

# Persuasive Writing

## English 312

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### **Course Description:**

This is a course on college-level persuasive writing including reading, research, argumentation, and rhetorical analysis. This class will encourage students to increase their awareness of the power of language in society. Since language both reflects and creates societal perceptions, we will learn to employ thoughtful language that recognizes the consequences of using certain words, phrases, and communication styles. We will discuss the misuse and abuse of language and gain a better understanding of the language sensitivities of different audiences.

Our goal is to empower students to use language thoughtfully, wisely, and compassionately.

English 312 pays particular attention to the ways arguments work within a discourse community, and how to persuade an audience who may be unwilling to see an opposing point of view. This section will require extensive reading, writing, and research in your topic area. Students will learn to research a topic and use the library to evaluate the credibility and appropriateness of sources, as well as effectively incorporating and accurately documenting outside sources in a research paper.

As a part of our process we will use a rhetorical syllogism—the enthymeme—to analyze writing and to invent our own arguments. While syllogisms (i.e., Pigs don't fly, Fred is a pig, therefore Fred doesn't fly) are created to test the logical validity of assumptions, enthymemes use practical logic that is derived from the beliefs and values of the intended audience. Rhetoric and logic have been taught since Aristotle in classical education and provide an outstanding foundation for persuasive invention; therefore, the disciplinary foundation for this class is Aristotelian rhetoric.

### **Required Texts:**

- Online readings, prezis, and power points as required. See schedule for links and additional details.
- Specific chapters from *Writing with Power: Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process* by Peter Elbow, Oxford UP; (1998-04-01) Available online through the BYU library catalog.

### **Other required Materials for this course:**

- something to write with in class, such as a notebook or laptop.
- access to a printer for printing papers, additional course readings, and the proposal assignment.
- Access to an APA or MLA style guide. (there are many online guides that will be sufficient)
- A positive attitude and a willingness to work.

### **What this Class will do for you:**

Some people mistakenly assume that writing is a basic skill that you “learn” or “take care of” once and for all, either by passing a timed test or taking a writing course. The reality is that writing is more like learning to play an instrument: you get better with *deliberate practice*—the kind of practice that takes guts and brains and hours and focus and feedback. Just as learning to play an instrument gives you the power to perform for and with others, learning to write convincing and graceful prose gives you power in your personal, professional, and public life through rhetoric, or the art of persuasion. And anyone can become a better writer.

In persuasive writing you begin your apprenticeship to become an effective writer by learning how a writer thinks and what a writer does when faced with complicated rhetorical opportunities. The most important habit you will take away from this course is the habit of mindful writing in response to new audiences and genres. Such mindful writing is what distinguishes expert writers from novice writers.

If you decide to give everything you've got to this course you will develop habits of rhetorical thinking that will help you write well in other classes, in your job, and in any part of your life that requires writing arguments effectively, and with style. In short, this could be one of the most useful classes you will take in college.

By the end of this course you should be able to:

1. Employ informed and flexible processes for writing and speaking, including creating and/or finding ideas, evidence, and data to write about; planning and drafting; revising; editing; and designing or presenting a message so that it is successfully understood by a specified audience.

2. Critically read texts including;

- analyzing how a text functions in a specific situation, community, or public;
- analyzing the nuances of language (diction, figures of speech, tone, etc.);
- Analyzing the parts of an argument; evaluate them in terms of the intended audience; and generate a reasonable argument for a specific audience. Anticipate and effectively respond to audience objections and counterarguments.

3. Write coherent and unified texts (effective introductions, clear thesis, supporting details, transitions, and strong conclusions) using a flexible and effective writing process, including prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing.

1. Use style—diction, figurative language, tone, grammar, punctuation, spelling, mechanics—genre, conventions, and document design correctly and for rhetorical effect, writing in a clear and graceful prose style.

5. Navigate the library to locate primary and secondary sources, evaluate the appropriateness and credibility of those sources; effectively and ethically incorporate and accurately document outside sources in a research paper.

6. Understand and appreciate arguments different from—even contrary to—your own, and be able to write an argument intended to influence and persuade those around you.

### **What You will do for this class:**

Good writers are good rhetors (or persuasive communicators) who understand how to make effective arguments for different audiences to achieve various purposes. For this course you will have four major writing tasks, each posing a unique rhetorical challenge:

**Papers:** Argument 1 (3-5 pages); Collaborative Definition Argument (5 pages); Genre Catalogue (3-4 pages); Big Idea Proposal and Blog Post

(4-6 pages). For each paper you will submit a portfolio of your writing process. The portfolio will include the following items in the following order:

- a reflective statement
- the final draft of the paper
- peer evaluations

### **Required Format for Papers**

All writing assignments need to be professionally designed and polished. You should have access to the major style guides. We will not be focusing on a specific style since this is a GE class and there are many majors represented. All argument papers will be research papers, and should be well supported and accurately cited, adhering to the standards of the format you choose (MLA, APA, ect.). Your final drafts should be double checked and proofread for errors before you turn them in.

**Argument One:** Your first assignment will be to write an argumentative essay about an issue on your mind this semester. This assignment challenges you to make a brief but compelling argument with a specific audience in mind. To prepare to write this paper you will need to read opinion editorials and essays from international, national, local, and university sources to get a sense of the conversation going on around you. We will be choosing several topics for the entire class, which you will narrow to your own specifications related to your own interests.

**Argument Two— Definition Argument:** After you make your own argument you will participate in a collaborative paper based on a definitional argument. Categorical arguments are among the most

common argument types you will encounter. They occur whenever you claim that any given X belongs in category Y. Does skateboarding belong in the category “true sports”? Should Karate Kid IV be rated PG-13 or R? Is graffiti “art” or “vandalism”? We will learn to base an argument on this type of definitional style. Think of your audience as composed of intelligent, concerned citizens with a vested interest in the issue you address.

**Genre Catalogue**—Writing and communication exists in many different forms. As a part of your preparation for your major, as well as employment opportunities, I would like you to take a look at the discipline you are studying and complete a thorough evaluation of the type of 'genres' that you might be expected to engage in. What do they look like? How do they work? Who is the audience? What are the genre expectations? Additionally you will need to find samples of these genres.

**Argument Three—Big Idea Proposal and Blog Post:** This assignment draws inspiration from the Landfillharmonic, and their mission to increase involvement in a musical community. Their Big Idea—the idea that individuals can promote peace through education and community is changing lives. And they are not alone. There are people all over the world making a difference through Big Ideas.

For this assignment, you will write a persuasive proposal to solicit help with bringing your own Big Idea to life. Your project or program can be focused on a global issue (e.g., world peace) or a local concern (e.g., water quality at Utah Lake), and the audience for your proposal can be real or imaginary, but your proposal should have at its core a clear idea that you can support and defend enthusiastically.

**Big Idea Presentation:** So much of what we read and write includes “modes” other than alphabetic writing—video, audio, images, hyperlinks, infographics, animations, charts, and graphs. For this last writing task you will compose a multi-modal text that will translate your persuasive text into a persuasive presentation to propose and promote social change.

In addition to these major projects you will complete minor writing assignments such as analysis papers, reflective essays, and in-class rush-writes. Some of these you will turn in, and some you will keep as exercises for the major essays.

## **Course Vocabulary**

You should master the following vocabulary by the end of the course:

- Rhetoric
- Argument
- Audience
- Old and new information
- Cohesion
- Topical development
- Emphasis
- Coherence



- Reader expectations
- Contract
- Ethos
- Logos
- Pathos
- Procatalepsis (responding to reader objections)
- Style
- Correctness
- Clarity
- Variety
- Distinction

### **Assessment Measures**

In order to pass this class you must do **all of the assigned work**, in and out of the classroom, including reading, informal writing, drafting, peer critiques, and instructor conferences as well as participating in class discussions and group work. You will not be graded on inborn talent as a writer, but rather on your willingness to learn, to revise your own work, and to help your classmates improve their own. If you are unsatisfied with your scores on any papers you may revise and resubmit your paper to be re-graded. You will be required to turn in the revised copy, the

previously graded copy, and a letter explaining the changes that you made and why those changes merit a better grade on the assignment. To have the opportunity to revise you will need to have visited the writing center before the original due date of your paper.

### **Late Assignments**

The major papers will be due in class the day listed in the syllabus. If there is a problem with this date an alternative should be worked out with me before the due date. After the due date they will receive a 10% deduction per day. Many daily assignments cannot be made up. If there are extenuating circumstances please talk to me throughout the semester- I am willing to work with you if you keep me informed.

### **1000 points possible**

*Daily Participation:* Since we do in-class writing and peer-review workshopping, your attendance is essential for your success. **We need everyone, everyday.** However, I know there may be days you will have to miss. You will have two unexcused absences, no questions asked. After that for every *unexcused* absence your final grade will drop by one letter grade. (from an A to an A-, ect.) If you need to miss class, or are sick please email me to let me know, and then contact a classmate to see what you have missed. If you miss class the day a paper is due you are responsible for getting it to me by the time it is due. If you miss a peer review it will be your responsibility to meet with classmates outside of class and conduct a peer review. A skipped out of class conference with

me also counts as an absence. You will receive points for every day you attend class, participate in the discussion, complete the reading assignments, and adequately prepare to contribute to the class.

**Reading:** This is a class that requires reading as well as writing. If you are like many students you will be tempted to cut corners by not reading what I have assigned. However, I promise that if you read with me you will learn how to use effective rhetoric. Come to class prepared. Exercise effective reading strategies by pre-reading, reading, and post-reading; by making notes in the margins and circling key terms, by asking yourself questions like, “what’s the main point?” “How would I summarize this?” “What does this author want me to think, feel, or do?” “What are the consequences for me?” “How is the author making his or her point?” “Is this author persuading me, as their audience, to their point of view?” Sometimes I will ask you to come to class with something written about what we have read.

**Exercise Journal:** You will use a writing journal to complete response assignments to critical readings, discussion prompts, and rhetorical exercises. These journals will be turned in with your portfolio.

**Reflection:** Writing, as I said above, requires deliberate practice, which in turn requires you to be mindful of what you are trying to accomplish and how you are doing. (This mindfulness is called Metacognition—that means “thinking about thinking.”) For each major assignment I will have you write reflectively at least three times—once right after receiving the writing task, once when you receive feedback from me and from your peers, and once when you turn in the final draft. The reflections will be

brief and informal, but they are essential if you want to develop habits of mind that will help you in future writing tasks. Since I want you to take these reflections seriously I will only give full credit to those who write thoughtful and specific responses.

**Twitter:** An important aspect of any kind of dialogue is taking note of the world around you. You will be expected to post an observation, opinion, or a response to the issues going on all around you at least twice a week using the tag #byuenglish312. I will follow you on Twitter and track and respond to your tweets. You will include a record of your tweets with your final portfolio. (note: no credit will be given for 26 tweets done the week before finals. This is meant to be an ongoing dialogue throughout the semester. Read what your fellow students have to say, and contribute to the discussion. You will occasionally be asked to respond to another's tweet. Do so promptly and respectfully.)

**Library Day and Research: (20 points)** Library Research Skills.

You will need to be present at the Library skills tutorial day—this will be in class and will discuss Library Research Skills and how to make your research personal. One class period is devoted to in-library research sessions, another to individual research and writing; more information will be provided in class.

**Conferences:** You will have the opportunity to meet one on one with your instructor (me) during the term. Come prepared with a writing goal or question, (we will discuss this in class) as well as any class questions you may have.

**Peer Evaluations:** Each of your major assignments will be peer reviewed, and you will do the same for another student. Come prepared, be thoughtful, and respect the opinions of others. A major component of rhetoric is expressing opinions and persuading others to see your point of view. We will be looking at how other students have used rhetorical conventions, and whether they are successful, not on the validity of their actual stance. (This can be very helpful if you take full advantage of it. Do as good a job for other students as you want them to do for you.) Participating in peer review will make you a better reader and writer. It will also give you experience at giving and receiving feedback. Peer review makes the writing experience a social exchange. Effective peer review is part of your grade, and I will review the comments you provide for other writers.

**Final Portfolio: (50 points)**

- Table of Contents
- Copy of tweets for the semester
- Final copy of each paper
- Final short reflection on how this course has changed your approach to writing.
- Link to one youtube clip demonstrating an enthymeme along with a short explanation of the Enthymeme.

**Google Drive:** To make collaboration and access easier we will use Google Drive for our peer review and for turning in major papers. Please get a google account before the semester starts. I will create a shared folder for the class, and then each student can create folders and documents within the class folder to produce an online portfolio of your

work. For each major writing task you will create a folder with at least three drafts of each paper: a draft for peers to comment on, a draft for me to comment on, and a final draft to be graded (revision drafts can go in there as well). You will also include reflective writing in these portfolios. The final portfolio will also be created in these folders. At the start of the semester I will have you sign a FERPA release that lets us comment on your writing in Google Drive. However, to respect your privacy, final grades will be given to you through Learning Suite.

**Late Writing:** Writing assignments are due at the beginning of class on their due dates unless otherwise specified. Each day a major paper is late your score will drop 10%. An absence is no excuse for late work. Although due dates are somewhat arbitrary they are a part of life. If you write everyday you will stay on track for all due dates. I do not accept informal assignments late.

### **Final Exam:**

#### **Our final exam will be**

The exam is mandatory. Please do not purchase plane tickets home, or plan on leaving for any reason before this date. If there is a conflict let me know as soon as possible.

### **Please Don't Fail:**

Students are required to complete the mandatory assignments: Argument #1, Argument #2, Proposal, Proposal Presentation, and the Final. If you do not complete any one of these assignments you will automatically fail! Please don't fail! If you feel like you have already read this, you did. It is important!

## **Course Policies:**

### **Attendance Policy**

You are allowed two “free” absences. Use them well (or don't use them at all). After that each unexcused absence will lower your overall grade by 1/2 a letter grade. Your contribution is important to our class, and it is important to attend. Use your absences wisely. That being said, if you have an emergency, let me know. I am reasonable. If you need to be excused from class, contact me at least 24 hours before the intended class date.

### **Important Things to Keep in Mind**

- Computer issues are not an excuse for late work. Save your work in at least three different places (consider using an online service like google drive or dropbox that can be accessed from multiple computers) and in three different formats.
- If you need to be excused from class, contact me at least 24 hours before the intended class date.

- You are responsible for checking the schedule on Learning Suite to know what reading assignments and other assignments are due. I do not always have time to remind you of everything. Please be responsible. Ignorance is not an excuse for a missing assignment.

### **Classroom Behavior**

- No distracting food is allowed whilst the class is in session (Eat your fruit snacks and granola bars quietly or bring enough for everyone). Beverages are ok.
- The use of any electronic device for recreational purposes is prohibited in class. If student uses either cell phone, laptop, or other electronic media (i.e. ipod, ipad) instructor reserves the right to require that the student leave the classroom. In that event, the student is automatically considered absent, thus his/her assignment is considered not turned in for that class period.
- If your cell phone goes off in class, I will make you answer it and tell the caller (it's always your mother) that you are in the middle of class, that everyone is listening to you right now, and that you will have to call them back. You will also need to bring treats to the class the next time we meet. So, please turn off your phone.

### **Email Correspondence**

Email is the best way to get in touch with me during non class hours. If you need to contact me you can do so at [spottedpen@gmail.com](mailto:spottedpen@gmail.com).



- Email will be read between the hours of 8 am – 5 pm from Monday to Friday. Please allow at least 24 hours for a response (although it is usually much sooner).
- I will respond to email sent over the weekend **at my earliest convenience**.
- I expect students to use professional language and tone in all communications with me, including in emails (netiquette).

### **Visiting During Office Hours**

Students with questions or concerns are encouraged to come see me in my office during the hours listed above. If you are unable to come during those hours, you may set up an appointment with me via email or brief after-class conversation. Please notify me ASAP if you are unable to keep your appointment.

### **Useful Websites:**

BYU Writing Center–<http://english.byu.edu/writingcenter/>

Library Instruction–<http://sites.lib.byu.edu/instruction/>

Rhetorical Conventions–<http://rhetoric.byu.edu>

BYU Learning Suite-<https://learningsuite.byu.edu>

BYU Style Academy-<http://styleacademy.byu.edu>

## **Honor Code**

In keeping with the principles of the BYU Honor Code, students are expected to be honest in all of their academic work. Academic honesty means, most fundamentally, that any work you present as your own must in fact be your own work and not that of another. Violations of this principle may result in a failing grade in the course and additional disciplinary action by the university. Students are also expected to adhere to the Dress and Grooming Standards. Adherence demonstrates respect for yourself and others and ensures an effective learning and working environment. It is the university's expectation that each student will abide by all Honor Code standards. Please call the Honor Code Office at 422-2847 if you have questions about those standards.

## **Preventing Sexual Discrimination or Harassment**

Sexual discrimination or harassment (including student-to-student harassment) is prohibited both by the law and by Brigham Young University policy. If you feel you are being subjected to sexual discrimination or harassment, please bring your concerns to the

professor. Alternatively, you may lodge a complaint with the Equal Employment Office (D-240C ASB) or with the Honor Code Office (4440).

### **Students with Disabilities**

If you have a disability that may affect your performance in this course, please contact the office of Services for Students with Disabilities (1520 WSC). This office can evaluate your disability and assist the professor in arranging for reasonable accommodations.

### **Plagiarism**

Intentional plagiarism is a form of intellectual theft that violates widely recognized principles of academic integrity as well as the Honor Code. Such plagiarism may subject the student to appropriate disciplinary action administered through the university Honor Code Office, in addition to academic sanctions that may be applied by an instructor. Inadvertent plagiarism, whereas not in violation of the Honor Code, is nevertheless a form of intellectual carelessness that is unacceptable in the academic community. Plagiarism of any kind is completely contrary to the established practices of higher education, where all members of the university are expected to acknowledge the original intellectual work of others that is included in one's own work. In some cases, plagiarism may also involve violations of copyright law.

**Schedule:** We will make adjustments to the schedule as needed. Stay tuned, and check the Content page under Learning Suite frequently.

## **And Remember...**

I am here for you! I want you to succeed and be rewarded for your efforts. Please email me or meet with me in person if you are having trouble with a concept, assignment, or are feeling overwhelmed. Do not wait until the end of semester. Approach me as soon as the concern arises. Part of the college experience is learning to talk with your instructors and collaborate with them.