

The Art of the Sentence: Style through Grammar

ENG 420/520, Fall 2015
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TR 1200-1320, 185 LIL

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Office Hours: W 12:30-2:00, Th 1:30 – 3:00, and by appointment

Course Syllabus

Course Description and Objectives: We are going to look very closely at sentences to see how they work, how the individual parts of speech draw together into syntax, and what effect (artistic and otherwise) these patterns of syntax create. The course will mix technical study of sentence structure and reflection upon the artful potential of those sentence elements, with the goal that each of us is able to see and describe how sentences achieve their effects. *Grammar by Diagram* will provide an introduction to (or review of) English grammar, and the process of diagramming sentences will also develop our sense of sentence structure. Virginia Tufte's *Artful Sentences: Style as Syntax* is a collection of and reflection upon sentences that serves as a starting point for each of our own descriptive and analytic work. In individual projects and in our pooled observations about writing from class discussions, we will each develop a critical language based in grammar for describing written prose style. We will be looking at our own sentences and writing styles in order to gain more artistic and technical control of them. Throughout, we will reflect on the process of learning and engaging with sentences at this level of detail. We may also, perhaps, enjoy the possibilities of English and have some fun with words.

Students in *Art of the Sentence* will work on these English Department Learning Outcomes:

- Perform critical, formal analyses of literary, cinematic, and other cultural texts;
- Write focused, analytical essays in clear, grammatical prose;
- Employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments;
- Employ primary and/or secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation, as they contribute to a critical essay's thesis.

Required Texts: *Artful Sentences: Syntax as Style*, Virginia Tufte (AS)
Grammar by Diagram, 2nd edition, Cindy L. Vitto (GD)
Additional readings will be provided on Canvas or distributed in class

Supplemental Texts: *Grammar by Diagram Workbook*, 2nd edition, Cindy L. Vitto
Deluxe Transitive Vampire, 1993, Karen Elizabeth Gordon

Class Participation

Creative analysis almost always starts from an intellectual wonderment and willingness to explore unknown territory. On this path, each of you brings unique sensibilities, experiences, and powers of observation that will help all of us understand how grammar and style work on us. Your active, thoughtful, regular participation in our work on grammar and style will therefore be crucial to the success of this course. You each have reasons for being in this class, some that might be expected and perhaps some that might not. Your working knowledge of grammar, your sense of what makes a good sentence, and your interest in the style and art of words are important and valuable to our work in this class. Listening is therefore as important as speaking, drawing out your colleagues and inviting their contributions as valuable as those you might make yourselves. To accomplish our course goals, students must feel their contributions valued and must be treated with respect. If this is ever not the case, please see me right away. The Bias Response Team and the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity can provide additional assistance. Please keep in mind that behavior that disrupts the learning environment of this classroom may result in your course grade being lowered.

Preparation for Class Participation

Preparing for Class Discussion: On days a reading from Tufte is due, choose a passage from the chapter to bring to our attention and be prepared to talk about it in some detail. I *strongly* recommend keeping a notebook to record observations and questions about readings, passages we discuss in class, and your own work with sentences. A journal in which you play with different sentence structures and variations that strike you as interesting or difficult or fun or annoying or stunning or odd will give you more facility and command of the possibilities and uses of different sentence patterns. Recent research suggests that taking handwritten notes requires more cognitive processing than taking notes on a keyboard.¹ My observation over the years is that students who explore sentence patterns with pen or pencil and paper internalize them and the ability to create variations to a much greater degree than those who do not or who engage this process solely on a keyboard.

Paragraphs: You will each participate in providing writing for us to think about. We will begin most class meetings looking at a paragraph of English prose (no drama or poetry) from a novel, website, technical manual, scientific paper, newspaper, magazine, short story, or any other source chosen by someone in the class. On the day we look at the passage you have chosen, be prepared to talk for two minutes or so about why you chose it and what you find noteworthy, lovely, irritating, or beautiful in it. Provide the **full** bibliographic citation, including page number, so that others can investigate further if so moved. These passages are due the week before they are used in class according to the schedule distributed in week one. We will write about and discuss these passages in class.

Academic Paper Sample: Each member of the class will submit a three-page to four-page excerpt of an academic paper that you have written for another course for use in the Academic Writing Analysis and Mark Up assignments. These may also be used anonymously in class activities, so choose something you wouldn't mind seeing project or distributed in class. The more typical of your usual writing the more helpful it will be to you in this class.

Grading and Assignments

5% Quizzes
20% Academic Writing Markups I and II
30% Analysis of Academic Writing
10% Style Project Proposal and Presentation
35% Style Project

Instructions for and details about these assignments will be available on a separate handout

Course Policies

Attendance: Your regular attendance is important for your individual success and that of the course as a whole. You may miss two class meetings for any reason without penalty. I suggest holding these in reserve for illness and unexpected, minor discombobulation. The fourth, fifth, and sixth absences will each lower your course grade by a third of a letter grade. The seventh and subsequent absences each lower your course grade by a full letter grade. In the event of a serious illness or crisis that interferes with your regularly attending class, be in touch with me as soon as possible, so we can decide together how best to proceed.

Academic Honesty: All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented. Consult the

¹ Pam A. Mueller and Daniel M. Oppenheimer. "The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking" *Psychological Science* 25 (2014): 1159, accessed September 28, 2014, doi: 10.1177/0956797614524581

library website <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/> for a definition and examples of plagiarism and the library guides to citing sources, <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/citing/>. If you have questions about how to integrate outside sources or are looking for more information to complete an assignment, please talk to me first. In cases where plagiarism is established, the penalty is automatic failure of the course. Some cases may result in additional sanctions, up to and including suspension and/or dismissal from the university.

Accommodation: The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me in week one if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You may also wish to contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155.

Incompletes: The grade of Incomplete is awarded only when the quality of course work is satisfactory and some minor yet essential requirement has not been completed for reasons beyond the student's control.

Notification of changes to class schedule: In the event severe weather or some other unforeseen event that results in class being cancelled I will send email to you from the course Canvas site and post an announcement on Canvas. Be sure you are checking your university email account regularly.

Late Assignments: I do not accept assignments on a delayed or alternate schedule without advance consultation. If you are having difficulty with an assignment, be in touch with me in advance of the due date. If you will be absent from class on a day materials are due, you may hand in your work early.

Emergency Preparedness: Call 911 in the event of an emergency. Call the UO Police Department (541) 346-2919 for non-emergency assistance. If we need to evacuate the building during class, our designated assembly point is on the west side of Pacific. To receive alerts about emergencies on campus, set up your cell phone to receive UO Alert text messages: 1) Login to DuckWeb, 2) Click on the "Personal Information" menu, and 3) Click on "Enter/Update Emergency Alert Phone." More information on emergency preparedness can be found online at emc.uoregon.edu.

Students who experience gender-based violence: Any student who has experienced sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, coercion, and/or sexual harassment is encouraged to seek help. Please visit <https://safe.uoregon.edu> for information. You are also strongly encouraged to contact Renae DeSautel, Sexual Violence Response & Support Services Coordinator, desautel@uoregon.edu. She will keep your information confidential. In addition, the UO Ombudsperson Bruce MacAllister ([541 346-6400](tel:541-346-6400) or ombuds@uoregon.edu) can provide confidential support and assistance. You can also contact any pastor, priest, imam, or other member of the clergy. All of these people, including all UO faculty members, have an obligation not to reveal your name or other specific information without your permission, although faculty members do have to provide "general information" that will help us create a safer campus. As your instructor, I can also reassign work partners and make other necessary accommodations.