

ENGLISH 15: COMPOSITION AND RHETORIC

Fall 2025

Tuesday/Thursday

Sect. 098	9:05-10:20AM	Health and Hum Dev 355
Sect. 101	10:35-11:50AM	Hammond 215

Instructor: Phillip Zapkin

Email: pzz17@psu.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday 12-1PM

Office: Burrowes 17

and Wednesday 12-2PM, or by appointment

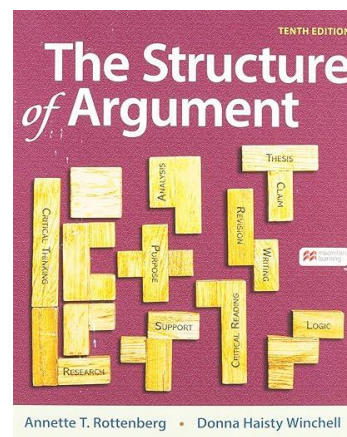
COURSE DESCRIPTION

In university, there are two broad types of courses: content courses and skills courses. Content courses teach you about a subject (e.g., US history, macroeconomics). Skills courses teach you to do something (e.g., painting, bio lab). English 15 is a skills course, teaching you to compose and use rhetoric. Composition involves putting elements together to form a whole—in this case elements of writing. And rhetoric is the art of persuasion. So, this course will teach you to put together writing to persuade audiences. You will learn traditional academic skills and engage with contemporary forms of rhetoric like video essays.

This course is a General Education: Writing/Speaking (GWS) course that fulfills the Effective Communication, Critical and Analytical Thinking, and Key Literacies learning objectives.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS AND SOFTWARE

- Rottenberg, Annette and Donna Winchell, [*The Structure of Argument*](#), 10th ed., MacMillan, 2021, ISBN 9781319214753.
- [*Penn Statements*](#) (available digitally).



ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Graded Assignment	Percentage
Group Rhetorical Evaluation (GRE)	15%
Video Essay (VE)	20%
Education Manifesto (EM)	20%
Letter to My Younger Self (LYS)	15%
Peer Reviews	15%
Participation	15%

To pass this course you *must* submit all four major projects. Failure to submit a project will result in an automatic failing grade for the course.

- Projects will receive letter grades based on the [*PWR Grading Standards*](#) and the grading criteria for that individual project.
- Peer Reviews will be graded out of ten points.
- Proposals will be marked Complete/Incomplete. For every project you must have a proposal approved before the project deadline. Not having a proposal approved will cost one full letter grade from the project.
- Submitting a project after the deadline costs one full letter grade per late day. Similarly, submitting peer review feedback late costs one point per late day.

Participation

Participation is crucial to our classroom community—this is an interactive class where what you get out depends on what you put in. The participation grade is holistic and comprehensive, evaluating your contributions over the semester to full class discussions, group work/discussions, writing conferences, and attendance.

- **Writing Conferences:** Coming to discuss your work, writing, or ideas with me during office hours will add $\frac{1}{3}$ letter grade toward your participation grade per visit. Especially if you're nervous about talking in class, this can be a great way to simultaneously get useful feedback and boost your participation score.

Grading Scale

This class uses the LionPATH standard grading scale to determine final course grades:

Letter Grade	Point Range
A	94-100
A-	90-93.99
B+	87-89.99
B	84-86.99
B-	80-83.99
C+	77-79.99
C	70-76.99
D	60-69.99
F	0-59.99

POLICIES

Attendance

You are allowed to miss 2 classes with no penalty to your grade. *Each class missed beyond those 2 will cost $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter from your overall course grade.*

- **Excused absences** do not count against you. In order for an absence to be excused you must notify me as early as possible beforehand (at least 24 hours). Reasons for excused absences include: religious holidays, military service, university required activities (i.e., participation in a university sports team), or severe illness or injury.
 - Excessive absences—even excused—are unacceptable (see [Policies and Rules, 42-27](#)). Students with a (long term) health issue or emergency situation should contact their advisor and to discuss the situation (including potentially [withdrawal options](#)).
- If you miss class, *it is your responsibility to make up the missed material*. Ask a classmate to take notes for you and then come to office hours and/or email me.
- Unless I explicitly grant you an extension, you must still meet assignment deadlines, regardless of attendance.
- Be aware: Students can fail a class for non-attendance regardless of the quality of written work done.

Academic Integrity Statement

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. Academic integrity is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at The Pennsylvania State University, and all members of the University community are expected to act

in accordance with this principle. According to Penn State policy [G-9: Academic Integrity](#), an academic integrity violation is “an intentional, unintentional, or attempted violation of course or assessment policies to gain an academic advantage or to advantage or disadvantage another student academically.” Unless your instructor tells you otherwise, you must complete all course work entirely on your own, using only sources that have been permitted by your instructor, and you may not assist other students with papers, quizzes, exams, or other assessments. If your instructor allows you to use ideas, images, or word phrases created by another person (e.g., from Course Hero or Chegg) or by generative technology, such as ChatGPT, you must identify their source. You may not submit false or fabricated information, use the same academic work for credit in multiple courses, or share instructional content. Students with questions about academic integrity should ask their instructor before submitting work. Students facing allegations of academic misconduct may not drop/withdraw from the affected course unless they are cleared of wrongdoing (see [G-9: Academic Integrity](#)). Attempted drops will be prevented or reversed, and students will be expected to complete course work and meet course deadlines. Students who are found responsible for academic integrity violations face academic outcomes, which can be severe, and put themselves at jeopardy for other outcomes which may include ineligibility for Dean’s List, pass/fail elections, and grade forgiveness. Students may also face consequences from their home/major program and/or The Schreyer Honors College.

Student Disability Resources

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University’s educational programs. Every Penn State campus has an office for students with disabilities. Student Disability Resources (SDR) website provides [contact information for every Penn State campus](#). For further information, please visit [Student Disability Resources website](#).

In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: See [documentation guidelines](#). If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus disability services office will provide you with an accommodation letter. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early as possible. You must follow this process for every semester that you request accommodations.

Counseling & Psychological Services

Many students at Penn State face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients’ cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

- [Counseling and Psychological Services at University Park \(CAPS\)](#): 814-863-0395
- [Counseling and Psychological Services at Commonwealth Campuses](#)
- Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400
- Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741

Reporting Educational Equity Concerns through the Report Bias site

Penn State University has adopted a “[Protocol for Responding to Bias Motivated Incidents](#)” that is grounded in the policy that the “University is committed to creating an educational environment which is free from intolerance directed toward individuals or groups and strives to create and maintain an environment that fosters respect for others.” That policy is embedded within an institution traditionally committed to [academic freedom](#). Bias motivated incidents include conduct that is defined in [University Policy AD 91: Discrimination and Harassment, and Related Inappropriate Conduct](#). Students, faculty, or staff who experience or witness a possible bias motivated incident are urged to report the incident immediately by doing one of the following:

- Submit a report via the [Report Bias webpage](#)
- Contact one of the following offices:
 - University Police Services, University Park: 814-863-1111
 - Multicultural Resource Center, Diversity Advocate for Students: 814-865-1773
 - Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity: 814-865-5906
 - Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs: 814-865-0909
 - Affirmative Action Office: 814-863-0471
- Dialing 911 in cases where physical injury has occurred or is imminent

COVID Statement

While COVID-19 cases have decreased substantially since fall of 2021, COVID-19 remains a pandemic. More transmissible variants are a major concern. Penn State urges everyone to continue to take steps to protect not only themselves, but their colleagues, friends, and the campus by practicing good hand hygiene, staying home if you are sick, being up to date on vaccinations and boosters, and wearing a mask indoors. There is evidence that masks are effective in reducing the transmission of COVID-19 (e.g., Li et al., 2020, Lima et al., 2020, Talic et al., 2021) and everyone is strongly encouraged to wear masks while indoors.

COURSE SCHEDULE

This schedule is subject to change by me. I will notify you ahead of time by email and/or Canvas announcement of any changes.

Readings Key: CA=Canvas, SA=Structure of Argument, PS=Penn Statements

WEEK I

❖ **Tu. 26 Aug.: Introductions; Course Expectations; What is composition? What is rhetoric?; Canvas**

- Homework for Next Class:
 - On CA, read:
 - Syllabus
 - Group Rhetorical Evaluation Assignment Sheet
 - Problems with AI Page
 - In SA, read:
 - “What is Argument?” pp. 3-19
 - In PS, read:

- [“What is Rhetoric?”](#)
- [“Program Outcomes”](#)
- On CA, watch:
 - [“The Rhetorical Situation and Fitting Response”](#)

❖ Th. 28 Aug.: Syllabus; Introduce Group Rhetorical Evaluation assignment; Begin finding groups

- Homework for Next Class:
 - In SA, read:
 - “Aristotelian Rhetoric” pp. 129-33
 - Sullenberger’s “We Saved 155 Lives on the Hudson. Now Let’s Vote for Leaders Who’ll Protect Us All” pp. 134-36
 - On CA, read:
 - “Crash Course in Rhetorical Appeals”
 - On CA, watch:
 - [“The Rhetorical Triangle”](#)
 - [“Audience Awareness”](#)

WEEK 2

❖ Tu. 2 Sept.: Audience Awareness; Aristotelian Rhetorical Appeals; Proposals

- Homework for Next Class:
 - GRE Proposal
 - In SA, read:
 - “Writing the Thesis (Main Claim)” and “Planning the Structure” pp. 91-94
 - Ingram’s “Electoral College is Best Way to Choose U.S. President” pp. 101-03
 - On CA, read:
 - “Thesis Statements”
 - On CA, watch:
 - [“Thesis Statements”](#)
 - [“Collaborative Writing”](#)
 - [“Submitting a Project and Downloading Feedback”](#)

❖ Th. 4 Sept.: Thesis Statements; Writing Collaboratively

- Due by 11:59PM:
 - GRE Proposal
- Homework for Next Class:
 - In SA, read:
 - “Induction” and “Deduction” pp. 319-28
 - O’Mahony’s “Are We Living Too Long?” pp. 329-31
 - On CA, read:
 - “CEI Paragraph”
 - On CA, watch:
 - [“Inductive and Deductive Reasoning”](#)
 - [“Paragraph Structure”](#)

WEEK 3

❖ Tu. 9 Sept.: Induction and Deduction; Paragraph Structure

- Homework for Next Class:
 - In SA, read:
 - “Summarizing” pp. 31-32
 - “Providing Support” and “Integrating Your Sources” pp. 95-100
 - Vuong’s “Reimagining Masculinity” pp. 33-34
 - On CA, watch:
 - [“Quotation, Paraphrase, and Summary”](#)
-

❖ Th. 11 Sept.: Summarizing and Integrating a Source

- Homework for Next Class:
 - In SA, read
 - “Common Fallacies” pp. 332-342
 - “Practice” pp. 343-45
 - On CA, watch:
 - [“Logical Fallacies Overview”](#)
 - Be aware of [“Logical Fallacies”](#) playlist
-

WEEK 4

❖ Tu. 16 Sept.: Logical Fallacies

- Homework for Next Class:
 - In SA, read:
 - “Introductions and Conclusions” pp. 263-265
 - On CA, read:
 - “Essay Formatting”
 - “Sample Intro”
 - On CA, watch:
 - [“Introductions”](#)
 - [“Conclusions”](#)
-

❖ Th. 18 Sept.: Essay Formatting; Introductions and Conclusions

- Homework for Next Class:
 - Bring in-progress GRE draft to class
 - In PS, read:
 - [“PWR Grading Standards”](#)
 - Mathews’ [“Untitled”](#)
 - Gallagher’s [“Proposal to Cut Pollution and Health Concerns on Campus”](#)
 - Ray’s [“Uniforms Should Not Be In Schools”](#)
 - Duffy’s [“How Student Loan Debt Furthers the Problem of American Education”](#)
 - On CA, (re)read:
 - “The Writing Instructor’s Approach to Grading”
 - “Revision Strategies”
 - Group Rhetorical Evaluation Assignment Sheet
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WEEK 5

❖ Tu. 23 Sept.: Grading Standards; Grade Norming; Revision Activity

- Homework for Next Class:
 - GRE Peer Review Draft
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❖ Th. 25 Sept.: GRE Peer Review

- Due by Beginning of Class:
 - GRE Peer Review Draft
- Due by 11:59PM:
 - GRE Peer Feedback
- Homework for Next Class:
 - **Group Rhetorical Evaluation**
 - On CA, read:
 - Video Essay Assignment Sheet
 - “3 Tricks to Get People to Actually Listen to Your Presentations”
 - In SA, read:
 - “Finding an Appropriate Topic” pp. 363-67
 - “Oral Arguments and Presentations” pp. 408-414
 - On CA, watch:
 - [“Academic Presentations”](#)
 - [“Research Questions”](#)
 - [“Cell Theory”](#)

WEEK 6

❖ Tu. 30 Sept.: Introduce Video Essay assignment; Public Speaking and Writing for a Listening Audience; Brainstorming

- Due by 11:59PM:
 - **Group Rhetorical Evaluation**
 - Homework for Next Class:
 - In SA, read:
 - “Audio and Audiovisual Rhetoric” pp. 58-59
 - On CA, watch:
 - [“Why Baseball Players Are So Superstitious”](#)
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❖ Th. 2 Oct.: *Meet in Media Commons*; Video Editing

- Homework for Next Class:
 - In SA, read:
 - “Evidence” pp. 193-206
 - “Planning and Research” pp. 367-82
 - On CA, watch:
 - [“Database Searching”](#)
 - [“Social Constructs”](#)

WEEK 7

❖ Tu. 7 Oct.: *Meet in Library*; Crash Course on Library Databases

- Homework for Next Class:
 - VE Proposal
 - In SA, read:
 - “Evaluating Sources” pp. 382-89
 - “Reviewing Your Research,” “Avoiding Plagiarism,” and “Building an Effective Argument” pp. 400-404
 - On CA, watch:
 - [“Assessing Researched Sources”](#)
 - [“How Kierkegaard’s Philosophy Embraces Anxiety”](#)
-

❖ Th. 9 Oct.: Evaluating Sources and Arguments

- Due by 11:59PM:
 - VE Proposal
- Homework for Next Class:
 - In SA, read:
 - “The Toulmin Model” pp. 156-60
 - On CA, watch:
 - [“Toulmin Model”](#)
 - [“Slender Man”](#)
 - [“How Bloody Mary Turns Fear Into Fun”](#)

WEEK 8

❖ Tu. 14 Oct.: Toulmin Model Argument

- Homework for Next Class:
 - Post to “Evaluating a Researched Source” discussion forum
 - In SA, read:
 - “MLA In-Text Citations,” “MLA Works Cited Entries,” and “MLA-Style Annotated Bibliography” pp. 423-436
 - On CA, watch:
 - [“Citing and Attributing Quotes in MLA Format”](#)
 - [“9th Edition MLA Works Cited Pages”](#)
-

❖ Th. 16 Oct.: *Remote Class*; MLA Citations; Discussion Forum on “Evaluating a Researched Source”; *Phillip Out of Town*

- Due by beginning of class:
 - Post to “Evaluating a Researched Source” discussion forum
- Due by 11:59PM:
 - Feedback Response to “Evaluating a Researched Source” discussion forum
- Homework for Next Class:
 - In PS, read:
 - Anonymous’ [“The Cancerous Side of THON”](#)
 - O’Hara’s [“Dismantling Student Loan Debt”](#)
 - Fowlkes [“Representation of Cultural Hairstyles on Black Women in Media”](#)

- Tillman's "[From Preschool to Prison and Back Again: The Cycle of American Incarceration](#)"

WEEK 9

❖ Tu. 21 Oct.: VE Grade Norming

- Homework for Next Class:
 - VE Peer Review Draft
 - On CA, (re)read:
 - Video Essay Assignment Sheet
 - Revision Strategies
 - Elbow's "The Believing Game"

❖ Th. 23 Oct.: Revision Activity; VE Peer Review

- Due by Beginning of Class:
 - VE Peer Review Draft
- Due by 11:59PM:
 - VE Peer Feedback
- Homework for Next Class:
 - **Video Essay**
 - On CA, read:
 - Education Manifesto Assignment Sheet
 - In SA, read:
 - "Claims" pp. 167-85
 - On CA, watch:
 - "[Claims of Fact](#)"
 - "[Claims of Value](#)"
 - "[Claims of Policy](#)"

WEEK 10

❖ Tu. 28 Oct.: Introduce Education Manifesto assignment; Different Types of Claims

- Due by 11:59PM:
 - **Video Essay**
- Homework for Next Class:
 - In SA, read:
 - Patel's "To Be a Good Doctor, Study the Humanities" pp. 161-63
 - "Appeals to Needs and Values" pp. 214-18

❖ Th. 30 Oct.: Appeals to Needs and Values

- Homework for Next Class:
 - EM Proposal
 - In SA, read:
 - Seltzer's "Teaching Trigger Warnings" pp. 146-51
 - "Stasis Theory" pp. 151-55
 - On CA, watch:
 - "[Stasis Theory](#)"

WEEK 11

❖ Tu. 4 Nov.: Stasis Theory

- Due by 11:59PM:
 - EM Proposal
- Homework for Next Class:
 - In SA, read:
 - “Rogerian Argument” pp. 139-41
 - “Organizing the Argument” pp. 248-56
 - Yee’s “Why ‘Safe Spaces’ are Important for Mental Health—Especially on College Campuses” pp. 397-99
 - On CA, watch:
 - [“Rogerian Argument”](#)
 - [“Rebuttal”](#)

❖ Th. 6 Nov.: Counterarguments, Compromises, and Middle Ground

- Homework for Next Class:
 - In SA, read:
 - “Assumptions” pp. 227-36
 - Sebelius’ “Remarks to Georgetown University’s Public Policy Institute” pp. 420-22

WEEK 12

❖ Tu. 11 Nov.: Navigating Assumptions and Appealing to Principles

- Homework for Next Class:
 - In PS, read:
 - Mathews’ [“Untitled”](#)
 - Gallagher’s [“Proposal to Cut Pollution and Health Concerns on Campus”](#)
 - Ray’s [“Uniforms Should Not Be In Schools”](#)
 - Duffy’s [“How Student Loan Debt Furthers the Problem of American Education”](#)

❖ Th. 13 Nov.: EM Grade Norming

- Homework for Next Class:
 - EM Peer Review Draft
 - On CA, reread:
 - Education Manifesto Assignment Sheet
 - Revision Activities

WEEK 13

❖ Tu. 18 Nov.: Revision Activity; EM Peer Review

- Due by Beginning of Class:
 - EM Peer Review Draft
- Due by 11:59PM:
 - EM Peer Feedback
- Homework for Next Class:
 - **Education Manifesto**
 - On CA, read:

- Letter to My Younger Self Assignment Sheet
- On CA, watch:
 - [“The Role of Reflection in Writing”](#)

❖ Th. 20 Nov.: Introduce Letter to My Younger Self assignment; Reflections and Building Arguments from Experience

- Due by 11:59PM:
 - **Education Manifesto**
- Homework for Next Class:
 - LYS Proposal
 - In SA, read:
 - “Language” pp. 269-91
 - On CA, watch:
 - [“Personal Narrative Plot Structures”](#)
 - [“Three Major Types of Narrative Conflict”](#)

WEEK 14

❖ Tu. 25 Nov.: *No Class: Thanksgiving Recess*

❖ Th. 27 Nov.: *No Class: Thanksgiving Recess*

WEEK 15

❖ Tu. 2 Dec.: Setting Stakes and Building Conflict

- Due by 11:59PM:
 - LYS Proposal
- Homework for Next Class:
 - On CA, watch:
 - [“Writing Sensory Imagery”](#)

❖ Th. 4 Dec.: Constructing Characters; SEEQs

- Homework for Next Class:
 - In PS, read:
 - Yi’s [“House to Home”](#)
 - Scotetto’s [“My Time”](#)

WEEK 16

❖ Tu. 9 Dec.: LYS Grade Norming

- Homework for Next Class:
 - LYS Peer Review Draft
 - On CA, reread:
 - Letter to My Younger Self Assignment Sheet
 - Revision Strategies

❖ Th. 11 Dec.: Revision Activity; LYS Peer Review; Course Wrap-up

- Due by Beginning of Class:
 - LYS Peer Review Draft
- Due by 11:59PM:
 - LYS Peer Feedback

- Homework for Monday:
 - **Letter to My Younger Self**

WEEK 17

❖ Mon. 15 Dec.: LYS Final Draft Due

- Due by 11:59PM:
 - **Letter to My Younger Self**