

## English Grammar: Concepts & Controversies: WRPR/LNGT 110 (Spring 2024)

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I don't judge people based on  
race, creed, colour or gender.

I judge people based on  
spelling, grammar,  
punctuation and  
sentence structure.



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appt.

### Course Overview

This course is designed to increase your ability to use grammatical terms for analysis, to make informed grammatical choices in your writing, and to understand some of the beliefs that underlie our judgments about grammar. The first half of the course is devoted primarily to learning about the structure of English. We will learn to analyze English sentences using grammatical terminology, and you will have many opportunities to apply and assess grammatical concepts. We will also engage various perspectives on the question, *Why does grammar matter?* We will draw extensively on our existing knowledge of and experience with English grammar instruction and usage.

In the second half of the course, we explore complex issues related to grammar, such as...

- Prescriptivism as a moral, educational, and social justice issue
- Forces that reinforce prescriptivism—e.g., technology, dictionaries, education
- Inclusive language, political correctness, profanity, and censorship
- The past, present, and future of grammar education

We will explore these issues through course readings, class discussion, and written work. Near the end of the course, we will focus on synthesizing and building on what has been learned in the semester.

### Required Readings

1. Greenbaum & Nelson (2013). *An Introduction to English Grammar* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Routledge  
*Available as PDF on Canvas, but you may wish to print out part of all of the text.*
2. Curzan, A. (2014). *Fixing English: Prescriptivism and language history*. Cambridge University Press. *Also available as PDF on Canvas, but a hard copy can be purchased relatively cheaply via online retailers.*
3. Other readings will be provided via Canvas (Files>>Readings)

## Course Expectations

### Communication and Timeliness

Your presence and engagement are an important part of your learning, of your peers' learning as well! I expect you to be in class on time as much as possible, to complete all assigned readings, and turn in your work on time. **Communication is key!** Unless we have made arrangements in advance, there may be penalties for late papers, multiple absences, or lack of preparation for class. If you do need to miss class, please notify me (via email or text message) before class that you will be absent. Extended absences may require approval from a Dean. I often send reminders and notes via email, so please check your email at least once every 24 hours. I attempt to return all calls and emails within 48 hours.

Your feedback on the course is very helpful to me. I will give you opportunities to reflect on how things are going, both in-class and anonymously. But I appreciate hearing from you at any point about your needs and experiences. If you encounter difficulties with any course material or assignments, please contact me early and often, so that I can help support you.

### Engagement during Class

What does it mean to “participate” in this course? Course participation includes discussion (both speaking and active listening), as well as engagement in individual, pair, and small group activities. This means that doing the readings and homework is crucial to your ability to participate (more info below). Participation in class discussion is also important to your course learning, and for this class, that means both **speaking and listening**. Some agreements that can help us to have productive dialogue together include:

- ❖ Share airtime- step ‘up’ or ‘back’ as needed.
- ❖ Avoid interrupting—allow others to finish their speaking.
- ❖ Maintain confidentiality with other people’s stories.

Being an **active participant** in class also requires you to be organized. This includes:

- Making time to do the readings before class, focusing in particular on key questions and terms, which I’ll share in class.
- Having a folder/notebook in which to keep course handouts and other materials.
- Keeping track of your schedule, so that you meet deadlines.
- Using multiple strategies (e.g., Google Drive, OneDrive, Dropbox) to back up your work (Note: Expect and prepare for a computer crash at some point this semester!).

I also expect you to take **ownership of your own learning**. In the first half of the course, you will have **frequent homework assignments** to reinforce your understanding of grammar structures and terminology. *You are to welcome to work with others on these shorter*

*assignments, but you should also attempt some exercises on your own, to ensure that you are learning the material.*

Finally, although I do not have a specific policy about the use of technology in the classroom, I expect you to be **mindful** about using devices in a way that promotes learning rather than distraction. I encouraged you to remain “unplugged” as possible so you can be fully present during class 😊

Final note: I am open to your using AI text-generation tools like ChatGPT to aid your learning, similar to how you might use an internet search engine to find information or examples for an assignment. But please be advised that these tools have many weaknesses, including inserting inaccurate information and made-up sources. If you would like to use one of these tools for a class assignment, please **notify me in advance** so we can make sure you use the tools to *enrich rather than inhibit* your learning. You may NOT use AI tools for the take-home quiz.

### **Formatting for Written Work**

Unless specified otherwise, written assignments should be double-spaced, 12-point font (Times New Roman), with 1-inch margins. [APA citation style](#) is preferred, but other formats may be accepted upon student request (NOTE: No cover page or abstract is necessary). All work should include an honor code statement: ***I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment.*** If you have worked with anyone other than a tutor (or Prof. Shapiro) on an assignment—or have used an AI text generation tool or other technology—please note that as well.

### **Academic Integrity and Support**

In class, we will talk more about academic integrity, including ways use sources appropriately, as well as when and how to collaborate with peers on assignments. For now, please remember that **plagiarism usually involves using someone else’s words or ideas as if they were your own.** It can have very serious consequences, including academic suspension or even expulsion. For more information on plagiarism and how to avoid it, please see this resource from the University of North Carolina Writing Center: <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/plagiarism/>. For a self-guided tutorial about academic integrity at Middlebury, visit **go/ait.**

If you have a learning issue **of any kind** that might impact your studies, please communicate with me as soon as possible. For formal disability accommodations, please be sure to contact the Disability Resource Center (formerly “ADA Office”): <https://www.middlebury.edu/office/disability-resource-center>

Although I will be available to support your learning, I hope you will also make use of support from:

- **The Center for Teaching, Learning, and Research (go/CTLR)** offers peer tutoring for nearly every academic subject, including drop-in writing tutors, prescheduled study groups, and professional staff.
- The **Writing Center (go/WC)** offers both peer and professional writing tutoring, online and in-person. If you would like to work multiple times with a single tutor, please let me know, and we can arrange that.
- The **Office of Digital Learning and Inquiry—go/DLINQ** offers support with all sorts of technologies and digital tools.
- **Professional librarians (go/lib)** can help you with finding sources for assignments, incorporating sources into your papers, and many other tasks. You can reach a librarian via chat, text, phone, and in-person- see details at <https://middlebury.libanswers.com/>
- **Counseling Services (go/counseling)**: Can help with emotional and social challenges, including stress, anxiety, and adjustment to Middlebury. There are often same-day in-person appointments available, in addition to 24/7 support via TimelyCare.
- **Anderson Freeman Center (go/afc)**: Intercultural Center in Carr Hall, designed in particular for students who have been historically marginalized in higher education. It's a great place to relax, make new friends, cook, etc.

## Grading Overview

- ❖ Participation (online and in-class, including 1x co-facilitating discussion) = 15%
- ❖ HW (practice exercises, reflections, peer review, other small assignments) = 10%
- ❖ Quizzes (dates are in calendar) = 10% each, 20% total
- ❖ Paper 1 (Grammar Autobiography- ~4pp) = 15%
- ❖ Paper 2 (Rhetorical Grammar Analysis, 4-5 pp.) = 20%
- ❖ Final Project: Public writing/speaking on a topic related to prescriptivism/linguistic profiling (length variable), plus in-class sharing = 20%

## About the Quizzes

Each quiz will assess your understanding of course terms and concepts. Quizzes may include fill-in-the-blank, matching, and short answer questions, as well as error analysis and other application activities. Quiz 1 will be taken in class, and you will be allowed to use a single “crib sheet” of notes. Quiz 2 is take-home and open-note. You will receive a list of terms and skills to focus on for each quiz, but the best way to prepare is to be present and engaged in class, and to complete all homework assignments. In the weeks before each quiz, you’ll be asked to do reflect on which terms and skills you are most confident with, which you have improved on, and which you still need more work on.

## DESCRIPTION OF MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS

(more details on each assignment will be provided in-class)

### I. Grammar Autobiography (~4 pages)

Describe your past experiences with learning and using prescriptive grammar, and your current views on the topic. Questions you might explore in your paper:

- Have you studied English grammar explicitly? What was the experience like for you? (If not, do you regret it?)
- Did you have any teachers (or friends/family members) who were “sticklers” for grammar? What impact did they have on your views/feelings about prescriptive grammar?
- Have you ever experienced linguistic insecurity regarding your spoken or written grammar?
- Do you ever judge people for improper use of grammar?
- Where do you fall on the “prescriptivist” vs. “progressive” continuum re: grammar?

### II. Rhetorical Grammar Analysis (4-5 pages)

Choose an author, musician, activist, or other public figure. Gather a piece (or collection of pieces) of writing they have done for a specific audience. This could be academic, public, artistic, or digital writing (e.g., blogging/social media), ideally totaling at least 5000 words (although there may be exceptions).

Analyze the text(s) to **identify** 3 or more key grammatical features/patterns and develop an **argument** about how these choices align with the writer’s goals, identities, and audience expectations, including multiple examples of each feature/pattern. (We will practice this sort of analysis in class).

You will write up key findings of your analysis in a 4-5 page essay that answers the following questions:

1. Why is it important/useful to analyze this particular person’s grammar patterns? **(Rationale)**
2. Why/how did you choose this body of texts for analysis? **(Methods)**
3. What key rhetorical grammatical patterns did you identify within these texts and why are they significant, given the rhetorical context (goals, identities, audience)? **(Findings)**
4. Why are these results significant more broadly? i.e., What does this tell us about that person, that genre/mode of writing, that audience, etc.? What might others learn from this writer’s rhetorical grammar choices? **(Implications)**

### **III. Final Project: Public Persuasive Writing or Speaking (length variable)**

Choose a topic from class (or related to class) that you have a strong opinion about, and an audience that you think needs to hear what you have to say. You develop the argument and the genre—it could be an op-ed, a children’s book, a video rant, a TED-style talk, or a letter to someone in your life. Make sure that you support your argument with evidence, including at least 2 sources or examples from class. You’ll share your work in class, and you’ll also be asked to reflect on the rhetorical grammar choices you made, in keeping with your goals, audience, and genre of writing.

Some topics students have explored in past iterations of this class include:

1. How serious of a problem is linguistic profiling in [school, courts, workplace, or another context]? What might be done about it?
2. Should grammar be taught more—or differently—in public schools? (in U.S. or elsewhere)
3. How important is standardization of spelling, grammar, etc.? Should the “rules” be more lenient in certain contexts? When/where?
4. Is texting or another technology/media trend a “threat” to the English language?
5. How might students use AI text generators (e.g., ChatGPT) to become more empowered as language users?
6. How important and useful is politically-correct and/or inclusive language?
7. When is censorship (e.g., of profane or obscene language) justified?

\*You can also respond to an argument made by an author we’ve read/learned from in class.

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## Course Schedule (Spring 2024)

**NOTE:** There may be small changes to readings or HW, but major due dates will stay the same.

Feb 13 (T)- Course introduction and overview. Begin discussing key terms: *prescriptive vs. descriptive grammar rules, register, standard grammar, grammarians vs. linguists, linguistic insecurity, rhetorical grammar*. Use Greenbaum & Nelson (2013) as reference. Review terms: **Subj vs. Predicate**; Parts of speech: **N, V, Adj, Adv, Pro, Prep, Conj, Det/Artic**

Feb 15 (Th)- Read/Learn: subject (NP), predicate (VP), transitive verb, direct object. **HW due from G&N:** pp. 25-27 Ex. 1.1, 1.3, 1.4- identify *subjects and verbs*, & 1.6- identify *subjects, transitive verbs, and objects*. In class: Freewrite/sharing for grammar autobiography. Also practice sentence analysis.

**Due Sun Feb 18 (on Canvas):** Draft of Paper 1: Grammar Autobiography (~4 pgs.)

Feb 20 (T)- **HW due from G&N:** pp. 27-30 Ex. 1.7, 1.9, 1.10, 1.12 (begin in class). Focus on verb types (*auxiliary, linking, transitive intransitive*), *direct object, indirect object, subject complement, object complement, adverbial*. We will look at more advanced exercises in class, including on *grammatical ambiguity*. If time: Basic tree structure diagrams.

Feb 22 (Th)- Read/Learn: *phrase vs. clause vs. sentence. Verb tense (past/pres/future), aspect (simple/perfect/progressive), and voice (active/passive)*. **HW due from G&N:** p. 58 Ex 2.6; p. 92 Ex. 3.7, 3.8, and 3.9; p. 99 Ex. 3.29. Will look at other exercises in class. Free-write self-eval #1: *What did you know already? What have you learned? What are you still struggling with?*

**Due Sun Feb 25** (if not completed in class, on Canvas): Self-evaluation #1

Feb 27 (T)- Read/Learn: *Phrasal verbs vs. prepositional phrases; Noun, Adjectival, & Adverbial phrases*; **HW due from G&N:** p. 91-97, Ex. 3.5, 3.17, 3.19, 3.25. Will look at other exercises in class Also review for Quiz 1.

Feb 29 (Th)- **Quiz 1.** Also bring Curzan book to class for preview/introduction.

**Due Sun Mar 3** (optional): Revised draft of Paper 1 (email to Prof S. along with Writer's Memo).

Mar 5 (T)- Read/Learn: *compound vs. complex sentences; subordinate clauses; relative clauses (restricted and non-restricted)*. **HW due from G&N:** p. 117 Ex. 4.6, p. 221-225 Ex. 8.2, 8.3, 8.13, 8.14

Mar 7 (Th)- Read Curzan Intro. (Theme- What is prescriptivism? Why should we care?). **HW due from G&N**: pp. 142-147: Ex. 5.2, 5.5, 5.7. 5.16, 5.19. \*Possible student led discussion. Start work on Tuesday's HW.

\* **3/7 4:30pm(ish): EC Opportunity**: Talk on "agency and transgender language" by Dr. J Calder from CU Boulder.

Mar 12 (T)- Read Curzan Ch 1—esp. pp. 24-40 (Theme: Types of prescriptivism). \*Student led discussion. **HW due from G&N**: pp. 159-161 **#s 1-5 ONLY** in Ex. 6.1, 6.2, 6.5. 6.6, 6.10.

Mar 14 (Th)- Curzan Ch 2, focus on highlighted sections. (Theme: History of prescriptivism in English). Also read Intro to Truss's *Eats, Shoots, & Leaves*. \*Student led discussion. Continue discussing style issues in G&N (e.g., do Ch 6- p. 162 Ex. 6.13- in class).

**\*\*\*\*\*Mar 15-24: SPRING BREAK\*\*\*\*\***

Mar 26 (T)- Read Hulst (2020) on rhetorical grammar article (Canvas). **HW**: Bring an excerpt of your past writing to class for rhetorical grammar analysis. Preparation for Quiz 2 (error analysis, recognizing stylistic choices, etc.)

Mar 28 (Th)- **HW**: Post to Canvas a sample of writing that uses grammar in rhetorically savvy ways—maybe even breaking some prescriptivist grammar rules! Begin discussing Paper 2 topics. Finish reviewing for Quiz 2.

**Due Fri Mar 29<sup>th</sup> (Canvas)**: Proposal for Paper 2- or sign up to meet w/ Prof S. next week

**Due Sun Mar 31<sup>st</sup> (Canvas)**: **Quiz 2** (take-home)

Apr 2 (T)- [hooks \(2004\)](#) and [Young \(2014\)](#) PDFs on Canvas. (optional: check out [NCTE/CCCC 2020](#)) (Theme: Anti-prescriptivism as Anti-racism?). \*Student-led discussion. Practice rhetorical analysis in class w/ assigned readings.

Apr 4 (Th)- ONLINE ASYNCRHONOUS CLASS- Read Curzan Ch 5 and [Kristoff \(2023\)](#) (PDF on Canvas) (Theme: Inclusive/PC language as prescriptivism). **HW**: By midnight, complete online annotation and discussion activities on Canvas.

Apr 9 (T)- Curzan Ch 6 and [Bergen, 2019- PDF on Canvas](#) (Theme: Slurs, Profanity, and Reappropriation) \*Student-led discussion. **HW**: Bring Paper 2 initial notes/outline to class for oral peer review.



Apr 11 (Th)- Shapiro (2022, Ch 1- PDF on Canvas) and consider relationship to previous readings and to your own experience. \*Student led discussion. (Theme: Progressive grammar instruction?!)

**Due Sun Apr 14<sup>th</sup>:** Draft of Paper 2 **OR** sign up for mtg on Mon, Tues, or Wed

Apr 16 (T)- Curzan Ch 7. (Theme: Summing up what we've learned about prescriptivism)

Apr 18 (Th)- Bring device for in-class workshop re: Paper 2.

[NOTE: Fri Apr 19: SPRING STUDENT SYMPOSIUM- extra credit opportunity!]

**Due Sun Apr 21<sup>st</sup>:** Revised draft of Paper 2 w/ Writer's Memo (Canvas)

Apr 23 (T)- Read [Shapiro blog post](#) (March 2022) on linguistic profiling. Bring examples of memes, other media, and personal stories connected to the reading. Also discuss final project.

Apr 25 (Th)- Jigsaw exploration of online readings re: fighting linguistic profiling in higher education:

- 1) [Savini \(2021\) IHE article](#) on classroom practices.
- 2) [Wolfram's \(2023\) Daedalus article](#) on campus-wide initiatives;
- 3) [Shapiro & Aull's \(2023\) IHE article](#) on plain/accessible language. Possible additional options—

**Due Sun Apr 28<sup>th</sup>:** Proposal for final project, including list of model texts and genre/grammar features (submit worksheet on Canvas)

Apr 30 (T)- ChatGPT day! Tentative readings (both short): 1) U of Michigan Writing Center: [Linguistic Justice and GenAI](#); and 2) [Rosenzweig \(2023\)](#) in *LA Times*. Bring a device to class for exploration and experimentation!

May 2 (Th)- Topic/focus TBD- Possible in-class work time.

**Due Mon May 6<sup>th</sup>:** Draft of Final Project (Canvas)

May 7 (T)- Student sharing of final projects. \*Possible student-led discussion. Course response forms.

May 9 (Th)- Finish Student Sharing. \*Possible student-led discussion. Course wrap-up

**Due May 13 (Mon)** (Extensions available upon request): Final Project