

Sample Introductory English Composition Syllabus

This sample syllabus is formatted as a course that meets twice a week for twelve weeks. It is easy to alter the length of the course in weeks and the timing of the courses during the week. I am familiar with more traditional introductory English Composition syllabuses and can accommodate strict curricular guidelines, though I have found that students who really require basic composition courses need engaging lessons that cater to their alternate talents and interests, lest they hate and fail at our precious, important topic forever. This method has worked particularly well for students with learning disabilities, stereotypical non-readers, engineers, visual artists and their ilk, who crave concrete building materials, favor unique solutions and have often been scarred by past language arts failures. I have even taken to printing the syllabus and handouts on off-white paper to accommodate dyslexic students, who are always more common than we think. The following strategies can also be adapted for class size, though lectures to large groups always work best with smaller discussion sections.

Skip to page five to avoid the boring, standard policies. :)

English Composition 101 – Sample Syllabus

Instructor: Beth Mattson

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Office Hours: Wednesdays, noon-2:00pm Humanities Hall or by special appointment

Required Texts (available at University Bookstore and the School's Copy Center):

Writer's Reference, by Institution's Preferred Author

Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain, by Verna Aardema

Fun with Dick and Jane, by Grosset and Dunlap Publishing

Tapeworms, by Wormy Guy

The Giver, by Lois Lowry

Reading Packet, available at School's Copy Center

In English Composition 101 we will strive to master basic writing concepts such as the elements of story, outlining drafts, documenting primary resources, editing and revising, peer review, research techniques, spelling and grammar. These topics are vital to everyday life and to academic success and we will tackle them in a manner that highlights the most enjoyable parts of reading and writing while learning to avoid the most common pitfalls. Not everyone is a natural at composition, but with effort and applied creativity, everyone can improve their English skills, join the ranks of better employed, functionally excellent writers and find out which style of literature and composition best meshes with one's personal style and interests.

Grading:

Grading in English Composition 101 will include assignments and papers, in-class exercises and extra credit. Each time class meets (after the first day of class), an assignment or paper will be due. Each class period (including the first day of class), everyone present will participate in an in-class exercise. When class is missed, not only is vital information missed, but the in-class exercises canNOT be made up. However, every week will also present opportunities for extra credit that requires effort above and beyond the assignment or paper. Extra credit is worth the same number of points as an in-class exercise, which are each one half of an assignment or paper. One extra credit assignment can (maximally) assist with a missed/poor grade on an in class exercise or assignments and papers. Papers and assignments are NOT accepted after the end of the course period in which they are due.

There are 23 papers and assignments due during the semester, with the final paper counting for twice as much as standard papers and assignments.

Daily assignment or paper = 100 points (maximum) x 22

Class Exercises = 50 points (maximum) x 24

Extra Credit = 50 points (maximum) x 24 (more opportunities may arise)

Final Paper = 200 points (maximum) x 1

Total possible points = 4,800 (extra credit over that number will only benefit you, not your grade)

Each paper, assignment, exercise and extra credit will be assessed and assigned a point value based on how well it meets the parameters of the assignment. Halve the following scale for in-class exercises and extra credit. Double for final paper.

90-100 – Meets all the requirements of writing at the collegiate level, including worthwhile content; sensible organization; readable style; and appropriate form, format, and mechanics.

80-89 – Meets most of the above requirements, but contains easily correctable deficiencies in one or more of the areas above.

70-79 – Needs extensive revision to meet one or more of the requirements, or contains the type or amount of mechanical errors that would distract readers.

60-69 – Needs extensive revision to meet several of the requirements, or contains the type or amount of mechanical errors that would distract readers in excess.

59 and below – Fails to establish most of the requirements, needs extensive revision to meet any of the elements, and shows little or no effort. Rushed jobs and incorrectly formatted assignments (huge font size, ridiculous fonts or altered margins) can land you here.

Final grades will be based on a straight percentage of points earned and then correlated with a letter grade.

Formatting:

ALL assignments, papers and extra credit that are turned in, MUST be typed and have the following:

- * 12 point Times New Roman font
- * Double-spaced paragraph formatting
- * Standard margins and indentation (L&R: 1 or 1.25 inches, top and bottom: 1 inch)
- * Page numbers inserted into the bottom right corner of the Footer
- * YOUR NAME and course section in the top right corner of the Header
- * Staples attaching multiple pages

Special formatting instructions for individual assignments and bibliographies will be covered in class and in the *Writer's Reference*.

Plagiarism: You may only turn in work that YOU have written, unless you cite the source of the original material. Failure to cite work that is not your own will result in possible failure of the assignment or course. Proper use of citations and sources will be covered in class and in the *Writer's Reference*.

Special Needs: All diagnosed special needs are welcome. This course will cater to many different learning styles, but you are encouraged to speak with Ms. Mattson about how your diagnosed special needs can be accommodated. This course will be rigorous, but flexible enough to include all who put in solid effort.

Syllabus Layout: So that there will be no confusion, this syllabus lays out many aspects of what we will do during each course period. Each class title hints at the themes of that period. You are reminded which extra materials to bring to class and told which required texts you are to bring AND have read before class begins. There is always a basic layout of what we will do in class, including the graded exercise and handouts. Finally, there are warnings about what is due at the beginning of the following class period and how you can bolster it with extra credit if you should desire or need.

Be sure to look at the descriptions of the next class period BEFORE the eve of each class. If something doesn't make sense, please be sure to ask as soon as you notice! Ignorance in the midst of such abundant information will not be a good excuse after the fact.

WEEK 1

Tuesday, Day 1

Introductions, read over syllabus, talk about required readings, engage in a general panning of forced literature and reassurances that writing can be enjoyable. There will be an in-class writing prompt on thoughts and feelings about past literature and composition experiences.

Handed Out – Contact info for the Student Writing Help Center.

Due Next Time – Bring all correct materials to class!

Thursday, Day 2 – Your Stuff is Better: You Already Like Literature

Bring Today – A thing you like to read: fiction, instructive text, poetry, magazine, newspaper or printed web content, etc.

Required book – *Writer's Reference*

In Class – Share and discuss found materials: differences, commonalities and benefits of each – the bazillions of ways that we enjoy and use reading and writing. Graffiti? Sports? Love letters? Scavenger hunt in the *Writer's Reference* for small prizes.

Exercise – Correcting absurd sentences on the board/overhead/projector.

Handed Out – The beginnings of three stories, each without their ends.

Due Next Time – Typed, invented end of chosen story, at least 500 words (about 2 pages).

Extra Credit – Find a grammatical error in found published material.

WEEK 2

Tuesday, Day 3 – The Importance of Cartoons: Elements of Story

Bring Today – An enjoyable children's picture book.

Required Book – *Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain, Fun with Dick and Jane, Writer's Reference*

In Class – Share children's books and discuss the basic elements of story: Setting, character, plot (foreshadowing/protagonism), crescendo and resolution. Review of basic punctuation: periods, commas, semi-colons, colons, apostrophes, dashes and quotes. Reminders about subject verb agreement and tense. Reminders about conjunctions and possessive apostrophes.

Exercise – Writing Prompt to fill in the word bubbles of a Calvin and Hobbes cartoon.

Handed Out – Elements of Story cheat sheet and Basic Punctuation cheat sheet, with page numbers to *Writer's Reference*.

Due Next Time – Typed children's story, at least 350 words. TWO copies: one to hand in, one to make correction notes on.

Extra Credit – Illustration that promotes elements of written story OR correct use of quotes, parentheses, an exclamation point and apostrophes in written story.

Thursday, Day 4 – Story Time

Bring Today – TWO copies of your newly-penned children's story.

Required Book – *Writer's Reference*

In Class – Reading each freshly composed children's story out loud. Finding punctuation in voice and timing. Self-correcting crescendo, resolution and confusing elements of story. Catching repeats and omissions. Applause for efforts made.

Exercise – Completing Ad-Libs as reminders of parts of language.

Handed out –

Due Next Time – Corrected children's story.

Extra Credit – Create an Ad-Lib sans answers, with blanks labeled with correct parts of speech.

WEEK 3

Tuesday, Day 5 – Short and Sweet

Bring Today – A piece of published writing that you abhor.

Required Book – Short stories from reading packet: one sci-fi, one New Yorker and one action-adventure.

In Class – Workshop the published stories. What worked, what didn't, and what they all had in common. Discuss how the elements of story were accomplished without pictures. What was described first? Which verb tense was used? Who narrated? How many sentences are in a paragraph? Share abhorrent stories and suggest revisions.

Exercise – Divide a story example into paragraphs while noting the narrator and the verb tense.

Handed Out – Cheat sheet of common revision short hand.

Due Next Time – A three-page (at least 750 words) fictional story on the theme of something that is too short (appropriate!). Must include the important elements of story: setting, characterization and resolution. Bring TWO copies: one to hand in, one for making corrections.

Extra Credit – Correct use of a hyphen, a semi-colon and quotes in written story OR a one page instructional on how to fix the found piece of abhorrent writing.

Thursday, Day 6 – The Switcheroo: Revisions and Editing

Bring Today – TWO copies of assignment short fiction.

Required Book – *Writer's Reference*

In Class – Reminders that there were disliked parts of even lauded published stories. Reminders to find positive points first. Workshop assignment short fiction in small groups. Note grammar, character, introduction and resolution.

Exercise – Write an all-positive note to a workshop partner about the absolute best parts of their story.

Handed Out – A section of *Twilight*.

Due Next Time – Revised, final version of three-page short fiction.

Extra Credit – Typed one-page suggested revisions for *Twilight*.

WEEK 4

Tuesday, Day 7 – The Biology of Tapeworms: Intro to Formal Structure

Bring Today – A found piece of non-fiction: newspaper, magazine or blog article.

Required Book – *Tapeworms*, by Wormy Guy (short, middle grade non-fiction)

In Class – Discuss topical paragraphs and formal structure of longer pieces, adding transitions and demonstrating how simple information can be laid out in an outline. Creating a Reverse Outline of tapeworm book.

Exercise – Writing Prompt – creating transitions between three almost unrelated topics.

Due Next Time – A typed Reverse Outline from found materials (1-2 pages).

Extra Credit – Two-page Reverse Outline from a TV show or movie.

Thursday, Day 8 – Yelling Thesis Statements: Shouting what you really mean

Bring Today – any one of the past required texts or found pieces.

Required Book – Historical letter from Eleanor Roosevelt to Lorena Hickock, from reading packet.

In Class – Discuss the power of a strong thesis statement and how to sleuth for and cite a primary resource. Defining primary sources vs. Wikipedia. Finding the thesis statements of past works.

Speculating about where primary sources could exist for each past work.

Exercise – What could three theses be using the Roosevelt letter as a primary source?

Handed Out – Examples of primary sources for various kinds of statements.

Due Next Time – Pick a preliminary thesis (one complete sentence), at least five primary sources for given thesis and a first outline of potential research paper (1-2 pages).

Extra Credit – Typed list of the theses of each previous found/required text.

WEEK 5

Tuesday, Day 9 – Seek and Find: Sources for a Research Paper.

Reminder: Meet in computer lab today!

Bring Today – thumb drive to save search results to, notebook, etc.

Required Book –

In Class – Search for approved primary and secondary sources for research paper. Ask if found sources are acceptable primary sources. Ask for help finding primary sources on chosen topics.

Exercise – Recording the answers given.

Handed Out – Hand sanitizer to remove shared keyboard germs and a cheat sheet for correct bibliography formatting, cheat sheet for correct end/footnote formatting.

Due Next Time – Draft of research paper: at least 1,000 words (about 4 pages of paper body, not including bibliography) with footnotes and a page of bibliography.

Extra Credit – A printed early draft of the research paper (at least 2 pages) with corrections and notes in the margins (self or other proof-reader).

Thursday, Day 10 – Where's Waldo? Research Revisions

Bring Today – TWO copies of drafted research paper: one to hand in, one to make corrections.

Required Book – All helpful cheat sheets and *Writer's Reference*

In Class – Partnered review and workshopping of research paper draft. Help each other find errors of grammar, structure, missing citations, excessive citations, transitions and conclusion.

Exercise – Rewording a thesis and introduction paragraph into a conclusion.

Handed Out – Contact info for the Student Writing Help Center (again, also handed out on first day)

Due Next Time – Finalized research paper of more than 1,000 words (about five pages of paper body, plus bibliography).

Extra Credit - Proof of utilizing the Student Writing Help Center.

WEEK 6

Tuesday, Day 11 – Breaking the Rules Once You Know Them: Poets Cheat

Bring Today – Favorite song lyrics printed out.

Required Book – Original Gertrude Stein and Lehrer's Gertrude Stein chapter from reading packet

In Class – Discuss which rules are broken, which remain and to what affect. Put in context of songs by sharing lyrical examples. Brows concepts of sonnets, rhythm and meters.

Exercise – Writing haikus from words out of a hat.

Handed Out – Copy of Emily Dickinson and Sidewalk Ends poems.

Due Next Time – Ten short poems of less than 100 words OR 2 long poems of more than 300 words.

Extra Credit – Reading aloud of written poems as they are turned in.

Thursday, Day 12 – Word Jungles: Lush Descriptions

Bring Today – The most annoying published poem you can find.

Required Book – Stephen King booger scene and Tom Robbins' *Jitterbug Perfume* opening from the reading packet.

In Class – Discuss translating the best language aspects of poetry into sentences, paragraphs and stories. Define similes, metaphors and analogies. Explore synonyms and antonyms. Discuss how the annoying published poems went wrong. Was it their descriptions?

Exercise – Several rounds of Scattegories, with excessive adjectives allowed and encouraged.

Handed Out -

Due Next Time – Two-page weather forecast, including lush descriptions, making weather interesting.

Extra Credit – Complete thesaurus list and word cloud from each word of the forecast title.

WEEK 7

Tuesday, Day 13 – We're all Dummies: Technical Writing for Beginners

Bring Today – A copy of a favorite recipe of something you sometimes make/cook/bake and a published instructional manual from a common appliance or activity.

Required Book –

Handed Out – Play Dough and Instructions for Sculpting with Play Dough

In Class – Discuss the flow or lack-there-of of the found instructions. Rants about the horrible writing found in instructional manuals. We try to follow the instructions provided for the Play Dough, and re-write them when we find them lacking. Marvel at results.

Exercise – Trade only the Ingredients section of partner's recipe and write a new method for something potentially tasty.

Due Next Time – Instructions (2-3 pages) and materials for a simple, not-too-messy, in-class demo with a random partner (two copies if desired, as I will need to keep one, and you may take notes on one).

Extra Credit – Bring the result of your favorite recipe to share.

Thursday, Day 14 – That Doesn't Work: Functional Clarity

Bring Today – Instructions and materials for a simple in-class demo with a random partner.

Required Book –

In Class – Trade instructions and tasks with a partner, taking notes on the down-falls of the instructions.

Exercise – Cleaning up all supplies that we brought to the room.

Handed Out – My favorite recipe and the results.

Due Next Time – Titled and revised instructions AND instructions on one other activity of choice (each 2-3 pages).

Extra Credit – Instructions for a piece of new technology for your parents or grandparents or Ms. Mattson.

WEEK 8

Tuesday, Day 15 – What Just Happened? Reporter Style.

Bring Today – A magazine or printout of a blog post that you subscribe to.

Required Book – Local paper, Monday or Tuesday edition, current edition if weekly.

In Class – Discuss which articles are most interesting. What makes them interesting – informative, clear, concise? Note that sources are listed in the paragraphs. What gaps are left in the story? Which sources make you skeptical? Is bias a problem?

Exercise – Write AP blurb about video clip played in class.

Handed Out – Campus event calendar for the coming week.

Due Next Time – Two-page “article” about a movie of choice, as though it really happened.

Quotes may be faked, but a full-length movie must be condensed into article length and style.

Extra Credit – Submit an editorial letter to local news source of choice and print copy of sent email.

Thursday, Day 16 – Front Page Headline

Bring Today – List of three events that you may want to attend over the weekend and are willing to share.

Required Book -

In Class – Play “Telephone.” Discuss sources that you should be on the look-out for at example events. Discuss importance of and techniques for note-taking. Share events listings.

Exercise – Practice quoting, verbatim, what a source just said from batches of famous quotes.

Handed Out – Contact information for the school paper.

Due Next Time – Two-page article about actual community event of choice.

Extra Credit – Submit your article to the school paper and print copy of the sent email.

Extra Extra Credit – One paragraph speculation about where in the “paper” your article could appear, choose and ad that might be placed next to your article and write a second paragraph about why.

WEEK 9

Tuesday, Day 17 – School's In Session: The Art of the Essay Exam

Bring Today – Syllabus from another course that has an essay exam.

Required Book -

In Class – Discovering the elements of a good written answer to a complex written question:

Who, What, When, Where, and Why. Remembering to answer all elements of the question.

Looking for clues about desirable answers in the syllabus and reading materials.

Exercise – Taking lecture/study notes on an unfamiliar topic.

Handed Out – The ideal notes for the unfamiliar topic AND the essay questions to be answered.

Due Next Time – Your original unfamiliar topic notes AND your answers to the essay questions.

Extra Credit – Revisions of a real exam essay that did not go well for you in the past.

Thursday, Day 18 – None of Your Business: Writing for Work

Bring Today – The job description for your dream job (short, not handed in).

Required Book – Classified section of local paper or three printed job postings from the web.

In Class – What kind of writing would you have to do at your dream job? What kind of writing is required by the real job postings? How many require a cover letter and resume? How can we all write professional and intelligent emails to professors, colleagues and supervisors? What are the differences between professional emails and friendly emails? Never forget spell-check, TO-check and spell-check again.

Exercise – Pen three formal greetings, and three formal closings.

Handed Out – A “Work Email” to reply to and a job description requiring a cover letter.

Due Next Time – Work Email reply and cover letter for pretend job.

Extra Credit – Typed and formatted copy of your resume.

WEEK 10

Tuesday, Day 19 – It's All About You: Speech, Memory and Persuasion

Bring Today – A small, personal good luck charm, if you like.

Required Book – Proust sections from reading packet

In Class – Discuss autobiography, first person and the art of persuasion. Examine how Proust, Martin Luther King Jr and many public figures use personal experience and lush memory prompts to hold attention and gain ground. What are they calling upon? Why is it so effective? What does your good luck charm conjure for you?

Exercise – Listen to Martin Luther Kind Jr speech segment and try writing prompt about a personal dream.

Handed Out – Tips for reading out loud and speaking in public.

Due Next Time – Two-page speech to read aloud, persuading us that your hobby is the best, most exciting or coziest activity ever, including your associations with the activity in the past, present and future.

Extra Credit – Bring a short instructional on how to begin getting into your hobby with enough copies for all (a half or third of a sheet will do).

Thursday, Day 20 – Tell Us How It Is: Speaking from Personal Experience

Bring Today – A small prop for your speech, if you like.

Required Book -

In Class – Reading hobby persuasion speeches. Applauding. Finding new, worthy obsessions.

Exercise – Successfully making eye contact and reading in a slow, controlled voice.

Handed Out – Madeleine cookies a la Proust (vegan and wheat-free alternatives will be available).

Due Next Time – 1-2 page essay on the differences between fiction and non-fiction, with original definitions and respectful opinions on the worth of each.

Extra Credit – One-page rave about how you share or have newly found enthusiasm for one of the hobbies of a fellow presenter.

WEEK 11

Tuesday, Day 21 – Lies, Nothing But Lies: Final Fiction Frenzy, Part I

Bring Today – A book you consider to be a “Classic” work of fiction.

Required Book – *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry, first 50 pages read by today!

In Class – Discuss the elements of “Classic” literature, including its benefits and downfalls.

Explore why we are reading *The Giver*, and which traits it shares with “Classic” literature.

Review transitions, characters, plot, outlines and clarity. Examine how to apply all past lessons of organization to a fictional story. Which of the past styles would you like to utilize and derive from?

Exercise – Write a short story that describes a character calming down from a trauma.

Handed Out – Final Fiction paper guidelines (final draft will be a ten-page story).

Due Next Time – Two-page first draft/summary of your proposed Final Fiction (longer is fine, shorter is not). TWO copies: one for handing in, one for making corrections.

Extra Credit – A one page review of the first fifty pages of *The Giver* and a one page review of the fictional book you think we should be reading instead.

Thursday, Day 22 – Final Fiction Frenzy, Part II

Bring Today – TWO copies of your Final Fiction draft.

Required Book – *The Giver*, second fifty pages read by today!

In Class – Small group workshop of your initial fiction idea and summary, paying special attention to what confuses, what is most interesting and which specifics have not yet been spelled out.

Exercise – Pop-quiz-style interesting questions about *The Giver*.

Handed Out – Check list of elements not to forget when writing fiction (names, places, speed of time passing, tense, narrator, etc).

Due Next Time – Four-page draft/summary of your Final Fiction project (longer is fine, shorter is not). TWO copies.

Extra Credit – A six-page draft of your Final Fiction with notes and corrections from a proof-reader.

WEEK 12

Tuesday, Day 23 – Final Fiction Frenzy, Part III

Bring Today – TWO copies of your most recent Final Fiction draft.

Required Book – *The Giver*, third fifty pages read by today!

In Class – Small group workshop of your second Final Fiction draft, noting which confusions you have remedied and which still linger. Those with length problems can ask questions about which parts of the story to focus on.

Exercise – Short analysis of the similarities/differences between your fiction and *The Giver*.

Handed Out – A letter from Ms. Mattson to your friends and relatives, asking them to proof read.

Due Next Time – Six-page draft/summary of your Final Fiction project (longer is fine, shorter is not). TWO copies.

Extra Credit – An eight-page draft of your Final Fiction with notes and corrections from a proof-reader.

Thursday, Day 24 – FINAL Final Fiction Frenzy

Bring Today – TWO copies of your most recent Final Fiction draft.

Required Book – *The Giver*, read through to the end!

In Class – Group round-table of everyone's most troubling story spot, with emphasis on note-taking as we workshop suggestions.

Exercise – Short analysis of the end of *The Giver*. Was it satisfying? How did the conclusion relate to the introduction? Was it a surprise?

Handed Out – All previous papers and assignments, with grades and comments.

Due Next Time – FINAL FICTION project (all ten pages) are due, in my mailbox, by the end of the assigned finals exam period. I will check my mailbox at the end of that period

Extra Credit – Proof of utilizing the Student Writing Help Center.