## **Introduction**

In this course we will be using a grading contract to evaluate your writing. A grading contract basically promises you a certain grade provided that you do all the work and meet all the requirements for that grade.

We usually think about grading essays – with a rubric and a final grade at the end. However, with a grading contract, we look at the entire writing process and all the work that you do, such as:

* reading, researching, and annotating texts;
* submitting a thorough, complete first draft;
* writing a thoughtful review of your peers’ drafts;
* revising your drafts;
* compiling a revised and polished final portfolio; and
* completing any other tasks that can contribute to your growth as a writer.

*Why are we doing it this way?*

You may already be familiar with the process of drafting, peer reviewing, and revising in order to submit a final draft. However, that process tends to focus on the end result – a final, well-polished paper that is graded on style as opposed to your effort and the development of your ideas and skills.

How unfair is that?! You spend hours on your assignment, reading and thinking, writing and rewriting, only for the instructor to give you a low grade because you missed a bunch of punctuation marks or because it just “wasn’t good.”

With a grading contract, instead of focusing on how well you edit your rough draft, instructors focus more on giving you feedback for revision and growth throughout the researching, drafting, and revision processes. Again, the focus is on completing your writing and the number of significant revisions that you will make.

Furthermore, we want you to feel comfortable taking your first steps in writing as your genuine self. This means that you should feel free to write in whatever dialect you wish – we won’t focus on Edited American English as it tends to promote a supposed style that doesn’t authentically exist. We do expect you to edit, proofread, and polish your works so that they don’t have serious grammatical errors that disrupt the flow of reading, but we will save that work for our final portfolio.

*How does it work?*

Read on to find out! Click on the link in the Table of Contents to jump to each section!

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## **Grades on BlackBoard**

All progress on your work will be tracked in BlackBoard. Your work will be marked as either Complete or Incomplete. A complete means that your work satisfies the requirements for the assignment. An incomplete means that your work did not satisfy the requirement for the assignment and may affect your ability to get a “B”.

To learn more about grades and how you can earn an “A”, or how you might make below a “B,” read the section [Criteria for Grades](#_Criteria_for_Grades)(p. 3).

*Tracking Points on BlackBoard*

For tracking purposes, all weekly and major assignments are worth 1 point. You earn 1 point if you complete the assignment. You earn 0 points if you do not complete the assignment. However, you can earn 2 points if you make a good faith attempt to complete the "Let's Reach for an A" requirements. You cannot earn half points.

*Midterm Grades*

Midterm grades will be assigned in early to mid-October. These grades will be based on how well you’ve fulfilled the grading criteria on p. 3. However, this grade may not reflect what your final grade will be.

*Final Grades*

Your final grade will be based on all the work that you’ve done throughout the semester. You can approximate your grade based on the Criteria for Grades.

You can find a list of the work that will count towards your grade on

p. 4 ([ENGL 1013](#_ENGL_1013_Checklist))

p. 5 ([ENGL 1023](#_ENGL_1023_Checklist))

p. 6 ([ENGL 1033](#_ENGL_1033_Checklist))

## **Deadlines**

Major assignment and weekly assignments have a preset due date, which you can find on the syllabus and in BlackBoard. However, you have a grace period of 2 days after the deadline to submit the assignment where it will still be accepted for grading. After that grace period, the assignment will not be accepted.

Of course, we understand that life happens. If an emergency arises, please email your instructor as soon as possible before the grace period ends. The instructor can work with you to figure out a new deadline.

This timeline can help you visualize how this deadline and grace period works.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Fri | Sat | Sun | Mon | Tues | Wed |
| You can turn in the assignment early. | You can turn in the assignment early. | ASSIGNMENT  DUE DATE | Grace Period Day 1 | Grace Period Day 2 | Assignment is late and not accepted. |

## **Criteria for Grades**

This section outlines the specifics on how you can earn your grades.

*Default “B”*

The default grade in this course is a “B”. You will earn a B if you do all of the following:

1. attend class regularly, not having more than 4 unexcused absences for a MW or TTh section (6 for a MWF section) in a semester;  
   in an online asynchronous course, not missing more than 4 discussion boards in a semester;
2. meet all due dates (including the grace period);
3. have no more than 3 incomplete weekly assignments (no fewer than 12 weekly assignment points);
4. meet writing criteria for all major assignments;
5. attempt clear substantial revision on each draft of all major assignments;
6. give thoughtful peer feedback during class workshops;
7. write a cover letter to accompany the final version of your major assignment;
8. attend mandatory conferences with the instructor to discuss drafts; and
9. submit a complete, cohesive, and organized final writing portfolio.

Essentially, you earn a “B” if you put in good time and effort, do all the work, and do your best to attend all your classes.

*“A”*

As you can see, earning a “B” depends primarily on behaviors. Have you shown responsible effort and consistency in our class? Have you done what was asked of you in the spirit it was asked?

You can earn an “A” if you:

* have no more than 2 incomplete weekly assignments (no fewer than 13 weekly assignment points); and
* make a good faith attempt to complete the “Let’s Reach for an A” sections in 2 of your 3 major assignments.

*“C”*

You will earn a “C” in this course if you:

* have 5 unexcused absences for a MW or TTh section (7 for a MWF section)  
  in an online asynchronous course, miss more than 5 discussion boards;
* have 4 or more incomplete weekly assignments (no fewer than 11 weekly assignment points); and
* miss 1-3 of the conditions in the “B” category (including the absences and the missing assignments as listed above).

*“D or F”*

You will earn a “D” or an “F” in this course if you:

* have 6 or more unexcused absences (MW or TTh sections);
* have 8 or more unexcused absences (MWF sections);
* miss 6 or more discussion boards (online sections);
* have 5 or more incomplete weekly assignments (10 weekly assignment points or fewer);
* fail to turn in ANY major writing assignment (cover letter + final submission);and
* fail to meet 5 or more of the B conditions (including the absences and the missing assignments as listed above).

## **ENGL 1013 Checklist of Items for Grading**

This checklist details all the work that you must submit in order to get a “B” in this course. If you earn a lower grade, you may have missed several of these items. If you want to earn an A, you will need to turn in some extra work. You can review the specifics in the section, [Criteria for Grades](#_Criteria_for_Grades) (p. 3).

* Attendance
  + No more than 4 unexcused absences (MW or TTh sections)

OR

* + No more than 6 unexcused absences (MWF sections)

OR

* + No more than 4 missed discussion boards (Online sections)
* Major Assignment 1: Summary
  + Draft
  + Peer Review
  + Cover Letter + Final Submission  
    (Each final submission must respond to the instructor’s feedback)
* Major Assignment 2: Rhetorical Analysis
  + Draft
  + Peer Review
  + Cover Letter + Final Submission  
    (Each final submission must respond to the instructor’s feedback)
* Major Assignment 3: Synthesis
  + Draft
  + Peer Review
  + Cover Letter + Final Submission  
    (Each final submission must respond to the instructor’s feedback)
* Weekly Assignment 1
* Weekly Assignment 2
* Weekly Assignment 3
* Weekly Assignment 4
* Weekly Assignment 5
* Weekly Assignment 6
* Weekly Assignment 7
* Weekly Assignment 8
* Weekly Assignment 9
* Weekly Assignment 10
* Weekly Assignment 11
* Weekly Assignment 12
* Weekly Assignment 13
* Weekly Assignment 14
* Weekly Assignment 15
* Final Portfolio
  + Course Reflection Letter
  + Major Assignment 1 Components
    - Edited & Polished Major Assignment 1: Summary
    - All drafts, peer reviews, etc. related to Major Assignment 1
  + Major Assignment 2 Components
    - Edited & Polished Major Assignment 2: Rhetorical Analysis
    - All drafts, peer reviews, etc. related to Major Assignment 2
  + Major Assignment 3 Components
    - Edited & Polished Major Assignment 3: Synthesis
    - All drafts, peer reviews, etc. related to Major Assignment 3
* "Let's Reach for an A!" (You need to have made a good faith attempt for 2 of the 3 major assignments.)
  + Major Assignment 1: Summary
  + Major Assignment 2: Rhetorical Analysis
  + Major Assignment 3: Synthesis

## **Frequently Asked and Un-Asked Questions**

1. **Why doesn’t this class use the normal grading system?**

The default “A” to “F” grading system often unfairly penalizes students who haven’t been trained in or brought up working with Edited American English. As recognized by the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s resolution on Students’ Right to their Own Language, students come into the university with a dialect and style that is representative of their individual background, culture, and style. Students should feel comfortable writing and existing at the University of Arkansas in ways that are authentic to their individual identities. Being a good writer and using Edited American English are two different things; in our courses, we have chosen to not penalize students for their lack of skill in an often-arbitrarily standardized version of American English. Students should be comfortable being and writing themselves at the U of A.

1. **Since we don’t get grades on papers, does that mean I don’t have to write good papers?**

You will still be required to write papers that meet the requirements of the course. If you’re asked to write an analysis, you can’t submit a parody. If you’re asked to submit a grant proposal, you can’t write an essay. You are expected and required to learn the genres taught in a given course. You are not, however, expected to write in Edited American English or in a style that reflects Edited American English. You can take risks in your papers, and you can reflect your own personal style in your papers, but you can’t opt to not complete your papers as assigned.

1. **Since we don’t get grades on papers, does that mean we won’t learn how to write proper English?**

Just because you’re not getting your paper graded based on Edited American English doesn’t mean your papers won’t be good or they won’t be in “proper” English. The dirty secret of language is that there is no “proper” form of any given living language. Language usage and conventions evolve over time based on changes in societies and cultures. There are flavors of English, but no better or best English. Any attempt to make a single form of English out to be the “proper” or “best” English cannot be supported by linguistics or even at many times common sense.

Students who are looking to master Edited American English will be able to pursue that goal during the course, even though it isn’t a requirement or the primary focus of the course. The writing approaches and techniques we learn will be broadly applicable across your coursework and future professional writing activities.

1. **Is this class easier because we don’t get A-F grades on papers?**

Absolutely not! This class is probably going to be harder than any writing course you’ve taken before that didn’t have a grading contract. There are no shortcuts in this course, and there is no easy road to passing. This course is designed from front to back to have you writing every single week, revising that writing as you go through the semester, and polishing that writing and your ideas into a final portfolio at the end of the semester. Like any other skill or craft, writing must be practiced to be improved, and you’ll be practicing your writing all semester long. There are no shortcuts.

1. **If the default grade is “B,” doesn’t this course lead to grade inflation and other problems?**

Not really. If you look at the course syllabus, you have to complete every single assignment on-time and as required while also regularly attending the class. Those individual assignments will be revised at least once based on peer or instructor feedback and will be polished before final submission at the end of the semester. Skipping just one assignment will give you a “D” in the course and being late on one assignment will earn you a “C.” If anything, this arrangement effectively raises the quality of work expected of you versus a traditional grading system.

1. **What if I want to learn Edited American English? Doesn’t this course prevent me from doing that?**

In this course, we separate good writing from a specific dialect of English. The purpose of this course is not first-and-foremost to teach Edited American English, but to teach students the skills and strategies they need to write effectively in the university and elsewhere. If a student wishes to pursue a mastery of Edited American English, however, that is something they can work on with instructor support during the course. In addition, there are advanced writing courses at the university that address style, grammar, and genre within professional and workplace settings. These courses include ENGL 2003 Advanced Composition, ENGL 2013 Essay Writing, ENGL 3053 Technical and Professional Writing, and ENGL 4003 Style and Grammar for Professional Writers.

1. **If I’m not learning Edited American English, then why is this course required and why do I have to take it?**

We want to stress that Composition 1 and 2 have never been about learning Edited American English. The course focuses on larger concerns in the writing process. The general education outcomes of Composition 1 focus on writing, revising, and researching the process of writing for specific audiences. Below, you’ll find this outcome as currently written. Note the outcome does not touch on grammar and Edited American English:

**Learning Indicators for Learning Outcome 1.1:**To successfully achieve this outcome, students will complete these five indicators:

* Focus primarily on how to generate written texts, receiving explicit instruction in how to analyze audiences and rhetorical situations, how to follow the examples of model texts, and how to revise.
* Complete at least four substantial writing assignments and produce at least 5000 words of prose.
* Incorporate specific feedback into their writing, in order to help them revise and edit for clarity, force, and correctness.
* Critically analyze the effectiveness of written prose.
* Incorporate and cite sources gathered from primary (observational) or secondary (bibliographic) research in their writing.