Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What do I do when students email me before the semester, asking to get into my class?

A: The English department does not issue closed class permits for general education classes. If you want to respond, advise the student to keep checking RaiderNet for open seats. Seats open up after the purge and during the drop/add period when students are switching sections. You can also simply forward those emails to Regina: Regina.Nelson@mtsu.edu. The LD office wants you to be able to focus on preparing your courses.

Q: What do I do when students who are not registered for my class show up on the first day?

A: Send them directly to the lower division office: 324 PH. Do not let them attend class. University policy states that students cannot attend a class for which they are not registered.

Q: Should I sign a drop/add form if I really don’t mind taking on another student?

A: No. Send the student directly to the lower division office. Caps are raised throughout the registration period to give every student an opportunity to build a workable schedule. If a student does not have a seat when classes begin, then a problem—most times with the student; occasionally with financial aid—has occurred. We will investigate, and if the student has a legitimate claim, find him/her a seat. Often, we encourage the student to take English the next semester. It is in the best interest of the student to begin class on day #1; it is in the best interest of the student and the teacher to keep class sizes low.

Q: What do I do if a student is registered for my class, attends on the first day, and then is purged?

A: Tell the student to keep attending class. In the meantime, send Regina an email verifying that this student has, in fact, been attending your class. (Students who are purged before classes begin must rebuild their schedules—see Q #1 and #2.)

Q: Will any new students appear on my roster after the drop/add period?

A: Probably not. Purged students will reappear on your list after they straighten out their finances. If a new student appears, it means that the LD office determined that a late registrant had a legitimate claim and a good chance of succeeding in your class despite the fact that it is already underway. In this case, we will either call or send you email.

Q: After the drop/add period, can I allow a student to switch into my class if s/he doesn’t like his current teacher or has some sort of scheduling issue?

A: No. We teach 6,000+ students each semester. Imagine the chaos. Send the student to the LD office.
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Q: What is the deadline for withdrawal? What if a student misses the deadline and wants to avoid an F?
A: October 29th. Please make sure your students know the W deadline. After the deadline (which has been extended to accommodate students on financial aid), students with legitimate extenuating circumstances should request a late administrative withdrawal through the lower division office.

Q: Does the LD office have copies of sample syllabi and appropriate assignments for the general education courses?
A: Yes. Sample syllabi, assignments, and other very useful information can be found at the English department’s website: click on “For Faculty” and then “General Education Faculty Resources.” Also, you will find information about our curriculum and policies in the front matter of Easy Writer and Research Matters at MTSU, our composition handbooks.

Q: Is there a standard curriculum for the composition courses?
A: There are standard objectives. Students in 1010 should learn the rhetorical triangle and get practice writing in multiple genres: personal statements, reports, reviews, rhetorical analyses, arguments, etc. While the kind of writing students do in 1010 is public (a wide audience), the kind of writing students do in 1020 is academic (scholarly audience). Students in 1020 should learn how to situate their writing within an ongoing conversation, which requires finding, managing, and citing source material. Rather than a maniacal focus on MLA style, however, instructors should focus on engaged, critical inquiry, encouraging students to identify an issue or explore a problem that matters to them. We will have succeeded in the two-semester composition sequence if students gain confidence in themselves as writers and researchers, knowing that every writing situation involves a consideration of (1) the rhetorical triangle, (2) genre, (3) various rhetorical strategies, and (4) design/presentation.

Q: The “content” or “subject matter” for 2030 is very clear—poetry, drama, and fiction. We teach students to read closely, with an appreciation for the aesthetic value of literature. What is the “content” for the composition courses?
A: Models of writing in various genres, including student writing. Students in 1010 should be annotating/analyzing expository writing, building a repertoire of rhetorical strategies to use in their own writing. Students in 1020 should be annotating/analyzing argumentative essays, the topics coming from across the disciplines. In the composition courses, we teach students to read closely, with attention to audience, purpose, organizational patterns, supporting detail and evidence, style, etc. Students will improve their writing by simply writing (and rewriting), but they will improve much more by sharpening their critical reading skills. An entire class period can be spent annotating one essay. Instructors should choose essays to annotate that represent a variety of approaches to the same genre so that students learn that writers make different choices to achieve different purposes for different audiences.
Q: 2030 teachers choose from an approved list of anthologies. Is there a set amount of reading students should be doing?

A: The lower division committee has been reluctant to specify an amount or even a range of page numbers. The amount of reading across sections of 2030 therefore varies considerably. Typically, the course focuses on each genre for the same amount of time, although some instructors organize their readings according to theme, not genre. One thing to keep in mind: while it may be difficult to discuss more than one or two short stories in one class session, students can be asked to read stories that are

Q: Are the requirements for students in 2030 standardized?

A: Students in all sections of 2020/2030 write two exams and three papers. The exams are typically a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and essay. The papers are 3-5 pages. Teachers can, however, deviate from this 2 exam /3 paper requirement as long as they can successfully argue that what they require is the equivalent or “in the spirit” of the standard requirements. For example, some instructors give a mid-term exam and assign a collaborative final project; some have students write frequent short response papers in lieu of the 3 formal papers. Unfortunately, plagiarism is a common form of academic misconduct in 2030. Designing creative paper assignments helps to curb the plagiarism impulse.

Q: What if I have other questions about the curriculum or my teaching?

A: If you don’t find answers to your questions on the “general education faculty resources” page, don’t hesitate to send either Regina (Regina.Nelson@mtsu.edu) or Laura (Laura.Dubek@mtsu.edu) an email. We are here to help.