ENGLISH 1020: Research and Argumentative Writing

Argumentative writing is intended to influence the reader’s attitudes and actions. Writing is usually called argumentative if it clearly supports a specific position.

In 2011, the English department renewed its commitment to general education by refocusing English 1020 on the two main principles of the writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) approach. (1) writing to learn (inquiry), and (2) writing content essays, the content coming from across the disciplines. The most popular 1020 textbook is Norton’s They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing. The rhetoric portion of the textbook teaches students how to situate themselves within existing conversations. The readings spark debate on a range of issues and provide models of argumentative writing published in various venues.

English 1020 students learn how to annotate texts, building a repertoire of rhetorical strategies for their own argumentative writing. They also gain “informational literacy”, all 1020 students receive instruction in how to locate, evaluate, and use source material. Rather than emphasizing the rules that govern a specific documentation style, instructors discuss academic integrity—the how and why of citing sources—teaching students how to use their handbook, Research Matters at MTSU, to choose the appropriate style for their writing task.

ENGL 1020 Learning Objectives.

1. Students will understand academic writing as a conversation about topics of consequence.
2. Students will understand their responsibilities as writers—to cite accurately the work of other writers, to provide their audience with reliable information, and to do their topic justice by conducting thorough research and considering multiple points of view.
3. Students will learn to take their writing seriously, approaching writing tasks as opportunities to increase their knowledge about a topic and to improve and expand their communication skills.
4. Students will understand academic writing as governed by the conventions of specific discourse communities.
5. Students will become more critical readers, learning strategies for previewing, annotating, summarizing, analyzing, and critiquing print, digital, and visual texts.

6. Students will acquire informational literacy—the ability to locate and evaluate source material.

7. Students will improve their ability to write clear and compelling thesis statements.

8. Students will become adept at using appropriate rhetorical strategies (description, analogy, planting a naysayer, etc.) to develop and make their arguments.

9. Students will develop the skill of constructive critique, focusing on higher order concerns during peer workshops.

10. Students will understand the distinction between revising and editing.

11. Students will know how to use their handbook as a guide and a reference tool.

12. Students will gain confidence in their ability to generate a plan for conducting research and for writing across the curriculum.

ENGL 1020 Teaching Objectives,

1. Provide a written rationale for the course. See the course justification in Research Matters at MTSU for an example.

2. Connect the practice of writing to reading. Pace your course so that students read throughout the 15 week semester. Get the most out of your textbooks.

3. Give students strategies for previewing, reading, and annotating a text. Students should be annotating texts in most class sessions. (In English 1010, you are using this time for peer workshops.)

4. Give students in-class writing activities that facilitate close readings of print, visual, and digital texts. Focus on accurate and complete summaries of single texts and of multiple texts that present opposing or complementary views. Identify the various rhetorical strategies different writers use to achieve their purpose.

5. Give students writing assignments that require them to join conversations about issues that matter. Control the source material, at least for the first half of the semester. A typical assignment sequence: summary paper, argumentative paper, annotated bibliography, research paper. An alternative sequence: argumentative paper, research
proposal, annotated bibliography (and presentation of source material), research paper (and multimodal presentation).

6. Encourage students to choose research topics related to their majors/interests and ideally, to the readings in your textbook.

7. Use the annotated bibliography assignment to teach informational literacy. Collaborate with a literacy librarian, bringing your students to the library as they are beginning this assignment. **Provide the librarian with a copy of your assignment before the session.**

8. Use the argumentative paper or the annotated bibliography to teach academic integrity. Put the emphasis on why we cite sources. Use Research Matters at MTSU as a reference for how to cite sources. Arrange for the Writing Center to give a tutorial on citation.

9. Provide opportunities for students to present their work. (This replaces time you would spend on peer workshops.)

10. Grade students on process (no more than 30%) and product (at least 70%).

11. Assign appropriate chapters in Research Matters at MTSU in addition to using it as a reference for documentation styles. **Do not teach MLA style.** Instead, teach students all the ways published writers (in your reader) manage source material.

12. Use the final exam period for an in-class, on-demand writing assignment that requires students to demonstrate their ability to summarize and respond to other writers’ views. Provide source materials from the database Opposing Viewpoints in Context. (See alternative sequence in #6 above.)