

English 4 Syllabus

English 4, Section 613: Composition & Critical Thinking
Fall 2007: 12:30-1:50 Tu & Th in Room 736
Office Hours & Place: TBA

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→ **Online Reference: QCounty.com (follow link to Solano College classes)**

Prerequisite: English 1

Visceral Course Objectives: English 4 is about argument, but not the kind of argument you may have with family, friends and classmates, or the kinds of ranting arguments between opposing forces that too often pollute our media and confuse our thinking. No, argument in English 4 involves close observation, critical thinking, analysis, research, and persuasive writing that has the power to change opinions one reader at a time. And because I hope you will use what you learn to do exactly that, in this workshop class you'll be studying the fundamentals of argument writing, reading arguments that work, helping your classmates write more effective arguments, and composing arguments that you believe have the power to change minds.

Ethical class behavior: In dealing with me and your classmates, treat others as ends, not as means; be happy for others when they succeed and be understanding when they struggle; be respectful of others' beliefs, most especially when they're different from your own; and be true to all these things even when no one is watching.

Required Texts:

1. *From Critical Thinking to Argument: A Portable Guide* by Sylvan Barnet and Hugo Bedau;
2. *Contemporary and Classic Arguments: A Portable Anthology* by Sylvan Barnet and Hugo Bedau;
3. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* by Malcolm Gladwell;
4. A college-level dictionary.

Suggested Texts:

1. A Roget's thesaurus, which is organized by meaning rather than spelling;
2. The grammar handbook by Little Brown, *LB Brief*, which is available in the bookstore packaged with a dictionary for approximately the same price as the handbook alone;
3. *They Say/ I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein;
4. *The Elements of Style*, 4th edition, by William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White, which is a short classic of English rhetoric that can be either intimidating or inspirational, depending on your point of view.

Concrete Course Objectives: This composition course, which will be divided into three parts -- a beginning, middle and end -- will involve lectures and group workshops focused on learning how to read critically, do academic research, and how to structure expository essays using developmental forms and argument structures. There will be considerably more reading each week than you had in English 1, and you will write a combination of long and short essays that will amount to at least 6,000 words (24 double-spaced pages) by the end of the semester.

Beginning: As E. M. Forster wrote, "How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" When we write to understand, we slow our thought processes down. We read critically, research, brainstorm, plan, pre-write, write, edit and revise, repeating this process iteratively until we begin to discover what we really mean to say. Mastery of this writing cycle and of the rhetorical structures that support it -- description, explanation, examples, comparison, causation, to name just a few -- depend critically on learning the importance of rewriting from rethinking, from performing additional research, and from receiving audience feedback, which I and your peers in this class will provide. This is a process that you learned in English 1 that will be reviewed in English 4 within the context of Barnet's and Bedau's *From Critical Thinking to Argument* and Parts 1 & 3 in *Contemporary and Classic Arguments*, which present in detail the structure of argument. In this beginning, you'll practice what you learn by writing short papers, usually no more than 750 words, three double-spaced, typed pages, which is the standard length of an opinion piece in a newspaper.

Middle: Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point*, published in 2000, has had a significant impact on our understanding of how some ideas seem to stick, spreading through societies like a contagious disease. You will analyze Gladwell's book, chapter by chapter, in workshop groups and will present his ideas to the class for discussion. In addition to short research and writing assignments, you will then apply Gladwell's concepts to the composition of a six- to eight-page paper on an idea or product for which you analyze the "law of the few," "the

stickiness factor,” and “the power of context.”

End: In this final portion of the course, you will work toward the goal of submitting an argument paper to a publication such as a newspaper or a forum such as your local city council or some other deliberative body. To prepare you for this final paper, we will focus on the casebook section, Part 2, of *Contemporary & Classic Arguments*. Working with your workshop group, you will analyze one of the casebook studies, write one or more papers, and present your findings to the class. While doing this you will also individually select, research and write a 750-word argument paper that you will present to the class and submit to the larger community.

Requirements & Grades:

Since your on-time attendance and classroom participation are critical to your success, it is imperative that you be in class from 12:30-1:50, Tuesday and Thursday, ready to work with required texts and a dictionary. Because you are allowed by school policy to miss one class for each credit, you have three free passes, but for each additional class missed beyond three, your grade will be lowered by 10 percent.

- 1) **60% of grade:** Your essays are due on the assigned date. If you hand in your paper on that date, you are allowed one significant rewrite, due within a week of receiving your paper back, to which you must attach your original. Essays must be typed, double-spaced, and follow MLA guidelines.
- 2) **20% of grade:** You will be graded on your classroom and workshop participation, which requires that you: take an active and cooperative approach to classroom discussions; get drafts to your workshop members on time; constructively do your best to help others improve their essays and arguments, always remembering that we feel vulnerable when others read what we've written; and cooperate and work hard whenever you or your group is presenting to the class.
- 3) **20% of grade:** There will be occasional quizzes, an examination upon completion of the beginning and middle portions of the class, and a final exam.

Important: Since one-on-one help can be the best kind of help when everywhere you look there are walls without doors and the sky is falling down, please make an effort to see me during office hours or make an appointment to meet with me.

Finally, will you be successful in English 4? Most students who struggle in my classes are trying to do too much because they start each week believing that there are plenty of hours to get everything done. Here's a quick calculation to help you determine whether you have enough time to do well:

Expect to spend two hours for homework for each class unit. Also don't forget that you need to sleep, eat, spend time with friends and family, get to all the places you need to go via car or public transportation, and also that you need to exercise and waste time to preserve your mental health. Let's say this is 15 hours each day (8 for sleeping, 2 for eating, 2 for commuting, and 3 hours for other things), which leaves you with just $(24 - 15) \times 7$ hours per week = 63 hours. Now do the calculation below to see how much time you need:

Hrs of work per week = _____
Hrs in class per week = _____
Hrs of homework per week = _____ units this semester x 2 = _____
Add these to get total hours needed for work+class+study = _____

If your total is more than 60 hours, you should consider cutting back on either work or school to be successful in English 4 *and* your other classes.