

Rhetoric and Composition  
BIG QUESTIONS  
English 131.022  
Department of English, SFASU

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OFFICE Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9:55-10:50 am & Wednesday 3:25-4:40 pm

All other times BY APPOINTMENT

Meeting Place: **MWF 11:00-11:50 am Ferguson 171**

Course Description:

“Study and application of the writing process and the skills of writing with a focus on analytical reading and writing. Essay assignments address rhetorical analysis and evaluation and critical responses to close readings of texts. Required of all students who do not qualify for English 133H. Prerequisite: acceptable THEA score or at least a C in English 099. Must earn a grade of C or higher to be admitted to English 132.”  
College Bulletin, 2012-2013.

In this section of ENG131, we ask a series of **big questions** about our personal, political, and social identity. We question many of the fundamental assumptions about who we are, how we live, and what impact we want to leave on future generations. In our first unit, we interrogate supposed truisms about leading a happy life, creating a code of ethics by which to guide our personal growth. By learning about rhetorical appeals, we also investigate whether positive thinking, charity, and love help or hinder who we are as moral individuals. Here we further engage with issues about liberty, discussing some of the most influential literature, songs, and oratory on freedom ever to be crafted and performed. We will sharpen our close reading and rhetorical analysis skills by asking what “liberty” means for Shakespeare, Billie Holiday, and other great thinkers. In our second unit, we hone our ability to formulate powerful questions as **you** and your peers pick lecture topics and decide which questions are most important to ask in class. Our course closes on a unit that grapples with who millennials are as a generation, crafting a persuasive argument about their values and their propensity to change the future.

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**General Education Core Curriculum Objectives:**

In any given semester, one or more of the following Core Curriculum Objectives for the English Foundational Component Area in Communication Writing may be assessed. These objectives are:

1. Critical Thinking: Creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information.
2. Communication Skills: Effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication.
3. Teamwork: The ability to consider different points of view and to work effectively with others to support a shared purpose or goal.
4. Personal Responsibility: The ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making.

**Student Learning Outcomes for ENG 131:**

ENG 131 learning outcomes are the goals that students must meet as part of the Freshman Composition requirements, which include:

1. Ability to show appropriate acquisition of CORE objective 1 skills. Students in compositions courses make application of these skills in the writing of personal, expository, and persuasive essays, which require students to make inquiries into and explorations of topics in creative, innovative, or analytical ways. Students are expected to complete readings, to engage in course and group discussions, and to analyze, interpret and synthesize their findings resultant from these critical engagements into well-developed essays. Written assignments will evidence the students' command of these considerations: effective engagement of audience (pathos), logical development of ideas (logos), and effective use of examples, expertise, or insight (ethos).
2. Ability to show appropriate acquisition of CORE objective 2 skills. These skills include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication. Following instruction about group interaction, students will engage in oral communication through class discussions and group work (orally in face-to-face courses, electronically in online courses). Students will have occasion to respond to visual medium, as found in assigned readings, lectures, power-point presentations, or other media dependent upon course materials. Students learn processes for writing that help them to form coherent, well-developed, well-organized and unified discussions through a variety of writing methodologies, including personal, expository, and persuasive methodologies. Students will write at least four essays in composition courses, and rubrics will assess such concerns as development and exploration, mechanical clarity, and interpretation or expression of ideas.
3. Ability to show appropriate acquisition of CORE objective 3 skills. These skills include the ability to consider different points of view and to work effectively with others to support a shared purpose or goal. Following instruction about peer review processes and small group work, students will perform peer mentorship on essay assignments and work together on group projects, which may include collaborative writing occasions, group presentations, or panel discussions. As peer review is the common teamwork experience, students will be required to share potentially diverse ideas with one another, to address those views in appropriate ways, and to help one another to finalize essays for submission.
4. Ability to show appropriate acquisition of CORE objective 4 skills. These skills include the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making. Students will have opportunity to

examine numerous readings, including essays written by classmates, to examine the credibility and value of those readings, and to understand how expository methodologies bear responsibility and consequence.

### LiveText Addendum to Syllabus

Assessment of these objectives at SFA will be based on student work from all core curriculum courses. This student work will be collected in D2L through LiveText, the assessment management system selected by SFA to collect student work for core assessment. LiveText accounts will be provided to all students enrolled in core courses through the university technology fee. You will be required to register your LiveText account, and you will be notified how to register your account through your SFA e-mail account. If you forward your SFA e-mail to another account and do not receive an e-mail concerning LiveText registration, please be sure to check your junk mail folder and your spam filter for these e-mails. If you have questions about LiveText call Ext. 1267 or e-mail SFALiveText@sfasu.edu.

The chart below indicates the core objectives addressed by this course, the assignment(s) that will be used to assess the objectives in this course and uploaded to LiveText this semester, and the date the assignment(s) should be uploaded to LiveText. Not every assignment will be collected for assessment every semester. Your instructor will notify you which assignment(s) must be submitted for assessment in LiveText this semester.

Core Objective	Definition	
Critical Thinking Skills	To include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information.	All Assignments
Communication Skills	To include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral, and visual communication.	All Assignments
Empirical and Quantitative Skills	To include the manipulation and analysis of numerical data or observable facts resulting in informed conclusions.	Not Assessed
Teamwork	To include the ability to consider different points of view and to work effectively with others to support a shared purpose or goal.	All Assignments
Personal Responsibility	To include the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making.	All Assignments
Social Responsibility	To include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities.	All Assignments

### Required Readings:

In an effort to **save students as much money as possible**, I have opted **not to use a formal textbook** for the class. All readings will be available on D2L. Please **read all the material** in advance of class. Should you like to purchase a composition textbook for your own edification, I am happy to offer some useful titles.

### Assignments:

- (10%) **Engagement and Class Work** (reading completions, in-class writing exercises, AD presentations, peer feedback, and debate participation all semester long)
- (10%) **Code of Ethics**, 2-3 pages (Draft: W Feb 15 // Final: Wed Feb 22)
- (15%) **Analytic Essay**, 3-4 pages (F Mar 10)
- (10%) **Analytic Essay Presentation** (approx. 5 minutes) (Weeks 10-11)
- (25%) **Research Debate Assignment** (summaries, rhetorical analysis, and counterargument), 5-6 pages (Draft: W Apr 12// F Apr 22)
- (30%) **Capstone: Persuasive Essay**, 6-7 pages (F May 5 **\*NO EXTENSIONS\***)

Your running grade will be available on D2L (<http://d2l.sfasu.edu>); please advise me ASAP if you see anything that seems amiss.

Students will write a core capstone essay. Students will be graded based on their use of critical thinking skills; grammar, vocabulary, and written style; and the effect of social background on the personal choices of characters in the literary work, comparing and contrasting these choices with the modern world.

### Late Policies:

- **All Written Assignments:** Work handed in after the stated due date without a documented excuse will result in a **3% deduction for each day** the work is late. Weekends count as two days or 6% deduction.
- **Ad Assignment:** If you miss or fail to prepare for this assignment without a documented excuse, it will deduct 10% off your Engaged Participation Grade.
- **Final Persuasive Essay:** Work will **not be accepted after Monday, May 8 at 9 am** without a documented excuse. Any work submitted after this date will result in a **ZERO**.

### Missed Classes:

Much of the learning and intellectual growth of this class occurs because of student interaction, discussion, and feedback. For this reason, consistent attendance is necessary for the course to succeed as a whole. While I strongly encourage students to attend all classes, each student is **permitted 3 unaccounted absences** during the semester. **All further absences will deduct 2.5% from your participation grade per class missed** unless a documented excused is provided.

### Grading Standard:

A: 90-100: Students earning the grade of an A on any assignment will have completed work that obviously demonstrates a more than average understanding of the course material and completion of all aspects and requirements of the assignment. The grade of an A is reserved for that work which expertly displays one's ability to engage the ideas at hand, recognize and dialogue about the complications of such ideas, and translate such dialogue into clear, academic prose that is free of stigmatized errors.

B: 80-89: Students earning the grade of a B on any assignment will have completed work that demonstrates a more than average understanding of the course material and completion of all aspects and requirements of the assignment. The grade of a B is reserved for that work which adeptly displays one's ability to engage the ideas at hand, recognize and dialogue about the complications of such ideas, and translate such dialogue into clear, academic prose that is free of stigmatized errors. However, the level of thought, while still above average, may fluctuate in terms of analytic abilities and expression.

C: 70-79: Students earning the grade of a C on any assignment will have completed work that demonstrates an average understanding of the course material and completion of all aspects and requirements of the assignment. The grade of a C is reserved for that work which displays one's ability to engage the ideas at hand (more so through summary and response rather than analysis), recognize and dialogue about the complications of such ideas (however, the complications recognized will focus more on surface level issues rather than the greater whole), and translate such dialogue into clear, academic prose that is free of stigmatized errors. As can be seen from this description, the level of thought will be acceptable and display that a student has read the assignment, but his/her analytic abilities and level of expression will not be nearly as complicated nor developed. Instead, C work will display a student's hold to traditional methods of expression (simpler construction of sentence and paragraph development) and a struggle to develop complex, critical thinking skills.

D: 60-69: Students earning the grade of a D on any assignment will have completed work that demonstrates a below average understanding of course material and a lack of completion of all aspects and requirements of the assignment. The grade of a D is reserved for that work which displays one's struggle or refusal to engage the ideas at hand, simply summarizes the work under study with no actual recognition of or dialogue about the complications of such ideas, and the translation of ideas into writing is completed in such a convoluted manner that the audience will have difficulty following the conversation.

F: 0-59: Students earning the grade of a F on any assignment will either not have completed the assignment, will have completed the assignment but not followed the guidelines, or will have completed the assignment and demonstrated a complete misunderstanding of the course material. In this case, it will be obvious that the student has either not completed the required reading and/or given him/herself enough time to develop the work. The grade of a F is reserved for that work which does not engage the issues at hand, offers a base (not complete) summary of the work at hand with no critical engagement, and the translation of ideas into writing is either incomplete or the audience will be unable to follow the conversation. It is important to remember that a student can receive 0 out of 100 points. In the case that a student only partially completes an assignment or completes a work (in terms of page length, but not purpose) s/he may receive 0 points.

**Academic Integrity (A-9.1):** Academic integrity is the responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members promote academic integrity in multiple ways, including instruction on the components of academic honesty as well as abiding by university policy on penalties for cheating and plagiarism. Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one's own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another; (2) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper without giving the author due credit. Please read the complete policy at

[http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic\\_integrity.asp](http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp).

**Withheld Grades Policy (A-54):** The following is taken from SFASU's *Policy Manual* (2012), "Semester Grades Policy" (A-54): At the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms, the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.

#### **Acceptable Student Behavior:**

Classroom behavior should not interfere with the instructor's ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to learn from the instructional program (see the Student Conduct Code, policy D-34.1). Unacceptable or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Students who disrupt the learning environment may be asked to leave class and may be subject to judicial, academic, or other penalties. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including electronic, classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The instructor shall have full discretion over what behavior is appropriate/inappropriate in the classroom. Students who do not attend class regularly or who perform poorly on class projects/exams may be referred to the Early Alert Program. This program provides students with recommendations for resources or other assistance available to help SFA students succeed.

#### **Classroom Conduct:**

This course is designed to be engaging, insightful, rigorous, and fun. Please come to class open to new ideas and methodologies, willing to share and participate in discussion, and, whenever possible, ready to laugh. Food is permitted, provided you dispose of any remains in an appropriate fashion and keep the classroom clean. If you have any extreme allergies, please let me know and I will bar any food that may cause you any issues.

#### **Office Hours and Skype Policy:**

In the interest of increasing accessibility and the productiveness of office hours, I hold office hours both in my office (LAN 255) and over Skype (jacqueline.cowansfa). If you wish to meet with me over skype, you **must** be in a **neutral**, quiet environment where our meeting can be conducted without distraction and without invasion of any location you wish to remain private. Our online skype meetings will proceed as though they are in my office, which require an adherence to appropriate social and professional etiquette.

### Cell Phone Policy:

Please turn all cell phones on “**silent**” during class unless you are expecting an emergency call or text. If your cell phone rings during class, I reserve the right to change your ringtone to the Justin Bieber song of my choice. If you send a text message during class, I reserve the right to send a text message from your phone to my darling mother in Canada. **If your cell phone usage becomes a frequent issue, I will deduct percentage points from your participation grade.**

### Reading, Writing, and Researching Resources:

AARC Policy: The AARC is located in the Steen Library and offers tutoring, workshops, and other online resources to improve your reading, writing, and research skills, regardless of your academic discipline. If you would like a tutoring session, please sign up for one ahead of time either in person or online at <https://library.sfasu.edu/aarc>.

Tutoring sessions provide strategies to improve your writing skills, but your writing consultant will not assess content nor will s/he proofread your work. For your tutoring appointments, please bring in a typed draft so you can easily jot down your writing consultant’s feedback. If possible, bring the assignment instructions with you to your tutoring session. Finally, please enjoy this wonderful academic resource!

### Resources for Mental and Emotional Health:

The rigors of university pose unique forms of stress—stress that can significantly compound life’s other challenges. If you are experiencing mental and emotional distress or if you just need to gain a new perspective on personal issues, please book an appointment at SFA’s Counselling Services. These services are FREE to any enrolled student. Do make use of this excellent resource.

Counselling Services: <http://www.sfasu.edu/counselingservices/> 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, Rusk Building, 936.468.2401

How to book an appointment: <http://www.sfasu.edu/counselingservices/104.asp> Call 936.468.2401

**Students with Disabilities:** To obtain disability-related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to <http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/>.

Big Personal Questions

**Week 1: Why should we Smile? (The Rhetorical Triangle):****W Jan 18:** Introduction and syllabus overview**F Jan 20:** Positive Thinking and Rhetorical Triangle**Week 2: Why should we Smile Continued****M Jan 23:** Selections from Barbara Ehrenreich's *Smile or Die* (D2L)**W Jan 25:** Plagiarism Workshop in Library**F Jan 27:** AD GROUP 1**Week 3: Is Honesty the Best Policy? (Appeal to Ethos)****M Jan 30:** Dan Ariely, "The Truth about Dishonesty" (D2L)**W Feb 1:** "What would you do?" scenarios**F Feb 3:** AD GROUP 2**Week 4: What is the Value of Charity? (Appeal to Pathos)****M Feb 6:** Slavoj Zizek's "First as Tragedy, then as Farce" (D2L) and Tom's Shoes commercial**W Feb 8:** Steven Pinker, "Now for the Good News;" John Green, "Will Life Get Better for the Poor?"**F Feb 10:** AD GROUP 3**Week 5: What is Love? (Appeal to Pathos)****M Feb 13:** Zizek on Love; 8-bit Philosophy: Is Tinder Killing Love?**W Feb 15:** Adam Ruins Everything: Engagement Rings (D2L) [CODE OF ETHICS DRAFT DUE](#)**F Feb 17:** AD GROUP 4**Week 6: Can Love be Rational(ized?) (Appeal to Logos)****M Feb 20:** Writing Workshop Peer Review**W Feb 22:** Discovery Channel: Science of Sex Appeal—Out of Your League (D2L)? And the Matching Hypothesis [CODE OF ETHICS DUE](#)**F Feb 24:** AD GROUP 5**Week 7: How do we define Liberty? (Close Reading and Analysis)****M Feb 27:** 8-bit Philosophy: "Should Animals have Human Rights?"**W Mar 1:** Reading Workshop**F Mar 3:** Writing Workshop**Week 8: Liberty Continued (Close Reading and Analysis)****M Mar 6:** Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, Shylock's monologue Writing Workshop**W Mar 8:** Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit", BBC: A lynching in Texas in 1916**F Mar 10:** Tupac "Dear Momma" and selected poems [ANALYSIS ESSAY DUE](#)**Week 9 SPRING BREAK****Week 10****M Mar 20:** ANALYSIS ESSAY PRESENTATION; student feedback

**W Mar 22:** ANALYSIS ESSAY PRESENTATION; student feedback

**F Mar 24:** S ANALYSIS ESSAY PRESENTATION; student feedback

### YOUR Big Questions

#### **Week 11 (How to Write Summaries)**

**M Mar 27:** ANALYSIS ESSAY PRESENTATION; student feedback

**W Mar 29:** Student topic

**F Mar 31:** Student topic

#### **Week 12 (Rhetorical Fallacies)**

**M Apr 3:** Rhetorical Fallacy Bingo

**Apr 5:** PROF COWAN IS AWAY ON CONFERENCE

**F Apr 7:** PROF COWAN IS AWAY ON CONFERENCE

#### **Week 13 (How to Write Arguments)**

**M Apr 10:** Student topic

**W Apr 12:** Student topic [RESEARCH DEBATE ASSIGNMENT DRAFT DUE](#)

**F Apr 14:** EASTER

#### **Week 14: (How to Write Arguments)**

**M Apr 17:** Writing Workshop and peer review

**W Apr 19:** Student topic

**F Apr 21:** Student topic [RESEARCH DEBATE ASSIGNMENT DUE](#)

### Big Social Questions

#### **Week 15: Should we Privilege Privacy or Protection (Persuasive Writing)**

**M Apr 24:** Government Surveillance and Edward Snowden

**W Apr 26:** Captain America

**F Apr 28:** Library Research Day (MUST attend this class)

#### **Week 16: Who are the Millennials? (Persuasive Writing)**

**M May 1:** Millennials and #Activism

**W May 3:** Selfie-Culture

**F May 5:** Course Wrap Up! [CAPSTONE PERSUASSIVE ESSAY DUE](#)