

Leap into the Matrix:
The Art and Practice of Rhetoric

English 103-8227 (Composition and Critical Thinking)

Fall 2013



Jan Steen. *Rhetoricians at a Window*. c. 1662 - 1666. Oil on canvas, 74 x 59 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA, USA
<http://www.abcgallery.com/S/steen/steen18.html>

Truth is more of a stranger than fiction.
Mark Twain

You've got to believe it to see it.
Marshall McLuhan

NEO
The Matrix. What is the Matrix?

TRINITY
Twelve years ago I met a man, a great man, who said that no one could be told the answer to that question. That they had to see it, to believe it.

.....
He told me that no one should look for the answer unless they have to because once you see it, everything changes. Your life and the world you live in will never be the same. It's as if you wake up one morning and the sky is falling.

.....
MORPHEUS
The Matrix is everywhere, it's all around us, here even in this room. You can see it out your window, or on your television. You feel it when you go to work, or go to church or pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.

Remember that all I am offering is the truth. Nothing more.
The Matrix (1999)

Truth is like taffy. It's delicious when it is stretched.
Stephen Colbert of The Colbert Report, Comedy Central

This course is taught completely online: 26 August-15 December

H. Vishwanadha

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Office Hours: Online anytime

1. The purpose of this course is to develop our critical thinking, a survival skill. In turn, this skill will help us to read, think, and write more effectively than we have been doing in the past. We shall also explore the history of the essay and be introduced to the fundamentals of **rhetoric**. Please note that this is an **online** course that runs from 26 August to 15 December (16 weeks).

2. The reading and writing assignments in this course will teach us the typical structure of a sound argument, will help us in critical evaluation of arguments presented to us, and will enable us to compose persuasive arguments based on the truth. As a result, we shall do our part in focusing more light than heat on important issues that affect us all.

3. Required texts:

- (a) Diane Ackerman. A Natural History of the Senses. New York: Vintage, 1991.
- (b) Neil Postman. Amusing Ourselves to Death. New York: Penguin, 1985. 2005.
- (c) **Silva Rhetoricae** at <http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/Silva.htm>. A free site
- (d) Socrates. Georgias and Apology. <http://classics.mit.edu/Browse/index-Plato.html>.
- (e) A Pocket Style Manual. Ed. Diana Hacker. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007.
- (f) A good desk dictionary.

4. Assignments:

Essays (about 5)	50%
Timed-Writing Assignments (about 5)	25%
<u>Weekly</u> online discussions	15%
Portfolio (at least one entry per week)	10%

5. The absolute TRUTH about composition according to Vishwanadha:

We write not just to use paper, but to discover and understand.
We write not just for grades or teachers, but to communicate with
and persuade human beings.
We shall write not just correctly, but also effectively and gracefully.
All good writing is intelligent re-writing.

6. There is no formal research paper. Most of the essays will, however, require research--according to standard procedures taught in English 101. You may review these principles and procedures in Diana Hacker's A Pocket Style Manual. Essays not following these guidelines will not be accepted.

7. **In this online course, we will cover all the material and do all the work usually completed in a 16-week course taught on campus.**

8. Therefore, we are expected to complete all the assigned work and participate in all discussions every week, just as we would in an on-campus course. There will be online discussions every week on a variety of topics and issues in which everyone is **required** to participate. Missing more than **three** discussions or being absent for **two or more weeks** (without proper extenuating reasons) will result in your being dropped from the class.

You should check the course home page and your email inbox at least once every day throughout the semester to be aware of the assignments and their deadlines as well as any updates.

9. There is no final exam as such. The last timed assignment and the last essay will be completed online latest by **Friday 13 December**.

Detailed instructions for the final essays to be given in the course of the term.

10. The course grade--a cumulation of all the written work--will be determined according to the following scale:

A+	12	B+	9	C+	6	D+	3		
A	11	B	8	C	5	D	2		
A-	10	B-	7	C-	4	D-	1	F	0

Please complete all assignments, both written and oral--on time. Any assignment more than one week late--except under extenuating circumstances--will lose one letter grade. **Not submitting a major writing assignment, such as an essay or timed-writing assignment, will result in an automatic drop of at least one letter grade in the course grade.**

11. Active class participation is vital. You should "attend class" regularly. As stated above (#8), there will be online discussions every week on a variety of topics and issues in which everyone is **required** to participate. Missing more than **three** discussions or being absent for **two or more weeks** (without proper extenuating reasons) will result in your being dropped from the class. Formally dropping the class is still your responsibility.

12. Course SLO: At the end of the course, the successful student will be able to research, evaluate and cite outside sources for uses in the student's own writing.

13. Student Learning Outcomes: Upon successful completion of the course, the student will be able to:

- read and critically evaluate college-level material;
- distinguish between factual statements and opinions;
- identify the thesis or main idea of a text;
- understand and evaluate the primary argument and assumptions of a nonfiction text;
- identify the chief qualities of the persona and tone of the author of a text;
- understand and evaluate the rhetorical strategy deployed by the author;

- understand and apply the basic principles of college-level research, such as locate sources, read and annotate them, and use them appropriately in the student's own writing;
- learn to write effectively for different audiences and purpose, with an emphasis on informative and persuasive writing;
- appreciate the nuances and richness of written and oral expression in the English language;
- use writing to construct a community of critical thinkers and responsible citizens.

This course helps improve our skills in critical thinking, critical reading, effective research, and persuasive writing. We will write and revise essays throughout the semester to help develop these skills and to measure our progress in improving these skills.

Please adhere to the principles outlined in the “Standards of Student Contact” in the “Things to Know/Policies,” pp. 114-16, in the Printed Class Schedules and Policies link at the college website, www.wlac.edu.

You will find clear discussion of the nature of academic writing, the procedures for submitting essays in college, and the nature of plagiarism and how to avoid it in Diana

Hacker's A Pocket Style Manual and at www.dianahacker.com/writersref. I shall refer to appropriate sections in the book throughout the semester. Read them carefully and follow the instructions.

Finally, before you consider dropping the class, talk to me. It's never as bad as you think it is. Best wishes.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Week(s)	Subjects discussed	Assignment
1-2	Introduction Comparison and Contrast	Essay I and Class Paper 1
3-4	Discussion of Ackerman	Essay I and Paper 1
5-6	Plato's "Gorgias" Essential Principles of Rhetoric Definition	Essay II and Paper 2
7-8	Review of Silva Rhetoricae Introduction to rhetorical analysis Socrates "Apology"	Essay II and Paper 2
9-10	Postman Chs.1-2 Evaluation of Arguments	Essay III and Paper 3
11-12	Postman Chs. 3-5 Rhetorical Analysis (continued)	Essay III and Paper 3
13-15	Postman Chs. 6-10 Logical Fallacies Argument and Persuasion	Essay IV and Paper 4
16	Summing up	Essay V and Paper 5

A Few Words to the Wise

1. The grade on an essay is a response strictly limited to that essay. It is not a reflection on the student's writing abilities generally, a comment on his or her level of intelligence in other areas, or a judgment of his or her worth as a human being.
2. Grades are not the only means, or always a reliable means, of encouragement. Teachers do provide encouragement in a variety of other, more effective ways.
3. The course grade is a cumulation of all the written work in the semester. A student's improvement during the semester will enhance the final course grade.
4. Re-writing is the best form of writing. Revision is not just "fixing" the grammar and spelling. It involves re-thinking the subject in order to make the essay clear and effective.
5. Students have a variety of forums in which to express their concerns about a course or the instructor and air their grievances. You should feel free to express your concerns, criticisms etc. to me directly as well as to other, responsible members of the college community regarding this course. In the interests of fairness, I suggest that you inform me of your concerns and discuss them with me first before you take them up with other members of the college community.