



# Syllabus for *Teaching Writing in the Secondary School*

(An Undergraduate Preservice English Education Course)

## Course Description

This course is designed to teach you how to teach writing to secondary school students. It will be very practice- and activity-oriented; the goal is for you to leave the class with the ability to design writing instruction appropriate to your students' needs, and you will do so by engaging in the sorts of activities that you will eventually design. Ideally, you will be able to apply this knowledge during your field experiences and student teaching, and eventually in your teaching career.

## Texts

- Smagorinsky, P., L. R. Johannessen, E. Kahn, and T. McCann. 2010. *The Dynamics of Writing Instruction: A Structured Process Approach for Middle and High School*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Weaver, C., and J. Bush. 2008. *Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Writing Study Group of the NCTE Executive Committee. 2004. *NCTE Beliefs About the Teaching of Writing*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English. Available at [www.ncte.org/positions/statements/writingbeliefs](http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/writingbeliefs)

## Fun Fact

*Syllabus* began life as a printer's error in a fifteenth-century edition of Cicero's *Epistles to the Atticans*. In this work Cicero had written "indices . . . quos vos Graeci . . . sittubas appelatis," meaning "indexes, which were called sittubas by the Greeks." The printer misprinted "syllabos" for "sittubas," and *syllabos*, later slightly changed to *syllabus*, became a synonym for index. Its meaning of index or table of contents was later expanded to mean "an outline or other brief statement of a discourse, the contents of a curriculum, etc." (From *The Facts on File Encyclopedia of Word and Phrase Origins*, by Robert Hendrickson.)

## Course Project

The purpose of the course is *not* to teach you how to make assignments but to teach you how to teach students to write. That is, if you assign any kind of writing—analytic essay, comparison/contrast essay, narrative, etc.—you then assign *yourself* the responsibility of teaching your students *how* to produce that kind of writing. You may do the following assignment either alone or with one or two other students. Working collaboratively will not have a negative effect on your grade.

Your assignment is to design writing instruction that you can use with students in your teaching assignment, either during your field experiences/student teaching or in your eventual job. Commonly in schools, writing instruction consists of giving assignments and then grading them. Perhaps a model of a finished product will be provided to students but little else. Much of the "teaching" then comes in correcting errors in the students' writing and including remarks explaining what the students should have done, if you'd taught them how. For this class you will design instruction that teaches students procedural or strategic knowledge; that is, you will teach them *how* to produce the kind of writing that you are looking for.

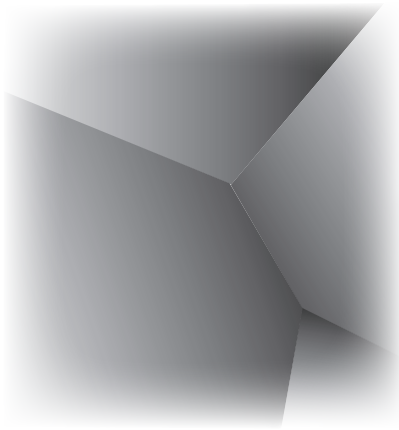
The task you are assigning may either (a) take a new approach to one of the tasks outlined in *The Dynamics of Writing Instruction* (fictional narrative, personal narrative, comparison and contrast essay, argument essay, extended definition essay, research-based argument), or (b) involve instruction in a different task (e.g., parody, satire, modern fairy tale, cause-and-effect essay, how-to explanation, literary analysis, evaluative essay, description, sonnet, descriptive research paper, etc.).

Each design will include:

1. A description of the context in which you anticipate teaching the unit, including such factors as state standards, district curriculum, school or department curriculum, demographic issues that affect your students' school achievement, expectations of a mentor teacher or department chair, etc.
2. A rationale for both the task you are assigning and the approach you take in order to teach it.
3. An account of the assumptions that you make about your students' entry-level characteristics, such as their experiences with writing, their knowledge about how to write in various genres and for different audiences, their knowledge about writing conventions, their potential for improving during any short-term writing instruction, etc. You CANNOT say that you assume that they already know everything that is involved in producing the kind of writing you are assigning; otherwise, there would be no point in teaching it. You should always assume that your students lack much of the knowledge that you have; that's why they are students and you are the teacher.
4. Instructional design that clearly teaches students how to write the form/genre/task that you are teaching them. This instruction should:
  - Begin with a task analysis in which you outline the kinds of knowledge that students need in order to complete a particular writing task successfully. This task analysis should

provide the basis for the activities that you plan; that is, if you determine that in order to write a comparison/contrast essay students must know how to identify similarities and differences between two given things, then you must design activities that involve them in making such distinctions.

- Clearly scaffold students' learning by beginning with familiar, accessible knowledge that they can easily put to use (e.g., arguing about their favorite pizza vendor, comparing and contrasting different hair styles, explaining how to make a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich, evaluating familiar television programs or recording artists, etc.) and gradually engaging students in increasingly complex tasks that involve the same knowledge or procedures (e.g., moving from evaluating familiar television programs to evaluating a set of school rules to evaluating a work of literature).
- Involve students in a combination of small-group, large-group, and individual work.
- Include opportunities for peer or teacher feedback at various points of development (e.g., writing groups in which students critique one another's drafts, writing conferences between students and teachers, etc.).
- Include a rubric that enables you to evaluate students' work fairly and systematically. Examples of rubrics are available at <http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php>. There should be a clear relation between your evaluation criteria and your instruction. That is, if you will grade students on a matter of form (e.g., paragraphing) or a matter of content (e.g., providing counterarguments and rebuttals in an argument), then you are responsible for teaching students how to produce these qualities in your instruction. Your criteria should be focused on a few specific aspects of writing that you teach during the lessons, rather than evaluating every single quality that a skillful writer employs.



# Class Schedule

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## Week 1: Introduction

### *Teacher-led review*

Review syllabus, course readings, course project, and class schedule.

### *Read*

*NCTE Beliefs About the Teaching of Writing* (Writing Study Group of the National Council of Teachers of English Executive Committee 2004).

### *Activity*

In small groups, discuss the *NCTE Beliefs About the Teaching of Writing* by addressing the following questions:

1. How could you summarize the *NCTE Beliefs* in order to explain them to a friend who is unfamiliar with writing pedagogy?
2. Do any of these beliefs seem strange or counterintuitive to you? If so, which ones, and why?
3. Compare these beliefs to the writing instruction you had as a high school student. To what extent did your high school English teachers follow these beliefs and practices?

Then, as a class, discuss the ideas generated in the small groups.

### *Writing*

Begin to draft your “beliefs statement” about the teaching of writing. This statement may, but need not, share the perspective of the *NCTE Beliefs*.

### *Reading assignment for week 2*

*The Dynamics of Writing Instruction*, Foreword, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2

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## Week 2

### Activity

In a group of three or four students, discuss the eight scenarios in Chapter 1 of *The Dynamics of Writing Instruction*. As part of your discussion, use examples from both your own experiences as a student and your field experiences to help clarify your positions on what contributes to an effective writing pedagogy. Which of the eight approaches are you most comfortable with as a student? As a teacher? Which would you least benefit from as a student? Be prepared to defend your answers. In addition, if you can think of other ways of teaching writing that you think are either exemplary or horrific, include them in your discussion.

Then, as a class, exchange and develop your views of writing instruction based on your small-group discussions.

### Writing

Return to your “beliefs statement” from week 1 and revise it following the discussion.

### Activity

Share your beliefs statements in small groups and discuss one another’s evolving positions about teaching writing.

Then discuss your belief statements as a class.

### Reading assignment for week 3

*The Dynamics of Writing Instruction*, Chapter 3, Teaching Fictional Narratives

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## Week 3

### Activity

In small groups, consider the instruction in Chapter 3, Teaching Fictional Narratives, in light of (a) your beliefs statement; (b) the teaching of fictional narratives you received as a middle and high school student; and (c) the teaching of fictional narratives you have observed (if any) in your field experiences. How are they similar and different? What different effects follow from the different approaches to teaching fictional narratives that have emerged in your discussions?

Then, as a class, address the same questions.

### Activity

In small groups, begin discussing the course project you will undertake. Today, *generate a description of the context in which you anticipate teaching the unit, including such factors as state standards, district curriculum, school or department curriculum, demographical issues that affect your students’ school achievement, expectations of a mentor teacher or department chair, etc.* Try to anticipate the setting of your teaching, and how it will affect what you teach your students how to do.

Then, as a class, share your ideas about how the setting of your teaching will affect the kinds of tasks you assign and how you will teach students procedures for writing in these genres.

### Reading assignment for week 4

*The Dynamics of Writing Instruction*, Chapter 4, Teaching Personal Experience Narratives

## Week 4

### Activity

In small groups, compare and contrast Chapters 3 and 4 on teaching fictional and personal experience narratives. What elements are included in both? In what ways are they different? Are any activities interchangeable between the two instructional sequences?

Then, as a class, report on and extend the ideas generated in your small groups.

### Activity

Continue to discuss your course project in small groups. Identify the task that you hope to develop your course project around. Discuss *a possible rationale for both the task you are assigning and the approach you take in order to teach it*. As part of this discussion, take into account Chapters 1–4 of *The Dynamics of Writing Instruction*, your beliefs statement, and what you know about teaching writing based on your experiences as a student and your field experiences.

### Reading assignment for week 5

*The Dynamics of Writing Instruction*, Chapter 5, Teaching Argumentation Essays

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## Week 5

### Activity

In small groups, outline the process you would go through in using a structured process approach to teaching writing. What steps are essential? What steps do you consider optional? How does this design process compare and contrast with other approaches with which you are familiar? What benefits and problems follow from the various approaches that you consider?

Then, as a class, make the process of instructional design explicit.

### Writing

Return to your beliefs statement and revise it based on your discussions, activities, and field experiences thus far. Then share your revised belief statements, first in small groups and then in a whole-class discussion.

### Reading assignment for week 6

*The Dynamics of Writing Instruction*, Chapter 6, Teaching Comparison and Contrast Essays

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## Week 6

### Activity

In small groups, discuss how the structured process for teaching narrative writing (fictional and personal experience) and expository writing (argumentation and comparison/contrast) in Chapters 3–6 is both similar and different. What considerations should you make as a teacher when the purpose and genre of writing are either similar or different from one task to the next?

Then air your ideas as a class.

### Activity

In small groups, consider, relative to the instruction in your course project, *the assumptions that you make about your students' entry-level characteristics, such as their experiences with writing, their knowledge about how to write in various genres and for different audiences, their knowledge about writing conventions, their potential for improving during any short-term writing instruction, etc.* Given what the students do and do not know, what will you need to teach them how to do so that they succeed in both immediate task-oriented writing and in similar sorts of writing that they undertake later?

Then, as a class, discuss your assumptions about students and the procedures needed to teach students to produce successful writing.

### Reading assignment for week 7

*The Dynamics of Writing Instruction*, Chapter 7, Teaching Extended Definition Essays

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## Week 7

### Activity

In small groups, discuss the aspects of structured process teaching you are having the greatest difficulty understanding and putting into practice. What do you need to know in order to resolve these problems?

Then, as a class, identify difficulties you are having both conceptually and practically with using a structured process approach to design writing instruction.

### Activity

In small groups, discuss possible *task analyses in which you outline the kinds of knowledge that students need in order to complete the particular writing task you are teaching successfully. This task analysis should provide the basis for the activities that you plan; that is, if you determine that in order to write a comparison/contrast essay students must know how to identify similarities and differences between two given things, then you must design activities that involve them in making such distinctions.* What do students need to know in order to do the kind of writing you are teaching them how to do, and what kinds of activities will help them learn processes that help them produce this writing?

Then, as a class, share your task analyses and critique one another's ideas to help sharpen them.

### Reading assignment for week 8

*The Dynamics of Writing Instruction*, Chapter 8, Teaching Research Papers

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## Week 8

### Activity

In small groups, discuss how you learned how to write a research report in either high school or college. What aspects of that instruction were particularly useful? What parts of the teaching were either wasteful or counterproductive? How did that instruction compare and contrast with the instructional sequence outlined in Chapter 8? What do you find valuable from among all

the different approaches considered during this discussion? How would you teach the writing of research papers, given all of these considerations?

Then, as a class, draw on your small-group discussions to help develop your understanding of a process for teaching the writing of research papers.

### Activity

In small groups, discuss how, for your course project, you would *clearly scaffold students' learning by beginning with familiar, accessible knowledge that they can easily put to use and gradually engage students in increasingly complex tasks that involve the same knowledge or procedures*. What kinds of gateway activities would allow students to have early success with the type of task you are teaching? What activities could follow them at levels of increasing difficulty?

Then, as a class, critique and learn from these ideas.

### Reading assignment for week 9

*The Dynamics of Writing Instruction*, Chapter 9, Putting It All Together: A Writing Curriculum

## Week 9

### Activity

Engage in a jigsaw activity using the following questions. In this activity you will participate in two sets of groupings (assuming a class of twenty-five students): (1) a “home” group consisting of five students; and (2) an “expert” group consisting of one member from each home group. After the home groups form, each student draws a number from 1–5. Each student drawing 1 becomes part of expert group 1; each student drawing 2 becomes part of expert group 2, etc. Then re-form into expert groups, each group taking on two questions:

#### Expert Group 1

1. How can teaching the process of writing be accommodated within the other demands of teaching the English/language arts curriculum?
2. How do you envision creating a curricular “spiral” so that students return to writing tasks routinely across the years of secondary education?

#### Expert Group 2

1. How might you revise Figure 9–1 for the school in which you are teaching?
2. What writing tasks do you think would be appropriate for the units in Figure 9–1, and then for units that you would substitute for the ones currently listed?

#### Expert Group 3

1. How would you create a writing curriculum that is well-integrated with the literature curriculum?
2. How would you create a writing curriculum that is well-integrated with the language curriculum?

#### Expert Group 4

1. How would you create a writing curriculum that is responsive to the demands of testing mandates, while also being well-integrated with the literature and language curricula?



2. Would you emphasize any particular kinds of writing (literary analysis, extended definition, personal narratives, etc.) over others during the course of schooling? If so, why and how?

### Expert Group 5

1. In planning a writing curriculum, how would you attend to the needs of English language learners and others whose cultural backgrounds do not prepare them well for the expectations of the curriculum?
2. How would you integrate technology into the overall writing curriculum?

After each expert group discusses its questions for about 30 minutes, everyone returns to her or his home group. Each “expert” then has 10 or 15 minutes to review with the home group the issues covered in her or his expert group discussion.

Then, as a class, discuss the issues from *The Dynamics of Writing Instruction* that you have found most confusing, compelling, informative, or otherwise worth pursuing further.

### Reading assignment for week 10

*Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing*, Chapter 1, Toward a Middle Way; Chapter 2, Grammar, Grammars, and the Traditional Teaching of Grammar; and Chapter 3, What Works in Teaching Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing

## Week 10

### Activity

In small groups, discuss the following prompt: In your experiences as a student, how was grammar instruction managed? What did you learn from this instruction? What did you find effective and ineffective about this instruction? How do your experiences mesh with the information in Chapters 1–3 of *Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing*?

Then, as a class, discuss your prior experiences with teaching and learning grammar and Weaver and Bush’s outline of the issues in the first three chapters of *Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing*.

### Activity

In small groups, discuss how, in relation to your instructional design, you plan to *involve students in a combination of small-group, large-group, and individual work*. Are there particular activities that are best done in one of these settings? Is there an optimal sequence for the different settings, or can they be sequenced randomly? Help each designer make the best available decisions on how to vary the students’ activity structure over the course of the unit of instruction.

Then, as a class, discuss the role of activity setting in instructional design.

### Reading assignment for week 11

*Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing*, Chapter 4, Teaching Grammar Throughout the Writing Process; Chapter 5, From Ice Cream to Dragons: Adjectival Modifiers at Work; and Chapter 6, Bringing in the Rest of the Gang: More Adjectival Modifiers

## Week 11

### Activity

In small groups, discuss the following prompt: In your experiences as a secondary school and college student, how was the teaching of grammar tied to your writing and speaking? Did the grammar instruction improve either your speaking or your writing? How did it affect your attitude toward the discipline of English? Based on your experiences and the ideas outlined in Chapters 4–6 of *Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing*, how do you anticipate that you will teach grammar in your own classroom?"

Then, as a class, consider the relation among grammar instruction, writing, and speaking.

### Activity

In small groups, discuss how each member has *included opportunities for peer or teacher feedback at various points of development (e.g., writing groups in which students critique one another's drafts, writing conferences between students and teachers, etc.)* in his or her unit design. Is it "cheating" for students to get help of this sort? Are students sufficiently expert to provide one another with useful feedback? How do you address occasions when student feedback does more harm than good? Does the peer feedback you have engaged in while learning to design writing instruction this semester help you think about how to use peer response in your own secondary school teaching?

Then, as a class, explore the role of in-process feedback for student writing.

### Reading assignment for week 12

*Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing*, Chapter 7, Revision to the Rescue; Chapter 8, Editing Begins with Observation: Adverbial Clauses and the AAAWWUBBIS; and Chapter 9, Editing: Approaching the Bugaboo in Diverse Classrooms

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## Week 12

### Activity

In small groups, discuss the following prompt: As a student, to what extent have your teachers helped you with the revising and editing of your writing? How do Weaver and Bush consider revising and editing in light of your experiences as a student? How is revising and editing managed by the teachers you are observing during your field experiences? What would you do in your own teaching of language and writing to make it responsive to what you now find important about the clarity of written expression?

Then, as a class, exchange ideas about revising and editing based on what you have explored in your small-group discussions.

### Activity

In small groups, consider the ways in which you will assess student writing. Discuss how you intend to *include a rubric that enables you to evaluate students' work fairly and systematically so that there is a clear relation between your evaluation criteria and your instruction. Your criteria should be focused on a few specific aspects of writing that you teach during the lessons, rather than evaluating every single quality that a skillful writer employs.* Help each student writer develop a fair means of assessment that is clearly tied to the instruction and is easily understood in terms of your expectations.

Then, as a class, discuss how to develop assessment criteria and use rubrics to help students understand a teacher's expectations for their writing.

### *Reading assignment for week 13*

*Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing*, Chapter 10, Rescuing Expository Writing from the Humdrum: From Rhetoric to Grammar; Chapter 11, Grammar: Rocks and Mortar; and Chapter 12, Making Decisions That Make a Difference: Grammar and the “6 Traits” of Writing

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## Week 13

### *Activity*

In small groups, discuss the following prompt: Many English/language arts standards identify six traits of writing. Do you agree with the idea that all writing has six common traits? If so, why? If not, why not?

Then, as a class, explore the extent to which there are universal traits to all good writing, or whether the quality of writing is dependent on occasion, readership, task, and other factors.

### *Activity*

In small groups, discuss issues of language use that arise in each group member’s instructional sequence. Is each of you taking into account appropriate issues of language usage? Are these issues being effectively addressed through instruction? How might each instructional sequence more sensitively and effectively address issues of language usage?

Then, as a class, consider the practical application of knowledge of language instruction in the teaching of writing.

### *Reading assignment for week 14*

*Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing*, Chapter 13, Rethinking How to Respond to Students’ Errors; Chapter 14, Code-Switching: Teaching Standard English in African American Classrooms; and Chapter 15, The Transformative Classroom: Rethinking Grammar Instruction for English Language Learners

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## Week 14

### *Activity*

In small groups, discuss the following questions: What issues of standard language usage do you anticipate you will face in your teaching? How will you address issues of language variation in students’ speaking and writing? How will you make these decisions in the broader context of district, state, and national standards, curricula, and assessments?

Then, as a class, consider how to manage issues of language variation in students’ speech and writing.

### *Activity*

Workshop your unit of instruction in your small groups, using the standards outlined in *The Dynamics of Writing Instruction* to help you identify the strengths and weaknesses of your designs.

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## Week 15

Share your final unit design with the class and receive feedback.