Course Description:
This course looks at the texts of “wingnuts” – “someone on the far-right wing or far-left wing of the political spectrum. They are the professional partisans and the unhinged activists, the hard-core haters and the paranoid conspiracy theorists” (Avlon, p. 2). Examples of wingnuts are Glenn Beck, Ann Coulter, Rush Limbaugh and Sarah Palin on the right, and Keith Olbermann, Michael Moore, Noam Chomsky, and Al Franken on the left. There are many others. We will examine their comments, images, speeches, and so on to identify common rhetorical tropes used to manipulate political messages. We will also discuss the impact wingnuts have on public discourse in contemporary America.

The course will entail readings, movies and video clips concerning wingnuts. We will also explore various rhetorical theories to help us in our understanding of the wingnut phenomenon. The course centers around class discussion, presentations, and critical papers.

Course Objectives:
At the end of the course, students should be able to:
1. know what a wingnut is and how they function in contemporary U.S. culture.
2. understand different theoretical perspectives to analyze wingnut rhetoric.
3. develop skills in using theory to analyze the texts of wingnuts.
4. articulate ideas in both oral and written contexts concerning the rhetoric of wingnuts.
5. discuss issues pertaining to wingnuts in civilized discourse.
6. construct arguments about the significance of wingnut rhetoric.

REQUIRED:


Huffington, Arianna (2008). Right is Wrong: How the Lunatic Fringe Hijacked America, Shredded the Constitution, and Made Us All Less Safe (and what you need to know to end the madness). New York: Doubleday. ISBN: 9780307269669


**Google News – more on this below**

Other Texts:


**Google News** – more on this below


COURSE EXPECTATIONS

ATTENDANCE:
Every class period is critical if you are to obtain the most of your education. Furthermore, issues that we discuss in class (which will frequently stray from the texts) will be necessary for your on-going assignments. Your participation grade also will undoubtedly be reflected in your attendance. After your third non-excused absence, your overall grade will be reduced by one full letter grade for each day you miss. I reserve the right to determine what constitutes a legitimate excuse.

LATE WORK:
Assignments not turned in on-time will be penalized one full-letter grade for each day they are late. Accepting any late work is strictly at the instructor’s discretion.

CELL PHONES, TECHNOLOGY, etc.:
Out of courtesy for all participating in the learning experience, all cell phones must be turned off before entering the classroom, and should not be turned on until class is over. This means, of course, that there should be no text messaging occurring during class. Laptops may be used, but please out of courtesy for others, do not use them for any other means except for taking notes and issues related to class (i.e., no Facebook or email reading). Since I have had students who disregard my request for courtesy in these matters, I will now give students a ZERO for participation if I notice that they are not paying attention due to a screen that is in front of them. Even if the students submits their discussion questions/comments, they will receive a zero for that day’s participation grade.

SPECIAL NEEDS/CONCERNS:
“Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability should contact Disability Concerns, FELL 350, 438-5853 (voice), 438-8620 (TDD).”

CLASS DISCUSSION:
This course is designed to improve your ability to communicate and interact with different concepts. Given the inherent communicative nature of symbols and rhetorical forces and their influence on our lives, your participation in class discussions is critical in practicing, developing, and understanding communication skills and messages. Additionally, we all learn more if everyone contributes. I expect all of you, as you should expect from yourselves, to contribute to our educational experience. It is expected that each of the reading assignments will be completed by the time you come to class the day the assignment is due. DO NOT think that your “attendance” is your participation grade. To participate means you add to the overall learning environment with your ideas and critical, albeit respectful, comments. It is up to you to come to class prepared to participate as a citizen — to listen attentively to others, to engage critically and creatively to the perspectives of others, and to contribute meaningfully to discussions of the class topics. In short, come to class having read the material with questions and comments ready for discussion. Students who interrupt discussions by frequently arriving to class late, who constantly interrupt others without meaningfully listening to their comments, or who constantly bring up questions that would more appropriately be answered by a glance at the syllabus or during office hours (e.g., “when is this due?” or “what do we have to read for the next class?”) not only reflect poorly on their own class citizenship; they also actively cheapen the educational experience of everyone else. Procedural questions about what is expected of you in the class should be saved for office hours if they are not answered after a re-reading of the syllabus, or can be asked via email.

A. Read before class: The only way class discussion will be meaningful is if you read the material before class. I will not lead the class in a discussion over material when discussion should be occurring. As active participants in the class, it is up to you to read and participate in discussions. Ultimately, if you do not read and there is little to no class discussion, it will hurt your class performance and devalue your overall education. DO NOT EXPECT TO READ MATERIAL WHILE IN CLASS!!!

B. When reading book material for class: There will be times when some of you believe the readings in the books are too difficult or confusing. As college students, I expect you to rise to the challenge and spend the time necessary to comprehend, reflect, and use the material in the books. You may have to read the material more than once, so budget your time carefully. You should also consult dictionaries for words or concepts that are unfamiliar to you. If you are having trouble with the readings, you should work with someone else in class. You may ask me questions about conceptual material, but I will not respond to claims that the material is too confusing or difficult.

C. Critical Questions — for each class period of reading, you need to bring to class 5 critical questions based on the reading. You will hand them in to me at the end of the class period. You should refer to the author and page number of the reading in which your question/concern relates. They must be typed. You will receive up to 5 points for your questions, and up to 5 points for your participation in that particular class.

D. Bring readings to class. Since we will be discussing a great deal in class, it is helpful if all of us can refer to the readings during the class discussion. Thus, you should bring your books and articles, for that particular day’s reading assignment, to the class.

E. Google News — for EACH discussion day, I expect you to read through the relevant news of the day that pertains to our class. This is essential for our class discussions (and your knowledge of current events), and I expect you to come to class knowledgeable about the current news items. Failure to stay abreast of current news and failure to incorporate it into your discussions will severely hamper your participation grade.

Each reading day involves class discussion. Your participation will be based on the following rubric – a total of 5 possible points per class. This rubric will also be used for your overall course participation grade (in conjunction with your total points earned).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full participation as a</td>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>Does what is expected:</td>
<td>Does not demonstrate a</td>
<td>Acts in a manner that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
leader in class, providing well-developed responses, questions, comments, and sharing knowledge with others. Demonstrates “big picture thinking” tying course concepts to class, experiences, & discussion.

participation as mostly a listener with some involvement in class discussions. Some questions and responses provided. Not always able to describe how concepts tie together in terms of the “big picture.”

comes to class and completes reading assignments. Normally a listener in class discussion. Often does not ask or answer questions. Sometimes is distracted and not motivated to see the “big picture.”

time commitment to the course (is tardy, misses some class, comes to class unprepared). Often does not participate. Not interested in how course concepts relate to the “big picture.”

disrupts the learning of self and others. Creates an uncomfortable environment for others (i.e., disrespect, incivility, comments unrelated to the readings, etc.). Often is tardy and/or misses class.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:
Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. This includes cutting and pasting from the internet (even if such cutting/pasting have a reference), and generally any material that is not your own unless broken off with quotation marks and cited to the proper author. THIS ALSO INCLUDES POWER POINT PRESENTATIONS!!! Specifically for this class, intentional borrowing material from others without proper citation or falsification/fabrication of supporting material, will automatically result in a ZERO for that assignment and may result in additional action taken by the appropriate university officials.

FINAL NOTE:
The nature of this course requires reading and examining controversial issues. By their nature, controversial issues foster disagreement. Our efforts in this course are to analyze these issues, discuss them, and criticize the strengths and weaknesses of the rhetorical messages and strategies employed in social movements. As such, respect and tolerance for the interrogation of movements in this course is imperative. At the same time, we should also be mindful of the sensitivities of others.

GRADING
Note: Failure to turn in any of the course requirements may result in failure of the overall course. I grade your work based on the final product, not your effort. The Grading Scale is an A (4) = 90-100, B (3) = 80-89, C (2) = 70-79, D (1) = 60-69, F (0) = 0-59. Here are the grading criteria I will use to holistically evaluate the quality of everyone’s papers:

- Superior (A) — Focused, well-written, thoughtful and well-organized argument in response to the assignment. The writer demonstrates the highest degree of intellectual engagement by competently using concepts, terms, and examples; plus the writer may address related issues of interest or further investigation to the assignment. The paper adheres to the expectations for the assignment, and the writer demonstrated maturity (i.e., style and tone) consistent with the expectations for college courses. The paper demonstrates competence in language use and manuscript preparation, and it is free or nearly free of grammatical, spelling, formatting and other errors. Research from external sources goes well beyond the minimum necessary for the assignment.

- Very Good (B) — Discussion of concepts and terms related to the assignment is okay but needs more application through explanations, examples, or other devices to demonstrate understanding. Intellectual engagement with the assignment’s topic is sufficient and may include additional points of interest related to the course’s content. The writing suffers from some problems in grammar, spelling, mechanics, organization, etc., and the style or tone of the writing is ineffective in places.

- Adequate (C) — Discussion reflects primarily on one’s self, answering only the “what” part of the assignment and not the “why.” Analysis is only at a surface level with limited, direct application of the course’s concepts. The writing suffers from frequent problems in basic matters of grammar,
spelling, mechanics, organization, etc., and the style and tone of the writing is ineffective and/or inappropriate in many places in the text.

- **Poor (D)** — Discussion of concepts lacks depth, having no or nearly no application of the course’s content for the assignment. Analysis presents little or no thoughtful reflection. Ideas are oversimplified and limited. The writing suffers from significant, numerous problems in multiple areas, including style and tone.
- **Failure (F)** — The writer’s work does not fulfill the assignment on any of the grounds for other letter grades, or the writer did not turn in the assignment. A “failed” paper also is replete with mistakes that violate the “grammar tips” at the end of this syllabus. An “F” paper is not college-level writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>200 pts.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leading class discussion</td>
<td>100 pts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Reflection paper</td>
<td>50 pts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wingnut Paper #1</td>
<td>250 pts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wingnut Paper #2</td>
<td>300 pts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>900 pts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grad Students: As part of taking a 300-level course, graduate students are required to complete additional assignments. For this course, graduate students will be expected to write their final papers between 15-20 pages, with 20 references (10 of which should be from peer-reviewed, scholarly sources, and only 5 of which can come from the internet). Additionally, graduate students will be expected to lead one class in discussion. The date/topic will be assigned in consultation with the instructor.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

*I will not accept anything over e-mail.* All work should be handed in. Make sure you proofread all of your work and that they are photocopied or saved on disk. If you forget to proofread or if you misplace your work do not expect me to be sympathetic. Any late work will be automatically reduced one-letter grade for every class period that it is late. If you foresee problems, make sure you discuss them with me BEFORE the assignment is due. The assignments for this class are as follows (more detailed descriptions will come later):

1. **Discussion:** As I mention above, you need to attend each class prepared, which means you should have read the material for that day. Some days will require more reading than others, but for longer readings you will probably get away with skimming carefully so long as you understand the core, key concepts in the reading. I will expect each of you to have at least 5 critical points for the readings. “Critical points” may be critical questions or critical issues worthy of discussion. What do I mean by “critical”? I mean questions that probe higher levels of thinking – compare/contrast, deep analysis, etc. I do not mean questions such as “according to the author, what is the concept of rhetoric”? Instead, a better question would be “The author describes rhetoric as _____; how is this helpful when analyzing ___________?” If there are multiple readings assigned for a particular day, you should ensure that your questions/comments reflect somehow all of the readings for that day. Additionally, for each question, you should put the page number of the reading for which you question/comment pertains – in other words, reference the page where your question/comment relates. And, you should bring with you to class the actual readings so we can refer to the pages of the readings in our discussions. The maximum you can receive for participation is 250 points.

2. **Leading class discussion:** Each of you will lead the class in discussion about that particular day’s reading material. You will carefully read through the material due for your discussion day, prepare a 5-7 minute overview of the topic material, and generate a list of critical questions about the material. Your responsibility will be to keep the class discussing the material for that day. Your purpose will be to provide a summary of the theory/material and stimulate discussion for that day. **You will need to submit to me your outline, copies of external resources you’re using, and a bibliography.** I will be looking for the following when determining your grade:
   a. Do you have insightful questions about the reading material for the class to discuss?
   b. Do you keep the discussion going?
   c. Are you flexible in your questions to ask new ones as they emerge from the discussion?
   d. Are you mindful of the time? (be sure to get through all of the material for that day)
   e. Are you encouraging everyone to participate?
   f. Are you respectful of others’ comments?
   g. Are you prepared and energetic?
   h. **Did you do outside reading to prepare you for leading class discussion?** (This means that you should consult other sources to help inform you about the material to be discussed that day in class. You should use additional material to help you frame your questions, add to the discussion at key points, and help you with handling the overall discussion.)
   i. Did you succinctly and accurately provide an overview of the theory/material?
   j. **IF IT IS NOT YOUR DAY TO PRESENT** – you are still expected to read the material and participate each day of class. Each of you will begin with 200 points for participation. If you fail to meaningfully and actively participate in a class discussion, you will lose up to 5 points for that day. You will also receive participation points for 5 critical questions for each day of reading, as explained above under “class discussion.”

3. **Political Reflection Paper:** For this paper (due Tuesday, September 1), you need to write about your views on politics: do you try to stay aware of current events, do you frequently discuss about political issues, what issues do you find important, what is your role in politics, how do you use media when considering political viewpoints, etc. This is a very open-ended assignment. It serves a couple of different purposes. First, it gives you an opportunity to write something for me early in the semester so you can receive my feedback on your writing. Second, it forces you to think about the role of politics in your life and how you communicate about politics – knowing this can help you in many of our class discussions. There is no page limit for this paper, but I expect it will be at least 2-3 pages in length. You may use the first pronoun “I” in your paper, and you do not need to do any additional research. It simply is a personal reflection about yourself around the issues I mentioned above. It is worth 50 points.
4. **Wingnut Paper #1**: For this paper (due Tuesday, October 27), you need to write approximately 10 pages (although quality is more important than quantity) analyzing the rhetoric of a wingnut of your choice. You must first define why the person is a wingnut, describe a brief biography of the person, and then spend the bulk of your paper analyzing the rhetoric of this wingnut (what are their major claims, what types of evidence do they use, what fallacies do they use, what are their goals/purposes, is their rhetoric effective – why or why not – and ultimately what is their significance to contemporary rhetoric?). This wingnut should be a liberal. You must conduct external research for this paper – this may include popular media cites and webpage relating to this particular wingnut, but it should also include at least three scholarly sources. You need to avoid sketchy and unreliable websites, such as Wikipedia and blogs. The paper should be double-spaced and should reflect what is under “written assignments” (and my writing tips) in this syllabus. The paper is worth 250 points.

5. **Wingnut Paper #2**: For this paper (due Tuesday, December 8), you need to write approximately 10 pages (although quality is more important than quantity) analyzing the rhetoric of a wingnut of your choice, but this wingnut must be a conservative. You must first define why the person is a wingnut, describe a brief biography of the person, and then spend the bulk of your paper analyzing the rhetoric of this wingnut (what are their major claims, what types of evidence do they use, what fallacies do they use, what are their goals/purposes, is their rhetoric effective – why or why not – and ultimately what is their significance to contemporary rhetoric?). You must conduct external research for this paper – this may include popular media cites and webpage relating to this particular wingnut, but it should also include at least three scholarly sources. You need to avoid sketchy and unreliable websites, such as Wikipedia and blogs. The paper should be double-spaced and should reflect what is under “written assignments” (and my writing tips) in this syllabus. The paper is worth 300 points.

**WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS**: All papers and written assignments must be typed, double-spaced, and in paragraph form. The quality of your written work (grammar, punctuation, format, spelling, etc.) will be included in grading evaluations (I generally deduct roughly one point for every grammatical/mechanical issue). The content of your work is necessarily implicated and impacted by the mechanics of the paper. Make sure you proofread all of your work and that it is photocopied or saved on a jumpdrive. If you forget to proofread or if you misplace your work, do not expect me to be sympathetic. I will not accept e-mailed copies of your written work. I reserve the right to choose whether or not to accept any late work. Any accepted late work will be automatically reduced one-letter grade for every class period that it is late. If you foresee problems, make sure you discuss them with me BEFORE the assignment is due. Accepting any late work is strictly at the instructor’s discretion. In addition, make an argument!!!! Don’t simply provide opinion. Support your reasons with sufficient evidence (including quotes, references, examples, etc.) that demonstrate, justify or prove your overarching argument. All the written work asks you to analyze the rhetorical implications of something. The paper should also demonstrate your working vocabulary of the ideas expressed in the literature indicative of rhetoric and social movements or activist campaigns. You should research your area thoroughly. Any and all arguments, ideas, words, concepts, material that is not your own must be appropriately footnoted and cited in a bibliography page. Your research should avoid being conducted from sketchy and unreliable internet sources. Citations: Any and all work or ideas taken from another person or entity must be appropriately cited. This means that material MUST be cited EACH time it is used in your written work (not a simple reference at the end of a paragraph or end of your paper), AND it must have an appropriate full reference in a footnote or works cited page.
TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

AUGUST
T, 18 Introductions and the syllabus
R, 20 Politics, political communication, and you – introduction
T, 25 More on the nature & context of American politics [read Hart et al. (2005); Noel (2013)]
R, 27 Introduction to rhetoric & ideology; Zompetti lecture [read Heatherington & Weiler (2009); Finlayson (2012); Huckfeldt (2001)]

SEPTEMBER
T, 1 Introduction to wingnuts [read Avlon, preface & chapter 1] Political Reflection Paper due
R, 3 Introduction to wingnuts [read Zompetti, introduction chapter, and chapter 1]
T, 8 Introduction to wingnuts [read Avlon, chapter 2, 3, and 4]
R, 10 Introduction to wingnuts [read Avlon, chapter 6, 8, and 10]
T, 15 Introduction to wingnuts [read Avlon, pp. 11, and 12]
R, 17 Wingnut rhetoric [read Lemuel (2010); Gutmann (2007)]
T, 22 Wingnut rhetoric [read Sobieraj & Berry (2011); Sirota (2005); Scott (1973)]
R, 24 Liberal wingnuts, Michael Moore [read Citigroup (2005); Mattson (2003); Misiak (2005); Spence (2010)]
T, 29 Liberal wingnuts, Michael Moore [Capitalism: A Love Story]

OCTOBER
R, 1 Liberal wingnuts, Michael Moore [Capitalism: A Love Story]
T, 6 Liberal wingnuts, Michael Moore [Capitalism: A Love Story]
R, 8 Liberal wingnuts [read Huffington, chapters 1, 2, 3]
T, 13 Liberal wingnuts [read Huffington, chapters 11, 12]
R, 15 Liberal wingnuts [read Huffington, chapters 13, 14]
T, 20 Liberal wingnuts [read Jeffrey-Jones (2010); Kincaid (2003)]
R, 22 Divisive discourse [read Zompetti, chapter 2] and Discussion about wingnut paper #1
T, 27 Divisive discourse [read Zompetti, chapter 3]; wingnut paper #1 due

NOVEMBER
T, 3 Conservative wingnuts, Ann Coulter [read Coulter, pp. 131-134, 149-182]
R, 5 Conservative wingnuts, Ann Coulter [read Coulter, pp. 237-271]
T, 10 Conservative wingnuts, O'Reilly & Gingrich [read Conway Grabe & Grieves (2007); Sclafani (2009)]
R, 12 Conservative wingnuts, Sarah Palin [read Larson & Porpora (2011); and Engels (2012)]
T, 17 Divisive discourse [read Zompetti, chapter 4]
R, 19 Divisive discourse [read Zompetti, chapter 5] and Discussion about wingnut paper #2
T, 24 Thanksgiving/Fall Break
R, 26 Thanksgiving/Fall Break

DECEMBER
T, 1 Divisive discourse [read Zompetti, chapter 6]
R, 3 Politics and the Internet [read Agre (2002); Farrell (2012); Milakovich (2010); Swigger (2013); Warner (2010)]
T, 8 Wingnut Paper #2 due by 5 pm in my office (NOT the SoC main office, and NOT under my door)
**Syllabus contract**

I have read the syllabus for Dr. Zompetti’s course and agree to the terms for required coursework and acceptable classroom behavior.

Name________________________________________Date____________________

Also, please give me some information about yourself.

ISU e-mail address:

Phone # (I will only use in an emergency):

Major:

Desired career field(s) or job(s):

How do you think this course might apply in your career?

How would you like this course to improve your civic, community or personal life?

Two unique things about yourself:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEADING CLASS DISCUSSION DATES/TOPICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Intro to wingnuts, T 9/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Intro to wingnuts, R 9/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Intro to wingnuts, T 9/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Intro to wingnuts, R 9/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Intro to wingnuts, T 9/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Wingnut rhetoric, R 9/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Wingnut rhetoric, T 9/22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Liberal wingnuts, R 9/24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Liberal wingnuts, R 10/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Liberal wingnuts, T 10/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Liberal wingnuts, R 10/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Liberal wingnuts, T 10/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Divisive discourse, R 10/22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Divisive discourse, T 10/27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Wingnuts on the right, R 10/29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Wingnuts on the right, T 11/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Wingnuts on the right, R 11/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Wingnuts on the right, T 11/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Wingnuts on the right, R 11/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Divisive discourse, T, 11/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Divisive discourse, T, 12/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. The Internet, R, 12/3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**DR. Z's WRITING TIPS**

How to use this guide: *Read this guide carefully*. Read it now, and read it before you turn-in your work. When you receive my feedback on your writing, I may use acronyms for certain principles in this guide – those acronyms are listed by the tips (e.g., tip #3 below has “EWP” at the end, meaning “ending with a preposition”).

1. Spend more time on your writing. Proofread, proofread, proofread. Follow my tips. Have someone you trust (and who can be brutally honest) proofread your work as well.

2. Use a Thesaurus. Seriously!

3. Avoid ending sentences and clauses with a preposition (e.g., don’t say, “those are the people I will be speaking with.” Instead, say “those are the people to whom I will speak.”) [EWP]

4. Use precise language – avoid vague language.

5. Avoid using conversational jargon, trite phrases, and informal writing. Do not write like you speak. You should write in a formal way and with a formal tone. Avoid using language like “going to,” something is “so” difficult, “whatever,” etc. The best way to do this is to read as much as you can, especially non-fiction (i.e., peer-reviewed journals, books on academic disciplines, etc.). [AWLPS – avoid writing like people speak]

6. Cite material EACH TIME you use it. [cite]

7. Cite evidence when you need to support a position or argument. [cite]

8. Vary your sentence structures.

9. Vary your word choice – don’t repeat the same words (or variants of words) over and over again. [WC]

10. As you write, always ask “how” and “why.” If your writing doesn’t answer these questions, you need more support (and/or evidence). Also, you should be sure to answer the “so what” and “who cares’ questions to accentuate the significance and importance of your topic and your writing.

11. Avoid unclear pronouns. Instead of saying “it comes from pork,” be careful with the word “it” and say “bacon comes from pork.” Other pronouns to watch are: they, he/she/it, people, this, that, these, things, etc. Here’s a good rule to follow: Imagine you are walking up to someone on the quad. If you just said, “it comes from pork,” they will have no idea what you mean. If, instead, you go up to them and say, “bacon comes from pork,” they will still think you’re a whacko for coming up to them and saying that, but at least they will know what you mean! [UP]

12. Avoid saying "today's society" or phrases like it, such as "the world today." This is one of my ultimate pet-peeves. It is filler, clutter, and simply just junk writing. Be more specific and clear in your writing. If you are referenceing a particular era, date, or period of history, say so. If you are talking about the present condition of things, chances are you have already described that or the reader will understand it. [YUK]

13. Be aware of there vs. their vs. they're.

14. Don't use contractions! Seriously, contractions detract from formal writing.

15. Also be aware of it's vs. its. "It's" is the contraction not the possessive. So, if you are referring to the stain on the book, you would say "its stain." You should never use "it's" because you should not use contractions in formal writing.

16. Be careful with dates. Often folks confuse 1970s vs. 1970's. More often than not, you will want to just use 1970s. The only time you use an apostrophe is if you want to show possession. E.g., "The 1970's economy was terrible."

17. Avoid run-ons. These are sentences that require commas to separate two full sentences, but have no commas. For example: "I detest papers that are written poorly and I love chocolate." The sentence should have a comma before the "and" to read: "I detest papers that are written poorly, and I love chocolate." [RO]
18. Avoid sentence fragments (such as this). Sentence fragments are phrases or clauses (often complex) that are not full sentences. Be sure all of your "sentences" have subjects and verbs! [FRAG]

19. Be careful with indented quotations. These are the lengthy quotes you may have in your paper that are distinct from the shorter quotations. Every line of indented quotations should be indented (hence their name) and they do not use quotation marks!!! Lengthy quotes that take 4 or 5 sentences should be indented – 1) the entire quote should be indented, 2) it should be single-spaced, and 3) it doesn’t use quotation marks. [BQ]

20. Use proper citations. If you don't know how to cite material, you need to purchase an MLA or APA guide. You can always ask me or someone else for help.

21. Use adequate citations. ANY material that is not your own, that you quote, that you paraphrase, that you allude to, etc., MUST BE CITED. Failure to do so is plagiarism and is unacceptable.

22. Avoid using the second person "you." Another big pet peeve of mine. This is sloppy writing. At times you may use the first person (e.g., "I"), but never use "you" unless you're quoting someone else. [2P]

23. Avoid writing like you talk. Some common examples are "doing this will be huge" or "like, this is important." Writing is fundamentally different than speaking, and you must be able to know the difference. [AWLPS]

24. Use dashes, not hyphens (-- vs. -). For example, if I say that good writing is important – it helps you get a better job, makes you appear more intelligent, etc., that is different than saying that you're a well-liked person (notice in the beginning the use of dashes, and the hyphen is used only for hyphenated language).

25. Be mindful of proper and appropriate paragraph development. This means that a paragraph should stick to one central point, but it should also be developed – meaning more than 2 or 3 sentences in length. Paragraphs should focus on a single concept or argument. [¶]


27. In general, follow the suggestions for composition in any widely-used manual of style. Pay special attention to the form for footnotes and bibliography entries. You may use whatever style you desire, as long as you use it consistently.

28. Papers should be expository or argumentative in nature. Avoid descriptive material unless it is brief and necessary to your overall argument. Narrative material on how you discovered the topic is neither necessary nor appropriate. Stay away from informal tones. Write your paper with the assumption that the readers are academics and/or scholars.

29. A paper is more than a receptacle for quotations from others. Do not produce a string of quotations held together only by transitions. Also, do not deposit quotations in the paper without preparing the reader with appropriate contextual material which elaborates on the quotation in an appropriate and useful manner. Finally, you should unpack and explain the significance of the quotation immediately after the quote. [SQ]

30. Please double space. Do not use 1-1/2 space. Leave ample margins at sides, top, and bottom so that comments may be made on the paper without great difficulty. I prefer Times New Roman, 12-point font.

31. Do not place papers in booklet covers or binders. Use staples to keep your paper together. Please do not dog-ear the pages.

32. Do not leave papers until the last minute. Please have consideration for your reader as well as pride of authorship, and allow enough time to prepare the paper so that your ideas may be expressed in clear, succinct, and stylistically appropriate ways. Poor writing due to last minute preparation will greatly damage the grade.

33. UMSL – “use more sophisticated language.” Formal writing should use sophisticated language, not words such as “get” or “a lot” or “got” or “x is so important.” Use a thesaurus.

34. Avoid referencing the class. Don’t say “as we’ve discussed in class” or some other form of referencing. It detracts from the formal nature of your writing.

35. Avoid generalizations – Avoid generalizations when it comes to descriptions of people (e.g., “all college students drink”), but also avoid generalizations when it comes to describing issues (e.g., “the media always criticize Bush”)

36. “Media” and “data” – these words are plural!!! This means you must be mindful of correct subject/verb agreement. For example, these are incorrect:
The media has discussed the election.
The data is informative.
These are correct:
The media have discussed the election.
The data are informative.

37. Proper citation – you should cite a source EACH time you use it, not at the end of a paragraph.

38. URL addresses – First, don’t cite the URL address in the paper. Instead, cite the author or the first couple of words of the title. The full URL is stated in your bibliography page (or footnote). Second, change the color of the URL address to black and ununderline it. In other words, make it match the destination of the rest of your writing. [URL]

39. Webpaged material – although you should avoid using the internet for your material, some of you will inevitably do so anyway. If you do, and you cut/paste it directly from the internet, make sure the font matches the font you’re using for your paper.

40. Support your claims – if you make an argument, back it up with evidence. If you use statistics or complicated explanations for ideas that the average person probably wouldn’t know, back it up.

41. If you emphasize a word or phrase in your paper and you feel it should be emphasized even more, do NOT italicize it or underline or put it in apostrophes. Special words should be important simply by reading them. If, however, you are coining a word or drawing attention to a word or phrase used in the literature, place it in quotation marks.

42. Any foreign words used in your writing should be italicized.

43. When citing web-based material, do NOT put the URL address in your paper. It should be cited by author or title. The URL address should be in the bibliography page only.

44. Citing material within your paper: Use embedded textual references or footnotes/endnotes – just be consistent with appropriate stylistic conventions. DO NOT place the entire title of a book or article in the text of your paper; there is no need for this, it just takes up space, it disrupts the flow of reading, and the full titles should appear in the bibliography/references page. All you need to cite in the text of the paper is the author’s (authors’) name, date and page number. If there is no page number, simply use “n.p.”

45. Citing material at the end of your paper: You must have an appropriate bibliography/references page. It should be listed alphabetically first, then if you have material from the same author, they should be listed by date in ascending order (i.e., the oldest date occurs first). If you have more than one source from the same author in the same year, indicate this by the use of letters at the end of the date (e.g., Zompetti 2010a, Zompetti 2010b, Zompetti 2010c, etc.).

46. Avoid putting titles of books and articles in your paper. They are unnecessary and take up too much space. They will appear in your Works Cited/Bibliography pages, so they do not need to be in the text of your paper.

47. Punctuation – Avoid doing these:

   a. “Smith argues that writing is fun,” (Smith, 2010). [no comma before the quotation mark]
   b. “Smith argues that writing is fun.” (Smith, 2010). [only use one period – should be after the parantheses]
   c. “Smith argues that writing is fun.” (Smith, 2010) [only use one period – should be after the parantheses]

48. All papers must have a thesis statement, and then the subsequent paragraphs of your paper should support that thesis statement. A thesis statement is a one-sentence, declarative contention of yours about the position you will be advocating.

49. Please note that titles of books, journals, albums, TV shows, and anything that is a “stand-alone” product should be italicized or underlined (you may use either, but don’t use both – be consistent and only use italics or underlining). If you are citing a chapter of a book, an article in a journal or magazine, a specific song, or an episode of a TV series, then those should be placed in “quotation marks.”

50. Embedded references in the paper itself – The punctuation of the sentence should occur after the reference, and there should not be any punctuation before it. For example:

   Incorrect: writing is fun. (Zompetti, 2009). [there should not be a period before the embedded reference]
   Incorrect: writing is fun. (Zompetti, 2009). [there should not be a comma before the embedded reference]
   Correct: Is writing fun (Zompetti, 2009)?
   Correct: writing is fun (Zompetti, 2009), but it can be challenging.
51. Introductory prepositional phrases should be offset with a comma. For example, “Although the course was challenging, I still learned a great deal” or “In the United States, apple pie is yummy.” Notice the comma after the phrases.

52. If you have questions, ask ME, not someone else who may not know about my grammar tips or who may not be knowledgeable about writing mechanics.

**Note: You may think that grammatical conventions such as these are restrictive, perhaps even colonizing. You might be correct. However, they are also perceived as being important, particularly among scholars and potential employers. Therefore, it is in your best interest to master these NOW!!!