



Engaging Students Through Active Learning and Culturally Responsive Activities

Santa Rosa Junior College
Sheryl Cavales Doolan, English Department Chair
scavalesdoolan@santarosa.edu / 707-527-4538

COURSE NAME: Engl C1000: Academic Reading & Writing + Engl 50: English C1000 Support Course

UNITS: Engl C1000 (4.0 units) + Engl 50 (2.0 units)

REGISTRATION: For all of the corequisite pairings, each Engl C1000 section is linked to a section of Engl 50, creating a learning community for both courses. Students must enroll in both sections when they register.

PLACEMENT: Students are placed either by high school GPA if they graduated within the past 10 years or by the Guided Self-Placement. Students with recent high school transcripts are placed according to GPA bands as noted below. The Guided Self-Placement offers the same options for students to self-select.

High School GPA	SRJC English Placement Calculation
2.6 and above	Eligible for Engl C1000
Above 1.9 and below 2.6	Eligible for Engl C1000 Engl 50 is a recommended support course
1.9 and below	Eligible for Engl C1000 with required* concurrent enrollment in Engl 50

* Students placed in the **required** concurrent enrollment band have the choice to opt-out of Engl 50 by submitting a Corequisite Challenge Form to the department chair. By department decision, all petitions to opt-out of Engl 50 are approved.

SCHEDULE: Engl C1000 and Engl 50 pairs are all only offered in-person. The two classes are scheduled back-to-back. The Engl C1000 section meets first for 2 hours followed by 1 hour of Engl 50, twice a week. Engl C1000 classes meet in regular classrooms, but the Engl 50 sections are scheduled in a computer lab classroom. The same instructor teaches both sections in the corequisite pairs.

TEXTBOOK: All textbooks and instructional materials are selected by individual instructors.

COURSE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM: Most instructors use Canvas. Each section has its own Canvas shell, though many instructors find that students are confused by having two Canvas shells for what feels like a single English class. It is common for instructors to primarily use the Engl C1000 Canvas shell for course content for both Engl C1000 and Engl 50, and then to use the Engl 50 Canvas shell just to record the Engl 50 assignment grades.



GRADING: Because Engl C1000 and Engl 50 are distinct courses, each with their own course outline and required assignments, they are graded separately. Engl C1000 is for Grade only, and Engl 50 is graded as Pass/No Pass. Many instructors who regularly teach Engl C1000+50 have adopted labor-based grading practices, though the traditional points-based grading is still common. I describe below my own grading practices, which are a combination of both labor-based and points-based grading.

Grading for Engl C1000:

Assignments for Engl C1000 generally fall into three major categories:

- Four academic essays (65%), together totaling at least 5,000 words in final draft form. Students complete writing process activities as part of the Engl 50 curriculum to directly support their essay development, revision, and polish. Essays 1, 2, and 3 can be resubmitted to attempt a higher grade, provided the student has revised the graded draft, received feedback on the revised draft from a professional level reviewer (e.g. seeing me during office hours, meeting with a tutor from the Reading & Writing Studio, or submitted online to NetTutor), and revised and copyedited again before resubmitting.
- Practice assignments (25%), including quizzes, in-class writing assignments and group work, and various other activities. Since practice assignments are about practicing skills and developing knowledge, they are scored as complete/incomplete. To earn full credit for this category, students must complete 90% of the practice assignments. Increments of partial credit are given for completing a proportional amount of the practice assignments.
- Group presentation or Group discussion lead (10%). Details of the group project change every semester, but I always incorporate some form of group work. Group presentations are often connected to a larger research project or activity. Group discussions leads are tied to class readings, where students working in small groups prepare students for an upcoming reading, develop discussion questions, and design and lead a discussion of the reading. Although students must collaborate and work together to complete the assignment, students are mostly graded individually based on a written assignment tied to their role in the presentation and their engagement with the class and group during the presentation. A small portion of the presentation is graded as a group, based on their overall cohesiveness and preparedness during the presentation. Each member of the group receives the same score for the group-graded portion.

Grading for Engl 50:

Because Engl 50 is graded Pass/No Pass, grading is based on completion of tasks and assignments for the Grading Contract. Assignments include: writing process assignments directly connected to each of the four major essays in Engl C1000 (e.g. prewriting activities, drafting, peer reviews); two conferences with the instructor; an academic reflection journal; annotations for four assigned readings; a Great Books/Book Club assignment; and a final reflection paper.

In order to earn a Pass, students need to meet these requirements:

- Complete writing process assignments for at least 3 of the 4 formal essays
- Meet twice with the instructor
- Complete at least 7 of the 10 entries in the Academic reflection journal



- Submit at least 3 of the 4 sets of annotations, showing concerted effort and engagement with the readings
- Complete the Great Books assignment by reading a novel of their choice and submitting a review/recommendation to the class
- Write and submit the final reflection paper

ACTIVE LEARNING:

Active learning is essential in what amounts to a 3-hour class session, not to maintain student interest, but to create student investment in the learning experience. Students help co-create many aspects of the class, including weighing in on choices for: themes for a unit, the novel the class will read, daily class readings, and even how much homework we'll do. We often read portions of class readings aloud together in class, particularly the more challenging portions, and we practice critical reading using Reading Apprenticeship tools. Class flow usually begins with some brief individual work – journal writing, reading silently, reviewing notes – followed by a brief talk from me setting up the agenda for the day and then providing a mini-lecture if appropriate. Students might then split up into small groups for a discussion or activity before returning to the full-class for a large discussion. I encourage students to take on leadership roles, doing things like facilitating small group discussion or organizing an activity the group can complete in a short timeframe.

GROWTH MINDSET:

One of the community-building activities we do early in the term for Engl 50 is a variation of Each One, Teach One, where students work in small groups to teach or show the others something they feel expert in (or at least, highly competent). Students get to show off their knowledge of a sport, playing an instrument, how to sing, draw, paint, or sculpt. Students have talked about everything from how to brew beer to how to wait tables. In addition to getting to know each other and see people shine with confidence, this activity is a beautiful way to introduce growth mindset by exploring how they became experts in their topic. We read Carol Dweck's short article on her research, connecting the lessons of growth mindset (especially the importance of getting things wrong) to their personal experiences of success as experts. My big pitch at the end is to convince students that education, and more specifically, becoming critical readers, writers, and thinkers, is no different than becoming a star soccer player or anime illustrator. I return to growth mindset often in the first half of the semester when we are working through a difficult reading or after essays are graded and students consider revising.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE/AFFIRMING PEDAGOGY:

When students make connections between their personal lives, cultures, communities, and experiences to the content they are learning and practicing in the classroom, they benefit in many ways. They become more invested in the work of the class. They want to put in more effort and are more resilient when facing challenges. They see the value and validity of their personal lives within the context of academic learning, not separate from academia. They are better able to integrate class content into their knowledge base for rich, deep learning.



EXAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS: One of the first assignments students do is some form of introduction of themselves: sometimes as a personal letter to me, sometimes as a slideshow to the class populated only with pictures to illustrate their identity(ies) and how they interact with the world. This low-stakes assignment sets students up for a larger assignment on Tara Yosso's concept of "Community Cultural Wealth." Students complete a creative project illustrating an example of how they have experienced one of the forms of capital Yosso describes: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, social capital, familial capital, navigational capital, and resistance capital.

Uplifting students' lived experiences to be as academic as they are personal changes cultivates belonging and, hopefully, is a step toward expanding what colleges accept as academic work. Although I haven't taught it yet, when I next teach Engl C1000+50, I plan to incorporate a new assignment that will build on the Community Cultural Wealth activity. The new assignment is a researched [Oral History & Community Resistance/Resilience paper](#).