

Instructor

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Office Hours: 9 – 10 MW,
and by appointment

Texts

- ☀ Daiker, etc. al., *The Writer's Options*, 5th ed. [Textbook Library]
- ☀ Articles available on D2L [from *The Best American Magazine Writing 2003* & other sources]
- ☀ audio texts [La Crosse (& other) Public Libraries, Internet, and instructor loans]
- ☀ D2L [<https://uwlax.courses.wisconsin.edu/>] and other web sites, including Writing-as-Game-Playing

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to help you develop your ability to write clear and effective prose.

Analysis and performance are equally important.

Course Goals *The overall goal is to become an athlete of the sentence.***Specific goals:**

1. write engaging and efficient **prose**,
2. expand your **observational techniques** and **skills**,
3. become skillful in **thinking analytically**,
 - A. develop **in-depth analyses** of *rhetoric, structure/genre, and prose techniques*
 - B. become skillful in **rhetorical analysis** and **planning**,
4. develop a **meaningful writing practice**
 - A. use **exploratory writing** for planning & to develop perception & understanding
 - B. play the **5 writing games** often, integrating them skillfully,
5. function effectively in a **community of inquiry**.

Disability Access If you have a condition or situation that will make any of this work difficult for you, please talk to me about it. We will find ways to accommodate your needs.

COURSE ACTIVITIES & REQUIREMENTS

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participation & Engagement 2. Writing Games 3. Course Journal 4. Listening | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Course Portfolio 6. Quiz Games 7. Transactional projects 8. Progress Reports |
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Grading: Engagement (with the course goals and activities) is not directly graded; however, weak engagement will lower your overall grade *because this course is grounded in a social construction theory of learning*. Requirements 1 through 5 are evaluated by effort & thoughtfulness; 6 -8 are evaluated by standards to be achieved. For an “A,” you must have at least an “A-” average in all requirements. To earn an “A/B,” you must have at “A-s” in #6 & #7 and not less than a “B” in the other 4. To earn a “B,” you must have at least a “B” in all activities. To earn a “B/C,” you must have at least “B’s” in 4 activities and not less than a “C” in the others. To earn a “C,” you must have “C’s” and above, not more than one “D’s,” no “F’s.”

Grading Scale—grades are based on criteria & standards, not on a “curve” or by “quotas.”

A=100-94	A/B=93-90	B=89-85	B/C=84-81	C=80-74	D=73-65
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Explanations of Course Activities/Requirements

This course is structured by using exploratory writing to

- 1) critically analyze the **primary traits of written texts** and, more importantly,
- 2) learn to play **the games writers play** in order to develop meaningful texts of your own.

The **primary traits** we'll analyze are

- *focus* and *purpose*
 - *development of content* (sustaining focus)
 - *structure*
 - *prose style*
 - *conventions & text design*
- with the *rhetoric*, the *genre*, and the *art* of the text coming through all the traits.

Focusing is a very rich concept and is also considered a meta-game

The **games** we'll play are

- *focusing* (sustaining & shifting it)
 - *developing* (through *narration*, *context*, & *analysis*)
 - *structuring* (through focus shifts)
 - *styling*
 - *designing*
- with *rhetoric*, *genre*, & *art* all-encompassing games

In good writing, all the traits of a text—all the games a writer is playing—function simultaneously, each affecting the others. That means that while *our primary focus* is on prose style, we will work with all of them, since each is a context for the others.

#1. PARTICIPATION & ENGAGEMENT: This course is grounded in—pervaded by—the theory that learning occurs through social construction: that is, you learn by individually constructing your understandings and then articulating them within social contexts that give you perspective about your constructions, enabling you to modify and develop them. Thus, the activities are designed to have both individual and social dimensions, and you must engage in both.

#2. WRITING GAMES: We'll be approaching writing as a set of games that are played by both writers and readers—games that can be isolated as exercises to develop understanding and skill. There are 4 “meta-games” (games pervading and underlying all the others) and 5 primary games—all of which are interconnected dimensions of writing: in this course being isolated for study and practice. The meta-games are *Focusing*, *Rhetoric*, *Genre*, and *Art*. The 5 primary games are *Focusing*, *Developing*, *Structuring*, *Styling*, and *Designing*. (*Focusing* is a very rich concept and may be understood as both a primary game and a meta-game.) This course is primarily about the “Styling” game—but all games have to be understood in the context of the others. You can play the styling game well only when you're playing all the other games well. We'll play *sentence analysis games* (to see & imagine sentence structures), *creative games* (to practice sentence and discourse techniques), and *editing games* (to practice putting all the concepts & techniques into play in real editing situations).

#3. COURSE JOURNAL: The course journal is the **exploratory writing** you do during and between classes to construct your understanding of the concepts and techniques we are studying. (Games—which are also exploratory writing—occurs in a separate section of the Course Portfolio.) Since exploratory writing is writing done for the purpose of learning, *it may be devoid of rhetorical or prose qualities*: it is done primarily to develop your understanding. And since you understand only what you can articulate, you should do a great deal of exploratory writing, trying to develop your comprehension. A second value of exploratory writing is that it provides a strong contrast to well-crafted prose. This section will be evaluated on how well you have used writing to construct deep understandings of the course concepts.

#4. LISTENING TO GREAT PROSE The goal is to develop your *ear* for skillful prose. There are many sources of recordings (although Murphy does not have a collection), including the La Crosse Public Library various media outlets (e.g., Wisconsin Public Radio has “Chapter a Day,” available as a broadcast or podcast.) Record what you listen to on the form provided (kept in the “Notes” section) and the time spent on the Course Requirements Check List. The assignment is to listen to highly accomplished **prose**—not poetry, not drama.

#5. The COURSE PORTFOLIO is an archive of **all the writing that you do for the course—both exploratory and transactional** (except for the D2L postings). If assigned work isn't in the portfolio at the end of the semester, it's considered not done. **Please adopt the following format for your Course Portfolio:**

- 1) Use a 3-ring notebook for 8½" X 11" paper
- 2) Put your name and "English 313" on the cover in the upper right corner.
- 3) Set the notebook up with 6 sections:
 - I. Basic Course Materials: a place to store this handout, the calendar/syllabus, the requirements check list—all material *not* connected with the course journal or writing games
 - II. Course Journal: exploratory writing done both *during* and *between* classes to construct your understanding of course concepts, including all the text analyses done.
 - III. Sentence Analysis Games: Sentence analysis games facilitate your ability to see & imagine a sentence can be structured/layered to increase its texture, depth of meaning, and conciseness.
 - IV. Creative Games: creative games give you practice with techniques and structures. Many work in tandem with the sentence analysis games to clarify potentials for sentence structures.
 - V. Editing Games: Editing games ask you to play all the writing games in the context of someone else's text. All editing games should be accompanied by a reflection about the primary strategies and concepts employed in the editing.

All games sections should contain appropriate writing games handouts as well as your efforts with the games: exploratory writing to develop understanding & skills.

Use **dialogue journal format** (*initial entries on the right-hand page, reflective entries on the opposite page*) for Sections II, III, IV & (especially Section V).

VI. Transactional Projects (including D2L exploratory work): a place to store *all the work done to create transactional writings*: all notes, plans, drafts, revisions, final copy for each project (final D2L copy is not necessary).

- 4) Entries in each section should be dated, labeled, and arranged in chronological order.

#6. QUIZ GAMES are in-class performance application, testing your understanding of specific game concepts & techniques. You'll be able to take a 2nd round if you're not satisfied with your 1st round score.

#7. TRANSACTIONAL Writings: Transactional writing is the arena in which prose style and editing come into play: you're crafting language in order to achieve purposes with a specific audience. However, since transactional/rhetorical writing involves all the writing games, we'll do only two (a film review and a character portrait)—in order to keep a strong, primary focus on the styling game.

D2L: We'll treat D2L entries as transactional, recognizing that the shared context of the course, the familiarity of the audience, and the low-stakes purposes push them down the continuum towards the *exploratory writing*. You will make three types of entries: Group Reports, Analytical Entries, and Game Example Entries. (See the D2L handout for explanation of each).

Transactional work also includes doing PEER REVIEWS: analyzing the work of other writers and giving constructive feedback to them is a very important skill for a writer. You will do peer reviews for the two transactional writings. To do them well, you have to understand both how texts work and how writers work.

#8. PROGRESS REPORTS: You'll write a progress report early in the semester and another at the end of the semester, reflecting on how, through your writing practice, you are understanding & achieving the course goals.

Creating a Writing Practice

The key to doing well in this course is to **develop a sophisticated writing practice**—in which the fundamental elements are the writing games and the course journal. If your writing practice is intense and serious, all the other activities—and your development as a writer—will fall into place

Writing practice is like music practice or sports practice or yoga practice or meditation practice: *something you do every day*—as routinely as brushing your teeth. You practice regularly for the discipline and for the cumulative effect. Why? Because it's the only way to develop as a writer, just as regular practice is the only way to develop as a musician or an athlete or a surgeon. The most important thing is to make the practice *your own*: something you create, something you are proud and fond of. **When you practice something regularly, methodically, you are said to “have a practice”:** *something fundamental to your character, your identity, your psyche*. Here are some suggestions:

1. **Set aside a regular time to work.** It may not be the same time every day, but it should be regular—at least 5 days a week, lasting an hour . . . and more.
2. **Use exploratory writing to review and plan your commitments, projects, and plans:** this planning would be for ALL your courses and activities—not just this course. *Think particularly about how you might use techniques from this class to study for other classes*—thus, getting studying done for two classes in one action (i.e., improving your exploratory writing while using it to study for another course).
3. **Follow a routine.** Here's one possibility for the work in this course:
 - A. **Review** your course journal and game entries and **write reflective/exploratory entries** on the notes and entries you've read, using the “dialogue journal” approach: reflections *opposite* entries (e.g., initial entries on the right, reflections on the left-hand page). Hint: move quickly, making reflective entries on the most important ideas. Try to get the big picture: how the major concepts fit together and lead to techniques, how the techniques work & concepts work together.
 - B. **List and prioritize your work**, getting a full sense of what you need to do for this class.
 - C. **Read/analyze assigned readings**, paying attention not only to the meaning and how you can develop the skills described in the text but also to how the writer played the writing games
 - D. **Play the assigned writing game(s).**
 - E. **Construct sentence-level/ layer analyses.**
 - F. **Write a reflection** on an analytical game, on a course journal entry, or a more general entry on concepts or techniques (reflection the next session.) *Then, play either*
 - G. **an additional Focus & Development game** (see handout), or a **Mindfulness game** (see handout), or a **Styling game** (see the “whole discourse” exercises in *The Writer's Options*: p. I-5 in the Index has a complete list), or a **Structuring game**, or a **Conventions/Designing game** or **Analysis/Editing game**. OR
 - H. **Work on drafting or revising or editing** a transactional project or a D2L entry.
 - I. **Set a timer when you begin and record the amount of time you spent practicing** (record it both practice work, next to the date & entry label and on the “Course Requirements Check List”).

QuizGame scores are one indication of what kind of practice you need. Concept Quizzes indicate more Course Journal work is needed.
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Very important: although your practice fits into your daily life as a regular routine, when you are practicing, nothing you do should be done routinely. Instead, **always work mindfully**.