

English 199 (to change to ENG 209)
The Craft of the Sentence
Winter term 2017

260 Condon Hall
MW 12:00 – 1:50
CRN 26991

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Office hours: Mondays 10-12
Wednesdays 2-3

The goal of this course is to learn how to analyze the structure of English sentences, or syntax. The method is sentence diagramming, a technique for identifying and separating the elements of a sentence, the subject, object, verb, conjunctions and clauses, in a graphic arrangement. We will only occasionally be concerned with English usage (choosing the appropriate word, on the basis of signification or register), and rarely with punctuation and capitalization.

The course is intended to be a writing course, not a grammar course. To many, the word “grammar” refers to a series or system of rules that classify a given construction as correct or incorrect. English professors are portrayed as sticklers or pedants who attempt to enforce the rules upon students and the public. But grammar is more accurately understood as a dynamic set of cognitive structures that are shared by all native speakers of a language, and acquired by second-language learners. There are many theories among linguists about how best to explain grammar as a cognitive structure. Because this is not a linguistics course, however, we will not cover them. The structure of sentences only scratches the surface of grammar’s complexity.

The secondary goal of the course is for students (whether English majors or others) to improve their writing, by knowing how to construct better sentences. Rather than simply try to respond to the admonitions of writing and literature teachers, who complain about awkward or flabby writing and mark up grammar and punctuation errors without explaining the reasons behind their complaints, students need to learn what lies behind their instructor’s comments. They need to see how clarity and simplicity work in the sentence, and then build upon those skills to craft strong paragraphs and arguments.

Textbooks available at the Duck Store:

Grammar by Diagram, 2nd edition, by Cindy L. Vitto (Broadview Press, 2006)
Grammar by Diagram Workbook, by Cindy L. Vitto (Broadview Press, 2009)

The Deluxe Transitive Vampire, by Karen Elizabeth Gordon (Pantheon Books, 1993).

You will need to bring the *Grammar by Diagram* textbook to class every day.

Our meetings will unfold more like a mathematics class than a typical literature class. We will tackle problems, review possible solutions, and evaluate why the best answer is correct. The course meets four hours a week rather than three, and we will spend much of the time working through exercises in our textbooks, often in small groups. I see five parts to our routine for each class meeting:

Part 1 – I will introduce the key concepts from the chapters of *Grammar by Diagram*. Students are required to read these pages ahead of class meetings, and work through at least some of the exercises in the chapters, so as to be prepared to solve the in class.

Part 2 – After we review the concepts, students will work in small groups on the exercises in *Grammar by Diagram*, or on additional exercises. Each group or team may be asked to send a member up to the board to write the answers or diagrams, and then we will all discuss or review them.

Part 3 – On most days we will take a break from the textbook for activities and applications of the concepts, that apply the grammatical concepts to literature or to stylistics.

Part 4 – Homework is assigned for the next class period, from the *Grammar by Diagram Workbook* (with the orange photo on the cover, and the lightweight paper). Both the workbook and the textbook include answers to nearly all exercises in the back of the volume.

Part 5 – You will not be required to turn in this homework, but you will need to do it to prepare for the quizzes, which will consist of exercises modelled upon those in the homework. quizzes roughly once a week except during week 1 and during the midterm

This course, English 209, is new to the English department curriculum, and so I have no basis to predict how much difficulty you will have in learning and applying these ideas. If necessary, I am ready to slow down the pace and devote extra time to the most difficult chapters in the textbook. In this event, we can delete some of the material scheduled for mid-March, chapters 12 and 13 on usage and punctuation.

Assignments and Grades

Seven quizzes: 8 points each

Writing self-analysis: 8 points

Midterm Exam: 12 points

Final Exam: 24 points

The writing self-analysis, due February 22nd, is an opportunity to examine your own writing, in assignments for other courses, to find repeated patterns and potential problems that you can work to change. A week before it is due, we will workshop peer's writing in class.

Attendance and Participation:

Attendance is required and students should be prepared to offer solutions to the exercises by writing them on the black or white-board, and to work with classmates on these exercises. I will take attendance by the method of a sign-in sheet that will circulate during class, although the quiz will on many days take the place of the sign-in sheet. Please sign your full name to verify your presence. Absences should be limited to two classes, of our 19 meetings, and those missing four or more will be penalized a full grade.

Classroom Electronic Communications Policy:

In this class the use smartphones and laptops is prohibited. All such devices should be stored in your bags or left at home. The writing and diagramming exercises are all on paper, in our textbooks, and there is no need for computers. I encourage note-taking, on paper, and quizzes and exams will be written by hand on paper. Please see me immediately if you have a reason to request exception to this policy.

Provisional schedule of assignments and activities:

Jan. 9th Introductory Lecture and Discussion

History of grammar, prescriptive and descriptive grammar, dialects, slang. We will begin with the parts of speech.

Jan. 11th Basic Sentence Diagrams

Read before class: *G by D* pp. 17-37, *Transitive Vampire* pp. 3-29, 77-92

Work on in class: exercises 1.2 – 1.8 on pronouns, adjectives, verbs, prepositions.

Activity: review the types of pronouns listed in *Transitive Vampire*

Homework review: *G by D Workbook* 1.1 – 1.13 (pp. 9-19).

Jan. 16th Martin Luther King Jr. holiday

Jan. 18th Prepositional Phrases and Conjunctions; Sentences with “to be” verbs

Read before class: *G by D* pp. 38-58

Work on in class: *G by D* 1.9, 2.1 – 2.3

Quiz #1 [drawn from chapter 2 exercise]

Activity: Character and Action, from Joseph M. Williams' *Style* pp. 48-51

Homework review: workbook 1.14 – 1.18, 2.1 – 2.6 (pp. 19-40).

Jan. 23rd Sentence Patterns with Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

Read before class: *G by D* pp. 63-77, Appendix 5 pp. 355-360
Work on in class: *G by D* 3.1 – 3.3, and chapter 3 exercise
Activity: Early grammar textbooks in Britain and America
Homework review: *G by D Workbook* 3.1, 3.2 (pp. 40-48)

Jan. 25th Reviewing sentence patterns and diagramming conventions
Read before class: *G by D* pp. 77-99
Work on in class: *G by D* exercises 3.4 – 3.8
Quiz #2 (drawn from chapter 3 exercise)
Activity: diagramming poetry by Emily Dickinson and John Milton
Homework review: *G by D Workbook* 3.3, 4.1, 4.2; Verbs in other languages activity

Jan. 30th Verbs: Form, Tense, and Aspect
Read before class: *G by D* pp. 201-208, *Transitive Vampire* pp. 40-50
Work on in class: *G by D* exercises 9.1, 9.2
Activity: conjugating verbs in English and in other languages
Homework review: *G by D Workbook* 9.1 (pp. 139-142)

Feb. 1st Verbs: Subjunctive Mood, Active and Passive Voice
Read before class: *G by D* pp. 209 – 217, 255 – 258; *Transitive Vampire* pp. 51-57
Work on in class: *G by D* exercises 9.3 - 9.5, 11.1, 13.3 (pp. 209-211, 258, 323-324)
Activity: When to use passive voice, from Joseph M. Williams' *Style* pp. 78-86
Homework Review: *G by D workbook* 9.10, 9.11 (pp. 143-150)

Feb. 6th Prepositional and Verbal Phrases
Read before class: *G by D* pp. 219 – 228, *Transitive Vampire* 125 – 132
Work on in class: *G by D* exercises 10.1 – 10.4
Quiz #3 on verbs
Activity: diagram some of the phrases in *Transitive Vampire*
Homework Review: *G by D workbook* 10.1 (pp. 151-160)

Feb. 8th Compound Sentences: Combining and Expanding with Conjunctions
Read before class: *G by D* pp. 117 – 130
Work on in class: *G by D* exercise 5.2, chapter 5 exercise
Midterm Exam in second hour

Feb. 13th Complex Sentences with Noun Clauses
Read before class: *G by D* pp. 131 – 144
Work on in class: *G by D* exercises 6.1, 6.2, chapter 6 exercise
Activity: Go over midterm exam
Homework Review: *G by D workbook* 6.1 – 6.3 (pp. 81-88)

Feb. 15th Complex Sentences with Adverb and Relative Clauses, pt. 1
Read before class: *G by D* pp. 145 – 155; *Transitive Vampire* pp. 140 – 154

Work on in class: *G by D* exercises 7.1 – 7.3
Activity: workshop in preparation for writing self-analysis
Homework Review: *G by D workbook* pp. 89-98

Feb. 20th Complex Sentences with Adverb and Relative Clauses, pt. 2
Read before class: *G by D* pp. 156 – 178
Work on in class: *G by D* exercises 7.4 – 7.6
Activity: non-sexist and non-gendered language
Quiz #4: [drawn from chapter 7 exercise]
Homework review: *G by D workbook* pp. 99 – 115

Feb. 22nd Case, Agreement, and Consistency
Read before class: *G by D* pp. 179 – 199
Work on in class: *G by D* exercises 8.1 – 8.4
Activity: re-writing to improve consistency and agreement
Homework Review: *G by D workbook* 8.1 – 8.6 (pp. 125 – 135)
Writing Self Analysis due

Feb. 27th continue with Agreements and Consistency
Read before class: *Transitive Vampire* 99 – 124
Activity: It's a problem: the its/it's error
Quiz #5

March 1st Verbals: Participles and Gerunds
Read before class: *G by D* pp. 228 – 247; *Transitive Vampire* 132 - 139
Work on in class: *G by D* exercises 10.5 – 10.8
Activity: TBA
Homework review: *G by D workbook* pp. 161-181

March 6th Verbals and Usage Problems
Read before class: *G by D* pp. 259 – 272
Work on in class: *G by D* exercises 11.2 – 11.6
Activity: Both or Each?
Quiz #6
Homework review: *G by D workbook* 13.1 – 13.6 (pp. 218-222)

March 8th Sentence Transformations
Read before class: *G by D* pp. 319 – 330
Activity: regional usage in the United States

March 13th Punctuation and Capitalization and Quiz #7

March 15th Review for Final Exam
March 20th Final Exam 10:15 – 12:15