers should receive feedback within one week. Do not hold onto student writing without feedback for longer than two weeks. Think about the impact of the "red pen." Dialogue with your students in the margins and end comments of their papers—motivate them to take risks and help them understand the consequences of their writing choices. All instructors must comment on one set of rough drafts to prompt and support evermore complex and effective writing from students.

English 211x/213x Suggested Curricular Sequence

	Writing Assignment	Reading Guidelines	Critical Thinking Questions
Diagnostic Assignment (For Program Assessment)	Signature diagnostic prompt. To be assigned in the first few days of class. See Program Assessment criteria.		
Unit 1:	2,000 word research – based writing project/paper supported by micro writing assignments for an Academic Audience	Based on theme, 3-5 texts. Choose based on genre. Aim for diverse, difficult texts from a variety of academic perspectives.	What’s the relationship between language, knowledge, and power in this conversation? How do you negotiate your position given the nature of the academic dialogue?
Unit 2:	2,000 word research-based writing project/paper supported by micro writing assignments for a Public Audience.	Based on theme, 3-5 texts. Choose based on genre. Aim for diverse, difficult texts from a variety of public perspectives.	What’s the relationship between language, knowledge, and power in this conversation? How do you negotiate your position give the nature of the public dialogue?
Unit 3:	500 word take-home, typed essay. Used for Program Assessment.	Students’ own writing.	Prompt-based scenario which asks students to solve a problem using writing.
Signature Assignment:	Signature reflective prompt. To be assigned at the end of the semester. See Program Assessment criteria.		

Policies, Procedures, and Resources for Writing Program Teachers

These policies and procedures are written with Gruening teaching faculty in mind. When appropriate, if the policy details are relevant to Graduate Teaching Assistants only, there is an asterisk marking.

Participatory Culture at UAF

UAF's University Writing Program encourages collaboration, communication, and sharing among teachers across the curriculum. This develops professional and academic skills aimed to improve learning for students and instructors. Student-faculty led events provide opportunities for continued growth as an instructor. We are committed to developing a community and program that learns from one another.

WriteAlaska.org

[WriteAlaska.org](#) is an online resource for teachers of writing at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The goal of the site is to support writing instructors as they develop their courses and grow as teachers. To that end, the website hosts a variety of resources—from ready-to-use lesson plans to information about engaging the diverse student body at UAF. In the [Collaborate](#) section of the website, we regularly post articles and host conversations about writing, rhetoric, and pedagogy at UAF and beyond. All instructors are encouraged to use and contribute to the site as well as mold it to their own needs by offering feedback to the site developers. Write Alaska is an ongoing project under constant revision and all suggestions for improvement are appreciated.

Professional Development Workshops

Professional Development Workshops establish community for writing instructors to foster theory, design and practice with one another. Adjunct faculty, department faculty and graduate instructors facilitate discussion on pedagogy by choosing themes for discussion ranging from assessment, conventional or otherwise, to backwards designing of syllabi. The goal is to engage with current scholarship within the field to re-invest back into the classroom. In addition, the [Office of eLearning](#) presents opportunities for teachers in our program. Look for these in your email.

685: Teaching College Composition

Studying student writing and teaching students to write requires intellectual activity. Historical movements, competing discourses, tenuous identity politics, notions of authority and power affect how we engage students in mutual meaning-making. While the course is designed for beginning instructors of College Composition, members from linguistics, education, literacy studies and other fields may find the course valuable.

Writing Center

The UAF Writing Center is run by the English Department throughout the year. TAs tutor patrons for five hours a week in person or by phone. Materials brought in for review range from dissertations to personal manuscripts and class essays at any stage of the writing process. From conception to editing, the Writing Center provides TAs with experience helping individual writers compose.

Personnel

The University Writing Program Director, Sarah Stanley, holds office hours throughout the week during the fall and spring semesters. Her office is located in the English Department and she will be able to assist you with teaching and adjusting to graduate school in Fairbanks. Finally, the faculty of the English Department participate in a mentoring program that will allow you to experience different personalities and methods in supporting our curriculum.

Before Class Begins: What should you know about UA Online?

Enrollments Caps & Waitlists: What are they?

English 111x has an enrollment cap of 25 students. English 211x and English 213x have an enrollment cap of 22 students.

You will be able to check your student roster on UAOnline under Faculty Services as soon as you are officially noted as instructor on record. Once a section has filled with 25 students, students still wanting to register for the section can place themselves on a waitlist. Waitlisted students will be automatically added in the order they registered if the enrollment drops below 25. Once classes begin, UAOnline no longer manages the waitlist. The teacher of record is now in charge of managing the roster.

Placement Policy: How are students placed in my course?

Students are placed into your course through various tools to ensure their success. These tools include ACCUPLACER, SAT, COMPASS, ASSET, and ACT test scores. If a student has a question about their placement, or if students contact you directly to seek your permission to take your course, please refer them to Sarah Stanley. This is to ensure that your resources are devoted to teaching, not administrating placement.

Special Permissions: What am I responsible for as the teacher on record?

As the teacher on record for your section, you may have students contact you for special permissions, such as granting an override for enrollment, prerequisites, or placement. Simply advise the student to contact the Director of the University Writing Program. The Director will promptly communicate with the student the policy, CC-ing the teacher on the communication.

The Director requests that writing teachers do not sign permission slips allowing students to enroll who do not meet the course's prerequisites.

Under no circumstances, should a writing teacher permit a course overload. This decision carries serious consequences for future teachers and students, as enrollment caps often grow if they are not carefully controlled. We must always argue for our writing classes to be smaller, not larger in order to better serve our students.

Planning your Course: Communicating and Scheduling your Syllabus

What do I need to communicate to my class on my syllabus?

All teachers must follow the syllabus requirements for UAF. You can access this checklist at <http://www.WriteAlaska.org/sample-syllabi>. There is also a collection of sample syllabi in the supply closet of the English Department on the eighth floor of the Gruening building.

Please also include on your syllabus the following statement, which specifies the program's universal attendance policy:

Our synchronous writing classes taught at UAF require attendance. Because writing courses depend on class discussion, peer review of writing, in addition to lecture and presentations, our classes share a baseline attendance policy. Students enrolled in writing classes must attend 80% of synchronous class sessions in order to be eligible for passing the course.

Office Hours and student conferences: How else can I work with my students?

*Teaching assistants will designate two hours a week toward office hours. Encourage your students to come to your office hours, as one-on-one writing instruction is the best way for writing to improve and writers to learn. In addition, schedule a minimum of one conference with each student; to accommodate these conferences, you may cancel a maximum of six hours of class time per semester in reasonable proportion to the number of students in your courses. You can also try group conferences.

What do I need to communicate to the English Department about my class?

After your class has settled into a routine—certainly by the second week of a new semester—you must provide two important pieces of information about your specific course—a list of working e-mail addresses for each student enrolled in the course, and your syllabus. This allows the English Department to contact your students in case of a class cancellation and to keep a record of the class schedule and policies. Attach these pieces of information in an e-mail to the University Writing Program Director and CC: Julia Parzick, Administrative Secretary. Please save each document with an appropriate file name (i.e., *lastname.documenttype.course#.semesteryear*).

Finals Policy: When and where do I hold my final exam period?

*In accordance with university regulations, teaching assistants will meet with their class during the final exam period. See <http://www.uaf.edu/register/finals/>. If unavoidable circumstances arise and you anticipate not being able to hold a meeting, please talk with the writing program director before making any plans.

Note that some finals are scheduled for Saturday. 111, 211, 213 English courses have a special exam period. It is your choice whether to schedule your exam during the period allotted for your section or during the special period, which can also be found on the finals schedule above. Neither period will present a scheduling conflict for your students. Decide which period you will use before the first day of classes, and include it on your syllabus. If you choose the special period, write “Location to be announced.” As final exams near, the department staff will ask you to complete a form indicating whether or not you will be using the special period. This is for room scheduling purposes. If you and another English instructor teach in the same room but at different times, and you both choose the special period, Leah will find an appropriate room for one of you to hold your final exam.

Running your Course: Communicating and Working with Students

What should I do if I have a student with a disability?

Students provide you with documentation (a letter) from Disability Services. You must follow the accommodation instructions set forth by Mary Matthews, Director of Disability Services. Teachers should never assume to diagnose students – it is the student’s responsibility to communicate with both Disability Services and the instructor. If you have questions about this process, please see the Director.

First Days Policy: What should I be sure to do the first days of class?

How you approach the first day of class sets up student expectations for the course. The “Diagnostic Writing Sample” must be completed during the first week of class. Please follow the guidelines for this exercise. Read your students’ writing to better understand what expectations/experiences students are bringing to your course – their response to the diagnostic essay should help you shape your approach. If you happen to have any concerns after reading this student writing, discuss them with the Director. In particular, if students share details about language background (such as languages they know beyond English), advise the Director as soon as possible, since this demographic data will help us better understand the resources with which our students come to our classes.

Early Semester Attendance Policy: What should I pay attention to?

In the first two days of your class, expect some section switching on the part of your students. If a student has not contacted you to say that he or she will miss the first day of class, drop that student from your roster and add in the next waitlisted student who *did* attend the class, and has been on the waitlist the longest time. A waitlisted student who does not attend either of the first

two meetings should not be added. If you have no students on your waitlist, there is no need to enforce this policy. Advise students on your waitlist to continue attending class through the second week as a lot of section switching takes place. We will make our best effort to keep you informed of which sections have seats available so that you can appropriately advise your students.

Attendance Policy: What to do if I must miss a class?

Serious illness and/or a university-sanctioned activity are the only reasons that warrant you ever missing a class. You may not cancel or get your classes covered because of a travel schedule. In the event of serious illness, you must notify the English front office and the Director of the Writing Program immediately. **Always report the event of a missed class to the Director of the University Writing Program. No exceptions.**

* Teaching assistantships are designed so that a total of five hours are spent tutoring in the Writing Center and fifteen dedicated to facilitating a class. Whenever possible teaching assistants will provide an alternative class meeting or additional office hours for students who would like to make up a class missed for university-sanctioned reasons. If a university-sanctioned event presents a conflict, you are responsible for getting a substitute or guest speaker for your course. To ensure a positive culture on the eighth floor, appropriate compensation for a substitute or guest speaker is collegial and expected. A good rule of thumb is to estimate the amount of time required and to compensate accordingly. See the Director of the University Writing Program if you have questions about fair compensation.

Plagiarism Policy: What to do when you suspect a student of plagiarism?

A key objective in our writing classes is to help writers understand the consequences of their choices, and plagiarism carries a serious consequence in academic literacy, resulting in some cases in a student failing a course, and even being expelled from the University. At the same time, the changing nature of texts and technologies demands that we recognize the subtle, gray areas that our students negotiate when they are working to synthesize sources and ideas. Such context informs the procedure below, where every attempt is made to discuss the incident with program leadership prior to deciding on a course of action.

If you suspect a student of deliberate academic dishonesty, you are required to report it immediately to the Director of the Writing Program. According to the UAF Student Code of Conduct, this includes a student using the same paper twice for different courses without permission from both instructors. You should not address the matter on your own with the student. Depending on the offense, the director may set up another meeting with the instructor and the English Department Chair. This meeting is in full support of you as the teacher, where we will discuss options together.

With the instructor's interest and perspective in mind, an appropriate next step of action will be determined. The Director will formally document the process, writing down the nature of the incident in detail in order to keep a program record.

As an instructor at UAF, you are expected to be familiar with the UAF student code of conduct, which discusses academic integrity in greater detail. Please include this code of conduct on your syllabus, and discuss in class the consequences and definition of plagiarism that you are using to determine what makes academic communication ethical and honest. Do not assume students know what you mean by your definition, because for some of your students, in practice, any definition can be “fuzzy” and is also a difficult concept to learn. See http://www.uaf.edu/catalog/current/academics/regs3.html#Student_Conduct

Troubling Situation Policy: What to do if a student acts out?

Writing classes are intimate environments and there can be moments of friction, anxiety, and even fear. Share and report these moments with either your teaching mentor or the Director. We will listen to your concern and advise you about next steps. In addition, we may involve the Dean of Students Don Foley as his experience will address any concern. Please don't manage the situation on your own or assume it will go away on its own, we have resources and support for you.

Medical Emergency in my class: What do I do?

Depending on the situation, you may need or another student who has a phone may need to call 911. Clear the area so that if needed a medical team can quickly access the person.

Grading and Providing Feedback

What are expectations about my grading practices?

*Teaching assistants will aim to return graded papers to students within a week of receiving them, and they will never keep them for more than two weeks. No exceptions.

Is there a policy on plus/minus grades?

Recognize as a teacher that a grade of C- in a required writing course is less than a 2.0 on the grading scale. While it is a passing grade at UAF, the C- grade may affect the students' financial aid because you need to be in “academic good standing.” A 2.0 GPA is academic good standing, and a C- would not qualify.

What's an “incomplete?”

Incompletes should never be given if the student hasn't already completed most of the work of the course. An incomplete is a temporary grade used to indicate that the student has satisfactorily completed (C [2.0] or better) the majority of work in a course but for personal reasons beyond the student's control, such as sickness, has not been able to complete the course during the regular semester. Normally, an incomplete is assigned in a case when the student is current in the class until at least the last three weeks of the semester or summer session. Negligence or indifference are not acceptable reasons for an I grade. Instructors include a statement of work required of the student to complete the course at the time the I grade is assigned and a copy of

the notice of the incomplete grade will be sent to the dean of the school or college in which the course is given. An incomplete must be made up within one year or it will automatically be changed to an F grade. **One year is the longest amount of time allowable for completion of the I.** The I grade is not computed in the student's grade point average until it has been changed to a regular letter grade by the instructor or until one year has elapsed, at which time it will be computed as an F. A senior cannot graduate with an I grade in either a university or major course requirement. To determine a senior's grade point average for honors at graduation, the I grade will be computed as a failing grade.

What is a NB grade?

A NB, which stands for “no basis,” is a permanent mark on a student record. It means that you have *no basis* for giving a grade to this student because you don't have any work to evaluate. Teachers should never give a NB grade simply because they don't want to fail a student.

What should I do if a student fails?

If you withdraw a student from your course or a student does not pass your course (earns a grade of D or F), then you should communicate the reason to the University Writing Director through a form. The form is available in the Google Drive folder also used for assessment.

***Contractual Obligations and Responsibilities of GTAs**

According to the English Department Policies and Procedures, Teaching Assistants are expected to conduct themselves professionally in the classroom, Writing Center, and cubicles. Failure to abide by these policies triggers the following procedure: first, you will have a face-to-face warning from the Director of Composition. The second violation results in a written warning through email communication to the following parties: English Department Chair, the TA Selection committee, the thesis advisor, the teaching mentor, and a member from the front office staff. The third violation will result in a hearing after which the TA Selection committee will take a decisive action.

Good Citizen Policy

Teaching assistants will follow the department guidelines for the course to which they are assigned, requiring the designated number of papers with the designated word count, and maintaining a commitment to academic writing instruction.

It is your responsibility to notify the Director in the event of a case of plagiarism or a class cancellation or if you will be absent from your teaching. In the case of missing a Writing Center shift, you must contact Rich Carr, Director of the Writing Center, immediately. Writing Center absences that are not handled immediately by making up hours will trigger the procedure described above.

Good Student Standing Policy

It is your responsibility to balance your learning and your teaching. You must maintain a 3.0 G.P.A. and make satisfactory progress toward your degree(s) in order to retain your

assistantship. You must also abide by the university's Code of Student Conduct, http://www.uaf.edu/catalog/current/academics/regs3.html#Student_Conduct

Students First Policy

You are teaching because of your students. You should not behave in a manner that makes what we all do appear “unprofessional,” which includes the following: consuming alcohol in your office space, grading student papers in a bar, violating FERPA which includes talking about your students' performances in public contexts (such as Facebook). We want our students to be valued as human beings and not perceived as a burden to be endured.

Technology and Social Networks Policy

Graduate instructors need to be conscious of how they represent themselves and the University on social networking sites. The division between public and private is becoming progressively ambiguous as technology merges personal and professional information.

What does this mean for instructors? How can they exist online and not have it affect their image as instructor, or the image of the university?

- The simplest way to avoid tarnishing instructor or University image is to refrain from publishing any literary text about students – whether they are in particular or in vague generalities.
- Talk about issues privately so that a textual artifact of your self-expression does not exist, and thus cannot be taken out of context and distributed in the same way that a written work could.
- Anything that was written to you under the expectation of privacy should remain private—even if it was written anonymously, and even if you do not mention names.
- If you feel the need to express anxiety or ask questions about teaching, share these things in an organized group of teachers in a private space.
- Privacy Settings on Facebook and other networking websites can be ambiguous. Read the privacy policies of any website you choose to publish personal information. Make sure that you have a clear understanding of these policies.

While one is teaching at the University, they should not be friends with their undergraduate students on Facebook. Even if the professor does not share personal information on Facebook, the friendship can be construed as fraternization, which other students may view with suspicion in regards to grading. With any and all publication – whether academic, creative, or on the internet – be aware of how your words may be perceived by an undergraduate, a professor, or other professional contacts.