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Words Matter: Crafting And Critiquing Rhetorically Effective Styles (ENGL 002W) Syllabus

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Words Matter

Crafting and Critiquing Rhetorically Effective Styles



The style is no more than the stylus, the pen you write with, and it is not worth scraping and polishing and gilding, unless it will write your thoughts the better for it. It is something for use, and not to look at.

~ H. D. Thoreau (slightly adapted)

English 2W, Spring 2023
Tues./Thurs. 1:15 to 2:30 p.m.
Office hours: Wed. 2 to 3 p.m. or by appointment

Professor Natalie Mera Ford
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Trotter 104, (610) 690-5540

Course Description

What does it mean to write an awkward or a clear sentence? Who determines what counts as appropriate or “good” writing, and how are such notions of standardized languages—English in particular—perennially and currently challenged? Can a scholarly voice be an authentic personal voice, too? In this course, we will examine the building blocks of written style at the local level while weighing cultural concerns about the global effectiveness of different styles. Though we will acknowledge tenets of style for more creative prose, our focus will be on how style is crafted and functions in academic, professional, and civic discourses. We will start by exploring grammatical foundations, using that vocabulary to help us analyze and evaluate the stylistic impacts of a variety of passages. We will then examine the rhetorical contexts and sociopolitical implications, including linguistic discrimination, of so-called norms for scholarly writing and other formal communication. Finally, we will seek to equip you to make stylistically savvy performances of moves that we have discussed in your own writing for distinct audiences.

Words Matter will involve close reading, some collaborative sentence diagramming, and detailed evaluation of the effects that structural, lexical, typographical, and other granular features of writing have within specific textual situations. The course will give you opportunities to draft as well as dissect strategically supple prose; to revise syntax and diction for intentional semantic purposes within academic disciplines, specialized fields, and public dialogue; and to reflect on how rhetors’ choices about the interplay of words, punctuation, symbols, and even space influence readers at the most fundamental level, line by nuanced line.

Learning Objectives

English 2W is designed to provide opportunities to

- Identify and analyze grammatical elements and stylistic techniques used in a variety of texts
- Develop critical alertness to writers’ rhetorically situated, performative style choices
- Engage in a metalinguistically informed writing process for academic/professional/civic audiences
- Produce argumentative writing that substantiates claims with cogent evidence and reasoning
- Incorporate sources meaningfully into your writing and document with APA or MLA style citations
- Respond to feedback from peers and the instructor in revising, and provide constructive feedback to others
- Demonstrate the ability to reconceive and edit writing at both the macro and micro level for projects
- Support our learning community by contributing thoughtfully to discussions and activities

Texts

Please bring texts to class as indicated on the Weekly Schedule. You may use hard copies or digital versions; copies are also available at the McCable Library Reserves desk. For readings posted to Moodle, either print and annotate a hard copy or take notes to consult in class while referring to the electronic document on your laptop.

Required texts:

- Kolln & Gray (2016), *Rhetorical Grammar: Grammatical Choices, Rhetorical Effects*, 8th ed.
- Sword (2012), *Stylish Academic Writing*
- McWhorter (2016), *Words on the Move: Why English Won't—and Can't—Sit Still (Like, Literally)*
- Readings and videos posted to our Moodle site; handouts distributed in class; written material you locate and bring to class

Recommended texts ~ we will read part of each, and the whole may be of interest:

- Williams & Bizup (2017), *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, 12th ed.
- Holcolm & Killingsworth (2010) *Performing Prose: The Study and Practice of Style in Composition*
- Curzan (2014), *Fixing English: Prescriptivism and Language History*
- Elbow (2011), *Vernacular Eloquence: What Speech Can Bring to Writing*
- Fahnestock (2011), *Rhetorical Style: The Uses of Language in Persuasion*

Course Expectations

Reading Assignments: All readings should be completed on schedule. Seminar discussions and activities as well as writing exercises and assignments will typically draw upon your critical response to assigned texts, so if you should ever fall behind in the reading, please make sure to catch up as soon as possible.

Writing Assignments: In our Writing-designated course, you will compose multiple drafts of three major papers. These projects, along with shorter writing assignments that feed into them, give opportunities to hone your skills in rhetorical analysis and argumentation with an emphasis on written style for academic, professional, and civic audiences. Each Communication Project (CP) requires a recursive composition process that includes prewriting, mapping/outlining, rough drafting, commenting on others' work-in-progress, responding to others' input on your work, and revising as well as editing for content and/or form or both in intersection (the style debate!).

Communication Projects: To pass the course, all three projects must be completed and submitted with a Progress Folder documenting your CP's development through outlines, drafts, etc. The final papers vary in length from 4-5 to 8-10 pages and require in-text citation (APA or MLA). I will post detailed guidelines for each project to Moodle, and we will discuss evaluation criteria together in class.

CP 1 Structural Analysis and Assessment of Scholarly Style

CP 2 Position Paper – Arguments on Prescriptivism

CP 3 Style Guide for an Academic, Professional, or Public Discourse Genre of your choice

Writing Exercises: In addition to the major projects, you will compose a comparable amount of informal, low-stakes writing in and out of class, including Style Diary entries, Styling Forum posts, Plain Style peer feedback, and micro Style Self-Studies. Writing exercises are designed to give you practice with targeted grammatical, convention, code variation, and flair features; some serve too as scaffolding for the longer CPs.

Reflection papers: You will compose a short Reflection paper (Rp) on each unit or “strand” focus. These reflections aim to deepen your holistic engagement with course topics while enabling you to experiment with styles that communicate critical points in an authentic voice. They also provide practice in making rhetorical choices, controlling sentence-level elements, and cultivating metacognitive habits as a writer.

Rp i. Your grammar memoir to date

Rp ii. What [fill in a language variety here] means to you

Rp iii. How and why you have revised for style

Assessment

To pass English 2W, you need to complete the assigned reading and writing, especially Communication Projects and Response papers, and participate productively in our seminars, workshops, and (one) out-of-class conference. Because our learning goals do not lend themselves to tests, there is no final exam; instead, CP 3 asks you to demonstrate the technical and rhetorical knowledge of writing styles you have gained over the course by creating a style guide for a self-selected genre. If you ever have questions about your progression or feedback you receive, stop by office hour or arrange an alternative time to discuss them. No appointment is necessary to come to my office hours: you are always welcome! If circumstances arise that make coursework challenging, please email me so we can meet to talk about a manageable way forward—I am committed to helping you succeed.

Grade Breakdown:

- 5% Reflection papers (3 total; evaluated only for completion and investment)
- 75% Communication Projects (3 total; option to revise first and/or second CP is described below)
 - 25% CP 1 Structural Analysis and Assessment of Scholarly Style
 - 25% CP 2 Position Paper: Arguments on Prescriptivism
 - 25% CP 3 Style Guide for an Academic, Professional, or Public-facing Genre
- 5% Commitment to process, i.e., substantial prewriting (outline, etc.) and on-time submission of all drafts
- 15% Engagement, including preparation for and involvement in all classes and the individual conference with me; thoughtful completion of shorter as well as longer assignments; constructive commenting on others' drafts and responding to feedback on your drafts via revision

Optional Revision: You can opt to revise the first and/or second CP if you arrange a re-submission with me, to be completed within 3 weeks of receiving my feedback and the original grade. This would comprise making substantive revisions and presenting, at the end of the new version, a summary of the changes and an explanation of why you made them. Detailed guidelines for this option will be posted to our Moodle site.

Other Course Policies

Linguistic Diversity Statement: Diverse languages, language varieties, and dialects are welcome in this classroom. As we communicate with one another, keep in mind that the reader/listener should work as hard as the writer/speaker in the communication process. This means that we will listen patiently, work to understand one another, seek out clarification when necessary, and avoid finishing each other's sentences or correcting grammar in drafts, unless invited to do so. *Important:* The value of all varieties of English is especially vital to stress in this course as we delve daily into linguistic elements and (dynamic) sociopolitical and cultural concepts of writing style.

Class Citizenship: As a member of our learning community, you are responsible for preparing for each meeting and engaging respectfully in all activities, including discussions and individual/group presentations, which require active listening in addition to meaningful contributions. Class citizenship further involves turning phones off and placing them out of reach for the seminar; any laptop use should be restricted to the seminar focus. Responsible, considerate interaction is likewise expected for collaborative activities online.

Workshops & Individual Meetings: An important form of participation asks you to engage in supportive exchanges of feedback between you, classmates, and me in order to fortify and advance your writing craft. This constitutes taking part in workshops but also carefully reviewing any comments provided on writing exercises, reflection papers, and prewriting/drafts for the major projects. If you have questions or concerns, please bring them to my office hour or to the conference you schedule with me...one-with-one meetings allow us to look at your work together and contemplate potential revising strategies.

Attendance: Because class discussions and workshops are integral to English 2W, you are expected to attend regularly and arrive promptly. Extreme or recurrent lateness disrupts others' learning along with your own and thus lowers the participation grade, so make every effort to join class on time. If medical or personal circumstances require you to miss all or part of a seminar, please let me know as far in advance as possible by email. Check the Weekly Schedule for any day you miss, but also contact a peer after that class to find out further specifics about

what we cover. To receive full credit for work if you are absent, you need to submit written assignments on their due date via Moodle/email and show me make-up work for the missed class by our next seminar (unless you arrange an extension). *Important:* While students may miss a few seminars without penalty, more than 4 excused or unexcused absences may result in a course grade of No Credit.

Completion of Assignments: Assignments should be completed by class time on the due date. Again, if absent you should submit your work by the beginning of class to receive full credit. The demands of invention, research, and revision eliminate the possibility of doing complex projects at the last minute, so plan ahead to manage your workload. Remember to keep all prewriting in order to show your composition process in the CP Progress Folders. *Important:* Failing to turn in assigned writing, including drafts, will affect your grade, and a significant amount of missing, late, or incomplete work may result in a grade of No Credit for the course.

Files: It is crucial to back up electronic files as technological difficulties will not be accepted as an excuse for lateness. Rather than saving over earlier versions of the longer papers, when you begin revising save the changed document under a different name to help track the project's evolution.

N.B. I can open **.doc, .docx, .rtf, and .pdf** files, so use one of these four formats. I cannot access .pages or .wps files. Google docs is okay to use for short exercises, prewriting, and rough drafts but not final drafts.

Email Communication: If you have a question that is not answered by the syllabus or assignment instructions, please either check with me around class time or by email. Due to faculty and family obligations, I may not see your message immediately but will respond as soon as possible. *Note:* Though I do not comment on full drafts sent by email (unless circumstances warrant an exception), you can email me a working thesis or key paragraph you would like input on, or you can schedule an office meeting so we can read the whole draft together.

Academic Integrity: Submitting someone else's writing or ideas as your own, or any other form of academic misconduct, will result in a major penalty and may lead to failure of the course. For more information, please see https://www.swarthmore.edu/student-handbook/academic-policies#academic_misconduct. If you have any doubts about how to use a documentation style or how to incorporate sources into your writing, I urge you to consult a WA or me before submitting the paper. Turnitin reports on the CP rough drafts may call attention to areas that need to be reworked to avoid plagiarism, so I encourage you to check these reports as you revise.

Additional Resources

Accommodations Statement: If you believe you need accommodations for a disability or a chronic medical condition, please contact Student Disability Services (Parrish 113W, 123W) via email at studentdisabilityservices@swarthmore.edu to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs. As appropriate, the office will issue students with documented disabilities or medical conditions a formal Accommodations Letter. Since accommodations require early planning and are not retroactive, contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. For details about the accommodations process, visit the Student Disability Services website at <https://www.swarthmore.edu/academic-advising-support/welcome-to-student-disability-services>. You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs. However, all disability-related accommodations must be arranged, in advance, through Student Disability Services.

Writing Associates: The Writing Center (Trotter 120) is available to Swarthmore students as an additional resource for any aspect of writing—from brainstorming a topic, organizing a draft, revising, to polishing before turning in a final draft. You can make an appointment to meet with a WA online, by phone, or in person when the Writing Center is open. For more information, see the following links:

- To meet with a Writing or Speaking Associate (WA or SPA) - [How to Schedule a Writing Conference Online](#)
- To learn more about ways that the Writing Center can support your work - [Writing Center Policies](#)

Other Writing Program resources are also available to support students individually and in community:

- Students encountering writing anxieties, 'blocks,' or other process challenges can schedule writing strategies consultations with [Professor Bragg](#).
- Students for whom English is an additional language can schedule writing consultations or participate in monthly student forums with the Interim Multilingual Writing Specialist, [Professor Mishra](#). All students can join TriCo workshops co-facilitated by [Professor Mera Ford](#) that promote linguistic equity in academia - [info here](#).