

LITERARY EXPLORATIONS I

Sections 2 & 10 • Fall 2019 • Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy • Dr. Eric Rettberg

Contents

Basic Information

INSTRUCTOR

REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS

TEACHING SCHEDULE

CLASS MEETINGS

Course Description

Essential Content

IMSA English Outcomes

Instructional Design and Approach

Assessment

GRADING

ON (NOT) ROUNDING

ASSIGNMENT TYPES AND GRADING WEIGHTS

REVISIONS

LATE ESSAYS AND PROJECTS

COLLABORATION

Student Expectations

ATTENDANCE

ACADEMIC HONESTY

ANNOTATING TEXTS

LAPTOPS

ON (NOT MAKING) TECHNOLOGY EXCUSES

Sequence of Topics

What You Can Expect from Me

What I Expect from You

Basic Information

INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Eric Rettberg (he/him)

erettberg@imsa.edu

(630) 907-5914

Office: A117A

REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS

- Your laptop and charger, which you must have with you and which will be used regularly in class
- Pen and paper
- Readings distributed as pdfs on the course site
- Other texts distributed in class
- *March*, by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell

TEACHING SCHEDULE

I'm often available during the school day outside the times when I teach. This semester, I teach during Mods 2, 4, 6, and 8 on A, C, and D days. You're welcome to stop by my office, or you can email or set up a Google Calendar appointment to be sure.

CLASS MEETINGS

Section 2: Mod 2 ACD, A119

Section 10: Mod 8 ACD, A116

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to develop students' processes for building knowledge through writing, discussion, speaking, and research. By developing skills of close reading, argument, rhetorical analysis, and research, students will deepen their knowledge of culture, literature, and current events. You'll be asked to read, think, and write with a critical eye, learning to interrogate texts the way we think of interrogating a living person. Such texts will include not just written documents, but also visual and technological artifacts, speeches, songs, and so on. You'll also become familiar with the language of rhetoric, a field that concerns itself with relationships between authors, audiences, and ideas, contexts for communication, and means of persuasion.

We will use presentations, projects, papers, quizzes, research writing, and other forms of assessment to explore ideas, develop perspectives, and add to ongoing conversations about culture. Ultimately, it is the goal of this course to support and inspire inventive, insightful thinking in its students – the kind of thinking that is most valued not only at this institution, but in the wider world.

Essential Content

A full set of the IMSA English department's stated outcomes is listed below, and each of our courses builds iteratively on each of these targets. LE I approaches the major outcome areas in the following ways:

Rhetorical Knowledge: A key focus of the course involves developing strategies for thinking rhetorically and for making persuasive arguments. Students will learn to write flexibly, creatively, and persuasively through sustained engagement with texts in a variety of modes and media with awareness of readers, context, and purpose. They'll also learn to think about different modes of communication, from the page to the screen to the in-person presentation.

Reading: LE I works primarily with non-fiction texts. Some national standards misleadingly call them "informational" texts, as if their sole purpose is to objectively convey information. We'll approach them instead as complex rhetorical artifacts that strive to persuasively shape readers' thinking even as they convey information. Students will iterate on their prior experience with reading comprehension, close reading, and annotation.

Composition Process: LE I will feature a number of staged writing assignments and projects that push students to reflect on and rethink their composition process. Rather than a "one-and-done" approach that assumes that some people are strong writers and some people aren't, students will pursue strategies that help them imagine, draft, revise, and reshape communicative artifacts to improve their quality over time.

Knowledge of Conventions: Students will gain exposure to and understanding of the conventions of journalistic and academic argument. They will work to iteratively refine their prior knowledge of English language usage and conventions, including an awareness of the conventionality of such conventions—that is, to distinguish between conventions that genuinely improve clarity and rules and formulas that serve mainly to reinforce structures of social power. They will gain some knowledge of the purposes of academic citation systems and experience using them.

Literary Knowledge: In preliminary engagement with the summer reading, students will learn that a complex series of imaginative choices shape ostensibly non-fictional narratives and see how texts and ideas are shaped by and interact with other texts and ideas. As they explore argument and rhetoric, students will learn to close read, to contextualize, and to apply a number of terms crucial to understanding literary works.

IMSA English Outcomes

At the conclusion of their IMSA English experience, students will be able to:

Rhetorical Knowledge

- Compose texts in forms appropriate to their rhetorical situation, with attention to audience, purpose, context, and mode.
- Respond critically to a variety of rhetorical situations.
- Explain textual evidence to generate multiple meanings and support an argument.
- Compose arguments in a variety of modes and media that engage with, critique, or synthesize multiple points of view.

Reading

- Comprehend a range of informational and imaginative works.
- Evaluate the quality and legitimacy of sources of information.
- Read texts with attention to rhetorical situation and purpose, language choices and patterns, literary techniques, thematic patterns, context, genre, and structure.
- Ask questions to produce intellectual debate about and find meaning in texts.
- Connect the concerns of texts to their lives, to the lives of others, to larger cultures, and to other intellectual disciplines.

Composition Process

- Give critical feedback with empathy and awareness of audience.
- Consider and apply feedback to take ownership of their writing.
- Develop flexible strategies for reading, drafting, reviewing, collaborating, revising, rewriting, rereading, and editing.
- Reflect on how composition processes influence their work.

Knowledge of Conventions

- Use conventions of grammar and language appropriate to the rhetorical situation.
- Cite sources using professional standards and demonstrate knowledge of the purposes of doing so.
- Demonstrate an understanding of distinctions between the conventions of different genres.
- Manipulate conventions intentionally for rhetorical, aesthetic, and expressive effect.

Literary Knowledge

- Describe the elements and features of a text using the methods and terminology of literary studies.
- Explain the relationship between a text and literary traditions, movements, styles, genres, and forms.
- Situate a text within historical, social, cultural, theoretical, and philosophical contexts.
- Apply knowledge gained from literature to understand contemporary issues and perspectives.

Instructional Design and Approach

The students in LE I have come from a variety of backgrounds and classroom experiences. The course seeks to help students grow from whichever skill set they bring by building on their prior skills and prior knowledge. Every student in the class is already a writer, but every student in the class will work to refine their writing skills and develop their composition processes. The course begins by foregrounding a shared object of inquiry and becomes ever more individuated as it goes along. In the second quarter, students develop a research project of their choice that builds on topics in which they are genuinely interested and about which they genuinely care.

Like all English classes at IMSA, small- and large-group discussion take center stage in this classroom, along with a variety of activities and projects. Part of developing excellent writing skills involves understanding the responses of readers. Regular peer workshops will find students sharing their writing with each other with an emphasis on development rather than correction. As students develop individually, they will depend on their peers for support, and each student will guide, converse with, and teach their peers in a supportive learning community.

Assessment

GRADING

While grades may show up in the gradebook as either point values, percentages, or letter grades, the primary logic of the grade is based on letter grades. Grades do not represent a starting point of 100 from which various deductions are made, but a qualitative assessment of the whole. Generally, A is the highest grade awarded in the class. To translate letter grades into numbers, assume that A = 95, A- = 92, B+ = 88, B = 85, and so on. Using those translated numbers, the English department calculates final grades that roughly signify the following:

A (90-100): Exceeds course requirements

B (80-89): Meets course requirements

C (70-79): Credit awarded but needs improvement

D (69 or below): Does not meet course requirements; no Academy credit awarded.

Your semester grade will be calculated based on the accumulation of grades in the categories for the entire semester (that is, the quarter grade represents a snapshot in time, not a set percentage of your final grade).

ON (NOT) ROUNDING

Instructors in the English department do not round quarter or semester grades.

ASSIGNMENT TYPES AND GRADING WEIGHTS

Major Essays and Major Process Documents 60%

This semester, you'll write at least three formal essays, two in the units focused on argument and rhetoric and one major research essay in the second quarter, which will be weighted more significantly. You'll also produce a series of pre-writing and reflective documents along the way, some of which will count as "Major," such as the annotated bibliography.

Homework and Minor Process Documents 10%

Throughout the semester, I'll ask you to write informally in a writing journal that I'll check for completeness on an occasional basis. The writing in your journal will help you prepare for class discussions and activities and for more sustained essays, projects, and presentations. Some of the aforementioned process documents, such as workshop drafts, will count as "Minor." You may also have other small homework assignments that will be described in class.

Presentations and Projects 20%

"In today's day and age," as a hackneyed writer might say, communication occurs across a variety of modes and media. Paper was once king, but now students must learn to communicate persuasively in person, with images, and on screen, among other modes—even, at times, in the dread format of the PowerPoint slide. This semester, you'll complete at least two significant assignments that find you communicating your ideas in modes beyond the printed word.

Participation 10%

I'm not going to do all the talking for you, so without students' active participation, we'd have no class. Participation will be assessed holistically at the quarter and semester mark. A basic expectation is that each student in the classroom speaks every day—that'll probably earn you a B—but I encourage you to distinguish your participation by coming prepared with excellent questions, by making thoughtful contributions to discussion, by actively assisting your peers in workshops, and by seeking advice for improve your writing in office hours.

REVISIONS

Excellent writing almost never emerges whole from the writer's mind on the first try. The strongest writers use an iterative process of planning, drafting, and revision—which is one of the key ideas of the class. We'll spend time in class even before your essays are due producing multiple drafts. You will also have an opportunity to revise some major essays for an improved grade.

"Revision" is not the same as "editing." Merely correcting a few superficial convention or style errors will not improve your grade. Rather, you should expect to rethink, restructure, and rewrite during the revision process.

To receive credit for revisions, you must follow the procedures outlined in class, which typically include an additional document, such as a “Dear Reader” letter or a revision memo. Detailed requirements of such documents will be posted to the course sites. All revised essays and revision memos will be due approximately two weeks after the feedback draft has been returned, on a due date specified in class. Late penalties accrued on feedback drafts will also apply to revisions.

LATE ESSAYS AND PROJECTS

It is important to get your work in on time. Not doing so means significant disruption to the sequence of the class and to your progress in the course, and it means your teacher is spending large amounts of time wrangling your work instead of commenting on your essays and those of your peers, which means slower turnaround times for everyone.

Assignments in the homework/minor process documents category may not be turned in late for credit.

Until the last two weeks of the semester, penalties for late essays and projects are assessed as follows:

0 – 8 hours: no penalty

8 – 48 hours: 1 letter grade deduction (85 becomes 75, for example)

48 – 168 hours: 2 letter grade deduction (85 becomes 65, for example)

168+ hours: essay/project receives half of earned grade (85 becomes 42.5, for example)

All work due in the last two weeks of class, when my own grading deadlines loom, must be turned in within 72 hours of the due time to receive any credit (and will be subject to the penalties above, up to the 72-hour mark).

Unless there are severe extenuating circumstances, you should plan on presenting presentations on the day on which you are scheduled. If you miss a group presentation, even for an excused absence, you will likely have to start from the beginning and complete a separate individual replacement project.

For essay and project (but not presentation) deadlines, extensions of up to 24 hours may be granted to students who request an extension at least 12 hours before the deadline **once** during the semester. If the student fails to meet the extended deadline, late penalties are calculated from the original deadline.

COLLABORATION

I encourage you to seek and implement feedback on your drafts from a variety of readers—teachers, classmates, tutors, parents, and peers. You must be the one to actually write your sentences, responses, and essays, though, so those readers should not implement changes directly in your documents. It’s great, that is, to have a parent or peer comment on errors in a Google Doc—but it’s not OK to have them simply correct errors in a Google Doc. It’s great to have a parent or tutor offer suggestions for how to improve your topic sentences—but it’s not OK to have them write your topic sentences for you. Seek feedback and guidance from readers, but take ownership of your own writing.

Student Expectations

ATTENDANCE

Whether or not you are present in class, you are responsible for class activities, presentations, and assignments. Please refer to the student handbook for the full attendance/tardy policy.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Writing classrooms depend on trust between students, peers, and teachers. It is always better to contact me about the difficulties you're having with an assignment than to plagiarize. I trust my students, but that trust is matched by the seriousness with which I take academic honesty. Instances of academic dishonesty will be forwarded to Student Life for disciplinary action.

ANNOTATING TEXTS

Whether you are reading a print text or an electronic text, you should plan to have a system to annotate it in preparation for class. For print texts, you can use pen and post-its. You may print electronic texts or read them on screen—as long as you have a way to take notes on them.

LAPTOPS

We will use laptops regularly in this class, and you will need to use your laptop to access and annotate electronic texts. In general, I permit laptop use in class—but if I notice a pattern of distraction, I will ask you to forego your laptop in favor of printed copies of texts. If I ask you to bring printed copies of texts, you must have a printed copy of each text each day.

ON (NOT MAKING) TECHNOLOGY EXCUSES

You live on a campus inundated with computers, and your IMSA Google Drive account lets you back up your work automatically. If you aren't working in Google Docs or another program that automatically saves your work, use Google Backup & Sync to make sure you always have a current backup of your work. Unless a technology problem is a system-wide failure, IMSA's fault, or my fault, please don't share it with me as an excuse. If you plan ahead and have good backup plans, you won't lose access to up-to-date copies of your work.

I can only grade what you turn in. If you submit an incomplete, corrupted, or outdated file, that is the file I will grade—so be careful with your submissions.

Sequence of Topics

Unit 1: Developing critical questions with March

At the beginning of the semester, we'll use the summer reading as a springboard for our initial discussions. We have a shared object of inquiry—what questions can we ask of it, and what worth saying can we say about it? We'll work on pushing initial student responses to evidence-based arguments about the text as we establish norms for our classroom community and begin to get a sense of how discussions in English class work at IMSA.

Unit 2: Making arguments verbally and visually

We'll formalize some of the language of argument and get a sense of the moves that sophisticated academic arguments make. As students revise their initial essay about March, they'll read a series of model arguments from the journalistic and academic realms. In groups, they'll use visual support to perform close analyses of focused sections of March and present their first group presentation in class.

Unit 3: Rhetorical analysis and persuasion

The argument unit already suggested that texts matter most when they are changing readers' mind, but in this unit we'll expand our sense of rhetorical thinking. Shifting away from a model of writing that views some writing as "formal" and some writing as not, we'll emphasize the diversity of rhetorical situations that writers and communicators face. Students will think through the way speakers adjust their content to appeal to different audiences and contexts as they formalize some of the language of rhetoric and perform rhetorical analyses of written and audiovisual texts.

Unit 4: Semi-independent research project

In the second unit, students will choose some topic related to culture that they already know something about and develop a focused research project that expands their knowledge of that topic. A series of process documents, from a pitch to an annotated bibliography to a series of drafts, will introduce students to the research process and to the conventions of academic writing. As they research their own topic, students will simultaneously share their knowledge with others and get feedback from peers that helps them develop their expertise about an eclectic variety of topics.

What You Can Expect from Me

RESPECT: I assume that my students have ideas to contribute to our discussions and to the world. Even when students have difficulties in class, I believe in their capacity to improve their thinking, writing, and communication. I will strive to take your ideas seriously and to fully acknowledge you as a person with a complex life.

UNDERSTANDING: Believe it or not, I am aware that life is complicated, and I will understand and empathize with you when you are having a rough time. “Understanding” does not necessarily mean that I will make special allowances for you in every circumstance, but I will at the very least not judge you because you are having trouble in life or in the class.

HELP AND GUIDANCE: I want you to succeed in my class, and I have chosen this profession because I want to work with you inside and outside of class to make that happen. If you are confused by an assignment or are struggling with something we are doing in class, stop by my office so we can talk about it. If you are having trouble understanding something, contact me early and often. Plan ahead so if you need help, you have time to get it.

AVAILABILITY: I will respond to clear, self-contained questions directed to my IMSA email within 24 hours during the working week. I will make myself available during office hours.

ENTHUSIASM FOR YOUR IDEAS: As a teacher, I am interested in helping you understand my ideas and the ideas of authors. I’m even more interested, however, in helping you hone and communicate your own ideas. If you’re having trouble connecting the content of the course with the things that interest and concern you most, please come see me during office hours so I can help you find the connections.

USEFUL FEEDBACK: I will spend a lot of time crafting comments and feedback on your assignments. It is important to me that you do your best to understand that feedback and produce work that responds to it. If you have trouble understanding my comments on your work, please see me during office hours.

HIGH STANDARDS: I believe that writing and literature are serious, important stuff that will be crucial to your life, education, and career whether you end up being a biologist, a mathematician, a doctor, an engineer, a teacher, or a novelist. Grades in my class are not “given,” and points in my class are not “lost” from some arbitrary beginning point. Instead, grades in my class are earned through hard work and the difficult process of completing excellent assignments and projects.

What I Expect from You

RESPECTFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH CLASSMATES' IDEAS: Discussions of texts and current events can involve challenging, contentious topics. Even when you disagree with your classmates, it is absolutely crucial to the success of our conversations that you treat them with respect. I will treat you like adults, and I expect you to treat your classmates like adults engaged in a respectful conversation.

COMMITMENT TO PROCESS: You will probably enjoy many of the texts we read in this class, but there are some you may not enjoy. Even if you realize a certain text is not your cup of tea, work through it and try to find what's interesting about it, even if it's hard. Similarly, commit to improving your writing, whether you believe you are a strong writer or a weak one. All of us, including me, still have lots to learn when it comes to writing.

WILLINGNESS TO SEEK HELP: I love nothing more than helping students improve their work. I can only do so, however, if students seek out my help. Taking advantage of my help—and, as importantly—the help of tutors at the writing center—will help you become a stronger writer, thinker, and communicator.

COMMUNICATION: When you are having a rough time, it's important to let your teachers know—you can offer important context that will help us teach better. It's also really important to respond to direct emails within 24 hours and to make it to meetings you have set up with me.

RESPONSIBILITY: I expect you to take responsibility for your own learning in the course and to feel responsible for helping your classmates learn in our classroom community.

CONSISTENT ATTENDANCE AND SIGNIFICANT PARTICIPATION: At the scheduled start time of class, you should be in your seat and ready for a conversation. Come prepared with questions and observations about the text, and be willing to share those questions and observations in small groups and in the large-group conversation.

HONESTY: I assume that you will tell me the truth and that your work represents your own effort. Please match my respect with your honesty.