

Instructor: Juan Reyes  
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## EN 104: The Invention of Words

### Course Overview:

For this EN 104 course, we will examine the very essence of any text: the word. We will explore the origins of words, the philosophies of meaning, the creation of definitions, ways in which words shape and are shaped by experience, and the very invention of language.

### Course Goals:

- Students will understand and use the processes of writing and revision as tools for analyzing topics and evaluating their own writing.
- Students will learn to collaborate productively.
- Students will be exposed to a variety of rhetorical strategies and processes of analyzing; they will also understand the advantages associated with composing in different print, visual, and digital media.
- Students will understand how to use writing strategies and processes to analyze and write about issues aimed at different audiences and for different purposes.
- Students will understand their part in the university discourse community and how its written conventions operate.
- Students will understand and apply the elements of formal argumentation in writing; will understand the differences between Aristotelian, Rogerian, and post-modern argumentation; and will understand that various disciplines apply these principles in different ways.
- Students will learn to locate source material both in the library and online, read and evaluate this material critically, analyze and summarize points of view and assumptions, and synthesize sources in order to write extended papers incorporating source material.
- Students will be able to demonstrate the appropriate and ethical use of academic research, understand that citation formats vary among disciplines, and use at least one format correctly.
- Students will become conscious of their own development as writers.

### Texts:

*A Writer's Reference*, Diana Hacker

*A Brief Guide To Writing Academic Arguments*, Steven Wilhoit

*Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, (10<sup>th</sup> ed.) Joseph M. Williams and Gregory G. Colomb

*The Professor and the Madman*, Simon Winchester

*The First Word: The Search for the Origins of Language*, Christine Kenneally

*Inventing English*, Seth Lerer

*In the Land of Invented Languages*, Arika Okrent

*Language Myths*, Laurie Bauer and Peter Trudgill

Additional readings will include:

excerpts from *Crazy English*, Richard Lederer

excerpts from *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson

excerpts from *Homeward Bound*, Elaine Tyler May

selections from *The Essential Noam Chomsky*, Anthony Arnone (ed.)

selection from *The Power of Myth*, Joseph Campbell

"Politics and the English Language," George Orwell

"What Sacagawea Means to Me," Sherman Alexie

"What is Pure English?" Brander Matthew

"The Problem Problem and Other Oddities of Academic Discourse," Gerald Graff

"The Simplicity of English," James Champlin Fernald

"The Future of English," H.L. Mencken

"And." William H. Gass

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### **Course Plan:**

#### Unit One—

We'll examine and write about the foundations of definition, how word meanings evolve, and how we actively play a part in both by reading *The Professor and the Madman* and *The First Word*. The first unit will culminate with a Definition Argument Essay that investigates the etymology of a word: it will explore the social contexts around which usage began as well as the cultural backdrop against which the word's meaning became independent of origin.

#### Unit Two—

We'll examine and write about the various contexts in which the English language is presented everyday (on everything from the McDonald's dollar menu to a parking ticket) by reading *Language Myths* and additional selections, and by writing a Visual Rhetorical Analysis Essay that explores the full meaning(s) (content and context) of the image-word coupling in a popular magazine advertisement.

#### Unit Three—

We'll examine and write about how regional dialects arise, how varying geographies define vernacular expressions, and how experiences shape and are shaped by the vocabulary we use by reading *Inventing English* and additional selections, and by writing a Causal Argument Essay to determine the environmental, social and political conditions that created regional American English dialects in the United States.

#### Unit Four—

We'll examine language evolutionary theories, as well as attempts to correct and control language, by reading *In the Land of Invented Languages* and additional texts and by writing a Proposal Argument Essay that illustrates a research we would like to conduct. As part of the proposal, we will identify a field in language study, explain its insights and informational shortcomings, and then justify how our proposed research will contribute to that specific field of study and to language learning, broadly.

### **Major Writing Assignments**

- \*Definition Argument Essay (1250 words) – 15%
- Visual Rhetorical Analysis Essay (1000 words) – 10%
- Midterm Reflection (750 words) – 10%
- \*Causal Argument Essay (1250 words) – 15%
- \*Proposal Argument Essay (1500 words) – 20%
- Final Reflection (750 words) – 10%
- Commonplace Handbook – 10%
- Quizzes – 10%
- (\* denotes **RESEARCH** paper)