

ENGL 0

English Composition and Grammar

General Description

Purpose of the Course

What is the purpose of this course? Before we can answer this seemingly simple question, we have to ask another: Why take English 0? It may be the course that opens the college door for you. By successfully completing this course, you can certify that you are qualified to undertake college work. Or you may just need to brush up on skills you have not used very much in some time. Our aim in English 0 is, through practice, to become better writers—to produce pieces that appeal to the intended audience, display appropriate organizational patterns and supporting details, and demonstrate correctness in sentence structure and grammar.

English 0 is not a course that will tell you exactly how to write perfectly. No good writing course will do that because so much depends on context—depends on the audience of the piece, depends on the purpose for writing. Successful writing is a matter of making choices that work best in context. Granted, not everything about writing remains fluid. Many of the smaller surface details—spelling, punctuation, agreement of subjects and verbs—have become fixed. In Elizabethan England, Sir Walter Raleigh could alter the spelling of his name with every document that he signed; in late twentieth-century America, “occasionally” is spelled only one way. In these matters, to be taken seriously as writers, we will have to learn and use the conventions of standard edited English. To make choices about larger concerns, we have to explore the ranges of possibility available and learn to judge them. The purpose of this course, then, is to help you make the connection that writing is a way of thinking and to give you the skills to be

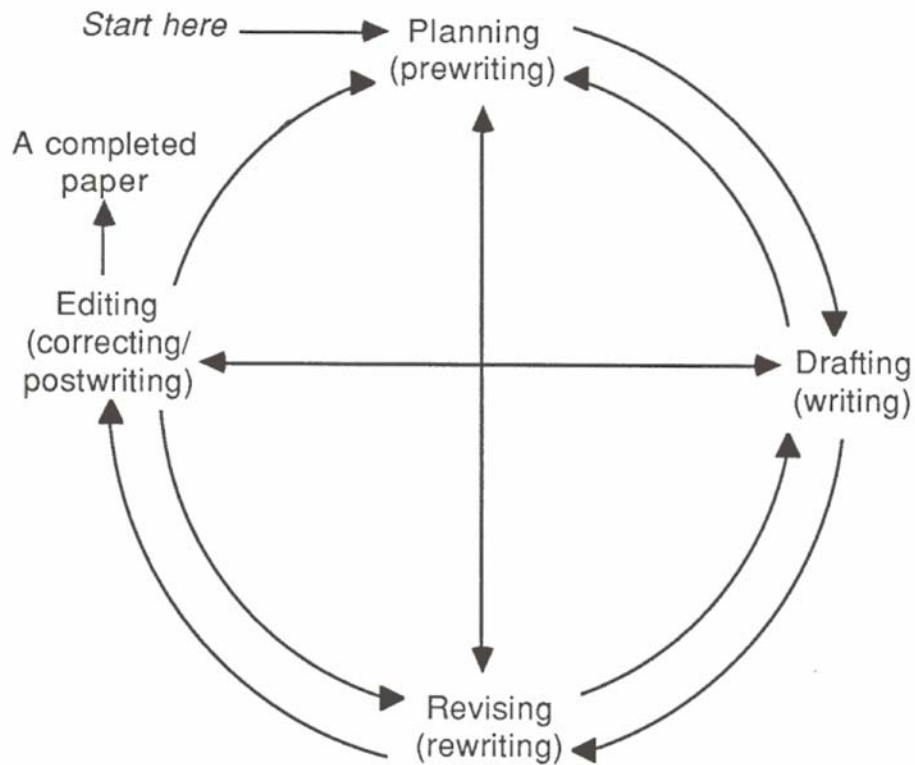
respected in situations where writing is taken as a measure of a thoughtful person.

Course Plan

We will go about accomplishing our goals with a series of readings, marked and unmarked writings, grammar exercises, ungraded drafts of papers, formal graded papers, and a final examination. In today's writing classroom, the emphasis is on group work. Writing is a community activity in which your classmates help you to shape your pieces through their reactions to the pieces in progress. In this situation, the teacher is a facilitator and a resource, not the final authority.

Obviously, group work is not an option available to us. We won't be able to talk about your writing, but we will be able to write about it. I will ask for drafts of your formal papers and for ungraded paragraphs of reaction and analysis to what you have read and written. I will write back; and while you will not have the benefit of observations from classmates, you will have my undivided attention.

In our independent study, one thing will be very much like any other writing classroom. We will concentrate on writing as a process. How we get to the formal papers we write is perhaps more important than those papers themselves. Figuring out what to write about, why that topic might matter, and how to organize such a piece will be our focus. Every piece will require planning—some sort of pre-writing—and drafting. No piece of writing is finished the first time we write it; however, some things may not be important enough to devote much time to re-writing, to rethinking and revising. Any piece that will be graded should also be polished by editing and proofreading to eliminate as many errors as you can detect. We will learn to recognize and correct the errors that inexperienced writers most often make. The writing process is often diagrammed as a circle, but it is a convoluted circle, with lots of doubling back and retracing of our steps.



The Writing Circle

There are sixteen lessons, a mid-course examination (a revision of one of your papers), and a final examination. The lesson assignments are to be done in sequence, and will usually require getting one assignment back before turning in the next, though you can begin the reading and writing requested as soon as you have mailed the previous assignment. Some lessons will take more time than others, and all will require reading, writing, and reflecting time.

Textbook and Materials

The textbook we will use is *Checkpoints—Developing College English Skills* by Jack Page and Leslie Taggart, 5th edition (2004). You may purchase the textbook from the Higher Grounds bookstore at the Friday Center. A book order form is located in this manual, or you can purchase the book online at <https://www-s3.ais.unc.edu/HigherGrounds/>.

General Description

We will use most of the material in the text, but we will not go through it checkpoint by checkpoint. We will change the order of the reading and writing assignments, a number of the grammatical points will be assigned only for personal review, and we will group the dictionary/word exercises. Why, you may be asking, are we using this textbook if we are going to be skipping around so much? Changing the order of the textbook is an occupational disease. Every teacher has a better idea about what the book should have done. No textbook is perfect, but *Checkpoints* has the material we need in English 0 and it's better than many textbooks I've seen.

You will also need a dictionary for this course. If you have a choice, get a hardbound college-level dictionary. Such a dictionary will be big enough to offer you encyclopedia features, but not too big to lift. The smaller your dictionary, the more limited it will be. The pictures, maps, essays about the history of the language, and entries with extended usage information will be trimmed. Even the paperback edition of a dictionary will, however, reward your attention.

Even though this course offers no credit, you will receive a grade. I will determine your grade by assigning a weight of $\frac{2}{3}$ to your written assignments and $\frac{1}{3}$ to your final exam.

A Final Word

I hope you enjoy your writing experiences in English 0!