

An Overview of English 50

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Be sure to read the departmental course outline of record for English 50. You can get a copy from the English Department secretary. The purpose of this overview is to help English 50 instructors become familiar with departmental expectations for the course. It is to be used in addition to, not in place of, the official departmental course outline of record.

Course Description

English 50 consists of two major parts which together account for the entire course grade. The writing practice part accounts for 70% percent of the course grade while the holistic final exam accounts for 30% of the course grade.

Part I: Writing Practice (70% of course grade)

This portion of English 50 provides the students with practice in the writing of paragraphs and short essays, focusing especially on papers that are written in response to articles the students have read and discussed. Students are expected to write unified, developed, and coherent paragraphs and short essays. They should learn to write effective topic sentences and thesis statements, to use appropriate support to develop their paragraphs and essays, to write effective introductory and concluding paragraphs, to use transitions both within and between paragraphs, and to write sentences that are varied in both length and structure and that are relatively free of substantial errors in grammar, punctuation, and usage. They should also learn to read and react perceptively to assigned reading material as well as to quote, paraphrase, and summarize that material.

In this writing practice portion of English 50, students should write a minimum of four satisfactory essays of 500-750 words in length, each essay revised as many times as the instructor thinks is necessary. Instructors may also assign single-paragraph assignments, but such assignments are not a requirement of the course. If single-paragraph compositions are included, no more than three should be assigned, and the combined grade should count for no more than 10 percent of the total writing practice grade. You need to prepare the students for the final exam by conducting in-class practice final examination essays of 500-750 words, using past English 50 final exam essays and prompts. Evaluate these as part of the 70 percent grade, return them to the students, and discuss them with the class. The department keeps past final exam essays, prompts, and actual student responses in file cabinets located in the workroom. Keep in mind we have changed the approach over the years, and, as a result, the essays differ in how they present an issue. Currently, we are using essays that present more than one viewpoint on an issue, showing the complexity of many topics in our society. Your best bet is to use essays no earlier than Fall 2002.

Most, if not all, of the writing assignments should consist of responses to assigned reading material. The following types of writing are required: a summary of one article and/or a synthesis of two or more articles; an expository response to one article (e.g., cause and/or effect, narration, problem and/or solution); an argumentative response (i.e., a response that supports, opposes, or evaluates specific ideas within a reading assignment).

Sentence level work should include instruction in sentence variety and subordination; in accurate quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing; and in correct grammar, usage, and punctuation.

As stated above, the writing practice portion of English 50 constitutes 70% percent of the course grade. Although instructors will differ in deciding how to arrive at the writing practice grade itself, the following statement from the department's course outline of record should be observed:

All essays receiving a grade of "C" or better must demonstrate an understanding of any articles under consideration and an ability to write in a clearly organized, well-supported, and coherent manner. In addition, all essays receiving a "C" or better must be relatively free of major sentence level errors in grammar, usage, and punctuation.

Part II: Holistic Final Exam (30% of course grade)

For the final exam, students will have two hours to write a 500-750 word essay answering a question that relates to a reading selection chosen by the English 50 Committee. Actually, the committee will choose three selections to be used for the Wednesday, Thursday, or evening final exam. Students will choose to take the final exam on the Wednesday or Thursday of the week preceding the scheduled final exams for the college. Once your students let you know which day they will take the test, you will hand out to them the appropriate reading—don't let them read the essays first before choosing the Wednesday or Thursday to take the exam. You will give them the reading selection one week before the final exam. Neither they nor you will know exactly what kind of prompt (questions) they will be asked to respond to until they arrive on final exam day. The exam may ask students to solve a problem, offer a solution, agree or disagree, or deal with causes and/or effects. The prompts may ask questions like the following: "What is your position on using audiovisual learning in the classroom?" "What do you think should be used to help "borderline" students succeed in school?" "Why do you think the electoral process has been plagued by low voter participation?" The students must offer more support than simply what was in the essay; they should find their own personal experiences, facts, examples, stories, quotations, authorities, or other appropriate forms of support. For this test, students are allowed a dictionary, an electronic speller, and a thesaurus. They may not bring other sheets of information to the test, but they can jot brief notes on the reading selection (not complete portions of a possible response) to help them with the summary and response.

During the week that the students have the final exam reading selection, instructors must not discuss the selection with them, nor should they set aside any class time for students to discuss the selection among themselves. Keep in mind that you must continue to meet your class during this week until the final exams on Wednesday and Thursday.

After the exam, **all adjunct faculty who teach English 50 and all contract faculty regardless of teaching assignments will meet to grade the exams. All adjunct instructors of English 50 are required to participate in this grading session. You are paid for this time because your contract includes pay for four hours of time when you will not actually meet with your class. Of course, all full-time instructors are also required to attend.** The date of this grading session will be announced early in the semester. It will be the last Friday of the regular semester right before finals week. Once the exams have been graded, **you must meet once more with your students during the final exam week to return the graded finals to them and to tell them their course grades.**

If this will be the first time you have taught English 50, please note that the final exam is given the Wednesday and Thursday previous to final exam week we grade the exams on the Friday before final exam week. You should prepare your class outline to account for this early final, using the dates that you will receive from me at the start of the semester. Depending on your schedule, be sure to meet with your students the Monday and Tuesday before they take their final exam.

Other Key Points

- Students are not required to write five-paragraph essays.
- The "Specific Course Objectives" and the "Contents in Terms of a Specific Body of Knowledge" more specifically define what instructors are expected to cover in the course.
- Students should learn to create several types of writing: a summary, synthesis, explanation (involving, for example, classification, compare/contrast, process, cause and effect, narration, definition), and argument.
- Grammar tests will be given only on an "as needed" basis. Grammar exam scores will no longer count as a percentage of the course grade. Rather, the student's proficiency in grammar will be reflected in the grades he/she receives on essays.
- Instructors may choose their texts; however, such texts should cover the specific course objectives and specific body of knowledge as listed in the course outline of record. If you have any questions about which text to use, see me or discuss the issue with those who have taught the class previously.
- Single-paragraph assignments are not required for the course. If they are included, not more than three should be assigned, accounting for no more than 10 percent of the course grade.
- It is the policy of the English Department that a writing sample be taken the first day of class and all students appearing to need ESL help be referred to that department. Do not tell students whom you refer to ESL that they may not take

your class. The purpose of the referral is merely to help them decide if they need more help or a different class.

- Other skills are important for success in this class (test taking, reading comprehension, and critical reading, for example), so I encourage you to teach these when appropriate.
- Students should not miss other classes to take the final exam; remind them that we can make other arrangements if they have classes during the time of the final.
- The department will offer an English 50 review session one week prior to the final exam; remind your students as the time approaches.
- As you figure the students' grades, remember that the final is 30% of the total grade, so students will still pass with a C if they have maintained a C average in class even if they end up with a D on the final exam.

Conclusion

Please feel free, especially the new adjunct instructors, to contact me about questions, suggestions, complaints. My office extension is 2710. My web site has syllabi and assignments for many of the classes I teach here at Palomar, including English 50. You may want to check out this site if you have any questions about this class or others. My job is to make sure that you have a successful semester teaching English 50, so talk to me about any concerns you might have.