

WRPR/LNGT 110- English Grammar: Concepts and Controversies (Fall 2017)

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Course Overview

The first half of the course is devoted primarily to learning about the structure of English. We will learn to analyze English sentences using grammatical terminology, and students will be assessed on their knowledge and application of concepts. We will also engage various perspectives on the question, Why does grammar matter? Students will be asked to draw on their existing knowledge of and experience with English grammar instruction and usage.

The second half of the course explores complex issues related to English grammar, such as...

- Language regulation, policy, and standardization
- Prescriptivism, moralism, “verbal hygiene,” and linguistic prejudice
- The influence of globalization, migration, and technology on the English language
- The role of grammar in English education (both in the US and abroad)

We will explore these issues through course readings, class discussion, a group presentation, and an individual position paper. Near the end of the course, we will focus on synthesizing and building on what has been learned in the semester. Each student will complete a research project, which will be presented to the class in a short oral presentation, as well as in a written report. (See details later in the syllabus).

Required Reading List (All books are available at the Middlebury bookstore.)

1. Morenberg, M. (2014). *Doing Grammar* (5th Ed.). Oxford University Press.
2. Crystal, D. (2006/7). *The Fight for English: How Language Pundits Ate, Shot, and Left*. Oxford University Press.
3. Cameron, D. (2012 or earlier edition). *Verbal Hygiene*. Routledge.

Recommended additional texts:

- Kolln, M., and Funk, R. (2011/2012). *Understanding English Grammar* (9th Ed). Pearson.
- Shea, A. (2014). *Bad English: A History of Linguistic Aggravation*. Perigree/Penguin Group

Expectations

Academic community is an important aspect of this course; cultivating that community requires the active presence and participation (including both speaking and listening) of each member. Unexcused absences and late or missed assignments will be penalized. In the event of illness, please notify me (via email or phone) *before* the class that you will be missing. Multiple absences could have an adverse effect on your final course grade. While I do not have a specific policy about use of technology in the classroom, I expect you to be mindful about using devices in a way that allows you and your peers to remain present and engaged.

I also expect that you will organize yourself so that you are prepared for class and can submit assignments on time. This includes

- Making time to do the readings before class, focusing in particular on terminology
- Having a folder/notebook in which to keep course handouts and other materials
- Using multiple strategies (e.g., Google Drive, OneDrive, Dropbox) to back up your work Note: A computer crash is NOT an excuse for late work!

I also expect you to take ownership of your own learning. You will have frequent homework assignments to reinforce your understanding of grammar structures and terminology. *You are encouraged to work with others on these shorter assignments, but you should also attempt some exercises on your own, to ensure that you are learning the material.*

Grading Breakdown

- ❖ Participation (online and in-class, including student-led discussion) = 10%
- ❖ HW exercises from Morenberg (checked in class, occasionally collected) = 10%
- ❖ Short Papers (two, 2-3 pages each)= 15%
- ❖ Quizzes (two) = 20% total (Quiz dates are on course calendar).
- ❖ Position paper (4-5 pp.)= 20%
- ❖ Independent Project (4-5 pp. report, plus in-class mini-presentation) = 25%

Formatting for Written Work

Unless specified otherwise, written assignments should be double-spaced, 12-point font (Times New Roman), with 1-inch margins. APA citation style is preferred, but other formats may be accepted upon student request. All work submitted should include the Honor Code statement: "*I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment,*" with your signature. If you have worked with anyone other than a tutor (or Prof. Shapiro) on an assignment, please note that as well.

In class, we will talk more about academic integrity, including ways use sources appropriately, as well as when and how to collaborate with peers on particular assignments. For now, please remember that plagiarism usually involves using someone else’s words or ideas as if they were your own. It can have very serious consequences, including academic suspension or even expulsion. For more information on plagiarism and how to avoid it, please visit <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/> .

For a self-guided tutorial about academic integrity at Middlebury, visit [go/ait](#).

Communication and Support

Communication and respect are very important to our course. I attempt to return all phone calls and emails within 24 hours, and expect the same of my students. Your feedback is essential to the success of this course. I will give you opportunities to tell me how the course is going, both in-class and anonymously, but I appreciate hearing from you at any point about your needs and experiences. If you encounter difficulties with any course material or assignments, please contact me early and often, so that I can help support you.

If you have a disability or learning issue of any kind that might impact your studies, please communicate with me as soon as possible. For formal accommodations, please be sure to contact Student Accessibility Services (formerly “ADA”), directed by Jodi Litchfield- (litchfie@middlebury.edu) See <http://www.middlebury.edu/campuslife/diversity/ada/> for more information.

We also have two Peer Writing Tutors who have a solid knowledge of English grammar, and can help you with your written work in this course. The main tutor, who is available by appointment, is Remeny White, (rjwhite@middlebury.edu). Our backup tutor, who is available for drop-in hours and occasional appointments, is Gloria Breck (gbreck@middlebury.edu). You may also work with other peer or professional tutors from CTLR- see [go/writingcenter](#) for info.

OVERVIEW OF MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS

(more details on each assignment will be provided in-class)

Quizzes

Each quiz will assess your understanding of course terminology and concepts. Quizzes may include fill-in-the-blank, matching, and short answer questions, as well as error analysis and other application activities. You will be given a study guide before each quiz, but the best way to prepare is to be present and engaged in class, and to complete all homework assignments.

Two Short Papers (2-3 pages each)

These papers give you a chance to practice writing (including putting your grammar knowledge to good use!) and encourage you to reflect on what you’ve been learning in class.

A. **“Grammar Autobiography”**: Describe your past experiences with learning and using prescriptive grammar, and your current views on the topic. Questions to consider:

- Have you studied English grammar explicitly? What was the experience like for you? (If not, do you regret it?)
- Did you have any teachers (or friends/family members) who were “sticklers?” What impact did they have on your views about prescriptive grammar?
- Have you ever experienced linguistic insecurity in regards to spoken or written grammar?
- Do you ever judge people for improper use of grammar?
- Where do you fall on the “purist” vs. “progressive” spectrum re: grammar?

B. **“Critiquing Crystal”**: Your goal for this paper is to present one critique of Crystal’s *The Fight for English*. You may wish to write a traditional “response paper” as yourself, responding as a student thinking about his work. Or, you can turn this into written role play by choosing an alternate ‘persona’ (written identity), genre, and audience for your work.

Some possibilities for this 2nd option include...

- Lynn Truss writing an editorial, email, or scholarly essay responding to Crystal’s criticisms of her work
- A scholar or teacher from the U.S. contrasting their context with that presented by Crystal (who is from the U.K.)
- A teacher, employer, journalist, etc. arguing that Crystal overlooks certain aspects of the “real-world” of language use

Position Paper (4-5 pages)

In this paper, you will take a position on a controversial question that has arisen in our readings and/or class discussion, and will support your position with course readings and/or outside sources, if needed.

Possible questions include:

1. Are the linguistic purists (and/or “pundits” or “sticklers”) right to place such a high emphasis on grammatical correctness? Is judgment based on grammar/language use ever justified?
2. How important is standardization of spelling, grammar, etc.? Does (Can) linguistic variation lead to inability to communicate?
3. How much emphasis should be placed on teaching prescriptive grammar in public schools?
4. Is texting (or another media trend) ruining the English language?
5. How important and useful is politically-correct and/or gender-inclusive language?
6. When is censorship (e.g., of profane or obscene language) justified?
7. (You could also take a position on one of the other arguments made by Crystal or Cameron.)

Independent Research Project (5 minute “mini-presentation,” plus 4-5 page report)

The goal of this project is to give you an opportunity to deepen your course learning through primary research. You (and possibly a partner) will choose a particular grammar error or grammar-related issue, and gauge the reactions/opinions of other Middlebury students. NOTE: This is **NOT** a library research project, in which you summarize findings from secondary sources (other people’s research/argument). Rather, it requires that you **gather original data** via one of the following methods (see next page):

- Survey (minimum 10 participants)
- Interviews (minimum 3 participants)
- Corpus of tweets or posts from a social media site (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Middblog, etc.)

In your individual written report, you will answer the following questions:

1. What did you do for your research and Why?
2. What did you expect to find?
3. What did you actually find?
4. What are the implications of your findings?
5. What did you learn overall from doing this project?

We will discuss a number of possible topics and approaches for this topic, but some examples of errors that could be investigated are as follows: *who vs. whom, split infinitives, missing articles, ending sentences in prepositions, incorrect spelling, use of “textese,” punctuation errors* (e.g. its vs. it’s, comma splice). Another option is to collect data in relation to one of the controversial issues discussed for the Position Paper (see above).

Tentative Course Schedule (Fall 2017)

NOTE: Daily HW assignments from Morenberg (2014) may change, but major deadlines will not.

Sept 12 (T)- Course introduction and Overview. Begin discussing key terms: *prescriptive vs. descriptive grammar, grammarians vs. linguists, linguistic purists, linguistic insecurity, rhetorical grammar*. Self-assessment of basic grammar terms (e.g., in Morenberg Ch 1).

Sept 14 (Th)- Morenberg Ch 1 (pp. 1-21) and 1st part of Ch 2 part 1 (pp. 22-35)
HW: pp. 19-20 #1-25 and p. 36 “Try This” (be prepared to offer explanations in class)
Review of basic grammar terminology, focusing on verbs and sentence types.
Compare approaches to diagramming sentences.
Discuss Short Paper 1: “Grammar Autobiography”

Due Sun Sept 17 (on Canvas): Draft of Short Paper 1: Grammar Autobiography (2-3 pp.)

Sept 19 (T)- Finish Morenberg Ch 2 and read Ch 3 pp. 52-59, focusing on terminology.
HW: pp. 49-50 label and diagram #1-25. Also do p. 51 “Thinking Critically.”
Continue learning terminology. Practice tree diagramming long and short forms.
Discuss themes and revision strategies for Short Paper 1.

Sept 21 (Th)- Rest of Morenberg Ch 3. **HW:** p. 73 all (#1-5) pp. 74-75 #1-25 label and diagram.
Preview Morenberg Ch 4. HW: pp. 95-96 #1-25, label and diagram (short form).

Due Sun Sept 24 (if needed) Revision of Short Paper 1 (email to Prof S.).

Sept 26 (T)- Morenberg Ch 4. **HW:** pp. 95-96 #1-25 label and diagram. Review for Quiz 1.
Sept 28 (Th)- **Quiz 1.** (Prof S. Out of town- guest will distribute in-class).

Oct 3 (T)- **Online class** (Canvas, post by **midnight**). focused on Morenberg Ch 5 and pre-reading for Crystal text.

Oct 5 (Th)- Morenberg Ch 5 (review) and Ch 6. **HW:** Exercises I and II pp. 153-154. Label p. 156 # 1-21.
Also read Crystal Ch 1-5.
Optional: Browse online excerpts from Truss’s *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* (link on Canvas).

*******NOTE:** From this point on, our focus in the Morenberg chapters will be *terminology* and overall *understanding* of concepts, with most diagramming optional. *********

Oct 10 (T)- Morenberg Ch 7 - focus on new terms. **HW** pp. 176-177 I and II. Choose 10 to analyze from section III. Also read Crystal Ch 6-12.

Oct 12 (Th)- In-class role-play/debate: Grammar Purists vs. Progressives.
Discuss position paper and Faculty Symposium.

*Fri Oct 13th, afternoon Faculty Symposium (extra credit opportunity- see schedule online!)

Oct 17 (T)- Morenberg Ch 8 and 9- focus on new terminology (list to be provided in class).

HW: Exercises I and II for BOTH chapters.

Also Crystal 13-18. (Possible student-led discussion).

Discuss quiz 2.

Oct 19 (Th) Morenberg Ch 10. **HW:** p. 249 “Try This” and p. 252 Ex I.

Also Crystal 19-23. (Possible student-led discussion).

Due on Sun 10/22 - Quiz 2 (take-home, submit on Canvas)

Oct 24 (T) **NO CLASS- MIDTERM RECESS**

Oct 26 (Th)- Continue with “Rhetorical Grammar” work in-class. Debrief from quiz 2.

HW: Bring position Intro paragraph(s), including thesis and overview, for workshop.

Oct 31 (T)- Cameron Ch 1. **HW:** Bring full draft of position paper (3 hard copies).

Nov 2 (Th)- Crystal 28-30 and Cameron Ch 3. **HW:** Reflect on your own educational experiences!

Due Sun 11/5: Draft of Position Paper (Canvas).

Nov 7 (T): Education (US): Kolln & Hancock and Delpit (on Moodle). (Student-led discussion)

HW: Reflect on your own educational experiences!

Nov 9 (Th): Political Correctness: Cameron Ch 4. (Student-led discussion).

HW: Come with 2 ideas for final project (will discuss in class).

***Meetings w/ SS and/or peer tutor this week re: Position Paper.

Due Sun 11/12 (2 things on Canvas): Revised draft of Position Paper and Proposal for Final Project

Nov 14 (T)- Censorship/profanity (readings on Canvas) (Student-led discussion).

Nov 16 (Th)- Media/Technology (readings on Canvas). (Student-led discussion).

***Meetings w/ SS this week re: Independent Project

Nov 21 (T)- Gender and Language: Cameron Ch 6 and/or video of her talk. (Student-led discussion).

HW: See other (short) readings on Canvas and post to online discussion before or after class.

Nov 23 (Th)- **NO CLASS- THANKSGIVING BREAK**

Nov 28 (T)- Writing Workshop for final project. Cameron Afterword.

Nov 30 (Th)- Start student mini-presentations.

***Meetings available with SS and PWTs re: Independent Project

Due Dec 3 (Sun): Draft of Independent Project Report (Canvas)

Dec 5 (T)- Student mini-presentations (cont’d). Writing Workshop

Dec 7 (Th)- Student mini-presentations (cont’d). Course wrap-up

Due Dec 11 (Mon): Final draft of Independent Project Report. (Extensions available upon request).