

Econ 365 Online: Junior Year Writing

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The Economics Department has offered (and required for all majors) the Junior Year Writing Course since 1984, the year the University of Massachusetts created the Junior Year Writing Program. The course is founded on such principles as these:

1. Writing is an activity, rather than an academic subject.
2. Writing an essay about a subject is a very effective way to learn more about that subject.
3. You become a better writer by writing a lot.
4. Good writing involves a considerable amount of rewriting.
5. You can learn from each other.

The main work for the class is a lot of writing, a lot of discussion of writing, and a lot of rewriting and revising. Learning to write is an ongoing process with no particular end to it. This semester's writing course is one step along the way, an opportunity to learn more about yourself as a writer, and about how to write effectively.

ASSESSMENT:

The main writing for this course comprises seven short assignments and three longer assignments. For these essays, "short" means somewhere between 250 words and three pages, as explained in each particular assignment; "longer" means probably five pages when the paper is in its final form. The longer assignments will involve considerable revision; for each of these you will write at least two, probably three versions.

After finishing the first version, you'll exchange your paper with one or more other students in the course, and each of you will write a *peer review* of another's paper. You may use some or all of your fellow students' comments and observations in revising the paper to produce a second (revised) version. I'll read that version and then return it to you with further comments. Making whatever seems like good use of my comments as well as those from fellow students, you'll then write a newly revised third version, which you may think of as the final draft unless instructed otherwise.

The idea of the revision process is that when you write a serious essay, you don't simply write a "rough" draft and later clean it up. Try not to think of it any draft you actually turn in for an assignment, at any stage of the process, as "rough." The idea is that each time you turn in a paper, you are delivering the most complete paper you know how to produce. The revision is a matter of thinking further about what you have to say, after you have already said something, and doing more with your material. The authors of the books for this course have all revised these books subsequent to their first publication. So think big.

GRADING:

Several students in this class each semester earn grades of A. Normally these students have completed all work on time; furthermore, their efforts to write the assignment have been good in the first place, and their efforts to revise the longer assignments have not only been thorough but have produced writing of superior quality. In other words, a grade of A means not only that you worked diligently to make use of the revision process but that you actually wrote some really good papers.

Anyone in this class should be able to earn at least a B. If you get all the work done on time, participate regularly in discussions, write imaginatively and with obvious involvement in the assignment, and make thorough efforts to improve your writing through the revision process, you should be able to earn a B, perhaps a B+ or A-. If you do most of these things most of the time, even if sometimes you don't get what's going on but you keep trying anyway, you should still be able to earn a B-.

A grade of B- means at least you did the work well enough to look as though you were taking it seriously. Students who earn grades of B- typically write less than enough on papers but still make an effort to apply principles of good writing to their work.

You may end up with a grade of C+ or lower if you do any of these things:

- Fail to hand in work on time.
- Write really sloppy papers.
- Ignore suggestions for revision and turn in "revised" drafts that are not improvements.
- Neglect the peer review process.
- Neglect other required parts of the course.

Inevitably, the grading of writing is not altogether a quantitative process. However, your grade is likely to be a function of the following numerical breakdown:

Three long essays including peer reviews; 15 points each	45 points
Seven short essays; 5 points each	35 points
Six discussion posts; 4 points	24 points
TOTAL possible points:	104 points

In order to be fair to all students in the class, all due dates are firm. If assignments are late the grade will be reduced by one letter grade each day up to two days late. After two days, the assignment will no longer be accepted and it will be marked as a zero. If you have a University sanctioned reason for late work, please notify me as soon as possible.

You must also complete your posts in the discussion forums on time. Late posts and responses will receive 0 points, because timely posts are essential to keep the conversation going.

Your final letter grade will be based on the following cutoffs:

Grade	Cutoff
A	95
A-	90
B+	86
B	83
B-	80
C+	77
C	73
C-	70
D+	67
D	60

Textbook:

- Course reader: “A Street Fighter’s Guide to Writing for Economics Majors”
- Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner, *Freakonomics*, Harper Perennial; Introduction and Chapters 1 & 5
- William Strunk and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*, MacMillan
- Charles Fishman, *The Walmart Effect*, Penguin

NB: The course reader and chapters from *Freakonomics* are provided on the course website.

Other readings:

- Various articles from many sources, as listed week by week in the course outline; some sample essays by students in this course in previous semesters

Other media:

- Greenwald, Robert, dir. *"Walmart: The High Cost of Low Price."* Video, 2005.
- Penn & Teller, *"Bull%&#" response to Greenwald's video.* Video, 2006.
- Msumanje, Eric, John Stifler & James Birtwistle, *"Grace in Haiti."* Video, 2014.
- Photos and recorded music from Haiti.

Optional additional readings:

- Dubois, Laurent, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*. Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt & Co. 2012.
- Katz, Jonathan, *The Big Truck That Went By: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster*. Palgrave/Macmillan 2013.

COURSE SCHEDULE

The semester is divided into three portions, each including a topic in economics and corresponding readings and discussion, with a long essay assignment related to each. Most weeks will also include

shorter written assignments. The complete schedule is listed in week-by-week form on the Blackboard site.

DUE DATES: VERY IMPORTANT!!!

In order to be fair to all students in the class, all due dates are firm. If assignments are late the grade will be reduced by 5% each day up to two days late. After two days late, the assignment will no longer be accepted and it will be marked as a zero. If you have a University sanctioned reason for late work, please notify me as soon as possible.

When turning in your assignments and assessments, please label your file name as Lastname.Chapter#.doc (e.g., Smith.Chapter3). The file should be in MS Word or Pdf format. Graphs should be done in Excel or using a drawing routine in MS Word. You can always scan your work and submit it as a Pdf file!

Please review the schedule below: Subject to minor changes

Week	Blackboard Course Content	Assignments Due	Activities & Lessons
1	Read: Course Reader pp. 1-12	Short Assignment #1: Describe what one of your parents (or a relative in your parents' generation) does for work.	Exercise: What is a chair? Style Lesson: Putting a noun or noun phrase after "This"
2	Read: <i>Freakonomics</i> , Intro, Chapter 1, Chapter 5 2 examples of Long Assignment 1 (exemplary papers from previous years)	Discussion Question 1: What specific qualities of Levitt and Dubner's writing make their work interesting, fun to read, easy to remember, or in any other way a satisfactory reading experience? Point to at least four passages in the reading as examples of what you have in mind. Long assignment #1, Version 1, (LA 1.0)	Style Lesson: Putting part of the main idea of the verb in the sentence Discuss the long assignment.
3	Read: Harper's Index, (Current month) Diane Ravitch blog post and other blog posts from "schooling" section	Short Assignment #2: Harper's Index	Style Lesson: "Durable Goods" Guidelines on peer reviews. Peer review of LA 1.0
4	Read: Course reader: pp 46-51	Short Assignment #3: High Meadow Rd. landscape improvement plan Long assignment #1, Version 2, (LA 1.1) (mid-process drafts of LA 1).	Style Lesson: Different levels of formality

Week	Blackboard Course Content	Assignments Due	Activities & Lessons
5	Read: Course reader: pp. 20 – 26.	Discussion Question #2 Long Assignment 1, Version 3 (LA 1.2) (final)	Style lesson: Course reader, pp. 20 – 26. Style Lesson: <i>Strunk and White, Elements of Style, Ch. 11, Rule 17:</i> Omitting needless words, tightening one's language
6	Read: (1) <i>The Walmart Effect</i> (2) various articles about Walmart	Short Assignment #4 Write Long Assignment 2.0	Discussion: expectations about shopping at Walmart Activities: Go shopping (for Short Assignment #4) Style Lesson: "Domino Principle"
7	Watch: (1) Greenwald video, "Walmart: the High Cost of Low Price" (2) Penn & Teller rebuttal (YouTube)	DISCUSSION QUESTION 3: What elements of the Greenwald film "Walmart: The High Cost of Low Price" do you particularly notice? E.g., how does the film manipulate or shape your impressions of Walmart? What tricks, if any, does the director use? What stories and comments seem to you particularly convincing? Do any seem suspect, incomplete, misleading? All in all, to what extent do you find yourself adopting the director's view of Walmart, and to what extent are you not sure you share it?	Style Lesson: Elements of Style, Rule 11 Discuss past semesters' examples of student writing about Walmart Peer review of LA 2.0
8		Long Assignment 2, Version 2, LA 2.1 Short Assignment #5 DISCUSSION QUESTION 4: What do you really think of Walmart? Seriously? (Yes, this is a deliberately broad question.)	Style Lesson: Introductions and Conclusions

Week	Blackboard Course Content	Assignments Due	Activities & Lessons
9	Read: Course Reader pp. 27-30	Long assignment 2, Version 3, LA 2.2 (final)	Style Lesson: (i) Memos, (ii) Good & Bad memo excerpts, review of Rule 17.
10	Read: Begin Haiti readings View the Bayonnais video (link: http://youtu.be/gedm91dwHA4). Also, John Stifler's slideshow.	Long Assignment 3, Version 1, 3.0 Short Assignment #6	Style Lesson: Tone. Stifler sports essay, PJ O'Rourke's essay on NPR Discuss the long assignment. Guidelines on peer reviews.
11	Read: Continue Haiti readings Excerpt of Jonathan M. Katz, The Big Truck that Went By: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster	DISCUSSION QUESTION 5: What do the readings about Haiti, together with the video and photos, make you think about the future of the world in which you are growing into adulthood and the responsibilities of career, family, and other aspects of your life?	Style Lesson: Resumes and cover letters Peer review of Long Assignment 3.0
12	Read "Assembly Line" for Short Assignment #7	Short Assignment #7 DISCUSSION QUESTION 6: Given what you have learned about economics in any previous courses, from Introductory Microeconomics to Economic Development to anything else, how much sense does the story in "Assembly Line" make? How would a conventional economist explain what happens in this story? How would an unconventional economist explain it? Long Assignment 3, Version 2, LA 3.1	Style Lesson: Instructor's discretion--possibly examples of strong writing by various students in the class, or from previous semesters
13		Long Assignment 3, Version 3, LA 3.2 (final)	