

Course Goals

Seminar in Composition is the course that most undergraduates take to fulfill the first of three writing-intensive requirements in the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences. While the readings and assignments in different sections of the course may vary, this section, like all the others, consists of a sequence of assignments that will require you to:

1. Engage in writing as a creative, disciplined form of critical inquiry.

In this course, you'll be asked to use writing to generate ideas as well as explain them. You'll form questions, explore problems, and examine your own experiences, thoughts, and observations. Investigating a multifaceted subject, you'll be expected to make productive use of uncertainty as you participate in sustained scrutiny of the issues at hand.

2. Compose thoughtfully crafted essays that position your ideas among other views.

In response to reading and discussing challenging texts, you'll write essays in which you develop informed positions that engage with the positions of others. You'll analyze as well as summarize the texts you read, and you'll compose essays that pay close attention both to the ideas voiced by other writers and to specific choices they make with language and form.

3. Write with precision, nuance, and awareness of textual conventions.

You'll work on crafting clear, precise prose that uses a variety of sentence and paragraph structures. You'll be required to learn the conventions for quoting and paraphrasing responsibly and adeptly, and you'll be assisted with editing and proofreading strategies that reflect attention to the relation between style and meaning. You'll also have opportunities to consider when and how to challenge conventions as well as follow them.

4. Revise your writing by rethinking the assumptions, aims, and effects of prior drafts.

This course approaches the essay as a flexible genre that takes on different forms in different contexts—not as a thesis-driven argument that adheres to a rigid structure. Much class time will be devoted to considering the purpose, logic, and design of your own writing, and you'll be given opportunities to revise your work in light of comments and class discussion, with the aim of making more attentive decisions as you write.

Reading

We will study three readings this semester. To genuinely enter conversation with a text, you will need to read it several times, both before and while you grapple with it in your own writing. Take notes, both in the text itself and separately. By doing so, you begin making records of your own understandings and questioning of the text, and these will be essential as you participate in class discussions and write your warm-ups and essays.

Writing

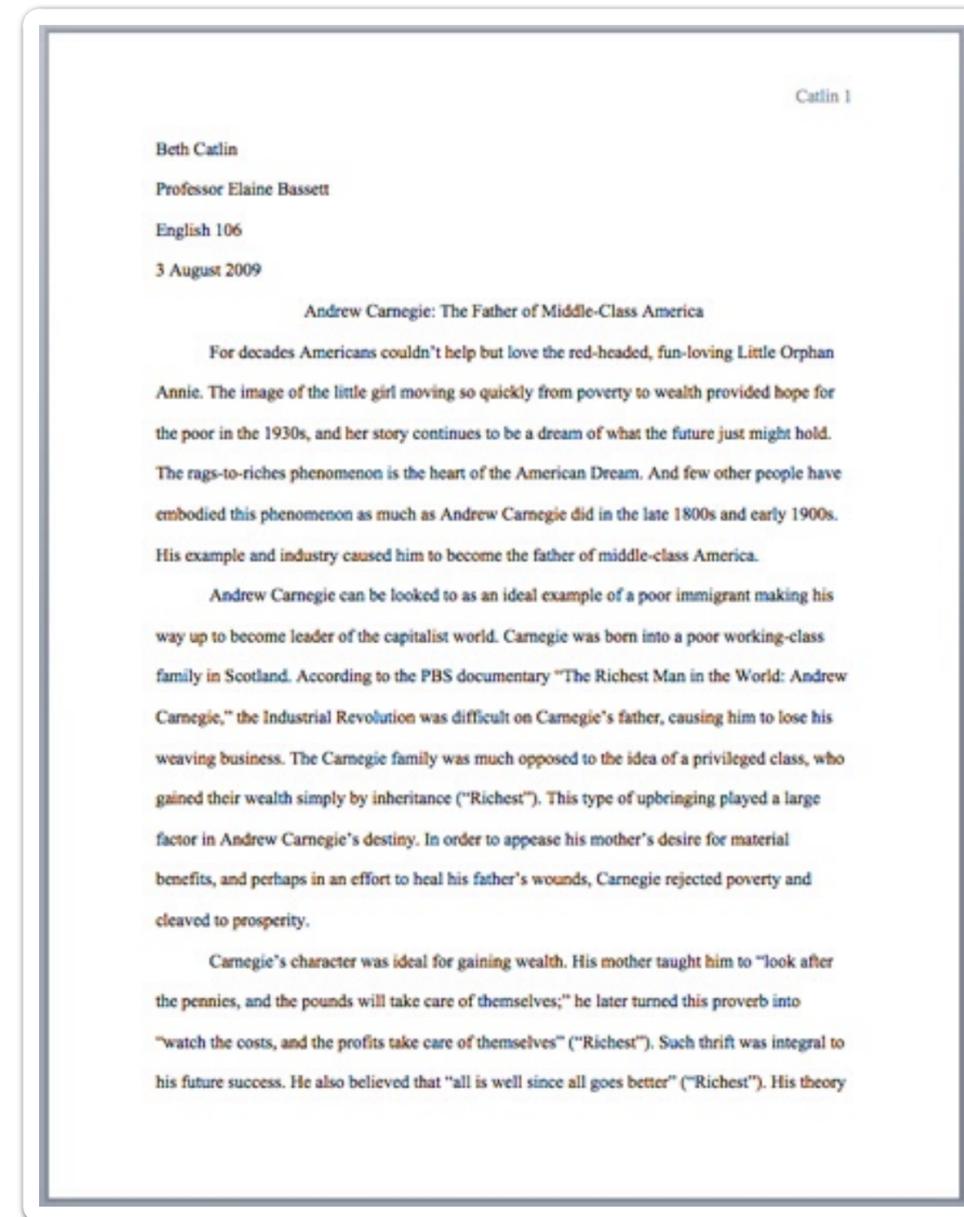
We will be writing in many different forms over the semester, and a piece of writing is due each class meeting. The two main forms of writing we will undertake are described below.

Warm-Ups

These brief, informal assignments ask you to think through a particular aspect of the assigned readings. You might, for example, respond to a specific question or apply an aspect of a writing style in a new context. Warm-ups are the first step towards more complete essays.

Essays

Longer and more formal, these assignments require you either to analyze an assigned reading—by way of summary, close reading, or attention to form—or try your hand at a similar project, extending and testing a writer's ideas by drawing on new examples or an illustrative experience from your own life. You'll write and/or revise seven essays this semester; one essay will be a digital composition, a re-mix of a written draft that includes both images and sound.



Follow MLA formatting guidelines as described in the Purdue OWL. Be sure to carefully proofread and edit.

Conferencing

Over the semester, we will meet at least twice for one-on-one conferences. During these twenty-minute meetings, we will discuss your draft of a specific upcoming essay assignment. Submit your draft to me at least three hours before your scheduled conference time. A missed conference is considered an absence.

Detailed instructions on how to sign up for these individual conferences are posted on Blackboard. Conferences will begin after you've turned in your first essay and run through the last week of class.

Attendance and Deadlines

Because this is a seminar, discussion is central to the work of the course. Come to class on time, prepared to take part in conversation. While you should try to attend every class, you are permitted three absences. Saving your three absences for emergencies is a wise idea, as four absences are grounds for failure (regardless of the reasons for missing class). If an emergency arises—a death in the family or a serious illness—please contact me as soon as possible.

Not having an assignment completed is not a reason to miss class! Doing so will result in a double penalty- a poor grade on the assignment and an absence.

Late work will not receive comments and will result in a lowered final grade, as will arriving late to class.

Plagiarism

It is important that you cite your sources, whether quoted or paraphrased, in both written and digital texts. When paraphrasing, you do not avoid plagiarism just by changing a few words or lines. We'll talk about responsible work with sources, but you should also consult the Purdue OWL. You can also receive help at the Writing Center. If you are unsure, ask. All instances of plagiarism will result in an automatic 'F' on the assignment and a report to the Dean.

note: There are five class days over the semester when we will not meet; conferences, in addition to workshop prep, are in lieu of these classes. (These days are noted on the course schedule.)

Workshops/Group Work

Beyond working on our essay-writing skills, we will also focus on how to read essays (both others' and our own) and revising our own writing. Workshops are a way to get at both of these skills. On workshop days, an assigned group will lead the class in thinking through and analyzing one of your peer's essays.

You will notice on the schedule that on most Mondays after an essay is due, we do not have a class meeting. (This is labeled as 'workshop prep' on the schedule.) On that day, those in the group leading that week's workshop will meet with me during our class time to prep for Wednesday's workshop.

Grades

Rather than giving you grades on individual assignments, I will give you comments and grade estimates on your essays. (The grade estimates will not be averaged into your final grade.) We also regularly discuss samples of student writing in class. In both instances, the goal is to help you revise and strengthen your work. Your final grade will be determined by a review of your work over the semester (including class participation) and your final portfolio. I will be looking not only at the quality of your work, but for evidence of a serious and sustained effort to strengthen your writing over the semester.

Keep in mind that it is not uncommon for writing that earned an A in high school to be evaluated as C work (or lower) in college. Here is how the University of Pittsburgh defines each grade:

A = superior attainment
B = meritorious attainment
C = adequate attainment
D = minimal attainment
F = failure

Note that meritorious means commendable or praiseworthy: a B, in other words, is earned for work that is above average. An important part of our effort in this course will be to identify what makes a composition strong, or for that matter average, or weak.

You must earn a C- or higher in order to pass Seminar in Composition.

You are welcome to visit me during my office hours to discuss your work at any point during the semester! My office door is always open.

Blackboard (CourseWeb)

Resources for this course can be found online at the University's Blackboard website, <http://courseweb.pitt.edu>, where you can log in using your university computer account username and password. CourseWeb automatically uses your Pitt email account. If you use another account as well (e.g., Yahoo, AOL, Gmail, etc.), be sure to check your Pitt account at least once a day, since I will occasionally send email announcements to the class via CourseWeb. Tutorials are available under "Help" in the menu. If you have trouble logging on, call the help desk at (412) 624-HELP.

Submitting Assignments

Submit an electronic copy of every written assignment to Blackboard by the due date. Detailed instructions specific to each essay assignment (such as how many hardcopies to bring to class) will be posted on Blackboard at least one week before the due date.

Additional Resources

Composition Tutorial (an optional one-credit course)

After you've written your placement essay, I may recommend you enroll in Composition Tutorial, a one-credit course in which you meet weekly with a Writing Center consultant to address problems with structure, grammar, and punctuation. Once enrolled in Composition Tutorial, you will need to attend all sessions; be sure to bring your syllabus, assignments, and writing either in-progress or with my comments

The Writing Center

Located in 317-B Student Center, 4024 O'Hara St., the Writing Center is an excellent resource for working on your writing with an experienced consultant. Although you should not expect consultants to correct your papers for you, they can assist you in learning to organize, edit, and revise your essays. Consultants can work with you on a one-time basis, or they can work with you throughout the term. In some cases, I may send you to the Writing Center for help on a particular problem; otherwise, you can decide on your own to seek assistance. Their services are free, but you should call ahead (412-624-6556) or make an appointment online at www.english.pitt.edu/writingcenter/

Other Services

Pitt offers a number of services to help students who are struggling either academically or personally. If you are a student with a disability for which you will be seeking accommodations, contact Disability Resources and Services in 216 William Pitt Union or at 412-648-7890. Pitt also offers free counseling at the Counseling Center, located in 334 William Pitt Union (412-648-7930), for students who are experiencing personal or emotional difficulties.

draft schedule* of key assignments
(smaller assignments posted on Blackboard)

Monday	Wednesday	Friday
1/5	1/7	1/9
1/12 reading: Birkerts	1/14	1/16 Birkerts Warm-Up
1/19 MLK holiday (no class)	1/21	1/23 Birkerts Essay
1/26 workshop prep (no class, group 1 meets)	1/28 workshop (group 1)	1/30
2/2 reading: Sommers	2/4	2/6 Sommers Warm-Up
2/9	2/11	2/13 Sommers Essay
2/16 workshop prep (no class, group 2 meets)	2/18 workshop (group 2)	2/20 Continuing Essay, Part 2
2/23 Revision Warm-Up	2/25	2/27 Midterm Portfolio (includes Revision Essay)
3/2 workshop prep (no class, group 3 meets)	3/4 workshop (group 3)	3/6
3/9 spring break (no class)	3/11 spring break (no class)	3/13 spring break (no class)
3/16 Digital Warm-Up	3/18	3/20 Digital Essay
3/23 reading: Griffin	3/25	3/27 Combo Warm-Up
3/30	4/1	4/3 Combo Essay
4/6 workshop prep (no class, group 4 meets)	4/8 workshop (group 4)	4/10
4/13 workshop prep (no class, group 5)	4/15 workshop (group 5)	4/17 Continuing Essay, Part 3

Final Portfolio due online Thursday, 4/23