

Writing as Labor: Reflection, Remix, and Portfolio Assessment

This Course

This course is part of the First-Year Composition (FYC) sequence at NIU. FYC classes give you guided practice in a variety of written communication situations relevant to your future academic and professional life.

Because no course can cover all the writing situations you'll face in school or life, my overall goal this semester is to help you develop skills that will help you adjust to diverse writing situations with more confidence. You should expect to read, write, and learn along with your classmates as you develop your own, more productive, more complex habits as a writer.

Books & Materials

All texts will be provided to you in class or Blackboard, but you'll need paper and something to write with every day for class.

Your Instructor

Her name: Melina Baer

Her contact info: mbaer1@niu.edu

Instructional Methods

Some class meetings will include a lecture or presentation of new information. Others will include solo or collaborative in-class writing and discussions about writing or texts we've read for class. A few times, we'll have in-class work time for major projects.

Attendance and participation

Because this class relies on the interactions of the whole class, I'm expecting both your regular attendance and active participation. If you need to miss class, leave early, or arrive late, please let me know as early in advance as possible. You can email me, send me a Blackboard message, or talk to me in office hours or in class about your schedule.

Please also plan to participate actively in class by being prepared and ready to learn. You'll have a number of ways to contribute to class but always do your best to come to class on time, having already completed any work that's been assigned to discuss or use that day. Also, make the most of your existing strengths in this class, but also try to challenge yourself with some less familiar or less comfortable ways to engage if opportunities present themselves.

Conferences and feedback

We will meet every few weeks, either individually or in groups, to talk about your work and performance in class. These conversations will be the primary way I give you feedback this semester.

Please note that these conferences will usually be scheduled outside normal class hours, but in exchange for your flexibility, conferences will replace about three weeks of regular class

meetings. Also, you are always welcome and encouraged to reach out to talk with me outside our scheduled conferences. Labor Log/Work Journal

Most of your grade this semester will be assigned based on the time you spend working for class—your labor. To help me understand your labor each week, you'll keep a labor log and work journal, where you'll track the time, you spend on class work and explain what you've done that week. You can find a basic template for both a labor log and a work journal in Blackboard under *Course Materials*. As a baseline, you should plan to spend 8-9 hours per week on this course for a grade of B. (You can find more information about how grades are assigned in the *Course Assessment* section of this syllabus, below.)

Workload Expectations

Three-credit college courses like Rhetoric & Composition I should take you about nine hours to complete every week, two hours outside class for every one hour in class. To do well in this course this semester, please plan to:

- Participate actively in class meetings (except for some conference weeks and holidays)
- Attend 3-4 individual and group conferences with me about your writing
- Commit about 9 hours every week to class to keep up with coursework (including class meetings)
- Share your writing, ideas, and feedback productively and respectfully with your classmates and me

Feedback on Your Writing

I will give you feedback through conversations we have about your writing at our conferences and other meetings. Please initiate a conversation about your writing with me any time by scheduling an office hour appointment, sending an email, or a message in Blackboard, or asking me a question in or after class.

Grading Policies and Final Grades

This class uses labor-based grading, which prioritizes the work you put in over the products you produce. Because your academic goals vary widely, your needs as writing students will also vary widely; a labor-based grading policy gives you the opportunity to let this class meet your specific needs and goals within a consistent standard for evaluation.

Even though much of the work I'll assign can be tailored to your interests, there will be general instructions and activities to guide your work each week. You'll find instructions for all assignments listed by week in Blackboard modules. Each module will open week to week, generally on Fridays for the next week.

I'll assign you a grade for your weekly labor—how you spend the approximately nine hours this course should take each week—through your labor logs, work journals, Blackboard progress, and other indicators of your work. You'll be able to track your progress in the Blackboard gradebook, which will be updated regularly after individual conferences. Please always reach out to me if you, yourself, would like to be graded more often or have any questions about your progress or grades.

Your final grade will be the average of each week's labor grade plus the grade you earn on your final course portfolio, which will be the only traditionally graded product in this course. **(Up to 150 points in weekly labor + 75 points for portfolio)**

Course Policies

Academic integrity, plagiarism, and academic dishonesty

Plagiarism is a type of academic dishonesty. In the simplest terms, you're being academically dishonest if you misrepresent anything about the work you've done for a class, no matter how you misrepresented the work or yourself. Always talk with me *before* you take shortcuts, mislead, or lie about work you did for class. Plagiarism is a serious offense because it demonstrates a lack of integrity, and the consequences are appropriately serious. If you have questions about academic integrity in this class (or any other), just ask.

The English Department's plagiarism policy can be found online at <https://www.niu.edu/clas/english/academics/composition/plag.shtml>.

Use of AI

Writing has *always* evolved alongside technology, so in a class about writing, we have to think about AI, especially generative AI tools like ChatGPT and Gemini, and all sorts of little AI-helper tools in our apps and websites. In this class, we'll try to use AI intentionally. You'll be welcome to use AI in specific ways, under specific circumstances, for specific kinds of work. When an assignment **does not** allow you to use AI, or when it specifically **requires** it, I'll tell you.

If you use AI in any way, I'll expect that you "own" it by **citing** your use of AI—which tool you used, what you did with it, when you used it, how you prompted it, etc.—at least in your **weekly labor journal** but also on any AI work you turn in for a grade or assignment. You'll usually be welcome to use AI for work like brainstorming, finding information on your topic, checking grammar and style, doing calculations, or drafting an outline from ideas you give it.

Remember: Using AI doesn't release you from the academic integrity policy of this class (see above), so you may not use AI to misrepresent your abilities, knowledge, work, ideas, labor, or anything else about you. Here are a few scenarios to illustrate violations of the academic integrity policy via AI:

- If you asked Chat-GPT for an essay that took just a few minutes to produce but you wrote in your labor journal that you took hours to write it yourself, you'd be violating the academic integrity policy.
- If you used AI when an assignment prohibits it, you'd be violating the academic integrity policy.
- If you presented as fact information Chat-GPT hallucinated or misapplied without checking it was accurate, you'd be violating the academic integrity policy.

Always feel free to ask me if you have any questions about whether or not a particular use of AI would be allowed.

