Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures (WRA) 125—Writing: The Ethnic and Racial Experience

Staci Perryman-Clark

Course Description

According to the Michigan State University (MSU) course catalog, WRA 125—Writing: The Ethnic and Racial Experience is a themed-based Tier I (first-year) writing course that focuses on "drafting, revising, and editing compositions derived from readings on the experience of American ethnic and racial groups to develop skills in narration, persuasion, analysis, and documentation." WRA 125 is one of many courses offered in the Tier I Writing Program. For course content, most instructors who teach sections of this course select one specific racial or ethnic group on which to focus, and self-design course readings and other materials corresponding to these groups accordingly. Therefore, most instructors find it useful to add more specific versions of the course in addition to the one identified in the course catalog. My specific description reads as follows:

As we use an Afrocentric lens, we'll study more specifically, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), African American Language (AAL)/Ebonics, and African American Rhetoric (AAR). As students, you will be introduced to Ebonics/AAL and AAR as systems of speaking and writing, equally legitimate to Standard Academic English (SAE), the writing that you typically do in school. In this class, each of you will have the opportunity to write in SAE, AAL/Ebonics, or other language varieties and languages. While many of you may or may not be familiar with AAL/Ebonics, it is my hope that you all will have a clearer grasp on the language usage of African Americans, and how this language fits in college composition classrooms.

Institutional Context

MSU is a large, Midwestern, Land-Grant University. There are approximately 46,045 students total: 36,072 undergraduate and 9,973 graduate and professional. 54 percent of its students are women, and 46 percent are men. There are approximately 4,800 faculty and staff. The average high school GPA for incoming freshmen (middle 50 percent of class) is between
3.4 and 3.8. The average SAT combined score is between 1020 and 1240, and the average ACT composite score is between 23 and 27 (http://www.msu.edu/thisismsu/facts.html).

WRA 125 is a first-year writing course that is housed in the Tier I Writing Program at MSU. Our Tier I Writing Program is unique because while it is a writing program, it is not housed in the English Department. The history of the department in which it is housed, Writing, Rhetoric and American Cultures (WRAC), is also distinctive because the department recently underwent a name change. Prior to 2003, the Department was called American Thought and Language. Tier I Writing’s disciplinary orientation was not rhetoric and composition, or English studies; instead, Tier I Writing was historically taught as a history-focused course on Western civilization. Because there are still many faculty and instructors who specialize in History and American Studies, some instructors choose to focus on themes related to these disciplines. Many instructors who also teach WRA 125 often approach topics related to racial and ethnic groups with an emphasis on History or American Studies. For the course I designed, however, I chose an emphasis on scholarship associated with Composition Studies.

**Teaching Rationale**

Because my section WRA 125 is situated within the context of an Afrocentricity, I find it useful to clarify exactly how I understand an Afrocentric approach pedagogically. My conceptual framework primarily relies on Molefi Kete Asante as a lens. Asante defines Afrocentric education as

> a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person. The Afrocentric approach seeks in every situation the appropriate centrality of the African person (Asante, 1987). In education this means that teachers provide students the opportunity to study the world and its people, concepts, and history from an African worldview . . . . Because all content areas are adaptable to an Afrocentric approach, African American students can be made to see themselves as centered in the reality of any discipline. (“Afrocentric” 171)

I understand Afrocentric education to be valuable not only because first-year writing students study alternative cultural traditions and communicative practices (like those engaged by African Americans), as opposed to studying mainstreamed forms of communication (like Standard English and the classical rhetorical tradition), but also, because I understand Afrocentricity as a pedagogical approach that is inclusive to all racial/ethnic, and gender groups. In *African American Literacies*, Elaine Richardson acknowledges that an “African American-Centered or Afrocentric orientation . . . generally has a negative popular reputation because certain scholars’
revisionist claims about African civilization or theories . . . could be termed separatist” (32). The way I understand Afrocentricity, however, is not separatist or exclusive to other cultural traditions. While African worldviews, concepts, and people may be at the center or focus of scholastic inquiry in my first-year writing courses, space is still made available for other rhetorical and cultural traditions to be included. With each assignment and required reading, I particularly encourage students to make overt connections between African American communicative practices and literacies, and their own literacy experiences as they investigate personal literacy practices, online literacy practices, and disciplinary literacy practices.

In Sociolinguistics and Composition Studies, Afrocentric pedagogy is also situated within the context of language acquisition and practice (Richardson; Richardson and Gilyard; Holmes). Such a focus often includes a discussion of Ebonics and African American dialect. Alice Ashton Filmer states that “an awareness of the sociolinguistic pressures facing African-American students is difficult for most outsiders, even sympathetic ones, to grasp without careful attention to the lived experiences of black people” (“African American” 265). Asante adds that “sociolinguistics or racism and cultural imperialism have to be challenged and neutralized in order to produce an area of respect where African Americans assume more than a marginal role in their own discourses” (Manifesto 7). Thus, a first-year writing course, I believe, must work to counter and teach students about linguistic prejudice. As Leah Zuidema cautions, while most scholars and practitioners in composition may be familiar with the CCCC Students’ Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL), most organizations stop short of teaching students about SRTOL and linguistic prejudice (“Myth Education”).

For each major assignment, I permit students to choose the language varieties that they determine most appropriate for each writing situation. The major writing assignments that I designed consist of the following: a linguistic literacy autobiography, a cultural literacy analysis assignment, a disciplinary literacies analysis, and a multigenre literacies project. For the literacy autobiography assignment, students compose a linguistic literacy autobiography that analyzes their spoken and written languages/language varieties at home and school. The linguistic literacy autobiography assignment uses Keith Gilyard’s Voices of the Self: A Study of Language Competence and Geneva Smitherman’s “From Ghetto Lady to Critical Linguist” (in Talkin that Talk: Language and Education in Black America) as lenses. While literacy autobiographies and personal narratives are common genres associated with first-year composition courses, I place greater emphasis on its relationship to Afrocentricity and Ebonics.

The next assignment moves from individual communicative practices to the communicative practices of particular online communities. For the cultural literacy assignment, students are to investigate the representa-
tion of AAVE in digital spaces. More specifically, they should formulate an argument on how AAVE is appropriated and/or discussed in online and digital spaces. For this assignment, students analyze a personal website, a popular culture website, and an academic website in order to understand how discussions and/or appropriations of Ebonics change, or do not change, depending on the website’s mode, audience, and purpose. To complete this assignment, students read essays and articles that combine African American Rhetoric with technology (including Adam Banks’s “Taking Black Technology Use Seriously: African American Discursive Traditions in the Digital Underground”; portions of Lisa Nakamura’s Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity and Identity on the Web; and Carmen Kynard’s “‘Wanted: Some Black Long Distance [Writers]’: Blackboard Flava-Flavin and other AfroDigital Experiences in the Classroom”). Students also read essays on Black feminism and how visual images and linguistic representations of African American women are manipulated in digital environments (including Stephen Knadler’s “E-Racing Difference in E-Space: Black Female Subjectivity and the Web-based Portfolio” and Regina Spellers’s “The Kink Factor: A Womanist Discourse Analysis of African American Mother/Daughter Perspectives on Negotiating Black Hair/Body Politics”).

The third assignment shifts the focus from online communities (broadly conceived) to disciplinary communities. In the disciplinary literacies assignment, students conduct research in academic journal articles published in Composition and then formulate an argument about how these conversations in the field have changed over time. To complete this assignment, students were assigned articles on Ebonics, language rights, and pedagogy between 1974 (beginning with the SRTOL Resolution) and 2000 to read in class. Once we discussed these articles as a class, students conducted research in academic journals related to Composition Studies. After they conducted this research, they composed arguments that assess the state of Ebonics in rhetoric and composition, and how discussions of Ebonics may or may not have changed over time. While research on Ebonics intersects with several fields, students were given the option to use research in fields related to Composition in order to formulate their arguments, as long as the sources were focused on the uses of Ebonics in writing.

The last assignment gives students the opportunity to synthesize key themes from the course (and their previous essays) while demonstrating creativity. The final multigenre essay asks students to take a theme from one of their previous major projects and compose a multigenre project based on that theme. In the past, some students have used multigenre essays to compose websites of AAVE resources for students. Others have prepared print-based packets with handouts and guides for elementary or high school teachers teaching AAVE. Many students select platforms consistent with their majors. If a student’s major is in communications, (s)he might select a magazine
to design. If the student specializes in K-12 education, (s)he might select a guide to design for teachers.

Critical Reflection

One of my first goals for the course was to initiate a class discussion of the term *Afrocentricity*. During the first week of the course, I asked students to conduct a search on the term. Students were then asked to come to class prepared to discuss their results. Although I did not specify which results they were to discuss, most students chose to record results that gave a working definition for Afrocentricity, so, for our class discussion on the search results, I asked students to identify [1] what Afrocentricity means, [2] where they searched for the term, and [3] why they chose to search in that particular place. Unpacking Afrocentricity became a useful space for introducing students to research and academic search engines. Based on students’ searches, they gathered the following definitions for Afrocentricity:

- an intellectual perspective of African people
- a way to show Africans’ contributions to Western culture
- something that seeks to discover and interpret information through a different filter from Eurocentric scholarship
- a worldview that emphasizes the importance of African people and culture

The majority of students chose to search in the following electronic locations: Wikipedia, Google and World Ages Archive. When students were asked why most of them chose to search in these locations, they identified the following reasons:

- Google is easy to use, and thus, very convenient;
- Wikipedia was the first result that came up on Google; and
- Wikipedia is a good place to find factual information.

After addressing the students’ decisions based on their responses to the previous questions, we discussed how different search engines and databases yield different results and how some search engines and databases may or may not be more reliable than other engines. For example, after discussing the results that students came to class with, I had students conduct a search again for *Afrocentricity* using Google, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. From these results, students concluded that Google Scholar may be more reliable than Google because it provides results from academic papers, journals, books, and other publications written about Afrocentricity, while Google displays a broad range of results that may or may not be as credible or evaluated by
scholars. Issues of credibility become more complex when comparing JSTOR and Google Scholar, however. Based on our searches in JSTOR, students concluded that there is a trade off: it may be easier to find peer-reviewed articles on JSTOR than Google Scholar since JSTOR contains a database of mostly peer-reviewed articles from academic journals written about Afrocentricity. Google Scholar also contains peer-reviewed publications, but it is often more difficult to exclude papers that have not been peer-reviewed by scholars and experts of a particular discipline from its search results. But Google Scholar has an advantage over JSTOR because it yields the most recent results, while JSTOR only stores articles published prior to a certain year.

Students also produced valuable work with particular research-related skills for their first essays. For an invention exercise to be used with the literacy autobiography assignment, students were asked to keep field notes where they recorded their daily communications, the language or language variety they used with these forms of communication, and the technological media used, if applicable. In students’ literacy autobiographies they often wrote about these linguistic differences in relation to computer-based technologies. For example, many students discussed linguistic differences in relation to IM chats or writing on someone’s Facebook wall. When it came time to reflect on these differences on students’ blogs (the platform for students to post invention exercises related to each major assignment), many students were unsure whether or not they should use Standard English or “digital language” to discuss their linguistic choices since they were working in digital spaces. Some students claimed that because their class blogs discuss literacy and academic issues, they felt compelled to use some variety of Standard English in order to prove their credibility and ability to respond “intelligently” to academic audiences. (We complicated this notion of a standard and issues of intelligence, correctness, etc. in subsequent class discussions.) Others attempted to draw on other varieties of English, including texting or digital language because of the genre in which they were writing. Since they were in fact composing on a blog, and since blogs are digital, they argued that digital and/or text message language should be acceptable.

Students’ responses to the literacy autobiography assignment were fascinating to read because they demonstrated how students made linguistically-based decisions and accounted for the decisions that were made. Consider the following example from one student’s literacy autobiography, where he describes the ways in which he codeswitches depending on particular contexts. He writes,

We’ve all seen comedy sketches that point out the one African American who works in the office building among his white coworkers. After a board meeting, everyone starts slapping high fives giving pats on the back and
say encouraging things like “Good job” and “Way to go.” When the congratulations get to the lone African American in the office his coworkers switch to Ebonics and say things like “Dats what I’m talkin’ bout, brotha,” as if he doesn’t understand Standard English.

When the student writes, “Dats what I’m talkin’ bout, brotha,” he does so deliberately and purposefully in order to show the necessities of being able to code-switch between Ebonics and Standard English. This demonstrates how he understands the situations that he determines require Ebonics for certain communicative contexts. Such purposeful decisions are often stated explicitly in his and many other students’ essays.

While the intellectual work that students did with the first assignment was quite engaging to read, there were significant challenges associated with the second assignment. Because the second assignment asks students to make an argument about the representation of Ebonics/AAVE in digital spaces using a popular culture, academic, and personal website, many students’ main arguments were too broad, vague, or less valid. Because the Web is such a large place to explore, it was extremely challenging for students to draw definitive conclusions about the representation of Ebonics on the web. Thus, many students merely concluded that Ebonics was represented differently on these three sites, an accurate, but weak, thesis that was less sophisticated than I was looking for. Another problem with this assignment derived from the categories I ascribed to the websites. Many students were unsure how to make sense of categories that did not fit neatly into any of the three categories provided, and some sites fit in more than one category. A final problem with this assignment was that students could not make a representative argument based on such a small sample of websites. In retrospect, I see significant flaws in the design of this assignment and take responsibility for the less sophisticated work produced as a result. Perhaps next time I won’t provide fixed categories, nor will I set the assignment up for students to make a representative argument. Instead, I might allow students to do rhetorical analyses on the uses of Ebonics on a specific site (or sites) that they choose as they self design their own theses and arguments.

Because of the disappointment associated with the second assignment, I was at times apprehensive about assigning the third, since I believe the third assignment to be the most challenging in the sequence. As previously stated, for the third major writing assignment, students were asked to make an argument about how Composition Studies addresses issues of Ebonics, language rights, and pedagogy. What is interesting about this topic is how through discussions of Ebonics, students learned more about the field. When I first introduced this assignment, students completed an activity that prompted them to use JSTOR and Google Scholar to look for sources on Ebonics and Composition Studies. To complete this task, students were asked to record
the keyword searches they used when searching for sources, the types of sources they found, and any additional trends they noticed when searching, just as they had done when searching the term Afrocentricity. These trends then prompted us to discuss various elements of scholarly discourse and the field’s discourse. Based on their findings, students used the following keywords in various combinations: AAVE, Composition Studies, Ebonics, college. After gathering a list of keyword searches, students explained why they tried different keywords. Some students noted that Ebonics and AAVE are often used interchangeably in the field, and by relying on one term, they might miss key articles that used the other term. Other students insisted that they needed to put in “Composition Studies” to exclude sources that discuss Ebonics in other related disciplines like Sociolinguistics and Education. Others indicated that if they only searched for “Composition Studies” the results would be too broad; they only wanted sources that discussed both Ebonics and Composition Studies.

Like the Afrocentricity search activity, the Ebonics/AAVE and Composition Studies search activity also prompted us to discuss the different genres of scholarly discourse. Students noted that in JSTOR the majority of their results were journal articles, essays, and book reviews. With Google Scholar, however, students noticed that books, edited collections, book reviews, journal articles, essays, electronic resources, and academic papers (including papers that I presented at conferences) were all included. With these observations we discussed the conventions of published books, published articles, and sources that were not peer-reviewed. Because Google Scholar results generated academic papers and conference papers, and because the third assignment specifically asks students to draw from sources published in academic journal publications, students were to proceed with caution and review sources carefully. One student asked if academic books could be included in his sources, since the assignment specifically asks for journal articles. The student accurately identifies book publications that are also credible, scholarly sources that should be used. If students were to make an argument about the field, then only referring them to journals may be misleading because it excludes book-length projects and edited collections, both of which are needed to make an argument about the state of the field.

Although the third assignment taught students many of the conventions associated with academic discourse and scholarship, my feelings toward their essay responses were mixed. I was pleased with the ways that students made sense of Ebonics-based discourse in the field. They were able to pick up relatively quickly on scholarship that assesses the strengths and limitations of SRTOL, in addition to scholarship that calls for more pedagogical models on Ebonics and changes in teachers’ attitudes. What I wanted to see more of, however, was the generation of their own new knowledge. Many students relied on summaries of disciplinary-specific themes related
to Ebonics, as opposed to building on these summaries to show where the field’s conversations need to go next. And when students added knowledge and critique of the field, many did not provide substantial evidence to support these claims. For example, some students argued that the field still uses racist practices in relationship to Ebonics-speaking students when it demonstrates how Ebonics is primarily appropriate for oral-based genres, but many of these students did not provide sufficient support to prove that this was the case. Other students who adapted similar arguments did not sufficiently develop them. I attribute this focus on summary to a portion of the essay prompt that suggests students begin by summarizing their sources. The next time I assign this, I’ll devote more attention to development and moving from summary to analysis. Despite these issues, I was generous in my assessment of their work because the task was so challenging and it was the first time that many of my students had read or engaged anything in the field this way.

As an instructor I often like to front-load my assignments so that students complete the most difficult work first. Therefore, I wanted the final multigenre project to be more creative and fun. This project was designed so that students could take a theme from one of their previous assignments and explore it through different genres; that way any additional reading that students would be required to complete would be minimal. I always appreciate reading these assignments at the end of the semester because they are all so drastically different from each other. And with this assignment, students also made particular linguistic choices based on the genres in which they write, just as they had done with their literacy autobiographies. Consider the following excerpt from a student’s poem, where she writes about Ebonics while incorporating many of its rhetorical, phonological, and syntactical features that we studied throughout the semester: “Hey how y’all doin / Dey be some great thangs happenin / I learned Ebonics in ma WRA class / Now, I be speakin it like crazy / Do you wanna try it out? / It be fun, trust me / Although ma teacher be interesting / She goofy wit dose projects sometimes / Dey be fun though / It be killin me so bad . . .” In the first line, “doin” is an Ebonics-based phonological feature where /d/ is used for /ng/ (Smitherman, Testifyin 17). In the second line, multiple Ebonics-based phonological features are present. The student first substitutes the /d/ sound for the /th/ sound. Next the vowel plus /ng/ in thing, for example, is rendered as thang. And she also substitutes the /in/ for /ing/ again. With regard to syntax, she makes use of the habitual be verb. The fourth, sixth, and eighth lines include the habitual be verb again. The eighth line is one of a few occasional examples of signifying, an African American rhetorical pattern that employs an “oppositional logical” or “reliance on reader’s knowledge of implicit assumption that is taken to be common knowledge” (Gilyard and Richardson 42). The student signifies when she makes reference to the instructor’s (my)
“goofy” demeanor. Such a reference assumes that readers are familiar with either the individual teacher’s disposition in the class or the disposition of nerdy or goofy English/composition teachers in general. The final two lines include additional incorporations of the habitual be, and the next to last line substitutes the /d/ sound for the /th/ sound (Smitherman Testifying). This student’s excerpt is meaningful because it demonstrates her knowledge of many of the rules governing Ebonics, in addition to her ability to execute them correctly and appropriately in different writing situations across genres.

Both the study of Afrocentricity and Ebonics/AAVE/Composition Studies open up a repertoire of disciplinary and scholarly conversations about how the academy operates. Students learned more from applications of Ebonics and Afrocentric pedagogy besides the cultural and communicative practices of African Americans. They learned how Ebonics is talked about in Composition Studies, how things get published in the academy, and how to do secondary research on scholarly sources. They also became more familiar with the various genres of published scholarship. Introducing students to conversations about scholarship, the academy, and how things operate provides students with glimpses of how writing is situated in disciplinary contexts. As demonstrated through students’ work with the term, Afrocentricity, students can learn much about disciplinary practices through an exploration of Afrocentric pedagogy and African-based communicative practices.

What was still unclear from this course, however, was how students now understand the concept of Afrocentricity. Although students became more and more knowledgeable about Ebonics, the relationship between African American cultural practices, worldviews, etc. was less apparent to students. And even though we spent the beginning of the course trying to unpack and apply concepts of Afrocentricity, an explicit discussion of Afrocentricity in the context of language remained underexplored. The next time I teach this course I want to encourage students to make overt connections between the conceptual frameworks that inform how they understand Afrocentricity and Ebonics. In doing so, hopefully as a writing teacher, I will gain a better sense of how they understand Afrocentricity at the beginning and end of the term. Despite these limitations, I was pleased that students learned many skills associated with research, the field, and the academy while learning about the communicative practices of African Americans.
Works Cited


WRA 125—Writing: The Ethnic and Racial Experience: An Afrocentric Approach

Instructor: Staci Perryman-Clark
Michigan State University

General Course Catalog Description

Drafting, revising, and editing compositions derived from readings on the experience of American ethnic and racial groups to develop skills in narration, persuasion, analysis, and documentation.

Specific Course Description

Welcome to WRA 125! While the title of this class is highly generic, we will examine writing the American, ethnic and racial experience, using an Afrocentric framework to explore the field of Composition Studies.

As we use an Afrocentric lens, we’ll study more specifically, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), African American Language (AAL)/Ebonics, and African American Rhetoric (AAR). As students, you will be introduced to Ebonics/AAL and AAR as systems of speaking and writing, equally legitimate to Standard Academic English (SAE), the writing that you typically do in school. In this class, each of you will have the opportunity to write in SAE, AAL/Ebonics, or other language varieties and languages. While many of you may or may not be familiar with AAL/Ebonics, it is my hope that you all will have a clearer grasp on the language usage of African Americans, and how this language fits in college composition classrooms.

Since this is a Tier I Writing course, you will be expected to write. While we’ll study the use of AAL/AAVE as a language and Composition Studies as a discipline, you will also practice producing various pieces of writing. Our course goals are also consistent with the shared learning outcomes passed by the Tier I Writing Program Committee. By the end of the course, hopefully you will have achieved the following goals as a student:

- To engage reading, writing, and research as epistemic and recursive processes;
- To understand AAVE/AAL/Ebonics as a valuable linguistic system, equally legitimate to Standard English;
- To understand the rhetorical value of legitimating AAVE/AAL/Ebonics and other languages/language varieties, in addition to recognizing the choices behind language variety appropriation;

126 Composition Studies
• To begin negotiating the use of different linguistic systems through audience expectations;
• To identify and use the appropriate conventions depending on genre and/or audience expectations;
• To collect, analyze, and share information (both orally and written) through the research process;
  To develop arguments and present ideas to others in clear, effective, and persuasive prose in a variety of genres; and
• To begin developing analyses of both verbal and visual texts in print-based and digital environments.

**Texts, Readings and Other Materials**

3) JSTOR (links to JSTOR articles can be found through Angel or http://www.lib.msu.edu)
4) Additional Course Readings from websites (links are posted on course website under “Readings”)

Some of the readings will be available from our Tier I Writing Reader, *A Reader for Writers*. This can be purchased at the MSU Bookstore. Other readings will be available online through JSTOR web links accessed in ANGEL. You will be able to locate several of the readings through JSTOR, an electronic database accessible from (http://ANGEL.msu.edu). If you are unfamiliar with navigating pdf files or electronic databases, we will work together as a class to ensure that each of you can access the required readings. It is also highly recommended that you bring a laptop to class with you to work on peer projects and other group work.

**Work Policies and Requirements**

**Reading**

Reading things carefully is an important form of participation in this course. You’ll be asked to respond to readings in various ways throughout the term—in class discussions, in class activities, and through your writing assignments. You must—to enable your own learning, as well as to contribute to the learning environment of others—come to class having done the assigned reading. Note that reading assignments are due on the DAY they appear on the syllabus. If I notice students aren’t doing the readings, I will conduct in-class pop quizzes. As an instructor, I prefer not to do this;
however, I want to make it clear that completing all required readings is necessary for doing well in this course.

Revisions and Development Workshops

Since this course assumes that good writing develops with revision, we will spend some time in class working on drafts of essays. On days when you see “Reader Review” on the syllabus, be sure to bring a hard copy version and/or (depending) an electronic version (in MS Word as a doc file—NOT docx or wps—only to access in the labs) of your work in-progress for other members of your group to see. Also be expected to attend all of these workshops classes (see attendance policy below). I will not accept final drafts from any student who does not submit a rough draft.

Revising Graded Work

You can submit revisions for two projects for reevaluation after they’ve been returned with grades—within certain constraints (Revisions for the final project will not be accepted):

1. Opportunities for revision will be time-limited—that is, you must submit rewrites for papers within a week of the day you get them back from me.

2. For me to accept a revised paper, you must submit to me (an MS Word attachment is fine) a REVISION MEMO in which you explain to me how you understand the work that still needs to be done, and in which you describe a plan for how you’ll go about doing it.

3. You must include your revision memo, as well as your graded and commented-on original version of the paper, along with your revised version of it.

Technology Components

In addition to course readings and writing assignments, you will be expected to produce work using the following technological mediums:

1) ANGEL (see http://ANGEL.msu.edu): Most of the course work and assignments will be accessible through ANGEL, where you can download and read them by the assigned due date. Your rough drafts must also be posted as a .doc file ONLY in drop boxes on ANGEL by 8 a.m. on the assigned due dates. At various times during the semester, you will be asked to post responses to course readings in the discussion forum. At other times, you will be asked to discuss course readings using ANGEL Chat.

2) Web logs (Blogs): For Developing Work exercises (more on this later) that will help you brainstorm ideas for each of your individual essays, you will be asked to post work to your own personal Blog spaces. In class, we
will learn how to create and post responses to our blogs through Blogger. Occasionally, you will also post responses to readings, and are encouraged to read classmates’ blogs and comment on their responses.

3) MSU Library http://www.lib.msu.edu/ : Because Assignments 2-4 will require you to do research, especially with electronic sources, the MSU library will provide you links to available databases. In addition, for those readings available in ANGEL, you will be required to access many of them through JSTOR. JSTOR is an academic database where you can access various academic journals. The link to JSTOR can be accessed both from ANGEL and MSU’s library website under Commonly Used E-Resources.

4) Email: Frequently, I will send notes, directions, and other reminders about class activities and assignments through email. It is expected that you check your MSU email (through http://mail.msu.edu) frequently to make sure you are up to date on course materials and expectations. If you use another email location (like Yahoo! or Gmail), please make sure your settings forward mail from mail.msu.edu to that location.

Evaluation

We’ll be using a point system to determine grades. Here’s how things will break down:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Project 1                                       | 25 pts.
| Project 2                                       | 50 pts.
| Project 3                                       | 75 pts.
| Project 4                                       | 100 pts.
| Attendance/participation/in class activities     | 100 pts |
| Developing Work                                 | 80 pts.
| IAR analyses                                    | 30 pts.
| Online Participation (on blogs and discussion forums) | 50 pts. |
| **Total**                                       | **510 points** |

This is the grading scale: 94-100% / 4.0; 87-93% / 3.5; 80-86% / 3.0; 75-79% / 2.5; 70-74% / 2.0; 65-69% / 1.5; 60-64% / 1.0.

Assignments

**Library Modules**

Library Modules are electronic exercises to be completed through ANGEL. They are tutorials that will help you understand research, and how to find and evaluate sources more effectively using library resources. These lessons are to be completed by the assigned due dates on the course schedule. Completion of these exercises will be reflected in your attendance/participation course grade.
**Developing Work** (500 words; 10 pts./each)

Developing Work (DW) Exercises are inventive spaces for working with ideas for all four of your major projects. For each project, you will complete two DW exercises. Responses to these DWs will be posted on your course blogs (details to come). These responses should be roughly 500 words, typed with careful attention paid to editing, since this work will become available to a broader audience beyond the class.

**IAR Analysis** (500 words; 30 pts./each)

For each unit, you will be asked to provide an Invention, Arrangement, and Revision analysis of one reading discussed in class. Sometimes you will provide your IAR analyses on your course blogs; other times, you will discuss these analyses in ANGEL class discussions.

**Reflective Essays** (1 page)

Reflective essays are to be turned in as a cover letter with your submission packet for projects 1-3 (project 4 will require a separate reflection prompt). For these essays you will discuss the Invention, Arrangement and Revision strategies you used to create your texts. (Note: As part of your submission packets for each project, you will also turn in rough drafts of the marked up copies of your essays where you received feedback during peer review.) Your project will NOT be graded unless you turn in a cover letter that discusses your IAR choices.

**Project 1: Literacy Autobiography** (4-6 pages; 25 pts.)

As a lens for completing this assignment, we will look to excerpts from Keith Gilyard’s Voices of the Self. In this book, Gilyard constructs a literacy autobiography, where he analyzes his use of AAL/AAVE and compares it to the language that is used in school. In light of this, you will be asked to create a literacy autobiography that includes a discussion of the differences between your home language and school language.

**Project 2: Cultural Literacy** (5-7 pages; 50 pts.)

For this unit we will shift gears from analyzing our personal literacies, to examining alternative modes for writing in online spaces. Here, we’ll incorporate evidence from academia, popular culture, visual, and digital environments in order to investigate attitudes toward AAVE/AAL and AAVE/AALs appropriation in these spaces. You will ultimately create an expository essay that argues how the general public and academia appropriate or portray AAVE/AAL through digital media.

**Project 3: Disciplinary Literacy** (5-7 pages; 75 pts.)

In unit 3, you will move from cultural literacy to disciplinary literacy, where you’ll discuss Composition Studies as a discipline. We will read select pieces from scholars in Composition Studies to examine how both fields deal with AAVE/AAL. You will create an expository research essay that argues how both the scholars we’ve read, in addition to scholars you research on your own, confront/deal with, or discuss AAVE in Composition Studies.
**Project 4: Multigenre/Remix** (Lengths may vary; 100 pts.)

For the final unit, you will select a theme/thesis or research question that deals with issues we've covered (from units 1-3) throughout the term. Using this theme/thesis, you will compose a Multigenre essay where you'll investigate recurring themes regarding AAVE/AAL. We'll work extensively on how to craft an effective research question and where to look for research. You may also consider experimenting with manipulating both standard and nonstandard languages within this essay. Further guidelines will be given later.

**List of All Required Readings**


Nembhardt, Judith. “A Perspective on Teaching Black Dialect Speaking Students to Write Standard English.” *The Journal of Negro Education* 52.1 (1983): 75-82. (pp. 433-42 in *A Reader for Writers*)


———. “CCCC’s Role in the Struggle for Students’ Language Rights.” *College Composition and Communication* 50.3 (1999): 349-76.

**Schedule**

**DAY 1**—Course Introductions; Syllabus; Language Attitude Questionnaire

**DAY 2**—Introduce Assign. 1; Create Blogs; Discuss Afrocentricity; **DUE: Come to class with search results from “Afrocentricity”**

**DAY 3**—**MLK Day - NO CLASS**

**DAY 4**—Watch and discuss American Tongues; Discuss Zuidema; Discuss IAR using Zuidema; Read Zuidema: “Myth Education”

**DAY 5**—Discuss Smitherman and Redd/Schuster Webb; Discuss IAR; Contrastive Analysis exercises; **Read Smitherman: “It Bees That Way”; Read Redd/Schuster Webb (Chs. 1-2); IAR of one Reading due on Blog**

**DAY 6**—Discuss Gilyard; Discuss DW1a; Practice doing contrastive analysis for literacy autobiographies; **DW1a Due; Read Gilyard Chs. 2-3; Bring literacy logs to class**

**DAY 7**—Q/A session for paper 1; Practice Peer Reviewing and creating a focus for paper 1; **Read Smitherman: “From Ghetto Lady”; DW1b Due**

**DAY 8**—Peer Review workshop (review attendance policy); **Rough Draft due in drop box by 8 am; Library Module 1: Searching with a Purpose Due**

**DAY 9**—Introduce Assignment 2; Brainstorming topics; Preliminary web browsing; **Submission Packet for Assignment 1 Due by class time**
DAY 10—Discuss Banks; Work with www.BlackPlanet.com; Discuss Kynard; Read Banks: “Talking B(l)ack”; Read Kynard: “Wanted”

DAY 11—Preliminary web browsing; Discuss Nakamura; Read Nakamura: “Cybertyping”; DW2a Due

DAY 12—Discuss Spellers; Discuss Knader; Web browsing and constructing thesis; Read Spellers: “The Kink Factor”; Read Knader: “E-racing”

DAY 13—In-Class Conferences; DW 2b due

DAY 14—Assignment 2 Check-In; Oral Reports on Additional sources; Report on 2-3 articles you found in research on Ebonics in Digital Spaces; Library Module 2: Identifying Credible Websites Due

DAY 15—Rubric for Assignment 2; Expectations for assignment 2; IAR for one reading Due on Blog

DAY 16—Peer Reader Review; Rough Draft due in drop box by 8 am

DAY 17—Introduction to Composition Studies as a discipline; Practice doing keyword searches; Library Module 3: Popular, Scholarly, Trade Due; Submission Packet for Assignment 2 Due by class time

DAY 18—Discuss what writing teaches should do to help students write; Discuss Ramsey; Discuss Nembhard; Read Ramsey :”Teaching the Teachers”; Read Nembhard: “A Perspective on Teaching”

DAY 19—Discuss SRTOL; Oral reports on Oakland Ebonics case; Oral Reports on Black English Case; Skim CCCC Students’ Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL) Position Statement (click on link that opens as a PDF after reading the background)

DAY 20—Discuss Ball; Discuss Richardson; Looking for Additional sources; Read Richardson and Gilyard: “Students’ Right to Possibility”; Read Ball: “Expository”

DAY 21—Work on Annotated Bibliographies; Read Brief McGraw Hill Handbook on Annotated Bibliographies (196-198); DW3a Due

DAY 22—Discuss Smitherman and Canagarajah; Read Smitherman: “CCCC’s Role in the Struggle”; Read Canagarajah: “Safe Houses”
DAY 23—**DW 3b + Annotated Bib due; Be prepared to discuss 1-2 sources you’re using in paper 3**

DAY 24—Rubric for Paper 3; Peer Reader Review; **Rough Draft due in drop box by 8 am**

DAY 25—Introduce Assignment 4; - Looking at Sample MGE’s; Brainstorming/Recapping themes; **Submission Packet for Assignment 3 Due by class time**

DAY 26—MGE Work; Work drafting genres; Identifying Genres and Conventions

DAY 27—**DW 4a Topic Proposal Due on Blog; CONFERENCES; NO CLASS; continued work on MGE**

DAY 28—**CONFERENCES; NO CLASS; continued work on MGE**

DAY 29—**DW4b Draft of 1 genre due (in print);** Continued work time on genres; In-class conferencing and consulting

DAY 30—Assignment 4 Check-in; Continued work time on genres

DAY 31—Continued work on genres

DAY 32—Rubric for Assignment 4; Peer Reader Review; **Rough Draft due**

DAY 33—**EXAM PERIOD; FINAL MGE DUE DURING EXAM PERIOD**