SECTION 1: USES OF *AOW* AND SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINES

Acting on Words serves first-year college and university courses providing program requirements in English, communications, or composition/rhetoric. Along with its emphasis on critical thinking, the text also reviews basic writing principles and skills. It therefore has the style and content needed to serve bridging programs as well as certain advanced level undergraduate courses. Over the years the text has served well at these lower and higher levels. Its primary use, however, is with the first-year degree program courses.

1. Length of Course
Acting on Words could be used for three-credit courses running approximately 45 classroom hours or for six-credit courses running approximately 90 classroom hours. It might also be used in first term for three credits of non-transferable preparatory work and for the same students in second term for three credits that transfer to university programs as meeting English requirement equivalency.

2. Mode of Delivery
While clearly designed for classroom-based teaching, *Acting on Words* will serve well as the core course text for courses by distance delivery. The systematic organization and comprehensive contents of the text suit distance methods. The text encourages self-motivated learning throughout.

For distance delivery, a short student guide can be developed to provide assignment instructions. Asynchronous or synchronous online discussion forums can provide interactive opportunities for students pursuing the various practice activities.

3. Precise Topic Area
Acting on Words can be used for a variety of courses: those that focus exclusively on composition; those that combine composition, communications, and speech; those that focus on English for Academic Purposes; and those that combine essay-writing and literary study (writing about literature, survey of literary genres and/or literary themes). Some users of our text may, therefore, combine *Acting on Words* with various literary texts— a novel or novels, a play or plays, and possibly an anthology of poems and poetics.

4. Preferred Method of Designing the Syllabus

In his essay "The Writing Sequence" (Section 7 in this manual), Mark Simpson describes the benefits of building writing sequences and literary analysis around a main concept, such as memory. Many instructors favour this thematic approach: they design their course—whether it is three credits or six credits—around a central theme or sequence of related themes (using the term here to mean concept or topic). Other instructors feel they work better using a technical and descriptive approach; that is, moving through a sequence of writing types and/or literary genres

Still others favour an approach explicitly based on a particular theory. Contributors to our section "From the Classroom" refer to various theorists, such as Jacques Derrida, Ferdinand de Saussure, and M.M. Bahktin. Composition theorists, such as Peter Elbow (*Exploring Language*) and Linda Flowers (*Problem Solving Strategies for Writing*), have had a significant influence on the design of writing and first-year English courses. Communication theory may play a significant role in your course, as may other academic or business theoretical models, depending on the exact nature of your course and the makeup of your students. Whether to design the syllabus according to a theme, a survey of technique and type, or a body of theory depends in large measure on your personal style of approach, but also, of course, on considering your students and the range of learning styles they comprise.

These three approaches to syllabus design—theme, forms of writing, and theory-- are, of course, not mutually exclusive. A certain amount of theory, whether conscious or implicit, underlies classification of types and genres; a syllabus based heavily on types and genres nevertheless will convey a broad theme or themes, such as the idea of all writing and communication as interplay of writer, reader, and topic. We recommend that when designing your syllabus you consider your students as precisely and closely as you can, and consider the merits of each approach—theme, forms, and theory. A creative blend of all three approaches could prove most serviceable to the largest number of students. In Section 2 of this manual, we have blended approaches to provide a sequence of topics and activities pitched to bridging and practically-focused courses, but likely to serve more theoretical ones as well.

As we said, almost all instructors wish to give some attention to forms of writing. The Reader follows a clear formal structure with personal writing (description and narration) in Section 1, expository forms in Section 2, and more intensely critical and argumentative forms in Section 3. In addition, in Section 9 of this manual we provide a further breakdown of rhetorical patterns found throughout the Reader. In Section 9 of this manual we also provide a listing of Reader selections by subjects and themes.

GROUP SELF-TEACHING

Since reading and writing are both highly active and interactive, it is a good idea to build

interactive elements into your classes. A lecture-style of approach wears quickly in this particular subject. Breaking the class down into several groups for specified learning and practice is one effective way to increase interactivity. Writing requires audience awareness and editorial review; group interaction replicates audience and editing components. Group assignments can also facilitate and speed learning by having individual group members responsible for answering or providing certain parts of the overall assignment and "teaching" what they have found to the other group members and then to the class as a whole. This taps into the principle that teaching can be the surest way to learn. Group self-teaching will provide a welcome variation to class routine and strengthen overall learning. In our Syllabus of Topics, we suggest the use of groups for various lessons, some of which are further described and supported in *Section 8, Enhancing Topics*. (This approach—the student as teacher—is not congenial for students of certain cultural backgrounds. Know your students when choosing methods..)

One procedure that works particularly well and can be used several times throughout a composition course is to have groups draft up a paragraph for display to the re-assembled class as a whole.. Breaking the editing work into assigned components helps to reinforce the various elements involved in specific writing assignments. If the class has not yet reviewed the basics of a paragraph, you might assign groups to provide one expository paragraph each on a different type of animal. Within each group, one member may be assigned to spend fifteen minutes researching the animal. One member may be assigned to read about and explain topic sentences. Another may be assigned to read about and explain kinds of support. The fourth member may be assigned to read about and explain concluding sentences. A fifth member (if there is one) might be asked to read about and explain transitional techniques. After 15 minutes of individual work, the group members put their findings together and draft the paragraph. After a break, or in the following class (depending on class length), the groups present their paragraphs to the class as a whole, perhaps as projected by Smart Board.. Each paragraph will be praised for the aspects that reflect the desired features. The drafts should be retained for future work.

In a following class, groups may again be formed, this time to work on assembling the knowledge needed to edit and revise for the fifteen common errors. They can work with the same paragraph as drafted in a previous class. These revisions are then demonstrated to the rest of the class as a whole. The same group method may be used to introduce a number of logical fallacies. Each member of the group reads about and demonstrates at least one type of fallacy. The group then reconsiders and discusses a previously read short text to see if it commits any of the newly examined fallacies. Each group may critique a different short text from several that were read by everyone before class.. Once you use this basic group self-teaching principle, you will find yourself adapting it to many different purposes.

PEER EDITORS

Each student in the class may be assigned another class member as peer editor. Assignments—or certain assignments—must be reviewed by peer editors before they can be handed in, and the submission must include a peer editor comments page based on guidelines from the text. A paragraph of response from the writer should also be included.

Another way to conduct the peer edit is to have all of the texts for editing submitted to you with signed cover pages. You then remove the cover page, number it, and number the text. The texts are then distributed randomly and returned to you with attached peer editing comments. This might be done electronically as well. The peer editor includes his or her name when submitting the edited draft to you, but you might choose to remove the name after reviewing the comments and returning them along with your own comments to the writer. You may wish to have the writer follow up with a paragraph of reflective response to the comments from the peer editor.

Online discussion boards can facilitate asychchronous peer editing exchanges. You might establish one board per assignment. Declare a period of several days for postings and peer reviews. Each posting should receive only one peer review. Students may review anonymously or not, as you and the class prefer (though presumably you will have an instructor-level of access and be able to identify all participants).. As in the above cases, writers may be asked to submit a response to the peer edit their text has received.

ASSIGNMENTS

Chances are good that you are teaching a pre-set course, that your evaluation components have already been established. However, here are two suggested schemes to apply to six credit courses in first-year required English. We are proposing in the first case a course in writing about literature; it is offered for university transfer at an institution where special attention must be given to remedial learning. In the second scenario involving the same subject, we are assuming that the students are attending at a highly competitive campus and already have strong basic skills.

Scenario I—University Transfer Program, 6 Credits, Grammar and Reading Skills Still Need Considerable Work (may include a large proportion of ESL students)

1st Term:

Journals/class work: 10%

Oral Presentation: 10%

3 Paragraphs: 15%

2 Summaries, 1 excerpt relationship : 15%

1 Analytical essay using some research and documentation (marked for 3 phases of outline, draft, and revision): 30%

Exam: 20% (must pass it to pass term)

Exam: One paragraph of analysis of a course short story; one paragraph of critical response to a course essay; one summary of an attached new essay; one excerpt relationship of a passage from a play studied in the term; one excerpt relationship of a passage from a novel studied in the term; finding and correcting fifteen common errors in a passage; labelling 10 logical fallacies in separate passages/statements.

Suggestions: The three paragraph assignments could draw from the following: personal, expository, analytical, argumentative, stylistic (using sentence variation and consistent/effective level of language).

The essay should be submitted three times, in three stages:
1) outline as described in Chapter 9 *Acting on Words*: 10%
2) first draft – 10%
3) revised draft – 10%

Oral presentations may be on topics of special interest to the students, but establishing some connection to course content and clearly demonstrating one of the major styles: expository, analytical, or argumentative.

It's easy to overload your course syllabus and assignments. Depending on class size and student readiness, you might cut the journals and oral presentation from the above, or even hold the essay portion for the second term or level course (if the approach is two required three-credit courses).

2nd *Term:*

Journals/class work: 10%

Oral Presentation: 20%

Essay of comparative analysis using the play studied in first term and another studied in second: 25%

Essay analyzing a poem or poems: 25%

Both essays should incorporate research and use correct documentation style.

Exam: 20%

Exam: One paragraph of analysis of a poem provided with the exam; one excerpt relationship of a passage from a poem studied during the term; one excerpt relationship of a passage from the play studied in second term; finding and correcting fifteen common errors in a passage; labelling ten logical fallacies in separate passages/statements; one short essay from a selected list of topics dealing with second term texts. [This exam may be divided over two periods, or one component may be take-home, e.g., the poem analysis] The play studied in first term might be the more complex or difficult of the two, at least regarding historical and linguistic elements. For example, the first-term play might be *Othello* and the second term play *Goodnight Desdemona, Good Morning Juliet*. Returning to the Shakespeare (or more demanding) play in second term will offer students additional time to absorb and work with it.

Oral presentations may be on topics of special interest to the students, but establishing some connection to course content and clearly demonstrating one of the major styles: expository, analytical, or argumentative.

Scenario II—First-year English Requirement for Students Whose Basic Skills are Solid

1st Term:

Journals/class work: 10%

Oral Presentation: 10%

Summary and Critique of An Essay: 15%

Comparative Analysis of Two Short Stories (using/documenting sources): 20%

Comparative Analysis of a Play and a Novel (using/documenting sources): 25%

Exam: 20%

This exam could be the same as that described in the scenario above. Class exercises will have reviewed grammar, common errors, and logical fallacies.

Oral presentation work could include one of the following: reading a paragraph of one of the major types and explaining its composition; summarizing research done toward the

second and third essay assignments; summarizing preliminary ideas and research toward the final language essay (end of second term); discussing a topic of special interest to the student, but establishing some connection to course content and clearly demonstrating one of the major styles: expository, analytical, or argumentative. You may decide against the oral presentation and redistribute the marks suggested for it.

*2nd **Term:***

Journals/class work: 10%

Oral Presentation: 10%

Argumentative Essay (using/documenting sources): 20%

Analysis of a Poem or Poems: 15%
Essay on Some Aspect of Language (using/ documenting sources): 25%

Exam: 20%

This exam could be the same as that described in the scenario above. Class exercises will have reviewed grammar, common errors, and logical fallacies.

Oral presentation work (class work category) could include one of the following: reading a paragraph of one of the major types and explaining its composition; summarizing preliminary ideas and research toward the final language essay (end of second term); discussing a topic of special interest to the student, but establishing some connection to course content and clearly demonstrating one of the major styles: expository, analytical, or argumentative.

ADAPTING YOUR APPROACH ACCORDING TO CLASS ASSESSMENT

In some cases on the first day of class, instructors meet with students who have already written an assessment/placement test or otherwise demonstrated their level of readiness. If your program/institution does have a collection of recently written assessments, try to review those of your class before your initial meeting. If an assessment test has not been written, it is a good idea at the start of your course to assign a diagnostic paragraph or short essay, and perhaps, as well, to assign a multiple-choice test of reading, grammar, and mechanical skills.

See "First Class Diagnostic" in Section 3: "Marking" for more ideas and resources to assist initial assessing of your students.

RESOURCES

The following Reading List for the Ph.D. Exam in Technical Writing at Oklahoma State University covers a wide range of rhetoricians and theorists, ancient and contemporary: http://www.cs.ualberta.ca/~cabay/Websites/C400/technical_writing_reading.html

Rhetorical Styles in Selected Readings from the Rhetoric, Reader, and Text Enrichment Site of *Acting on Words*

See IM Sec. 9 for a rhetorical table of contents for the textbook. This table, though not exhaustive, highlights readings that demonstrate specific tones, styles, and organizational methods. A subject and themes breakdown is proved as well. From these listings, you can quickly find sample readings to suit specific topics and classes.