

GRAD 5900: Special Topics In Graduate Education

Graduate Seminar in Academic Writing

Instructor Information

Instructor: Gabe Morrison (pronouns: he/him/his)

Office hours: Wednesdays, 3:00-4:00 p.m.; Thursdays, 10:00-11:00 a.m., and by appointment

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Course Information

Modality: Distance Learning

Section: 005 (1 credit)

Meeting time: Tuesdays, 4:00-6:00 p.m.

Course dates: October 6 to November 3

Required texts: a computer; digital readings and materials available through HuskyCT

Classroom: HuskyCT and WebEx (<https://uconn-cmr.webex.com/meet/gpm16102>;
call in number: 1-415-655-0002; meeting number: 645 031 074)

No short course can make you an expert academic writing, and this one won't either. Professional academic writing is difficult and complex. Entire disciplines and research fields have grown up to study its complexities, and most researchers have concluded that it takes many years to develop substantive confidence and expertise. Since this is an interdisciplinary seminar for graduate students at differing stages in their careers, we won't try to develop deep specialist expertise in the next five weeks; instead, we'll focus on broad metacognitive skills and writing habits that will help you build a toolset for confronting the writing problems you'll encounter during graduate school and beyond. We'll consider strategies for academic writing that range from higher-order concerns (such as productivity, organization, and framing a project for a specific audience) to more local concerns (such as clarity, style, and conventions). You'll test out these strategies with a piece of writing you bring to the seminar with the hope that you'll finish the course with a stronger draft.

This seminar uses a mix of discussion-centered seminars, reading, individual writing activities, and peer workshops. Expect to spend 2 hours per week in synchronous class meetings and 3 to 4 hours per week on work outside of these class sessions.

Learning Objectives

Participating in this seminar should help you to:

- Identify and implement repeatable writing and editing processes to accomplish multiple situated writing tasks
- Analyze texts and contexts for information about stylistic, genre, and discourse community conventions and incorporate these conventions into writing
- Evaluate effective rhetorical strategies in published and peer work
- Use peer and mentor feedback strategically as resources for revision
- Produce or revise a section (introduction, methods, literature review, or data commentary section) of an academic research project that meets professional publishing standards in the student's field

Schedule

Quick View

Date	Due
10/6	Read Yancey; read Kirsch; read Anson; skim Rule; post drawing and introduction video to discussion board; submit project draft to HuskyCT (Assignment 1)
10/13	Read and annotate Johns; read Swales and Feak excerpt; read Matsuda; read Wardle; submit drafts of your process plans to HuskyCT (Assignment 2)
10/20	Read and annotate Swales (1990) and (2004); submit 3 mentor texts (Assignment 3); submit notes on an interview with an expert in your field (Assignment 4)
10/27	Read and annotate Gopen and Swan (1990); read handout; read your peers' projects; submit your reflection on interview and mentor texts (Assignment 5)
11/3	Read Schimmel (2011); read Rose (2015); skim Williams and Bizup (2017); post to discussion board; meet with peer review group; submit peer review reports (Assignment 6) by 10/29
After seminar	<i>If taking the class for credit</i> , submit your revised project section by 11/14 (Assignment 7)

Week 1: Tuesday, October 6

Productivity and the Writing Process

Before class:

- Read: Yancey (2015) "Learning to Write Effectively Requires Different Kinds of Practice, Time, and Effort"
- Read: Kirsch (2019) "Sit Down and Write, Get Up and Move"
- Read: Anson (2019) "Storyboard Your Writing Projects"
- Skim: Rule (2018) "Writing's Rooms," pp. 217-228
- Post: Make a drawing of your preferred writing space, like the sketch on p. 227 of the Rule article. You can do this digitally or on paper (but you will need to take a picture of it if you do it on paper); don't spend too long on this (five minutes will do), and don't worry if you don't feel your drawing skills are very good! No one is grading these! Alongside your drawing, record a brief (about 30 seconds) introduction video of yourself that introduces 1) your name; 2) your [pronouns](#); 3) your department/program at UConn; 4) your current writing project; 5) your goals for participating in this seminar; 6) 1 fun fact about yourself. Record the video using [Kaltura](#), then [embed it](#) in your HuskyCT discussion post.
- Submit: Your project draft to Assignment 1 on HuskyCT. It's okay if it's an incomplete draft. Don't add to or revise it; just submit whatever you have.

During class:

- Introduce participants and goals
- Introduce to the seminar and assignments
- Define productive writing processes
- Storyboard projects

Week 2: Tuesday, October 13

Context and Audience

Before class:

- Read and annotate: Johns (1997) “Discourse Communities and Communities of Practice”
- Read: Swales and Feak (2012) excerpts “Audience” and “Purpose and Strategy,” pp. 4-8
- Read: Matsuda (2015) “Writing Involves the Negotiation of Language Differences”
- Read: Wardle (2017) “You Can Learn to Write in General”
- Read (optional): Belcher (2019) “Selecting a Journal”
- Submit: A macro-level storyboard of your project and a process plan for boosting your productivity. These don’t have to be perfect; we’ll have time to revisit them at the end of the course. Upload to Assignment 2 on HuskyCT.

During class:

- Review process plans and storyboards
- Discuss readings: audience, ethics, discourse communities, difference
- Define discourse communities
- Preview Assignments 3 and 4

Week 3: Tuesday, October 20

Genre

Before class:

- Read and annotate: Swales (2004) excerpts “The Research Article Revisited”
- Read and annotate: Swales (1990) excerpt “Create a Research Space”
- Read (optional): Swales and Feak (2012) “Constructing a Research Paper I”
- Submit: Choose three “mentor texts” — examples of the same kind of text you’re working on (e.g., dissertation chapters, book reviews, articles, grant proposals). Upload these mentor texts to the Google Folder with your name on it linked in HuskyCT (Assignment 3)
- Submit: Conduct your interview with an expert in your field (could be someone in your department, an advisor), and submit your notes on the interview to HuskyCT (Assignment 4)

During class:

- Discuss interviews
- Analyze mentor text genres
- Discuss research article introductions
- Discuss literature reviews
- Introduce peer review groups

Week 4: Tuesday, October 27

Style

Before class:

- Read and annotate: Gopen and Swan (2018) “The Science of Scientific Writing”
- Read: Handout on metadiscourse
- Read: Your peers’ projects

- Read (optional): Swales and Feak (2012) “Constructing a Research Paper II”
- Submit: Write a brief reflection on the interview you conducted last week and the mentor texts you collected. Upload that reflection to HuskyCT (see Assignment 5).

During class:

- Discuss reflections and the role of metacognition in writing development
- Discuss readings
- Practice style exercises
- Meet in peer review groups, set goals

Week 5: Tuesday, November 3

Editing and Presentation

Before class:

- Read: Schimel (2011) “Condensing”
- Read: Rose (2015) “All Writers Have More to Learn”
- Skim: Williams and Bizup (2017) “Correctness”
- Read (optional): Caplan (2019) “An Approach to Academic Written Grammar”
- Read (optional): Kumpf (2000) “Visual Metadiscourse”
- Meet: Convene online with peer review partners to discuss reports sometime before class
- Post: Create a discussion board post that includes an audio recording of yourself proofreading your project as well as a short resource on a grammar/editing issue you can learn and teach the class about.
- Submit: Peer review reports by Thursday, 10/29 (Assignment 6)

During class:

- Reflect on peer reviewing
- Discuss readings
- Practice editing exercises
- Discuss document design
- Revisit process plans
- Reflect on seminar

After Week 5

- Do (optional): Have one-to-one consultation with instructor
- Submit: *If taking the course for credit*, upload your revised project section to HuskyCT (Assignment 7) by 11/14.

Assignments

You will achieve the class’s learning objectives and be assessed based on your completion of the following brief assignments. For the purposes of this syllabus, an *assignment* is any required work you must “turn in” to the instructor.

Assignment 1: Project Draft

This assignment is an easy one! Just upload a draft (what you have so far) of the project you’ll be

working on throughout this seminar to HuskyCT. This will help me see what you're all working with and will give you practice submitting things to HuskyCT. Limit your submission to no more than 20 pages and no less than 5 pages. That means that if you have a longer project, you will have to excerpt it; if you are excerpting, choose the section(s) that you most want to work on. This will allow us to work with a manageable chunk in later assignments. Please submit your draft as an editable document (not a PDF; [MS Word](#) if possible).

Assignment 2: Storyboard and Process Plan

Effective writers are effective planners. That's because expert writers realize that effective writing takes a lot of time to produce, and that time needs to be anticipated and integrated within writers' productivity habits in order to meet deadlines. This assignment will prompt you to create two plans: 1) a **storyboard** that "maps" the macro-scale steps and milestones in a project's production pipeline; 2) a **process plan** that describes the micro-level actions and practices that will enable you to efficiently deliver on one of the milestones in your storyboard.

- Your **storyboard** should be a map, drawing, table, or spreadsheet that includes 1) the *name* of your project; 2) the *audience* or *outlet* for your project (e.g., a journal, professor, or dissertation committee); 3) the *deadline* for your project; 4) all of the *milestones*—the subtasks and checkpoints—before your deadline (e.g., "draft of introduction," "finish reading relevant research," "share draft with colleague for peer review," "send out for proofreading," etc.); 5) a *time estimate* (how long you think tasks will take) and *deadline* for each milestone on your storyboard. For an effective storyboard, try to break your project down into as many subtasks as you can possibly think of and plot these as milestones on your storyboard.
- The **process plan** should take *one* of the milestones you've plotted on your storyboard and break down how you will structure your writing space and workflows to meet the deadline you've set for it. For example, if the milestone is "draft of literature review" and you've budgeted 8 hours for this task, detail where in your schedule you will block time for this. Put those hours in your calendar. Describe where you will work and, importantly, *how* you will work. Will you break the time into a series of [pomodoros](#)? Will you [schedule online meetings with an accountability partner](#)? Will you sprint through a lot of writing in one session at a [writing retreat](#) or will you hold yourself to writing 150 words first thing each morning for two weeks? You can format this plan in whatever way makes the most sense to you (e.g., bulleted list, narrative paragraph, diagram, etc.), but try to keep it compact enough to be useable; a page or two should probably be your goal.

Assignment 3: Selecting Mentor Texts

Each research field has different writing conventions. An interdisciplinary writing course like this can't teach you all of the conventions in every field, so instead we'll focus on building analytic skills for using sample or "mentor" texts to create a guide for structuring your own writing. For this assignment, all you have to do is find three examples of the kind (genre) of text you're working on in this seminar (the project you submitted in Assignment 1). E.g., if you're working on a dissertation proposal, find three other examples of dissertation proposals. The closer the examples are to what you're trying to produce, the better. For instance, if you're working on a dissertation proposal, try to find other proposals that students have written in your department at UConn; if you're working on an article, find similar articles (with similar methods) in the same journal you'd like to publish in. You don't have to read the entirety of these mentor texts word-for-word, but you should browse them enough to be familiar with the style and content of the texts. We'll use these mentor texts in class, and you'll also reflect on them alongside the interview you conduct (Assignment 4) in the reflective

assignment (Assignment 5) next week. Submit all three mentor texts to the folder with your name on it I've linked to in HuskyCT.

Assignment 4: Interview with an Expert

For this assignment, you will:

- Locate an expert in your field (most likely a professor) who is willing to be interviewed
- If possible, read some academic writing written by this expert in preparation of your interview (ideally, you should choose something recently published and something the expert was the first author on)
- Interview the professor. In your interview, you should focus on three areas:
 - the process the expert used to write the piece you read
 - how the expert learned to write in this genre, with this style (in other words, as a disciplinary insider)
 - advice the expert has for writers still learning to write in this field (i.e., graduate students)
- Take careful notes on your interviewee's responses during the interview

You may audio-record the interview if you would find a recording and if the expert you interview consents to this. Submit the notes you wrote to HuskyCT. These notes *don't* have to be polished or edited. A messy bulleted list is fine. You can even take a photo of hand-written notes and upload that. You'll use these notes next week for Assignment 5.

Assignment 5: Reflection on Expert Writers and Writing

Metacognition (thinking about your own writing and thought processes) is key to developing portable knowledge that can be transferred to unfamiliar contexts. This assignment is designed to promote metacognition by prompting you to articulate what you think expert writers in your field do to be successful. The goal of this exercise is to build some heuristics (writing strategies and guidelines) that you can apply when you write professionally in your field.

Write a reflection of at least 750 words that describes *principles* and *practices* for writing in your field that you deduce from reporting on the interview you conducted last week and analyzing the mentor texts you selected for Assignment 3. Use some of the same genre analysis tactics we practiced in class to make observations and derive conclusions from your mentor texts. You might ask, for example, how do authors you're studying conclude their introductions? What subheadings tend to appear under the "Methods" section? After making initial observations, ask yourself whether these are conventions for all writing in your field or for this specific genre (you might need to find examples of a few more texts to check your hypothesis). How flexible are these conventions? Conclude this assignment with a bulleted list of writing recommendations you would make for other graduate researchers in your field based on the reflective work you have done.

Assignment 6: Peer Review Reports

Now that you've read your peers' projects, it's time to provide some feedback on them. This is valuable because everyone will get feedback on their drafts. But the practice of reviewing someone else's work is also an effective way to sharpen your writing and analytic skills and also develop a vocabulary for *talking about writing*, which will allow you to improve your writing proficiency more quickly than practice alone. Incidentally, writing reviews is a really common purpose for academic writing in all fields: Book reviews are a genre published in many academic journals; reviewer reports are something most full-time academics will be called on to do at some point to ensure the quality of

published knowledge in a discipline; and most professors and TAs need reviewing skills for giving feedback on student work.

For your reports, write a one-page, single-spaced letter to the writer. You can also leave in-line comments on the draft, although this isn't required. Outline what you think is working really well and also specific sections that could be improved. When offering suggestions, always strive to offer concrete solutions to the writing problem you've identified. Focus your feedback on the specific elements the text's author asked you to pay attention to when you met during class to set goals for the reviews. Prioritize feedback—that means that you should address the most important things first. It's okay if you can't get all the feedback you'd like in the report. You'll also have a chance to meet with your peers to deliver feedback verbally, so you might want to keep a separate set of notes on things you noticed that might not have made it into your review report.

Upload the reports to HuskyCT, and also send them to the writer you reviewed when you meet with your peer review groups outside of class.

Assignment 7: Revised Project Section

You should only complete this assignment if you are taking this class for credit. Revise one section (e.g., an introduction, a literature review) of your project based on the feedback you received in the peer review reports and discussion. You may schedule a consultation with me if you would like to go over these revisions. When you're done, send both the revised and original versions to me as email attachments.

Policies

Synchronous Participation

This course will involve online synchronous work. These synchronous sessions give us the chance to have discussions, build community, and learn from each other. We'll also have the opportunity to complete short tasks (such as style exercises) and get immediate feedback, which facilitates learning. However, I understand that online synchronous work can be challenging, too. We're all on our screens a lot these days, and technology issues can create barriers at times. Try your best to participate fully in each session: Sign in on time to sessions; turn your mic off when others are speaking; and turn your camera on if you feel you're able to so that we can all see your face and communicate nonverbally. Although you are expected to attend all of our class meetings, I understand that emergencies do occur. In the event of an emergency that keeps you from being able to attend class, please email me as soon as possible so we can arrange a way to make up missed material.

Accessibility

I want this to be an accessible space for everyone. I understand if you need to turn your camera off at times to stretch or grab a snack. We will have a ten-minute break at the middle of each seminar session. And you should feel free to make use of all the modalities available to us in an online setting to engage (e.g., chat, link sharing). In order to make this space more accessible, I am hosting these sessions through WebEx so that you can call in if your technology fails. I am also hoping to have Computer-Assisted Real-Time Translation (CART) so that we have transcription of each session that allows you to read along. Please let me know if there are any ways I can make it easier for you to participate.

I assume that all of us learn in different ways and that the organization of any course will accommodate each student differently. Please contact me about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them, whether you plan to arrange for accommodations with the CSD or not. I want to make this class work for you as much as possible. If you are experiencing difficulty accessing this course or its materials, I encourage you to contact me as well as the [Center for Students with Disabilities](#) for support and accommodations.

Mutual Respect and Professionalism

I want this class to be a space in which we all feel safe and comfortable to share our thoughts, ideas, and opinions. Each one of us comes into the classroom with our own histories, experiences, identities, values, etc., and each one of us deserves respect, care, and thoughtfulness. I will never ask you to change your mind, but I will expect it to remain open in this course. That being said, I will not tolerate disrespectful or inappropriate comments that cause harm to others, and students making such remarks will be asked to leave the seminar.

As this is a writing course, we will share our writing with each other. I ask that you strive to be constructive in your responses to the ideas and writing of your peers. This does not mean that I want you to avoid being critical. However, our work is intended to focus on improvement rather than criticism, to look forward to the revised draft rather than to dwell on imperfections of the current draft. If you feel that another participant is being disrespectful, or you are uncomfortable with the dynamics of the seminar, please let me know and I will do my best to correct the situation. Please do not share any of your peers' writing outside the context of this class unless you have explicit permission to do so.

As in any other graduate course, you are expected to create your own work and properly attribute sources when referencing others. For an articulation of UConn's policy on academic honesty, see [the Graduate School's Policy on Scholarly Integrity](#). That said, I understand that many of the in-progress drafts we work on in this course may not have complete citations yet.

Communication

The best place to post questions about this course is the Q&A discussion board on HuskyCT. I will try to respond as quickly as possible, but I invite you to respond to your classmates also.

Individual and more private messages should all be handled through University (@uconn.edu) email. In accordance with university policies, I cannot communicate with you through a non-UConn email address. I check email multiple times throughout the day during most weekdays, but it might take me a day or two to get back to you. I check and respond less frequently on weekends.

For complex issues, it's best to set up a meeting with me through WebEx during office hours. This saves us both time, allows us to deal with the issue in a timely manner, and allows us to deal with the issue much more comprehensively. My schedule during the week is fairly flexible, and I really do like meeting with students, so don't feel like it's a bother to me!

Grading

Some of you may be taking this course not for credit or auditing it; if so, you can skip this section, as you will not receive a grade. This policy pertains only to those taking the course for credit.

This course uses a grading contract. Under this model, if you uphold the terms of the contract across the whole semester, you will receive an A grade. In the table below, you must meet *all* of the requirements in a given row to receive the corresponding grade in the left-hand column.

	Assignments completed	Annotations and discussion board posts completed	Participation activities completed
A	7	5	5
A-	7	4	5
B+	7	4	4
B	6	3	4
B-	6	2	3
C+	5	1	3
C	5	0	3
C-	4	0	3
D or F	0-3	0	0-2

**"Assignments" means the formal, numbered assignments described in the previous section; "Annotations and discussion board posts" means following the directions and completing all of the tasks for Perusall and HuskyCT discussions for a given week; "Participation activities" means completing the activity we do during each synchronous online session (if you miss a session, I may be able to give you the opportunity to make up this work in a different way if you contact me beforehand). D or F grades both represent a failure to engage substantively with the course. In such cases, I reserve the right to assess which grade is merited based on your overall performance.*

The contract for this class tries to make grading as transparent as possible by structuring grades around the completion of work rather than its quality. The course is structured this way because what matters is how you are developing new writing strategies in this course (through the completion of assigned work), not the writing abilities you bring to the class already.

It is possible that you may not be able to meet the terms of this contract due to extenuating circumstances, through no fault of your own. I will decide in consultation with the you whether alternative arrangements can be made. You should contact me as soon as possible about such extenuating circumstances so that you and I can make fair and equitable arrangements. (This will generally necessitate a WebEx meeting to discuss the situation and work out a solution.)

Syllabus Changes

We may need to adjust the timing, readings, and topics in response to the needs and pace of the seminar. I will always inform you of these changes through an announcement on HuskyCT. This syllabus is a live web document, so changes will be reflected in the document linked through HuskyCT.

Materials and Platforms

We will use WebEx to hold synchronous class sessions. Please download this software to your computer for optimal connection. We will use HuskyCT for all assignment submissions. Please let me know if you have trouble accessing the HuskyCT site for our course. We will use Perusall (which has been added to the course's HuskyCT) for completing annotations.

All readings and other seminar materials will be made available via HuskyCT. Since this course cannot promise to be comprehensive, you may desire additional resources to read on your own. I've included a full bibliography of materials I've excerpted for this class below, but I would especially recommend Caplan (2019) and Swales and Feak (2012) as references.

Bibliography of Readings

Anson, C. M. (2019). Storyboard your writing projects. In J. R. Gallagher & D. N. DeVoss (Eds.), *Explanation points: Publishing in rhetoric and composition* (pp. 53–56). Utah State University Press.

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Caplan, N. A. (2019). *Grammar choices for graduate and professional writers* (2nd ed.). The University of Michigan Press.

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<https://www.americanscientist.org/blog/the-long-view/the-science-of-scientific-writing>

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Matsuda, P. K. (2015). Writing involves the negotiation of language differences. In L. Adler-Kassner & E. A. Wardle (Eds.), *Naming what we know: Threshold concepts of writing studies* (pp. 68–70). Utah State University Press.

Rose, S. (2015). All writers have more to learn. In L. Adler-Kassner & E. A. Wardle (Eds.), *Naming what we know: Threshold concepts of writing studies* (pp. 59–60). Utah State University Press.

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Williams, J. M., & Bizup, J. (2017). *Style: Lessons in clarity and grace* (Twelfth Edition). Pearson.

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