

Writing Your Way Into Western

Professor [Jeremy Cushman](#)

Office [HU 363](#).

Office Hours: Wed 10-12pm; Friday 12:30-230

Email jeremy.cushman@wwu.edu

Your English 101 course is dedicated to providing you with opportunities to challenge yourself as a thinker, reader, and composer. Welcome! Success in college and certainly in the world outside the classroom generally involves more than simply knowing how to read and write on paper. Learning to read and write (or compose) effectively in differing contexts and with differing tools will benefit you regardless of the life you're chasing after. Simply put, good writing, in whatever form it takes, can make lots happen.

What You Need: 1. A dedicated course notebook 2. An account on medium.com 3. Constant access to Canvas

Here Are All

The Aims For the Course

Rhetorical Thinking



The course is designed to help you strengthen your capacity to understand, develop, and deploy various strategies for seeing connections between and across systems of meaning-making.

Reading & Doing With Texts



In this course, we'll push to not only 'read' for understanding, but we'll also work together to try and read well enough that we can do something with the material we encounter.

Writing in All Its Forms



We'll write (in all its wonderful forms) incessantly and for a public outside our own class. We'll spend lots of time and effort looking at our writing and reflecting on how it might better surface meaning and impact others.

Research Practices

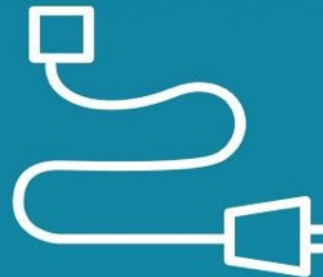


We'll try some practices that help us understand what research is about, which includes so much more than the library and the Internet.

Asking Questions



Learning to create or begin work from a position of 'not knowing' is challenging. We'll practice asking questions that often lead to better, more interesting questions before they lead to answers.



#1

Invent



#2

Build



#3

Reflect



#4

Invent Again



Writing Looks Different In Different Places!

Writing is part and parcel of nearly every human endeavor, and many human endeavors owe their existence and essence to writing. No matter the course of one's life—personally and professionally—writing is one of the primary ways we navigate that life's contours and complexities. It's often how we capture our wild worlds.

COURSE PROJECTS

The projects for the course are varied to be sure, but they are all in service, in one way or another, of helping you get a small foothold on this unwieldy concept called Writing.

Each project is described in careful detail on Canvas under 'Assignments' and on the Canvas Calendar. Here, I've broken the projects down and have done my best to explain the different ways we'll go about creating work and making meaning. **Check the Canvas calendar for due dates and more explanation.**

Reading Discussions & Drafts

Throughout the quarter we will practice new reading and writing moves in and out of class, we'll respond in writing to everything we read, and we'll compose heaps of drafts. This work will serve as a starting place, the "raw material" to work with in class the day they are due. Please note: All drafts due dates are indicated on the schedule (Canvas calendar) and are mandatory.

An important notes about Discussions & Drafts

Because we will usually be building on this work in class, to get the full benefit you must be in class, with a copy of the completed assignment in hand or on a screen. For this reason, I will not accept this late work for credit. You need to complete all this work on time to successfully earn the points possible. (See evaluation below). This invention and revision work is either completed on time, according to all of my directions, allowing you to participate in class, or it is not.

Exploring Rhetoric & Binary Thinking:

Each of our major projects will build on each other as well as on our class activities and discussions. Each project is designed to help you explore a line of inquiry that you feel compelled to pursue that will help others re-see or discover new ways of understanding your chosen concern.

Now, the line of inquiry you take up in this class is, indeed, wide open with one exception: You need to be able to directly access it. In other words, your line of inquiry or concern needs to be about something you can concretely and even physically observe and study. Abstract ideas are amazing; where do they show up in your worlds

Text-Image Juxtaposition-

In this rather small but important project, you'll pair images of the ideas you're working with and different words and quotes to create what we'll call a third meaning. That is, you'll put a word onto an image that doesn't explain the image but helps viewers 'feel' or understand the place with which you're working differently. You'll make three of these and write about what you're doing in each juxtaposition

"Think Piece" for medium.com-

From the ideas/feelings you started to create in your juxtapositions, you'll write a kind of exploratory essay for the readers at medium. That means you have to create a piece that helps readers unfamiliar with the ways you're approaching your idea(s) and, so, the places you inhabit understand the significance of your thinking. You'll also have to help readers connect to the interest you're starting to create around your idea.

Proposal for Research

Unlike your other projects, I am your only audience for this project (and I will be a tough audience). What you'll do here is write me a polished proposal that articulates what void or gap your research project fills. In other words, I will need to be convinced why the project you want to write and produce matters: who will impact? what issue(s) is it addressing? how is it timely? what impact do you hope to have and how will you work to achieve that impact.

Observe/Analyze/Theorize (OAT Project)

Think of all these previous assignments, and research as the initial 'ground' of for this project. You're observe, deeply analyze, and then develop a new Theory about your topic. Keep in mind that a Theory is different than a Thesis that you argue and defend. Rather, you're working from observations and analysis to create meaning. Rad! We'll, of course, talk lots more about this as we go.



REQUIREMENTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Technology Responsibilities

Familiarity with certain technologies is crucial for success in this course. I expect you are proficient with email, Canvas, a word processor, and other typical stuff of that sort. I also expect you to have no idea how to use some of the digital tools we'll use in this class—tools like Garageband, Audacity, iMovie and few other. Your responsibility is to be patient enough with the learning curve, graceful enough with yourself, and brave enough to just keep working at it, pushing buttons until you figure it out or until it breaks. If you don't know how to do something, ask the internet! People are amazing about creating helpful little tutorials and posting them for us 'newbs.'

Collaborative Work

We will be making a great deal of stuff together and supporting one another in differing ways, so honest collaboration is crucial in this course. Your responsible for reading/listening to other people's work, being kind in class, asking good questions, and working toward really hearing each other before responding. I expect moments to arise that might call for some vulnerability, and I want us to try and build a space together that not only allows for the powerful actions that can grow from vulnerability, but welcomes and encourages them. Some of this work will be hard; let us all be supportive and willing to learn from the risks we encourage others to take. I'm going to work hard to foreground the collaborative spirit underlying the notion of rhetoric and learning. I ask that you help me in this work.

Attendance

As you'll learn fairly quickly, heaps and heaps can happen in class. And although my relaxed classroom demeanor might suggest otherwise, do know you'll always be missed when you're elsewhere. Since sickness and other circumstances can sometimes make it difficult to make it to class each day, **you are permitted three absences** with no explanation needed.

If you miss more than three class sessions, we'll have to talk about what's going on with you given that I'll be worried. **It is also means you cannot earn more than half of you Invention Work credit.** An additional absence beyond that may prevent you from passing the class.

Readiness

Readiness relates specifically to being prepared by the start-time of the class period (and any outside-of-class work that we negotiate to do). Look, this can be a tough, busy course in that what we're working with might be new composing methods and communication technologies. I assume the course will be full of new concepts that don't always fit into the schemas most of us have for thinking about writing in English class. So you need to dive into your work and come at the course with questions and confusions and contentions. That is to say, not fully tracking with a line of thinking in one of our texts or projects is fine. But not spending the time it takes to figure out where things break down for you is not. Be ready. Be ready to go through some kind of act, some kind of process nearly every class.

Late Work

The majority of missed class assignments cannot be made up, nor will I accept late projects. (See Contract). This class is carefully scaffolded so that each action leads us to the next; falling too far behind is troublesome. If a serious and unavoidable problem arises, however, you should contact me prior to any deadline to determine what we can do.

Academic Integrity

WWU students and their instructors are expected to adhere to guidelines set forth by the Dean of Students in "Academic Honesty Policy and Procedure," which students are encouraged to read [here](#).

Accommodations

Students with documented disAbilities have the right to reasonable accommodations. [Please click here](#) for the resources available to you.



EVALUATION FOR THIS COURSE: A LETTER FOR YOU

Dear Class:

In most learning situations outside of school, grades are never given. The learning that occurs in martial arts dojos, or cooking, dance, or yoga studios do not use any grading. Why? In these “studio” cases, it seems meaningless to give students grades, right? And yet without any grades, those students get better at martial arts, better at dance, and better at cooking. I know we that can’t radically change our institution’s grading culture in one quarter, but these studio learning situations should prompt us to ask some big questions: Why are grades meaningless in those settings but seem so important in a university setting? How do grades affect learning in classrooms? What social dynamics do the presence of grades create? In both the classroom and in the “studio,” instructors provide students/participants with evaluative feedback from time to time, pointing out where, say, they’ve done well and where the improvement is possible. In the studio situation, many students help each other, even rely on each other for this feedback. Why is that rare in the classroom?

Here’s one of the biggest hurdles I’m trying to overcome: Using conventional grading structures to compute course grades often lead students to think more about their “A” or their “C” than about their writing and learning; to worry more about pleasing a teacher or fooling one than about figuring out what they really want to learn, or how they want to communicate something to someone for some purpose. Additionally, conventional grading may cause you to be reluctant to take risks with your writing and ideas. It doesn’t allow you to fail in spectacular was, which many folks suggest is a primary way in which people learn. Sometimes grades even lead to the feeling that you are working against your teacher, or that you cannot make a mistake, or that you have to hide part of yourself from your teacher and peers. I flat hate that reality. And the psychological research in education, over thirty years of it, has shown over and over that letter grades not only do not help students learn, but they actually harm your learning, even keep you from learning.

For these reasons, I am incorporating a contract for grading in our class, which avoids the use of letter grades. **The contract is all (all!) about the labor you do for this course.**

That is to say, I’m using a form of evaluation that I think will help you focus on the ways in which you engage your own learning. I’m convinced that such a contract fits better with a course that is built on the idea that a great deal of learning can occur alongside production—alongside making and the working through of cool projects. Ultimately, *I’m interested in giving my attention, my concern, and my care to your labor—the work you actually do. That’s what I hope you care about too.* Of course, when you give all your attention, concern, and care to the ways in which you work, I believe, you’ll produce high quality projects that you and I can both be proud of.

What we’re going to try to do together, then, is *approximate* the evaluative conditions of a studio course. So if you’re looking to game the system, and do the least amount of work to get the highest possible course grade, you’re going to really struggle here. You’ll only be frustrated, even angry. But if you wish to learn and improve yourself as a maker, a writer and a reader, and are willing to do a lot of work to reach those goals, then this is the class for you. Again, the idea is that I reward and concentrate on your labor not, necessarily, the quality of your work (although we will discuss quality and how it is important to your success, but not important to your course grade),

My hope is that this contract system will encourage you to take risks in your writing and to work harder in class than you might be used to, knowing I am trying to value both risk and hard work. Failing or missing the mark is healthy for learners. Good, deep, important learning often happens because of failure—so it’s really not failure at all. Failure really only happens in our class when you do not do the work. Most importantly, what looks like failure in this class can show us our weaknesses, misunderstandings, and opportunities for growing and changing. This will help you build strategies of self-assessment that function apart from some teacher’s approval.

Cheers,
JC

THE CONTRACT

I'M WORKING TOWARD SIMPLICITY. MAKE NOTES WHERE YOU NEED CLARIFICATION AND I WILL

IN CLASS

Attendance: You agree to attend all class days and to complete all the class activities for each day. Of course, life shows up in interesting ways, so you can miss a total of three class days, no questions asked or excuses needed. *Please Note:* You don't need to worry about excused absences. You have these three days to play with, which means it doesn't matter why you're absent so please use them wisely. If you know you tend to get sick in Feb., save them for that; if you are thinking about a party you don't want a miss or a friend coming to town, save them for that; and so on. If you have an extended illness, I will take that into consideration.

Lateness: To much happens to fast in class to be late. You each agree to come on time or early to class. Five minutes past our start time is considered late. Walking into class late a couple times in a quarter is understandable, but when does lateness become a problem (for the class as a whole and/or for the individual)? Good question. So as a rule, coming in late *three times* in a quarter will constitute an absence.

Sharing and Collaboration: You agree to work cooperatively and collegially in groups (a lot). This may be the easiest of all our course expectations to figure out, but we should have some discussions on what we expect from each other. See my Collaborative Work policy in the syllabus.

PROJECTS:

Invention Work (Discussion/Drafts/Classwork)—Engaging Binaries Project—OAT Project—

Again, all final course grades depend upon the *labor* you do, and I've designed each project to help you produce great work if you really labor over each of your projects. So as I've said plenty of times, if you do all that is asked of you in the manner and spirit asked, and meet all the **standard** stipulations in each of the projects, you'll certainly earn a B course grade. Grades higher than that, however, depend on you meeting some **exceptional requirements**, which I designate in the **rubric** for each project.

Let me further explain:

Again, I'm working from a point system that tries to value your labor – in other words, the time and effort you put into your work. What I'm trying to resist are rubrics that start with 100 points and then deduct points for all the 'mistakes' you make. Unsurprisingly, these kinds of evaluation kill creativity, and they don't leave much room for experimentation without penalty.

Instead of thinking of points as something you have right now and might lose, here's the thing: you currently have 0 points in this class. The only way you can acquire points is by working, and the more work you do the more points you earn. Not unlike a game. I'm trying to be as simple and straightforward as possible about points, and how you earn them. So for each project you will see the amount of work that constitutes a C or a B or an A for that specific project. To be clear, you'll see my exact expectations for every project I evaluate, and how those expectations translate to your project grade.

Put simply, on each assignment, you will be able to read about the kind of work/labor I expect you to do, and how that work earns you points toward a grade for the project. Again, You can't

Each OF The Three Projects Amount To 1/3 Of Your Final Course Grade:

Invention Work (Discussions, Drafts. Classwork) 33%; Engaging Binaries Project 33%; OAT Project 33%