

## **WRI 299: Independent Study: Rhetorical Grammar for the Writer: Awareness and Intention**

2 Credits (satisfies the grammar requirement of the creative writing and English major and minor)

### **Course Overview:**

Let us consider the sentence. Here we find the central structure (of meaning, of feeling) in the language. Even poets and prosers who elide or refuse to complete a sentence do so knowing what makes a clause. Still, given that the possible varieties of the sentence are infinite, it is lucky that the contours of even the most complex sentence are traceable. Grammar (and its companion, syntax) is your guide as you parse the sense of sentences—and it is also your guide as you compose your own.

Since the sentence is comprised of parts of speech, we'll trace and locate those parts. But since English is—like all modern languages—a system *in use*, we'll always complement our study in the textbook with investigation of grammar as it is written (and spoken). The course then becomes a thorough (but not exhaustive) study of Modern English Grammar designed to add variety and sophistication to your writing choices. With the main framework of sentence student we may also cover these topics (among others):

- Fragments, Splices, & Run-Ons
- Subjects & Predicates
- Subordination
- Nouns
- Verbs
- Verbals
- Adjectives & Adverbs
- Pronouns
- Agreements
- Phrases
- Clauses
- Punctuation

Among these classes, we'll investigate many of their species (that are living and changing in the language). In the course of this investigation, we'll learn the “rules” of usage but also discover where the rules become questions of style.

### **Course Objectives:**

Through the work of this course, you should:

- Gain an increased awareness of the structures of the language, in particular the boundaries of and within the sentence.
- Resultantly, find an increased ability and agility in your own sentence-writing.

### **Text:**

Kolln, Martha. *Rhetorical Grammar: Grammatical Choices, Rhetorical Effects (5th Edition)*. New York: Longman, 2006. ISBN-13: 978-0321397232

### **Meetings:**

We'll meet once a week, most weeks introducing a different topic, but consistently considering the sentence. You should read assigned portions in the book *early* in the week so that you can be alert to new aspects of language as you do that week's Sentence Transcriptions. Our meetings will typically begin with your narration of something interesting you discovered in one of your Inscriptions and then include some review of the week's topic and some exercises.

Our week 1 meeting will cover logistics. No meeting week 12 (instructor out of town). Week 15 you will present your semester project. No meeting week 16. *Do not miss any of our meetings.*

**Note:** this course assumes a good deal of **independent** study; you'll need to prepare fully for each of our weekly meetings and work consistently on the term projects, which are expected to be **cumulative** demonstrations of your understanding of the topics we'll address (that is, you can't adequately address them the night before they are due).

## Assignments:

### Sentence Transcriptions:

A good deal of grammar study is finding ways to slow down your apprehension of the language you encounter every day. To this end, I'll ask you to **transcribe** ten (10) sentences a week. That is, re-write them, word for word. You can do this by hand or word processor (although if you're a quick touch-typist, you may find there is further value in the added slowness of handwriting). While you transcribe, allow yourself to pay closer attention to the language and how the author is using it. Every week, I'll ask you to narrate something interesting you found (a sentence structure; a word choice; a use of punctuation—anything other than content). You might use the week's reading to direct your attention to a specific aspect of grammar, but you don't need to limit yourself to that topic. You can even (and especially) note parts of the construction of the sentence that you don't understand.

### Annotated Portfolios:

Along the way, you'll keep an ongoing collection of these Sentence Transcriptions. This collection will be the basis for the two (2) Annotated Portfolios you will create. Each portfolio should first present a sample of your transcriptions. Then, using each sample as a model, try your hand at **imitation**: write your own sentence following its contours. Next write a **narrative commentary** about what you have discovered about language and grammar through this exercise. These annotations may well draw on the narratives you begin in class, but an effective portfolio should re-organize your learning in some cohesive structure. As assistance toward that organization (and toward my understanding of your portfolio as its reader), you should begin each portfolio with an **introduction** that sketches the learning you aim to present (and which may also point to the further questions you have).

Components of a portfolio:

- Introduction
- Transcribed sentences (as many as needed to demonstrate your learning)
- Imitations of these sentences
- Narrative commentary on included sentences and imitations

Due Dates for Annotated Portfolio:

- **Week 7:** Week of March 1
- **Week 13:** Week of April 19

Find your sentences *anywhere*: in your textbooks, in conversations, in the media, on posters, online, in your own writing.

### Sentence Extraction & Completion & into Crafted Story

The other good way to flex and grow your grammatical abilities is to work with sentences, breaking them apart and re-combining them. We'll do some exercises in both sentence extraction and sentence completion. And then you'll use one set of combined sentences as the basis for a story. I'll ask you to find some way of noting which sentences came from the exercise and which you invented (probably using colored text). After you complete your story, please take a step back and write a **reflection** on the process of creating it and what you think you have learned.

Due Date for Sentence-Completion Story:

- **Week 15:** Week of May 3

### Evaluation:

- Meetings/Discussion/Exercises 30%
- Portfolios 40% (20% each)
- Sentence-Completion Story (& Learning Reflection) 30%