

Writing 2550A 200 (Fall 2026)
The English Language for Writers
Instructor: Michael Fox

Course description and objectives

This course will teach you about the English language. You'll learn that language, though it also evolves, functions like a machine, in predictable and systematic ways. Once you've learned how the machine works, you'll learn how to get the machine to do what you want, becoming a more effective communicator.

Required texts

Fromkin, Victoria, Robert Rodman, and Nina Hyams. *An Introduction to Language*. 11th ed., Cengage, 2021. **This textbook costs between \$80.00 (365-day rental) and \$137.65 (paperback). This edition is required.**

Course learning outcomes

Students who successfully complete this course should be able to do the following:

- Write and speak with a greater degree of clarity, confidence, and appropriateness to different kinds of readers and listeners, as a function of being able to identify and analyze how the English language works
- Understand and replicate the sounds and rhythms of language
- Understand and apply the principles of syntax and semantics in the original deployment of rhetorical devices, that is, figures and tropes
- Understand the fundamentals and evolution of Standard English and the ramifications of choice in diction, style, and register

Course requirements and grade allocations

The graded work in the course is as follows:

Quizzes (40%): We will have six quizzes, one for each of the main chapters in Fromkin (Chapters 1, 5, 6, 2, 3, and 4, in that order). Your best five quizzes will count. Quizzes will be in class.

Assignments (20%): We will have two short assignments (3 pages maximum). The first will ask you to analyze how sound and meaning go together (or don't) in a short piece, and the second will ask you to use the principles of the course to compose a brief work (this could be a poem, a passage from a speech, an advertisement, or even a comedy sketch). The assignments are due in Week 6 and Week 12.

Final exam (40%): We will have a final exam in the final exam period.

Students are responsible for checking the course OWL site (<https://westernu.brightspace.com/>) regularly for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class. If students need assistance with the course OWL site, they can seek support on the

[OWL Brightspace Help](#) page. Alternatively, they can contact the Western Technology Services Helpdesk. They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800.

Course Policies

Assignment Format

All assignments are to be “typed,” and must have your name, course name, section number, and instructor’s name on the first page. When using sources (unlikely, but not impossible!), you will be expected to follow MLA, APA, or Chicago citation practice.

Submitting Assignments

Assignments are due on the dates specified in the syllabus. Late work **will be penalized at 5% per day unless** I have permitted an extension of the due date. You must contact me ahead of time for an extension (see also the section “Accommodation Policy” below).

Attendance/Participation

I hope you will be “present” and participating – and I think the course could be difficult for some students without regular attendance – but there are no penalties for non-attendance. However, obviously, we have quizzes in six of the first nine classes: writing the quizzes is important (see further “Academic Accommodation,” below).

Student Conduct

This ought to go without saying, but please remember that *the use of any language that works against the values of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion will not be tolerated.*

Scholastic Offences, including Plagiarism

The University Senate requires the following statements, and Web site references, to appear on course outlines:

“Scholastic Offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, which can be found here: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement currently Western and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.”

“In this course, the use of AI (such as automatic translation tools, grammar checkers, ChatGPT) is prohibited, unless there has been discussion with and agreement by the instructor before beginning an assignment. If AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines, and/or other materials used in preparing assignments. Students are expected to retain these materials until after final grades have been entered. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, students may be asked to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against them.”

Prerequisites/Antirequisites

None.

Academic Accommodation

University policy on academic considerations is described [here](#). This policy requires that all requests for academic considerations must be accompanied by a self-attestation.

Please note that any academic considerations granted in this course will be determined by the instructor, in consultation with the academic advisors in your Faculty of Registration, in accordance with information presented in this course outline.

For procedures on how to submit Academic Consideration requests through the Student Absence Portal, please see the information posted on the Office of the Registrar's webpage:

https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academic_considerations/index.html

All requests for Academic Consideration must be made within 48 hours after the assessment date or submission deadline.

All academic consideration requests must include supporting documentation, which may include a Student Medical Certificate. Recognizing that formal documentation may not be available in some extenuating circumstances, the policy allows students to make one Academic Consideration request **without supporting documentation** in this course. However, the following assessments are excluded from this, and therefore always require formal supporting documentation:

In this course, because not all elements of the quizzes (only five of six quizzes get counted) are required in the calculation of the final course grade, the instructor reserves the right to deny academic consideration for missed quizzes.

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation_disabilities.pdf

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western:

(<https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Immediate help in the event of a crisis can be had by phoning 519-661-3030 (during class hours) or 519-433-2023 after class hours and on weekends.

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays and should give reasonable notice in writing (email), prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance.

Statement on Gender-based Sexual Violence

Western University [is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

<https://www.uwo.ca/health/studentsupport/survivorsupport/get-help.html>. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Other Student Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Academic Support and Engagement <https://academicsupport.uwo.ca/>

Intellectual Property and Copyright

All instructor-written materials (e.g., PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course and remain the instructor's intellectual property.

Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

Schedule

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|---------------------|---|
| September 9 | What is language? |
| September 16 | The establishment and evolution of Standard English (Fromkin, ch. 1) |
| September 23 | English sounds (Fromkin, ch. 5)
Quiz #1 |
| October 7 | English phonology: sounds meet (Fromkin, ch. 6)
Quiz #2 |
| October 21 | Case studies: patterns of rhythm and sound |
| October 28 | English morphology and etymology: making words (Fromkin, ch. 2)
Quiz #3
Assignment #1 |
| November 4 | English syntax: figures (Fromkin, ch. 3 [pp. 75-98 only])
Quiz #4 |
| November 11 | English semantics: tropes (Fromkin, ch. 4)
Quiz #5 |
| November 18 | Pragmatics: the importance of context
Quiz #6 |
| November 25 | Case studies: writers who play with language |
| December 2 | English stylistics and register (Fromkin, ch. 7) |
| December 9 | Language creation (an approach to review)
Assignment #2 (end of classes) |