

HONR 500: Everybody Needs an Editor**Credits: 2****Honors Units: 2**

***Counts as an Honors high impact experience
for students doing the Interdisciplinary Track
under the “old” Honors curriculum***

Meets: F, 3:10 – 4:30 p.m. in Huddleston Hall, 224B**Prerequisites: none****Instructor: Catherine Peebles****Director, Honors College****Affiliate faculty, dept. of Classics,****Humanities & Italian Studies****Office hours:****M, 1-2 p.m.; R, 11:30-12:30 p.m.****in Huddleston 201D**

The quality of our writing is often the first impression we make on others, for better or for worse. In this two-credit course, we'll make it *for better*! We will give ourselves the time, the freedom, the techniques, and the courage to be merciless but joyful editors of our work. Do you feel you only really started learning English structures when you studied a foreign language? Do you wish your fairly good command of English were more nuanced? Are you unsure why your prose doesn't carry the impact you intend, but certainly savvy enough to recognize that AI-generated writing is dull and soulless? Join this once-weekly course and learn about the beauty and strangeness of English while you practice honing sentences and paragraphs into cogent and compelling narratives.

Addressing the question: Why is it important to write well?

- The ability to use your voice: writing can be difficult; honing the skills needed to write well makes it possible for you to make yourself heard in a compelling way.
- The art of persuasion cannot be practiced successfully without good writing. Demonstrating a solid command of the language you are using is *in itself* persuasive, because it shows your audience that you are thoughtful and skillful.
- Your writing makes an impression on others, for better or for worse. This includes friends, colleagues, employers and potential employers... anyone who will see your writing.
- Writing is one tool humans use for understanding – self-understanding, and understanding of things outside us. As we improve the skills involved in writing, we become more skillful observers of the internal and external worlds. This power of observation leads to opportunities, relationships, discoveries.

One behavior that allows one to develop into a good writer is to become an avid reader. Another is to write a lot. We will therefore be reading some excellent prose, and memorizing some phenomenal poetry. Fortunately, both of these things are fun to do.

Rather than reading quizzes, students come in with three samples of interesting / favorite / puzzling moments from the reading, and corresponding thoughts or questions, written down in the form of a sentence each. These, we then use as opportunities to discuss, and to edit each other. Each day we start with this exercise (4 minutes), and then 2 or 3 editors can share out.

Workload expectations: the legal definition of a credit hour stipulates a minimum of 45 hours of work (including in class) per credit hour, per term. Two credit hours equal 90 hours of work, or 6 hours per week, which comes to 4 and half hours outside of class. Nice to know. **All of your written work needs to be handed in on time and in class, where we will be using it for active editing work. Please always come with your work written or printed out on paper.**

If you need to miss a class session, please let me know as early as possible. Absences should be kept to an absolute minimum.

This will seem strange, but *you will not be graded on your writing in this course*. Why? Because I want you to approach it for the pure joy of effort, improvement, and learning. Also, we tend to be self-conscious about our writing. In order to improve, we need to get rid of that self-consciousness and the fear it engenders with respect to our writing. We will dare to write badly, and improve!

How will you earn your grade, then? You will present orally, often, in this course. To the whole class, to small groups, to a partner. A sub-goal of the course (subordinate to improving one's writing) is increasing comfort with one's own imperfections. Improving one's writing is impossible without this skill. We will all gain practice, comfort, and confidence in public speaking, performing language (e.g., poetry), and engaging others in active learning. And that is where your work will be evaluated. We will also all gain practice and confidence in separating *ourselves* from *what we have written*, in order to approach and improve the work we produce. Therefore, we will learn to be "brutal" with our writing – merciless but merry! – and in order for this to work, no one will be graded on their writing. The stakes are too high to let a grade stand in the way!

Readings: *You will need to have the physical books for this course.*

The Truth about English Grammar, by Geoffrey Pullum (Polity Press, 2024)

Emma, by Jane Austen (Norton Critical or Penguin Classics edition)

Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue, by John McWhorter (Avery/Penguin Random House, 2009)

Selected poems by Shakespeare, John Keats, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Emily Dickinson, Theodore Roethke, Edna St. Vincent-Millay, and Robert Hayden (copies provided)

A note on reading:

While reading, always have a notebook and a writing implement handy. For each reading, you should always be writing down the sentences that interest you / trouble you / intrigue you / upset you / puzzle you / stop you in your tracks... Always with the page number first, for ease of reference during class discussions. (You won't have to find yourself in the position of saying, "Somewhere in the earlier part of the book, I remember there was something about...") N.B. Do this even if you are also underlining/highlighting interesting sentences in the book itself.

Student Learning Outcomes:

The work of this course will allow students to

- Demonstrate a basic understanding of the history of the English language
- Employ a proficient understanding of English grammar
- Craft well-written sentences, paragraphs, and longer narratives
- Offer useful editorial feedback on others' written work
- Receive and implement effectively the editorial feedback of others on written work
- Memorize and perform great works of poetry
- Know intimately well Jane Austen's novel, *Emma* – its structure, plot, characterization, and rhetorical features

Course Schedule

Weeks	Assignments to be completed by class time
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- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | 1/23
Introduction to course and each other
Sample sentences from students: diagramming and editing |
| 2 | 1/30
<i>The Truth about English Grammar</i> (vii-67)
Your language questions |
| 3 | 2/6
<i>The Truth about English Grammar</i> (68-117)
Your language questions |
| 4 | 2/13
<i>The Truth about English Grammar</i> (118-162) |

Your language questions

- 5 2/20
The Truth about English Grammar (163-177)
Jane Austen, *Emma*, vol. 1, at least through end of chapter 10
Pick an Austen sentence and diagram it
- 6 2/27
Jane Austen, *Emma*, vol. I
One-page response paper: What do you make of Emma, the character?
Your language questions
- 7 3/6
Jane Austen, *Emma*, vol. II
One- or two-page response paper: What do you notice about the world of *Emma*? Can you name some of the assumptions and mores at work in the little world of Highbury? Also: what intrigues or perplexes you?
- 8 3/13
Jane Austen, *Emma*, vol. III
Begin memorizing poems
- 9 3/20
UNH Spring Break: no class (memorize sonnets in your spare time 😊)
- 10 3/27
Shakespeare sonnet #18 (Shall I compare thee to a summer's day)
Shakespeare sonnet #116 (Let me not to the marriage of true minds)
Shakespeare sonnet #130 (My mistress' eyes are nothing like the son)
2-pages on: something that strikes you as surprising about Shakespeare (from your independent reading) and something that strikes you about one of the sonnets.
- 11 4/3
John Keats, "To Autumn"
Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Spring and Fall"
Emily Dickinson, 744 (Remorse—is Memory—awake—)
Emily Dickinson, 1551 (Those—dying then)

Two-page response on one of these poems: What is the mood of the poem, and how is this mood created?
Analyzing the language of the poems: vocabulary, syntax, multiple meanings, rhythm, tone

- 12 4/10
Theodore Roethke, “Elegy for Jane”
Edna St. Vincent Millay, “Spring”
Robert Hayden (1913-1980), “Those Winter Sundays”
Two-page response on one of these poems: As you read the poem both silently and aloud, what thoughts and feelings come up? How do you think the poem elicits them?
Analyzing the language of the poems: vocabulary, syntax, multiple meanings, rhythm, tone
- 13 4/17
Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue (vii – xxiii and 1-61)
Assignment TBD
Note: April 17 and 18 are the dates for this year’s [Nossrat Yassini Poetry Festival at UNH!](#)
- 14 4/24
Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue 63-136
Assignment TBD
- 15 5/1
Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue (137-197)
Assignment TBD