

ENGL 629

History & Theories of Composition



Northern Illinois University

Class Information

Location: Reavis Hall, 202
Day/Time: MW 3:30-4:45
Readings: All readings available through Blackboard

Instructor Information

Instructor: Ryan P. Shepherd (he/him)
Call me: Ryan or Dr. Shepherd
Email: rshepherd@niu.edu
Office: Reavis Hall, 215B
Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays 2-3:30

Course Description

This section of ENLG 629 will focus on the history of composition studies as well as early theories of composition and modern approaches to teaching writing. The class will move through the early origins and development of the field, through theories that helped to professionalize the field—such as expressivism, cognitivism, and social construction—and through modern theories of teaching writing—such as multimodality, writing transfer, reflection, and social justice.

Course Outcomes

By the end of ENGL 629, you will be able to:

- Articulate the place of composition in English studies and the university more broadly.
- Draw on a variety of composition theories to teach more effectively.
- Apply theories of composition to create your own theory of teaching writing.

Major Assignments

ENGL 629 includes a smaller mid-term project and a larger final project. ENGL 703 students will also complete one additional assignment.

Exploration Assignment

Choose one article or book chapter that covers an area of composition that we're not already covering in class (or aren't covering fully). Present what you learned from the text and guide a discussion on your chosen topic.

Application Assignment

Grapple with the literature we've covered on composition this semester and provide one of three possible final projects.

- Provide a detailed “theory of composition” to explain your take on the field.
- Provide a shorter “theory of composition” along with an updated composition syllabus that puts your theory into practice.
- Design a composition-based research study.
- Draft a composition studies article.

All options are expected to be deeply connected to current research and to extend that research in some way.

Facilitation Project (ENGL 703 Only)

Students taking ENGL 629 as a doctoral seminar (ENGL 703) are expected to co-facilitate one class with Ryan. This involves choosing extra readings on a topic, preparing discussion topics, and creating an activity. A short reflection on the facilitation is required.

Class Policies

Attendance

You are expected to attend all classes in person. Reasonable accommodation can be made for a missed class if approved in advance. If you cannot attend due to an emergency, please let Ryan know as soon as you're able.

Out-of-Class Work

All assignments should be submitted to Blackboard at least 60 minutes before class time. Work will be accepted late with prior approval or in extreme circumstances.

Tech

You are encouraged to bring a laptop, tablet, or phone to each class. Please use your tech during class time for class-related subjects.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. Using other people's words without giving credit—even in reading responses—is not acceptable. The English department's plagiarism policy is available [here](#). If you are unsure if something is plagiarism, please ask us in advance.

Anti-racism & Inclusion

All students should feel safe and respected in this class and others. This includes a rejection of white supremacy, a commitment to LGBTQ+ rights, and every effort to include people of different cultural backgrounds, abilities, and beliefs. Hate has no home in this class. If you feel unsafe or disrespected in this class or any other, please reach out to me, and I will do all I can to help.

Preferred Names & Pronouns

You will be asked for your preferred name and pronouns on the first day of class. If these change during the semester, please let me know.

Grading Policies Updated

Continuing an experiment from last year, grades for the class will be determined not by percentages but by completion of specific benchmarks. If you complete everything in the row below, you will receive that grade.

| Grades | In Class | Homework | EXP Project | APP Project | 703 Extra PhD Only |
|-------------------|--|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| A | Attend all classes and participate actively | Complete all homework assignments | All A criteria met or exceeded | All A criteria met or exceeded | All A criteria met or exceeded |
| A- | “ | “ | All A- criteria met or exceeded | All A- criteria met or exceeded | All A- criteria met or exceeded |
| B+ | One unexcused absence or inactive discussion | One incomplete homework assignment | All B+ criteria met or exceeded | All B+ criteria met or exceeded | All B+ criteria met or exceeded |
| B or lower | Two unexcused absences or no discussion | Two incomplete homework assignments | One or more B+ criterion not met | One or more B+ criteria not met | One or more B+ criteria not met |

Resources

Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability and would like an accommodation for this class, please contact the [Disability Resource Center](#). The center is located in the Campus Life Building in Suite 180. They can be reached at 815-753-1303 or drc@niu.edu. I am happy to provide a productive learning environment in any way I can.

International Students

NIU welcomes students from all around the world. [International Student Scholar Services](#) can assist you if you are facing any problems, such as visas or cultural adjustment. They are located in Willston Hall and can be reached at 815-753-1346 or isfo@niu.edu.

**Language
Diversity**

You are welcome in this class regardless of your first language or fluency in English. If language barriers are causing problems for you in class in any way, please reach out to me.

**Undocumented
Students**

You are welcome in this class regardless of your documentation status with the US government. If you are undocumented and need help, you can contact [Undocumented Student Support](#) in the Campus Life Building in Suite 230. They can also be reached at undocumented@niu.edu.

NIU Land Acknowledgement

The four locations of Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Naperville, Rockford, and Oregon occupy the traditional homelands of Anishinaabe peoples— Niswi-mishkodewinan, also known as the Council of the Three Fires—comprised of the Potawatomi, Ojibwe, and Odawa. Other Indigenous peoples who call this land home include the Sac and Fox, Kickapoo, Peoria, Miami, and Sioux. We acknowledge the presence and continued vitality of these and other Native communities in our state and Midwest region.

Syllabus Updates

This syllabus is subject to change with notification. Any changes made will be posted in Blackboard, and you will be notified.