

English 303
Scientific and Technical Writing

Fall 2026-2027 **ENGL 303-01** (3 credit hours)

Time & Place

Tue & Thur
9:30 - 10:45 AM
Humanities 215

Instructor Contact Info

Yuan Zhao (he/him)
y0zhao23@louisville.edu

Office Hours

Humanities 333
Wed 9:30 - 11: 30 AM
And by Appointment

Course Description.

Introduction

Technical communication scholars identify two sets of literacy skills—functional literacy and critical literacy—and students need both of them. To put them in plain language and relate them to our course, functional literacy responds to how to use tools, and critical literacy involves reflections on the use of tools and the process of learning/using processes. In this course, we will train these two skills by teamworking for multiple projects, interplaying with various platforms, and reflecting on a number of roles in technical communication situations. In addition, we will engaged and prolonged conversations about AI literacy.

The focus of English 303 is recognizing and responding in writing to different rhetorical situations in scientific and technical discourse communities. A student in English 303 should expect to create and revise documents in multiple genres. Each document should establish a clear purpose, sense of audience awareness, and sense of the writer's presence and position. A student in English 303 should expect to complete four-to-six projects.

Plan & Goals.

Rhetorical Knowledge

By the end of English 303, students should demonstrate the ability to produce writing and use oral communication skills that

- Demonstrate knowledge of audience, which includes the ability to determine appropriate scope, genre, technical vocabulary and detail, and tone when writing for both technical and non-technical audiences
- Demonstrate knowledge of context, which includes analyzing professional cultures, social contexts, and audiences to determine how they shape the various purposes and forms of writing
- Demonstrate an ability to use, explain and integrate quantitative information with verbal prose to achieve particular rhetorical purposes
- Demonstrate knowledge of research methods that produce professional documents, including analyzing professional contexts and assessing and summarizing information resources

Processes

By the end of English 303, students should demonstrate the ability to produce writing that

- Demonstrates knowledge of the writing process, which means engaging various strategies for planning, researching, drafting, revising, and editing documents that respond effectively and ethically to scientific and technical situations and audiences
- Demonstrates knowledge of collaborative strategies, such as writing in a team setting, working and communicating on-line, setting and achieving project goals, and responding constructively to peers' work

Conventions

By the end of English 303, students should demonstrate the ability to produce writing that

- Demonstrates control of the editing process, including the production of documents which exhibit concise language, appropriate technical vocabulary, appropriate format, proper sentence structure, and standardized grammar
- Demonstrates knowledge of document design, including the implementation of various principles of format, layout, and design of professional visual/verbal documents that meet multiple needs and integrate a variety of written, visual, and oral elements of design

Course Information.

Course Prerequisite

English 102 or 105.

Written Communication Statement

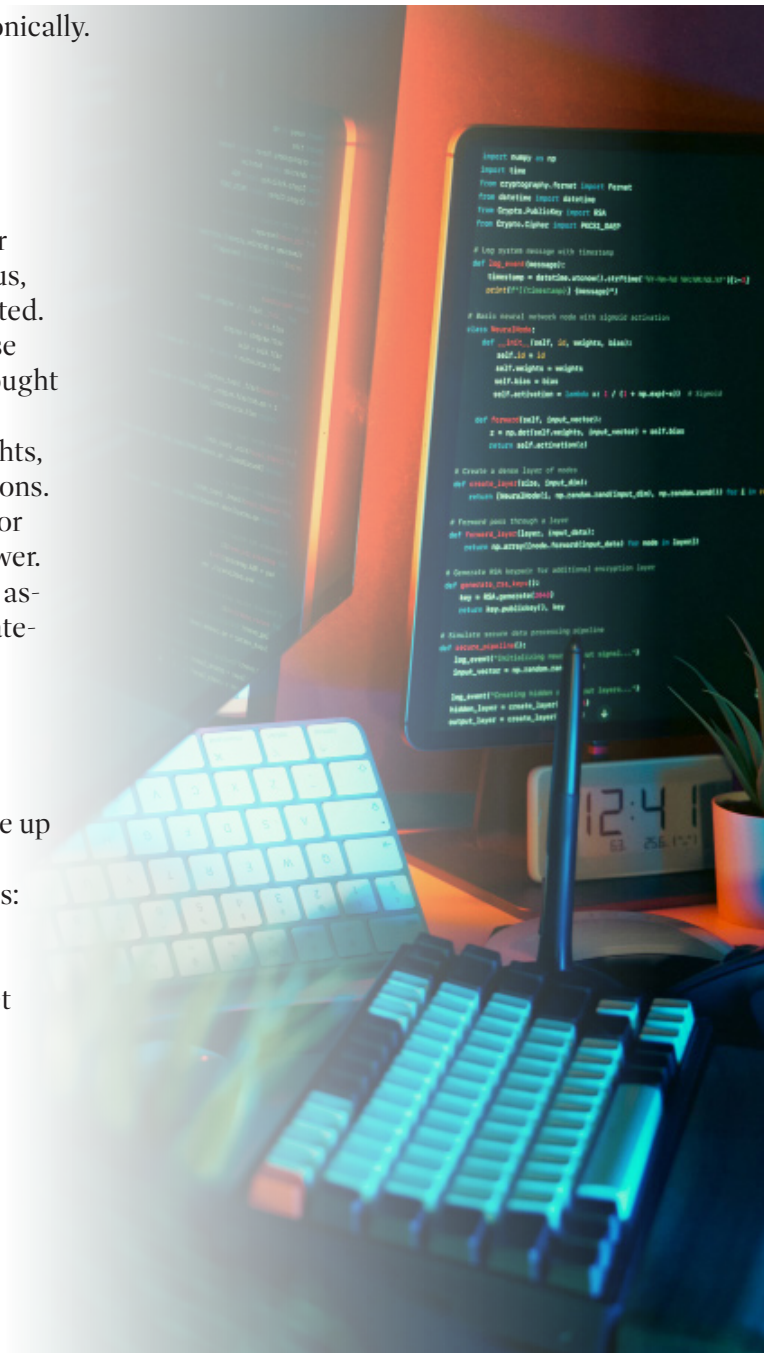
Approved for the Arts and Sciences upper-level requirement in written communication (WR).

Texts and materials:

- Baker, Suzie. **Professional and Technical Writing**. OER Commons, 2019.
  This textbook is free and produced under license "Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial 4.0." You will need to create a free account with the publisher in order to download a PDF copy of the textbook.
- Other reading materials will be provided electronically.

In Class Participation

The interdependency between you and the instructor matters a great deal to the success of this course. Thus, your contributions to discussions are much appreciated. This means that, to ensure the class is effective, please make sure you've read the assigned readings and thought about the corresponding questions before coming to class. Get prepared for the class and share your insights, thoughts and questions. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Sometimes, we are not looking for a resolution, and for humanities, not every question can get a perfect answer. Don't skip class even if you cannot finish reading the assigned texts. We will talk about effective reading strategies in class.



Attendance

According to our grading contract, everyone can have up to 4 excused absences.
If you will miss class, I recommend doing three things:

- email me about your absence
- submitting any homework on time
- asking your peers what you missed so you can get caught up

Grading Policy.

Labor-Based Grading Contract

- A labor-based grading contract is offered to explain in detail how I assess your performance and how you can get letter grades. Please read the contact from page 16 of this syllabus. The default grade for this course is A.
- By staying in this course and attending class, you accept this contract and agree to abide by it, in effect "signing" it.

You are guaranteed a course grade of "A" (4.00) if you meet all of the following conditions.

- Participation in good faith. Your job is to participate as fully as possible and meet our course goals and your personal learning goals. You cannot miss more than 3 class sessions. Any absence due to a university-sponsored group activity (e.g., sporting event, band, another class field trip, etc.), military-related absences (e.g., deployment, work, duty, etc.), or documented illness will be considered independently of the above attendance policy, as long as the student has FIRST provided written documentation as soon as they are aware of the days they will be absent.
- Avoid turning in late or incomplete work. You agree to turn in properly and on time all work and assignments expected of you in the spirit they are assigned. During the semester, you may, however, turn in a few assignments late. The exact number of those late assignments is stipulated in the table. **Late work** is defined as any work or document due that is turned in AFTER the due date/time BUT within 72 hours of the deadline. After 72 hours, the work will be considered as **missed**. **Incomplete work** is defined as any assignment submitted before the due date/time but fails to meet all of the labor expectations.
- Do not miss work. You agree not to miss any work expected of you. If you turn in late work AFTER the 72 hours stipulated in Late/Incomplete Work, then it will be considered "**missed work**," which is a more serious mark against your grading contract. Complete all work in the spirit it is assigned, on time, and in good faith. You agree to turn in on time and in the appropriate manner all the labor assigned in the spirit it

Knowing Where You Stand

- To know about any late or missed assignments I have recorded that may lower your final grade, you agree to check your Blackboard grade book frequently.
- In the grade book, I will mark complete work with 1 point, late/incomplete work with 0.5 point, and missed work with 0 point.

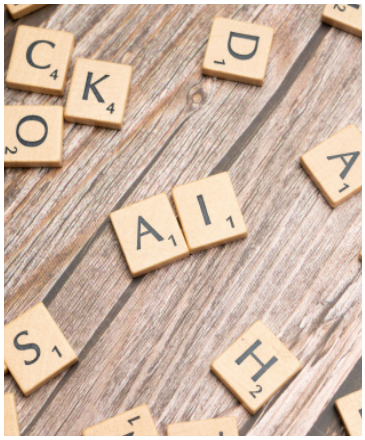
	# of non-participation days	# of late/incomplete assignments	# of missed assignments
A (4.0)	4	3	0
B (3.0)	5	4	0
C (2.0)	6	5	1
D (1.0)	7	6	2
E (0.0)	8	7	3

Description of Assignments.

During this course, we will have a number of group projects and multimedia assignments. Each has its own submission requirements. You will find them in assignment sheets.

For traditional writing assignments, this course has some specific requirements you have to follow. All individual writing assignments should be submitted in .docx or .pdf format via Blackboard. To be fair to your peers, NO URLs to online documents will be accepted, because owners of online documents can still revise them after the deadline. Your submissions should follow MLA or APA format.

Recurrent Assignments: AI Reflections



AI is a topic a technical communication course (or any course after 2023) cannot avoid. While the technologies of AI evolve rapidly, how they affect learning and teaching generate lots of topics, even positionalities to debate. This course does not promote or prohibit the use of AI, but we appreciate transparency—for more, please read the AI policies.

During the first three units, we will have occasions to discuss, share, and reflect on the impacts of AI, or how you as a student use or decide not to use AI in conducting reading, researching, writing, and collaborating with your peers. The AI reflections will be submitted along with major assignments, so they can be, but are not limited to, project-based. You will write about **500 words** for each AI

Major Project 1-1: Resume and LinkedIn page

You will draft a resume that is ready to be submitted with minor revisions when applying for jobs. You will also create a LinkedIn page to promote your visibility on the job market.

Major Project 1-2: Folder Management (Video Project) and Reflection

Either organized intuitively or in a more systematic manner, everyone who uses digital devices has their own way to manage folders and track resources. In this project, you will share and demonstrate your habits/skills of folder management. We learn from each other and acquire new skills. You will write an 800-word reflection based on your observations and musings on the relationship between your habits and professional expectations. You can also reflect on the teamwork and troubleshooting process in our class so far.





Major Project 2: UI Proposal

In Unit 2, we will try to book a sports ticket following UofL's instructions and have several rounds of discussions about the user experiences. As a product of your reflections, you will compose a proposal that you intend to share with UofL to improve their app design and ticket-booking instructions. The proposal should be around 1000 words.

Major Project 3: A Conference Website (Group Project)

In Unit 3, you will be a website designer working with your peers. You will learn how to create a functional conference website based on the content management system (CMS) WordPress and the content of the current Watson Conference website. Perhaps a lot of us are not experts in web design, so the assessment of this assignment will be conducted in the form of a progress presentation. Before you complete the website, you and your group members will deliver a 15-minute presentation reporting on the ongoing progress of the website and how your teammates collaborate with each other in learning and troubleshooting. When the website is complete, we will have a showcase. The showcase won't be assessed.

Major Project 4: Infographic Portfolio

You will design and create an infographic to present your journey and achievements in ENGL303. The completion of this assignment is based upon your prior assessments, so your major task for this one is about arrangement and design. You will submit your infographic portfolio to both Blackboard and Cardinals Create Showcase organized by the Digital Media Suite.



Course Schedule.

I reserve the right to make changes to the reading schedule below, to facilitate learning in this course.

All assginments are due by 11:00 am of the assigned dates.

Unit 1: Resume, LinkedIn, and Folder Management

Week 01

Aug 18 **Tuesday** Ice-breaking Design

Aug 20 **Thursday** Email tasks: (1) absence requests; (2) invitation for a keynote speaker

Activities

- UofL color palette
- UofL Email avatars and heroes
- Email Signature Principles: Dos and Don'ts
- How to add and change an email signature in Outlook

Week 02

Aug 25 **Tuesday** AI Discussions

Aug 27 **Thursday** (1) Resume Reading; (2) Job Ads Reading

Readings

- "Tracing the thoughts of a large language model," **Anthropic**, May 27, 2025;
- McIntyre, M. "Talking to Students about Gen AI," **FEN Blog**, March 9, 2026;
- Job Ads from UofL Career and https://www.liveinlou.com/jobs-list/

Week 03

Sept 1 **Tuesday** Resume Writing

Sept 3 **Thursday** Resume revising and group work

Readings

- Resume writing tips and samples on Blackboard.
- "Resume, CVs & References" section on UofL Career Center Website.
- Jobs page on UofL Career Center Website.
- UofL "Resume Tips Guide."

Assignment **AI Reflection (1) due by Sept 6**

Week 04

Sept 8 **Tuesday** Scoial Media Screening

Sept 10 **Thursday** LinkedIn Workshop; knowledge base documentation

Readings

- Kong, Y., & Ding, H. (2024). Tools, potential, and pitfalls of social media screening: Social profiling in the era of AI-assisted recruiting. **Journal of Business and Technical Communication,** 38(1), 33-65.
- Fechter, J "What Knowledge Base Documentation Is and How I Build It for Real Users," technicalwriterhq.com Aug, 2026.
- LinkedIn Help Documentation.
- "How-to" documentation samples.

Assignment

Major Project 1-1 due by Sept 12

Week 05

Sept 15 **Tuesday** Folder Management (readings+sharing+vidoe editing)

Sept 17 **Thursday** Folder Managment (video editing + trouble shooting + voice over)

Readings

Reddit post: "Guys, create a folder on your computer that holds all the work you've done in college."

"Under the Rock: File management and a student's guide to staying organized," **The Daily Campus**, Oct 14, 2025

Week 06

Sept 22 **Tuesday** Folder Management project presentation + discussions

Sept 24 **Thursday** Class Writing: Reflections on Unit 1;
Technical Writer Basics

Readings

"Technical Writer." In **Wikipedia**. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technical_writer.

Assignment

AI Reflection (2) and Major Project 1-2 due by Sept 29

Unit 2: UX/UI (Audience) and How to Book a Ticket

Week 07

Sept 29 **Tuesday** AI Discussions
How to book a ticket

Oct 1 **Thursday** What is audience;
Reflections on ticket booking process

Readings

- Wagen C. (Feb, 2023). "Science and Engineering."
- The Economist (Sept, 2026). "Top mathematicians are outraged by OpenAI's methods."
- Tao, T. (Sept, 2026). "A Severe Misalignment of AI in Mathematics."
- "It's not you. Bad doors are everywhere." Vox YouTube, Feb 26, 2016.
- 2.1 & 2.2 "Understanding your audience," from **Professional and Technical Writing (2019)** by Suzie Baker.
- UofL Student Ticket Lottery Reading list:
- "UofL introduces student ticket lottery system, adds $200 athletic fee to tuition," WDRB WAVE news.
- "UofL Student Ticketing FAQ," University of Louisville, https://gocards.com/sports/2025/7/7/student-ticket-information-faq.
- "UofLvillens Instastgram tutorial page," uoflvillens.
- Baarlaer, K. (2025). "University of Louisville implements new $200 student athletic fee for 2025-26 year," Courier Journal.
- Campagna, B. (2018). "Tuition and fees task force recommends reducing student athletics fee," Louisvllle Cardinal Newspaper.
- "Student Athletic Fee Request," UofL Website.

Week 08

Oct 6 **Tuesday** No Class: Oct 5-6 Fall Breaks

Oct 8 **Thursday** Reading UX/UI;
Proposal for how to improve the ticket booking experience

Readings

- Xu, Q., & Jiang, K. (2025). UX Design vs. UI Design: Understanding US Employers' Expectations Through Semantic Analysis of Job Descriptions. **Communication Design Quarterly**, 13(1), 15-30.

Week 09

Oct 13 **Tuesday** Peer review on proposal + revision

Oct 15 **Thursday** WordPress Basics

Readings

- Unit 7 "Proposals," from **Professional and Technical Writing (2019)** by Suzie Baker.
- Burge, S. **WordPress Explained** (2020), OSTraining.

Assignment

AI Reflection (3) and Major Project 2 due by Oct 18

Unit 3: UX/UI (Designer) and How to Build a Website

Week 10

Oct 20 **Tuesday** Pratice to create a conference website 1 (labor divison + workflow)

Oct 22 **Thursday** Pratice to create a conference website 2

Readings

Burge, S. **WordPress Explained** (2020), OSTraining.

Week 11

Oct 27 **Tuesday** Presentation of progress + Troubleshooting **(Project 3 Assessment Day)**

Oct 29 **Thursday** Cont. Presentation of progress + Troubleshooting
Complete Website Design + Reflections

Week 12

Nov 3 **Tuesday** AI discussions
Redesign your own website

Nov 5 **Thursday** No Class: Nov 5-7 Watson Conference

Readings

Hackl, V., Müller, A. E., & Sailer, M. (2026). The AI literacy heptagon: A structured approach to AI literacy in higher education. **Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence**, 100540.

Week 13

Nov 10 **Tuesday** Revision of Website + In-class Writing

Nov 12 **Thursday** Website Showcase + Troubleshooting + Q&A

Unit 4: Infographic Portfolio

Week 14

Nov 17 **Tuesday** Infographic Portfolio session 1

Nov 19 **Thursday** Infographic Portfolio session 2

Assignment **Infographic Portfolio due by Nov 30**

Other Important Days

Aug 21	**Last day to drop/add with 100% tuition credit**
Sept 8	**Last day to withdraw with 50% tuition credit**
Sept 15	**Last day to withdraw with 25% tuition credit**
Oct 5-6	**Mid-term Break**
Oct 16	**Last day to withdraw**
Nov 25-29	**Thanksgiving Break**
Nov 30	**Last day of classes**
Dec 2-8	**Final Exams**
Dec 11	**Degree Date and Commencement**



Course Policies A-Z.

"Andy's Coming!" Challenge

Our class discusses attention, so when you feel you are about to lose your attention, please shout out "Andy's Coming!" Everyone in the class should imitate Toy Story--freeze and pretend to be inanimate toys because our owner, Andy, is approaching. I hope this embodied interactivity can entertain you and interfere when you are about to lose your attention. "Andy's Coming" challenge can be played three times maximum in one class.

Artificial Intelligence and Student Writing

Plagiarism, or "representing the words or ideas of someone else as one's own," is prohibited at UofL ("Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities"). In the Composition Program, plagiarism includes the use of AI-generated text without proper citation or credit. That is, students should not use AI tools to generate any body of text (sentences, paragraphs, etc.) and then pass that generated text off as their own work. Any inclusion of AI-generated text must be properly cited and acknowledged as AI-written. Students who wish to cite AI-generated text should consult the resources developed by APA, MLA, the Chicago Manual of Style, or their style manual of choice.

You will sign a "Declaration of the Use of Generative AI" for every major assignment indicating your use of AI.

Basic Needs Support:

Doing well in classes (and in life, for that matter) means getting a good night's sleep, having enough to eat, and being able to get to where you need to go. If you are having any difficulties with these necessities, remember that UofL has resources to assist you. Please reach out to one of these great resources if you find yourself in need at any time during this course or after.

- Food (fresh and non-perishable), household and toiletry items: Cardinal Cupboard (SAC W312)
- Clothing, shoes, household items and office/art supplies: UofL Free Store (SAC W303C)
- If you're experiencing any academic, financial, or personal difficulties, a Student Success Coordinator in our Student Success Center can work with you individually to provide guidance and support and connect you to resources. For first-generation college students, Student Success Center is highly recommended to you.
- The UofL Concern Center can help you find and connect with relevant resources: https://louisville.concerncenter.com/.

Cardinal Core Outcomes

Written Communication (WC)

Written Communication is the ability to develop and express ideas, opinions, and information in appropriate forms. To fulfill this requirement, students will complete, revise, and share a substantial amount of writing in multiple genres or media. Students who satisfy this requirement will:

1. Produce writing that reflects a multi-stage composing and revising process and that illustrates multiple

strategies of invention, drafting, and revision.
2. Select and/or use appropriate genres for a variety of purposes, situations, and audiences.
3. Apply academic conventions in different writing situations; employ structural conventions such as organization, formatting, paragraphing, and tone; and use appropriate surface features such as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
4. Employ critical thinking processes to create an understanding of knowledge as existing within a broader context and to incorporate an awareness of multiple points of view.
5. Select, evaluate, and integrate material from a variety of sources into their writing and use citation appropriate to the discipline.

Modes of assessment:

1. Students will produce at least two drafts of each major assignment and will receive credit for engaging in various stages of the writing process (e.g., brainstorming, peer feedback).
2. Students will write in multiple genres and address at least two different audiences over the course of the semester. Their written reflections will address how their audience and purpose shaped their research and writing choices.
3. Students' writing will be graded, in part, on awareness and use of textual conventions.
4. Students' writing will be graded, in part, on students' ability to think critically about their sources.
5. Students' writing will be graded, in part, on students' ability to integrate a variety of sources in their writing.

Cell Phones and Laptops: see Tech Policy

Counseling Center

If you are having a difficult time or generally feel stuck, it may be helpful to work with a trained therapist at the Counseling Center in an individual or group setting. People come into the Counseling Center to discuss a range of topics, including relationships, family, identities, grief and loss, depression, stress, and many more experiences and concerns. The Counseling Center provides short term individual, group, and couples counseling, crisis intervention, and psychological testing. Clients seek services for a variety of areas of concern, including psychological, personal/social, academic, and career issues. To schedule an appointment, please contact the Counseling Center at 502-852-6585 or stop by the office in the Student Activities Center Room W-204. More info: http://louisville.edu/counseling.

Additional Counseling Resources:

- 24/7 Adult Crisis Line: 502-589-4313 or 800-221-0446 (available 24/7)
- The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) (available 24/7)
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741 (available 24/7)
- The Trevor Project: 1-866-488-7386 (available 24/7 for individuals ages 13-24 who identify as LGBTQ)

Email

Please check your UofL email account regularly for any class-related messages from me. Also, make sure to

check the Blackboard site for questions and other study materials. I welcome your e-mails and will try to respond to them promptly. If you do not hear from me after two days, please send me a quick reminder to make sure I did not forget about your email.

Gender-Inclusive Bathrooms

A list of gender-inclusive bathrooms on campus is available via the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine; a PDF is available here.

Grade Disputes

If you have questions or concerns about your progress in this course, please do not hesitate to discuss any issue with me during my office hours. If you wish to dispute a grade, I will be happy to meet with you, but I will first ask you to carefully explain your justification in writing. In most cases, I will offer you the chance to revise and resubmit your assignment.

Right to make changes statement

The instructor has the right to make changes to the course schedule/syllabus if necessary.

Tech policy

I understand that many of you will choose to write with your laptops and tablets throughout the semester, which is great, but that technology can also easily distract us. When using your laptops and tablets, please stay focused on classwork and don't have distracting material on your screen.

If, for whatever reason, you do not have access to the Internet or to various technologies, books, etc., please let me know privately. We can come up with an alternative plan; I am happy to provide assistance so that all students have access to required materials. While I expect everyone to submit their own work, I strongly encourage groups to help each other with technology or other questions. If you need to borrow laptops, you can contact Ekstrom Library for help (https://library.louisville.edu/ekstrom/aus/equipment).

Title IX/Clery Act

Sexual misconduct (including sexual harassment, sexual assault, and any other nonconsensual behavior of a sexual nature) and sex discrimination violate University policies. Students experiencing such behavior may obtain confidential support from the PEACC Program (852-2663), Counseling Center (852-6585), and Campus Health Services (852-6479). To report sexual misconduct or sex discrimination, contact the Dean of Students (852-5787) or University of Louisville Police (852-6111).

Disclosure to University faculty or instructors of sexual misconduct, domestic violence, dating violence, or sex discrimination occurring on campus, in a University-sponsored program, or involving a campus visitor or University student or employee (whether current or former) is not confidential under Title IX. Faculty and instructors must forward such reports, including names and circumstances, to the University's Title IX officer.

For more information, see the Title IX website.

Veteran Services

There is a range of resources for UofL veterans, including the Office of Military and Veteran Student Services (Houchens LL08). This office serves as a resource for any issues you may be encountering. I recognize that calls to active duty, problems with GI Bill disbursements, and other issues might affect your ability to complete assignments. If any problems arise, feel free to keep me in the loop, and I will do what I can to help. See also louisville.edu/admissions/apply/transfer/veterans/campus-resource-team.

Writing Center

The Writing Center (http://louisville.edu/writingcenter) is a free service for all undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff. Highly trained consultants will meet with you for 50 minutes to discuss any stage of the writing process—brainstorming, organizing your essay, refining your argument, identifying patterns of error, etc. To make an appointment, go to their website or call 852-2173.



Grading Contract for ENGL303

Adapted from Asao Inoue's labor-based grading contract 2023 version.

A Letter

Class:

Imagine that this wasn't an official course for credit at this school, but instead that you had seen my advertisement in the newspaper or on the Internet, and were freely coming to my home studio for a class in cooking or yoga. We would have classes, workshops, or lessons, but there would be no official grading of omelets or yoga poses, since letters and numbers would be meaningless in those scenarios. But we all would learn, and perhaps do so in an encouraging, fun, and creative environment. In considering this course and that home studio scenario, we might ask ourselves several questions:

- Why are grades meaningless in that home studio setup?
- How do grades affect learning in classrooms?
- What is the nature of grades? What do we think they really do?
- What social dynamics does the presence of grades create? How do we react to them and why?

In both situations, students or participants receive evaluative and formative feedback, but in the home studio, many of you would help each other, even rely on each other during and outside of scheduled meetings. In fact, you'd likely get more feedback from your peers on your work and practices than in a conventional classroom where only the teacher is expected to evaluate and grade. So what makes the presence of grades harmful in the classroom?

Three Arguments Against Grades in Our Course

First, using conventional classroom grading of essays and other work to compute course grades often leads students to think more about acquiring grades than about their writing or learning; to worry more about pleasing a teacher or fooling one than about figuring out what they really want to learn, or how they want to communicate something to someone for some purpose. Lots of research in education, writing studies, and psychology over the last 40 or so years have shown overwhelmingly how the presence of grades in classrooms negatively affects the learning and motivation of students. Alfie Kohn (2011), a well known education researcher and teacher of teachers, makes this argument succinctly. Kohn argues that grades negatively affect students in at least three ways. Grades:

- "diminish students' interest in whatever they're learning";
- "create a preference for the easiest possible task"; and
- "reduce the quality of students' thinking."

In short, grades do not help students learn. To put it another way, if learning is what we are here for, then grades just get in the way since they are the wrong goals to strive for. An "A" does not build a good bridge for an engineer, nor does it help a reporter write a good story, or an urban planner make good decisions for her city. It's the learning that their grades in school allegedly represent that provides the knowledge to do all that

they need to. And so, how do we make sure that our goals aren't about grades in this course, but about learning to write?

Second, conventional grading may cause you to be reluctant to take risks with your writing or ideas. It doesn't allow you to fail at writing, which many suggest is a primary way in which people learn from their practices. Sometimes grades even lead to the feeling that you are working against your teacher, or that you cannot make a mistake, or that you have to hide part of yourself from your teacher and peers. The bottom line is: Failure at writing is vital to learning how to write better. We have to embrace our failures because they show us the places we can improve, learn, and get better. And aren't these the reasons we are in college? In short, grades on our work and writing do not allow us to productively or meaningfully fail. They create conditions that mostly punish failure, not reward it for the learning opportunity it can and should be.

As you might already notice, what I'm arguing for here is a different kind of classroom, and even education. Sir Ken Robinson (2010), a well-known education researcher, makes the argument in a TED talk that typical schooling, with grades and particular standards, is an old and mostly harmful system that we've inherited, but now needs to change. One harmful aspect of this old system is that it assumes everyone is the same, that every student develops at the same pace and in the same ways, that our brains are all the same and develop in the same ways and at the same rates, that variation in skills and literacies in a classroom is bad. It is clear the opposites of these things are more true if we think diversity is a strength and offers us valuable ways to innovate, learn new things, and understand old things from new angles and perspectives.

Third, and lastly, conventional grading often relies on uneven and inequitable expectations about how much labor or work any given student must do to get the grade they want. Typically, how much time you need to spend on something in a course is a hidden, even unspoken, part of the assignment. In most cases, the teacher and their grading system simply do not account for the time students spend on the work of the course. You are assigned something, and you must do it, if you want the grade. And yet, it may take one student an hour to read an assigned chapter or write a short 100-word response to an assigned topic, while it may take another student two or three times that amount of time to produce the same thing.

Our Grading System Should Value and Honor Our Differences

We all labor differently and produce words, or read them, at different rates for a number of reasons. Most of these reasons we do not control. For instance, we all live different and complex lives in conditions that can vary dramatically from one student to another. Living in a busy dorm room affords very different periods of "homework" time than, say living in a quiet house off campus with your mother or father. Many of us work and go to school at the same time. Some of us don't. Each of our brains work differently, often dramatically differently, and function at different rates or speeds. Some of us experience chronic or periodic disabilities or illness. In fact, most of us will experience some disability in our lives, and all of us will experience illness. The point is, our grading system in this course should try to account for these very real and important neurological, biological, environmental, and social differences that make our ways of laboring possible, particularly our laboring with language.

One way to value and honor our differences is to have a definition of "disability" that allows us NOT to create "normal" and "abnormal" kinds of laboring or progress in the course. This definition will help us negotiate this grading contract in ways that afford what is called "universal design for learning" (UDL) principles. Most disability scholars and researchers understand that the idea of disability, what it looks like and how to define it, is not something that is inherent in people. That is, disability is not an abnormal biological or medical condition. We all have biological and medically defined conditions. It's just that some of our conditions have been deemed to be "normal" and others not. And we've designed our world in ways that better fit those deemed "normal," which causes problems for others. No ramps and only stairs is a classic example of this. Imagine a world where stairs didn't exist, only ramps. Those who currently can not access buildings because there are no ramps would not have any problems getting to doors, and would not be considered disabled in this way. So we might ask: Where are our ramps in our grading contract? Are there enough of them?

In her book Feminist, Queer, Crip, Allison Kafer, a scholar who is disabled, offers this definition of disability:

> the definitional shift away from the medical/individual model makes room for new understandings of how best to solve the "problem" of disability. In the alternative perspective, which I call the political/relational model, the problem of disability no longer resides in the minds or bodies of individuals but in built environments and social patterns that exclude or stigmatize particular kinds of bodies, minds, and ways of being . . . the problem of disability is located in inaccessible buildings, discriminatory attitudes, and ideological systems that attribute normalcy and deviance to particular minds and bodies. The problem of disability is solved not through medical intervention or surgical normalization but through social change and political transformation. (my emphasis)

Our grading structures, the rubrics and policies, the practices and procedures that produce grades, are the structures in our course that create "normal" and "abnormal" students, or A, B, C, and other performances. We have control of these structures. The social change or political transformation we can make in our grading contract will come from our contract negotiations. How can we value and honor our differences while still accomplishing our stated learning goals?

To help us in our negotiations, I offer the key principles of universal design for learning (UDL) that come from the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 and the National Center for Universal Design (see also CAST). If we've got the right contract, then it will engage with these principles:

- provide multiple means of representation, or offer information and learning to students in a variety of ways;
- provide multiple means of action and expression, or offer a variety of ways to do the learning;
- provide multiple means of engagement, or offer a variety of reasons why students should do or engage with the learning asked of them

While I've tried very hard to use the above definition and UDL principles to design our course's grading contract and our labor instructions in flexible ways, I may have missed something or a good idea that you can help us with. Keep in mind that the above principles are for curriculum design, not assessment or grading system design. They need translating when thinking about our grading contract. So we might boil a good part of the above principles down to this design principle, which I'll call a universal designed for assessment (UDA):

> afford multiple and collaborative means of judging and assessing student performances and learning, which includes standards or expectations that are responsive to all students' needs and learning conditions

Thus, as you consider this grading contract ask yourself: How do we make our grading contract flexible enough so that everyone can learn and succeed in this course? What barriers to learning and progress are there in our grading contract? How are our multiple and collaborative means of judging and assessing responsive to our needs and our learning conditions?

And So . . .

I offer this first draft of a contract that focuses on the responsibilities we'll assume, the labors we'll do, not the things to which someone else (usually the teacher) will hold you accountable. The shift I'm suggesting is in part a cultural one, one that I would like you to control. Therefore, we will try to approximate the evaluative conditions of a home studio course. That is, we will try to create a culture of support, or rather a community of compassion, a group of people who genuinely care about the wellbeing of each other – and part of that caring, that compassion, is doing things for each other. It turns out, this also helps you learn. The best way to learn is to teach others, to help, to serve. So we will function as collaborators, allies, as fellow-travelers with various skills, abilities, experiences, and talents that we offer the group, rather than adversaries working against each other for grades or a teacher's approval.

Do not worry. You will get lots of assessments on your writing and other work during the semester from your colleagues and me. Use these assessments (written and verbal) to rethink ideas and improve your writing and practices, to take risks, in short to fail and learn from that failing. Always know that I will read everything and shape our classroom assessment activities and discussions around your work, but you will not receive grades from me. Sometimes, I will not even comment directly on your work, except in class when we use it or discuss it. I want you not only to rely on your colleagues and yourself for assessment and revision advice, but to build strategies of self-assessment that function apart from a teacher's approval.

Thus the default grade for the course is an "A" (4.00). In a nutshell, if you do all that is asked of you in the manner and spirit it is asked, if you do all the labor asked of you, then you'll get an "A" course grade, the highest grade possible. It will not matter what I or your colleagues think of your writing, only that you are listening to our feedback compassionately and doing what you can to respond to it. We may disagree or misunderstand your writing, but if you put in the labor, you are guaranteed an A course grade. If you do not participate fully, turn in assignments late, or forget to do assignments, you will get a lower course grade (see the final breakdown grade table at the end of this contract).

"A" Grades

You are guaranteed a course grade of "A" (4.00) if you meet all of the following conditions.

1. Participation in good faith. Your job is to participate as fully as possible and meet our course goals and your personal learning goals. You cannot miss more than 3 class sessions. Any absence due to a university-sponsored group activity (e.g., sporting event, band, another class field trip, etc.), military-related absences (e.g., deployment, work, duty, etc.), or documented illness will be considered independently of the above attendance policy, as long as the student has FIRST provided written documentation as soon as they are aware of the days they will be absent.

2. Avoid turning in late or incomplete work. You agree to turn in properly and on time all work and assignments expected of you in the spirit they are assigned. During the semester, you may, however, turn in a few assignments late. The exact number of those late assignments is stipulated in the table on the last page of this contract. Late work is defined as any work or document due that is turned in AFTER the due date/time BUT within 72 hours of the deadline. For example, if some work was due on Tuesday, January 1st at 11:59 pm, that piece must be turned in by 11:59 pm on Friday, January 4th. After 72 hours, the work will be considered as missed. Incomplete work is defined as any assignment submitted before the due date/time but fails to meet all of the labor expectations.

3. Do not miss work. You agree not to miss any work expected of you. If you turn in late work AFTER the 72 hours stipulated in Late/Incomplete Work, then it will be considered "missed work," which is a more serious mark against your grading contract. My sense is that missing the work so crucial to one's development as a learner in our community is bad and unacceptable.

4. Complete all work in the spirit it is assigned, on time, and in good faith. You agree to turn in on time and in the appropriate manner all the labor assigned in the spirit it is assigned.

Knowing Where You Stand

This system is better than regular grading for giving you a clear idea of what your final grade looks like at any moment. If you are doing everything as directed and turning things in on time (no matter what anyone says about the nature or quality of your work), you're getting an A (4.00) course grade. To know about any late or missed assignments I have recorded that may lower your final grade, you agree to check your Blackboard grade book frequently.

In the grade book, I will mark complete work with 1 point, late/incomplete work with 0.5 point, and missed work with 0 point.
You can count up how many late labors and missed you have on your grade book page, then consult our breakdown table at the end of this agreement (below).

Thus, the grade of A (4.00) depends primarily on behavior and labor. Have you shown responsible effort and consistency in our class? Have you done what was asked of you in the spirit it was asked? Have you put in the appropriate amount of labor? But if you turn in too many late essays or assessment labor goals or miss labors, your grade will drop (see the grade breakdown table below).

Breakdown of the Main Components

Below is a table that shows the components that affect your successful compliance with our contract. The grades in the far left column are the ONLY grades you may receive in this course (there are no in-between grades, like a C+ or a B-).

	# of non-participation days	# of late/incomplete assignments	# of missed assignments
A (4.0)	4	3	0
B (3.0)	5	4	0
C (2.0)	6	5	1
D (1.0)	7	6	2
E (0.0)	8	7	3

HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR GRADE

Writing Center Visits. You can make up for the loss in the labor points before the end of the term. All you need to do is to visit the University Writing Center twice with any of the assignments from our class. You will need to ask the University Writing Center consultant to send your visit reports to my email as a proof. After visiting the University Writing Center twice, I will

- make 1 late assignment into an "on time" assignment
- make 1 missed assignment into a late one (but not the final project labor)

By staying in this course and attending class, you accept this contract and agree to abide by it, in effect "signing" it. I (Yuan) also agree to abide by the contract, and administer it fairly and equitably.