

8N:102 Prose Style Course Syllabus
11:30-12:20 MWF, EPB 204
Brooks Landon, Spring 2009

Contact Info:

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This is what I mean when I call myself a writer. I construct sentences. There's a rhythm I hear that drives me through a sentence. And the words typed on the white page have a sculptural quality. They form odd correspondences. They match up not just through meaning but through sound and look. They rhythm of a sentence will accommodate a certain number of syllables. One syllable too many, I look for another word. There's always another word that means nearly the same thing, and if it doesn't then I'll consider altering the meaning of a sentence to keep the rhythm, the syllable beat. I'm completely willing to let language press meaning upon me. Watching the way in which words match up, keeping the balance in a sentence-these are sensuous pleasures. I might want _ very_ and _ only_ in the same sentence, spaced a particular way, exactly so far apart. I might want _ rapture_ matched with _ danger_-I like to match word endings. I type rather than write longhand because I like the way the words and letters look when they come off the hammers onto the page-finished, printed, beautifully formed.

--Don DeLillo

Overview and Goals: Just sentences. This is a course that will run through all the ways sentences get longer-and shorter. Whatever we can learn about how they work, what they do, how we can think and talk about them in ways that will help both our own writing and our understanding of prose style. Part of our concern will be with stretching our sense of options--all the things a sentence can be and/or do, and part with the notion of style itself. In other words, this a course in which we will dance with language, not a course in which we will trudge toward remedial correctness. And much of that dancing will depend upon your willingness-better make that eagerness-to experiment, to play with sentences. Your initiative and imagination will be much more important than your ability to "meet" minimal assignments. As we work with sentences, we will think about, talk about, and write sentences suggested by the following terms-plus more terms we'll make up as we go along:

Kernels and Masters, Predicatives, Subordinatives, Conjunctives, Cumulatives, Suspensives, Adjectivals, Adversatives, Interruptives, Intensives, Cohesives, Extensives, Balances, Serials

These terms refer more or less to rhetorical phenomena--ways in which sentences do whatever they do. In many cases the terms overlap and should probably be thought of as suggesting qualities demonstrated by sentences rather than as kinds or categories of sentences.

Textbook: *Artful Sentences: Syntax as Style*. Virginia Tufte
Book has been ordered from Prairie Lights. (It will almost certainly not be found anywhere else.)

The ICON page for this course is active and will be extensively used. Check it regularly. All Handouts will be on ICON.

Course Requirements: Your writing for this course will be kept in an electronic portfolio. Your portfolio will consist of three parts:

(1) all assignments for the course. All out-of-class assignments are to be typed, I may ask for electronic copies of some in-class assignments, your final portfolios will be electronic files.

(2) 1-2 page reflections* on the major sentence moves we study (I'll specify these moves), and a final 1-2 page reflection on the nature of your writing in terms of your sentence moves

(3) a list of sentences or clumps of sentences you generate during the semester (at least 50) of which you are particularly proud (and for each a brief explanation of what makes you proud), and **a list of sentences or clumps of sentences you discover in the writing of others during the semester (again, at least 50)** that particularly please or interest you (and a brief explanation for each of what pleased or interested you

Your grade for the course will be determined from your contributions to individual class sessions and from my evaluation at the end of the semester of parts 2 and 3 of the portfolio. I'll be glad to give you my sense of how you are doing at any point in the course, but **I will usually NOT place grades on assignments**

***Reflection:** In one important sense, this is a course about thinking about sentences--the ways in which we can shape them, the reasons for shaping them one way rather

than another way, and our personal reactions to the possible sentence moves. Your assigned reflective pieces will consider the way you think (or feel) about particular sentence moves—whether a move is a good match for the way you see the world and think and write. But your reflective pieces will also try to look at these moves from a less personal perspective, from which you will consider the more objective advantages and disadvantages of a particular sentence move.

Approximate Conceptual Syllabus

(We may fall behind this schedule, but will never get ahead of it.)

Week one

W Jan 21 First Principles: What is a sentence? What is prose style?
F Jan 23 First Principles: Form is content; style is meaning.

Week two

M Jan 26 First Principles
W Jan 28 First Principles
F Jan 30 First Principles

Week three

M Feb 2 How Sentences Grow
W Feb 4 How Sentences Grow
F Feb 6 How Sentences Grow

Week four

M Feb 9 Cumulative Sentences
W Feb 11 Cumulative Sentences
F Feb 13 Cumulative Sentences

Week five

M Feb 16 Cumulative Sentences
W Feb 18 Cumulative Sentences
F Feb 20 Cumulative Sentences

Week six

M Feb 23 Cumulative Sentences

W Feb 25 Cumulative Sentences
 F Feb 27 Cumulative Sentences

Week seven

M Mar 2 Periodic/Suspensive Sentences
 W Mar 4 Periodic/Suspensive Sentences
 F Mar 6 Periodic/Suspensive Sentences

Week eight

M Mar 9 Periodic/Suspensive Sentences
 W Mar 11 Periodic/Suspensive Sentences
 F Mar 13 Periodic/Suspensive Sentences

Week nine

M Mar 16 Spring Break
 W Mar 18 Spring Break
 F Mar 20 Spring Break

Week ten

M Mar 23 Periodic/Suspensive Sentences
 W Mar 25 Periodic/Suspensive Sentences
 F Mar 27 Periodic/Suspensive Sentences

Week eleven

M Mar 30 Periodic/Suspensive Sentences
 W Apr 1 Periodic/Suspensive Sentences
 F Apr 3 Periodic/Suspensive Sentences

Week twelve

M Apr 6 Balanced Forms/Balanced Sentences
 W Apr 8 Balanced Forms/Balanced Sentences
 F Apr 10 Balanced Forms/Balanced Sentences

Week thirteen

M Apr 13 Serial Forms/Serial Sentences
 W Apr 15 Serial Forms/Serial Sentences
 F Apr 17 Serial Forms/Serial Sentences

Week fourteen

M Apr 20 Rhetorical Tropes
 W Apr 22 Rhetorical Tropes
 F Apr 24 Rhetorical Tropes

Week fifteen

M Apr 27 Other Sentence Forms and Sentence Phenomena
 W Apr 29 Other Sentence Forms and Sentence Phenomena
 F May 1 NO CLASS

Week sixteen

M May 4 Other Sentence Forms and Sentence Phenomena
 W May 6 Other Sentence Forms and Sentence Phenomena
 F May 8 Other Sentence Forms and Sentence Phenomena

Course Policies

Resources: I need to hear from anyone who has a disability which may require some modification of seating, testing or other class requirements so that appropriate arrangements may be made. Please see me after class or during my office hours.

Attendance: Be here or live in fear? Well, not exactly. This is a class in which the more examples of and views of sentence moves we have the more effective the course will be. Unless you're here, you can't contribute to this process. While the balance of your grade will be determined by your portfolio, I take classroom participation and contribution very seriously and will factor that into my grading.

Late work: Don't go there! I accept late assignments but they make me grumpy. It's always best to give me advance warning when you think you'll miss class or have to turn in something late. If you do miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed.

See ICON for the official list of CLAS policies with which this class will cheerfully comply.