

ENGLISH ASSIGNMENTS & EXPECTATIONS

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ASSIGNMENTS

English 135: Academic Reading and Writing

One of the goals of ENGL 135 is to help students understand the fundamentals of writing and become better writers themselves. Consequently, the main assignments in ENGL 135 encourage students to think about writing-related ideas like audience, context, rhetoric, and purpose. The hope is that if students better understand these ideas and how they affect an author's writing, students' own writing will improve. For example, students may never have considered using strategic rhetoric to persuade a specific audience for a particular purpose.

ENGL 135 tends to include three major assignments: a summary, a rhetorical analysis, and a research paper. The summary aims to teach students how to understand someone else's writing and how to paraphrase. The rhetorical analysis helps students uncover the strategies that scholars use to make their arguments convincing. The research paper ideally allows students to incorporate skills from the first two assignments as they gather academic sources to support their argument. (For more information please see additional handouts on the Summary and Rhetorical Analysis assignments.)

English 146: The Literature of Our Era, and 147: Great Moments in English Literature



In a sense, ENGL 146 and 147 assume that students have developed certain writing skills already (writing in essay structure, summarizing arguments, analyzing rhetoric, etc.) and these courses shift the emphasis to Close Readings. Accordingly, ENGL 146/147 assignments adopt a more literary emphasis. To complete a Close Reading assignment, students will focus on an assigned passage from a literary work and develop an argument of their own. Moreover, students will also be asked to identify and discuss the significance of literary elements in the text (e.g. repetition, metaphor, imagery, alliteration, and more). Attention is given to reading the whole text carefully first, then focusing on the assigned passage, then developing an argument and outline, and finally writing the assignment.

A key aspect of the Close Reading is focusing on *analysis* rather than summary. Whereas others can read the literary work for themselves, they might not notice the same connections between the text, the author's language/choices, and various interpretive meanings; these connections are what makes an analysis interesting and insightful. Students are also encouraged to make links between the assigned passage and the broader work when possible (while still retaining a focus on the assigned passage).

Upper Year Courses



Generalizing trends across upper year English assignments is a difficult task. That being said, there are some broad conventions that seem to apply to assignments in many advanced English courses. These conventions include: engaging in critical thought, building connections within and across texts, applying theory to analyses, adopting a trans-disciplinary approach, and generating a work of significant creativity (for more information please see the "English: Conventions" handout).



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EXPECTATIONS

100 Level

Students in first year English courses (135 and 146/147) are expected to focus on the quality of their writing. Accordingly, students should pay attention to writing skills such as proper grammar, punctuation, word choice (i.e. being more precise with language), sentence structure, paragraph structure, etc. Students are also expected to use a formal (academic) tone and appropriate vocabulary. Some common errors in first year English assignments include:

- ✪ using informal or colloquial language (including contractions like “can’t” or “don’t”)
- ✪ making assumptions and generalizations (e.g. “All people...” or “Society today...”)
- ✪ moving off topic and/or ranting
- ✪ failing to proofread (including grammatical issues, like tense shifts between past and present)

Also, sometimes it is easy to slip into “exploratory mode” rather than “argumentative mode;” professors and TAs tend to favour papers in which students take a stand because it seems like there is more at stake.

Reading comprehension is also important across English courses. Whether students are completing a Rhetorical Analysis (135) or a Close Reading (146/147) they are expected to use critical reading skills. In addition, students should use evidence to support their arguments, such as quotations from the primary text or references to other (secondary) sources (depending on the assignment). Students are expected to use proper academic sources to support their arguments (this means no citing Wikipedia) and to cite their sources according to the appropriate Style Guidelines (usually MLA Citation Style for English courses).

English 135



Because ENGL 135 focuses on writing technique and skills, students are expected to adhere to specific instructions for each assignment. The general expectations are that students will be able to read carefully, identify authors’ arguments, write clearly, organize ideas into proper sentences and paragraphs, and support arguments with evidence. The more specific expectations are that students will learn to summarize scholarship, analyze rhetoric, and perform independent research.

English 146/147



Because the most frequent assignment in ENGL 146/147 is the Close Reading, careful and critical reading is the foundation of these courses. Other than dictating which passage to focus on, assignments guidelines are somewhat flexible and allow students to be creative. Students are expected to read the entire text, and then close read the assigned passage and analyze it. Students are also expected to focus on their analysis of the passage rather than merely providing a summary.

Upper Year

The expectations in upper year English courses are that students will not only close read their texts, but also think critically, apply theory to analyses, and make intriguing connections. As students move towards 400 level English courses, importance is placed on building more complex arguments. Students are expected to construct intricate arguments by reading a literary text, linking it to theory (e.g. thinking about modern/postmodern tendencies), using secondary sources, considering the author’s oeuvre, reflecting on the historical period, and more. As a result, upper year assignments become endeavours involving significant creativity. In these courses, students are encouraged to write about something new—ideas that have not been explored before and were not covered in lectures or course materials (for more information, see “English: Conventions” handout).

