

Assignments & Schedule for WAC+Transfer

ENGL 680, Bradley Dilger, Spring 2015

This handout provides more information about our four core assignments, and concludes with an overview schedule.

1. Class participation
2. Online participation
3. Semester project
4. Explainer (added January 26, 2015)

I offer detailed discussions of grading and performance here to be clear about my expectations—not because I expect poor effort from you all. Quite the reverse!

Class and online participation

Summary: Participate actively in our classroom discussions and course weblog. Evaluate your participation in weeks 5 and 16.

Please note that I had planned for everyone to lead discussions at least once during the semester, but I have decided to drop this requirement to allow you to focus on other work.

Active engagement in class and on the course weblog is expected. I will facilitate discussion, ask questions of individual students, provide in-class assignments, make stupid jokes, and do whatever else is necessary to ensure a lively, intellectual environment. Help your cause by doing the reading, coming to class prepared to ask questions and offer comments, and speaking up as often as you can:

1. Read the assigned texts carefully, taking notes and making lists of ideas you can use in your other coursework;
2. Bring your texts to class, and use them to drive the discussion forward;
3. Make concrete claims and use specific examples;
4. Add to the discussion with humor and/or by encouraging others with your attention;
5. Connect what's said in class to the weblog;
6. Work eagerly and steadily during collaborative work;
7. Add to the sense of community by sharing interesting things on the weblog;
8. Visit office hours and/or contact me outside of class to improve your work and attempt to resolve any problems you have;
9. Support other students out of class by sharing books, articles, offering reviews of each others' work, sharing class notes in case of absence, etc.

Expectations

Everyone should participate actively in every class—asking questions or offering comments multiple times, engaging actively and continually in group work. I will not ask those who are silent to contribute—you need to speak up on your own.

If you miss more than two classes, expect to see a reduction in your grade. Miss more than four, and you need to consider dropping, barring spectacular effort in other ways.

I expect everyone to be visible and active on the weblog at least once each week, either starting a conversation by posting, or contributing to one by commenting. This should be continual—not just the day before classes—and you should pay special attention to conversations over our long weekends. To help start conversations, I will post some discussion prompts; you need not answer all (or heck, any) of them. Rather, our goal is an authentic conversation about the course content. Share your work, show your work, engage the texts, learn by doing.

Evaluation

Points are allocated as follows:

	<i>Weeks 1–5</i>	<i>Weeks 6–16</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Class</i>	50	150	200
<i>Online</i>	30	70	100
<i>Total</i>	80	220	300

The asymmetrical structure of evaluation periods reduces the negative impact of any slow start on your final grade. That is, because you are evaluated after six weeks, and there are more points in the second part of the semester, a good grade can reduce or even neutralize the impact of a poor grade in the first part of the semester. You can also meet with me if you need personalized help.

Self-evaluation

On or just before Friday 02/13 and again Friday 05/01, write a brief evaluation of your participation performance. Simply email me, composing in the body—no attachment.

Please speak to both in-class and weblog participation, referring to the criteria above as needed. Offer evidence as needed to support your argument. Assign yourself separate grades for both in-class and weblog participation.

I will reply with my agreement and affirmation of your grade, or disagreement and an explanation. If we need to talk further about your grade, we will.

Semester project

Summary: Develop a semester project which explores a specific area relevant to course content in depth. Select a form appropriate for your forward-looking goals and the subject matter you select. Following the schedule below, propose, draft, and complete your work.

This semester, I would like you to complete a scholarly project which engages the issues and texts we read this semester, with a particular eye toward your long-term academic goals. We often imagine the seminar paper as the best form for graduate work, but that's not always the case. Frankly, it's a poor fit for many students. I'd like you to consider alternative forms which enable you to develop scholarly skills, improve existing work, and/or target teaching or other needs.

While there is a common framework, this assignment will be highly individualized. If you're new to WAC and/or transfer, you might focus on background research, building and documenting connections with others in the field, and developing the base of knowledge needed to think about our subject matter across the field. More experienced students could conceptualize and begin to develop a research project, or even work which will contribute to a thesis or dissertation. Discussions in class and on our group weblog will help you flush out an approach which works best for you.

Some ideas:

- Build a reading list and plan for writing an essay publishable in a journal (or answering a call for proposals), identifying an issue, reading broadly and taking notes, and developing a draft essay. You can imagine working at nearly any stage of the game here.
- Revise an existing essay in preparation for submitting it to a journal at the end of the semester, commissioning readers' reports, conducting additional research, developing a revision plan, and completing the revisions.
- Create a web presence which investigates one or more of the arguments made about WAC and/or transfer in our course texts, using online services such as Twitter, Mendeley, Tumblr, and/or WordPress.
- Respond to a conference call for proposals, and create a conference presentation and accompanying media (handout and/or PowerPoint deck), or materials which will enable creating one in the future.
- Develop a media-intensive teaching portfolio, including a syllabus, assignments, and materials which explain the way you'd approach the theory we read this semester in courses and/or curriculum design.

Whenever possible, you should do this work publicly, sharing in-progress writing on our course weblog (via links to your own spaces, Google Docs, etc.).

This work is broken up into several milestones. You will get extensive comment from me on each one. See below for details.

Project proposal (50 points) 2/20

Using Google Docs, sketch out the project you imagine completing this semester. Our texts spell out this work, which should include, but not be limited to:

1. Name the subject matter you are interested in, share web sites and other information, and describe why it appeals to you. Identify any specific books, web sites, or other texts you expect to include in your work.
2. If you can, identify individuals and professional organizations which are relevant and may be able to provide support or prior knowledge.
3. Outline the form and content of your work, looking ahead to all the other milestones here—make a plan for the deliverables you'll complete at key points.
4. Describe your rationale for picking the content and form you have selected.
5. Explain any questions or uncertainties which might shape your work, or places you'd like extra help.

Post a link to your proposal in the project proposals thread I will create on the weblog for that purpose.

Project update (50 points) 3/13

Before Spring Break, write a brief (300–500 word) update about your project. Post it on the course weblog in the “Semester project” category. Include relevant links, and explain any shifts from your project proposal.

Our key goal here is a check-in which allows everyone in the class to offer you ideas, and helps ensure you are on target for a successful draft.

Project draft (100 points) 4/10

Submit a draft of the project you outlined in your proposal and update. At this point, you should be at least two-thirds complete. Include a brief note which indicates what work you’ve completed and what’s left. Feel free to use annotations or comments to show, in your documents, the specific things you’d like extra attention in my review.

We will determine a method for sharing drafts based on the forms they take. See the detailed schedule for an update.

Final project (400 points) 5/07

Complete your work, making revisions and/or extensions which consider my suggestions, your own review, and the feedback of your classmates.

Best practices for success:

1. **Write.** There’s no other way forward for makers, thinkers, and scholars. Period.
2. **Share early and often.** Practice saying: *Here’s why and how I’m doing X. I’ve read Y. I’ve found Z so far. Here’s what XYZ may mean. Next, I’m thinking about ABC. What do you think?*
3. **Realize the unit of scholarship can be small.** An article can represent a month’s work, not a year’s.
4. **Read charitably.** What have you published lately? Be kind to those who share their ideas. Respond with their next piece in mind.
5. **Don’t obsess over finding Big Truths.** Instead, try be a little bit less wrong almost every day.
6. **Don’t fixate on outcomes.** Many times, finding out more about the problem is far more important than finding a solution.
7. **Diversify.** Learning the shape of a field includes content, but also methods, rhetorics, genres, writing processes, and networks. Give conscious attention to these things, too.
8. **Share.** Seek the help of others. Help those who ask, and offer help to those who do not. Work together to make our tasks easier and more fun.

Explainer

Summary: Create a short document about a subject relevant to writing across the curriculum or transfer, targeting a specific non-specialist and/or non-writing audience. Make connections which will help you accurately evaluate the rhetorical situation. Draft your document, test and revise, and hopefully, publish it in some way.

Rhetoric and composition is often criticized for an abundance of scholarship which looks inward. This is manifest in two ways: first, for all our talk about interdisciplinarity, we too often consider challenges which are shared by other disciplines and professions to be unique to our field, and collaborate less often with others than we should. (I think some of us alienate people with our exceptionalism and arrogance, but I've only my own experiences to point to there.) Second, we do not target external audiences very well—despite composition's charge of teaching writing for broad forward-looking purposes, and the outward-looking nature of other areas of interest such as writing across the curriculum. As a result, it's not unusual to see writing about writing in the popular press which ignores our field, and it's rare to see theory native to our field being used by others. For a transfer scholar, this is not surprising, but for a WAC practitioner, deeply troubling.

This assignment is designed to encourage us to start thinking about these issues and beginning to address them in several ways by writing about WAC, transfer, and related issues with outside audiences in mind. I hope this will help you:

1. share what we know about reading and writing with non-specialists, without being reduced to Shakespeare or grammar, and through a generous and meaningful understanding of the way they see us;
2. share what we know about reading and writing with other specialists, without being reduced to as bearers of academic services, and with generative possibilities in mind;
3. better understand the contexts in which others in your institutions work, and the way those contexts shape their writing tasks;
4. make more informed decisions about our use of scholarship from other fields.

So, you will select an interesting chunk of your semester project material, identify relevant audiences with whom it can be shared, then create, test, revise, and hopefully publish.

I want your explainer subject matter to be derived from your semester project, so yes, you are “double dipping” in some ways—let's keep the effort reasonable. If you're targeting a non-specialist audience in your semester project, simply pick a different one here.

Testing will be required. I won't expect formality, and methods will vary, but expect to write a short report (two or three pages) about your approach to testing your explainer, and reflecting on the process overall. Feel free to consult with me regarding testing methods.

Consider Anne Beaufort's model of writing as you write: what rhetorics, genres, content knowledge, writing processes, and discourse communities are involved in the act of translation and transformation required to explain content across fields? What do you know and not know about the fields and audiences you are crossing? Some research will be required—a mix of library work, conversations with people who can help, reading what's out there for other fields. Consider what we're learning about transfer, too—this assignment is a laboratory for putting that theory into practice.

Proposal (25 points) 2/20

Use the same approach as your semester project — see that assignment. (In fact, if you want to combine your proposals, that's fine with me, since they are due on the same day. Just add a subhead or alternate discussion of audience, deliverables, etc.)

Ensure you address #2 carefully so that you have clear possibilities for testing your project.

Draft (25 points) 3/13

Complete a draft and share it with me, using appropriate means. Ideally, Google Docs, since that makes delivering feedback easy, but if you want to do something else, that's okay, too. Please share an update with the class via our weblog — perhaps not the whole project, but at least a sense of the house.

Ensure your draft includes a proposed method for testing your draft with at least one person who makes sense given your audience. My feedback will include suggestions about the draft itself and your plan for testing.

Final (50 points) 5/07

Your completed-for-now explainer, shared with me via appropriate means. If you are ready, publish it!

Please include a short report which describes your methods for testing. Who did you work with, how did you collect testing data, and what did it suggest? Also reflect on the entire process and assignment—what was great? Too difficult? Frustrating but rewarding? Etc.

Note

This is my first time doing this assignment, so I am very interested in comments about the process and requirements, and your difficulties and success stories, at any time during the semester. Please use our weblog (there's an Explainer category), or approach me directly with rants & raves, or slide a note under my door. As you know, I am eager to shape courses to meet student needs, so I'm willing to modify this assignment if it would be useful for you.

Overview schedule

This is only an overview, and subject to change. For a far more detailed schedule, please see the course web site (<http://dtext.org/s15/680/>).

<i>Wk</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Activities & readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>
1	Jan 13, Jan 15	Introductions Downs/Wardle 2007; McCarthy 1987; McLeod 1989	
2	Jan 20, Jan 22	WAC background Bazerman et al 2005	
3	Jan 27, Jan 29	Transfer background Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak 2014; Essays TBD	
4	Feb 03, Feb 05	General education Nowacek 2011; Essays TBD	
5	Feb 10 Feb 12	Genre I Soliday 2011; Essays TBD	Participation evaluation #1 2/13
6	Feb 17, Feb 19	Genre II Melzer 2014; Essays TBD	Semester project proposal 2/20 Explainer proposal 2/20
7	Feb 24, Feb 26	Professional writing Essays TBD	
8	Mar 03, Mar 05	STEM Essays TBD	
9	Mar 10, Mar 12	ESL, EAP, L2 Essays TBD	Semester project update 3/13 Explainer draft 3/13
10	Mar 17, Mar 19	Spring Break / CCCC No classes or assigned reading	
11	Mar 24, Mar 26	First-generation college students Neil Baird visit; Essays TBD	
12	Mar 31, Apr 02	Writing centers Essays TBD	
13	Apr 07, Apr 09	Review week #1 Readings TBD	Semester project draft 4/09
14	Apr 14, Apr 16	Review week #2 Readings TBD	Explainer update 4/17
15	Apr 21, Apr 23	Presentations No assigned reading	Semester project presentations 4/21
16	Apr 28, Apr 30	Presentations & reflections No assigned reading	Participation evaluation #2 4/30
<i>Ex</i>	May 05, May 07	All projects due 5/07 No classes or assigned reading	Semester project final 5/07 Explainer final 5/07