HUNTER
The City University of New York
Department of English

ENGL 280: The Structure of Modern English

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Office Hours by appointment

Course Overview

We're going to study the structure of modern English the way linguists do—by exploring and examining language in the same way biologists study human, plant, and animal life. Biologists don't make assertions such as "Mammals should not fly" and then "correct" winged bats for breaking this "rule." Rather, they study an organism's actions in order to understand how it behaves and why it acts the way it does. Similarly, linguists study language in order to understand how and why people speak their language the way they do. And that's what you'll do in this course—figure out how English "works" and how we use it. We'll begin by exploring why everything you think you know and have been taught about "grammar" is wrong. There's no such thing as "correct grammar." So-called "correctness" is always in the ears of the listener and the eyes of the reader. Similarly, there's no such thing as "bad grammar." And no one can describe the so-called "rules" of so-called "Standard English" speech because these are always situational. You'll have to think about the unconscious tacit "rules in your brain" (not in handbooks) that guide the way you speak and write in every communicative situation, context, and medium.

This is a course in understanding grammatical theories, not improving your grammar.

Readings

There's no required textbook. All of the readings are on the Blackboard/Brightspace Course Documents button.

At the beginning of almost every class, you'll be required to write responses to questions about a particular reading or readings that were assigned for homework. This is my way of assessing whether you are doing—and understanding—the readings (and not using ChatGPT to write).

Grading Criteria

regular participation in class and on Brightspace's Discussion Board. 20%
timely completion of all print and online reading and writing assignments 50%
in-class written reading responses 30%

Note that regular participation Brightspace counts for 20% of your course grade, which should give you some idea of how seriously I take it. **You cannot get a good grade in this course if you don't volunteer to ask and answer questions during class and on Brightspace.**

Weekly Schedule

Because I can't know in advance how long it will us to discuss readings, I can't give you a detailed syllabus with weekly assignments. **Homework will be assigned for every class meeting**; it will appear on the Assignments button on Brightspace soon after class ends.

Attendance and Lateness

This policy is simple: Come to every class on time. Lateness is disruptive and disrespectful. In addition, if you're absent, you'll get a grade of F for the in-class response. (If you must be absent, please send me a copy of a doctor's note or a positive Covid test result.)

Class Policies

1. **I don't accept late assignments**. All homework and other assignments must be printed and handed in during class.

2. **Don't email me homework.** If you need to email me about something else, make sure you put ENGL 280 in the subject line**.**

3. You're welcome to bring laptops to class. However, if you are not using them to participate in class, they should be shut off and put away. Silence your phone and put it away during class (and **don't even think about reading and writing texts**).

4. You may bring beverages to class, but please **don't bring any food of any type.**

5. Print everything you hand in (including homework) in accurate MLA page format. (Instructions for doing this in Word and on a MAC are on our Brightspace site.) Work that doesn't follow all the guidelines for MLA page format will receive an F grade.

Generative AI Policy

Generative AI tools are computer programs that use algorithms to create new content (text, images, video, audio, etc.) "learn" by scouring the net and applying patterns and structures found in the data. Current examples include ChatGPT, Bard, Dall-E, and Midjourney. (OpenAI's ChatGPT is probably the most well-known one.) Generative AI tools are increasing exponentially, which means that the knowledge and skills required to use them will soon be required in every workplace.

These tools can be used to enhance your learning and skills but they can hinder both if you misuse them to bypass the critical thinking tasks that are required for academic and professional literacy. Their "outputs" make it almost impossible to identify gaps, biases, or outright misinformation. People can do many things that AI tools cannot, such as thinking creatively and critically and making inductive and deductive judgments based on experience. These skills will always be needed in personal and professional circumstances.

There will be assignments that require use to learn and use ChatGPT in order to gain insights into its capabilities, limitations, and potential applications. In addition, by understanding how AI can be manipulated or biased, you can develop a more nuanced understanding of its impact on society.

Plagiarism

Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., using generative AI tools without citing them, plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.

When plagiarism is confirmed (whether it is accidental or deliberate), the student is liable to severe penalty, including disciplinary action (For more information about this, see CUNY's policy on academic integrity at http://www1.cuny.edu/portal_ur/content/2004/policies/image/policy.pdf.)

Accommodations for Disabilities

In compliance with the American Disability Act of 1990 and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented consult the Office of AccessABILITY located in Room 1124 East to secure necessary academic accommodations. For further information and assistance please call (212-772-4857) /TTY (212-650-3230).

The Office of AccessABILITY is supposed to notify all instructors about any students in their classes who are legally entitled to special accommodations. If you think that you are entitled to these accommodations, and if by the third week of class, I haven't mentioned receiving a notice about it, please speak to me about this after class.