

# First Year Writing

## ENGL 1A

Spring 2026 Section 33 In Person 3 Unit(s) 01/22/2026 to 05/11/2026 Modified 01/21/2026

### Contact Information

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Instructor: Mark Cunningham

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Office: FOB 106

#### Office Hours

In-Person:

Tuesday, Thursday, 11:00 AM to 11:30 AM, FOB 106

Online (Zoom), Mon/Wed 10:00-11:30 AM

I'm here to help you succeed, and always happy to speak with you. If you'd like to meet with me during office hours, please let me know ahead of time. And if my scheduled office hours don't work for you, please contact me and we can find a time on campus or online that works well for both of us.

### Course Information

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CLASS MEETINGS: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:00 - 1:15 PM

FIRST CLASS: Thurs. January 22, 2026

CLASSROOM: Hugh Gillis Hall (HGH) 227

*Nota Bene:* This syllabus is a *human-made document*, and, like all things human, it is subject to change. All but inevitably, you'll see updates and revisions to this syllabus during our first several weeks of the course, and possibly later on.

Welcome to *English 1A: Mindful Writing*! I'm looking forward to meeting and working with each of you.

I'm a writer, editor, and teacher with numerous book and magazine publications (pen-name M. Allen Cunningham). My professional and creative journey as a writer has been unusual, so I bring a unique perspective to my teaching, which involves expanding how we think about our work as writers. I've planned an invigorating semester with the hope that you'll soon find yourself approaching the writing process in new and rewarding ways, this spring and beyond.

What is ENGL 1A all about? The Course Description (in the following section) will tell you more, but our course will also—*must also*—reckon with the elephant that has lately materialized in every writer's room (and in the room of every student).

This elephant can speak. This elephant can produce intelligible text. This elephant and its creators seem to suggest that humans may soon have no need or reason to write anymore. The elephant (i.e., an algorithm) will do that for us.

But as writers we are individually expressive beings, and as students and faculty we are members of a community of inquiry and discovery (the university). Thus we're charged to ask questions and identify distinctions, and it's our responsibility now to remind ourselves of what it means—*what it really means*—to write. So, amid Large Language Models (LLMs) and other so-called "Artificial Intelligence" technologies, what place and purpose does the act of writing still have? And can that algorithmic elephant *actually* write? Can that elephant actually *think*? Can that elephant *express*?

Our meaningful work as writers this semester will include renewing our understanding of the uniqueness and value of the writing process for the individual, the college student, and society at large.

Let's go!

—Mark Cunningham

## Course Description and Requisites

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English 1A is an introductory course that prepares students to join scholarly conversations across the university. Students develop reading skills, rhetorical sophistication, and writing styles that give form and coherence to complex ideas for various audiences, using a variety of genres.

*Satisfies 1A. Written Communication I (Formerly Area A2).*

**Prerequisite(s):** Completion of Reflection on College Writing

**Grading:** Letter Graded

## \* Classroom Protocols

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### ENGL 1A Course Content

Diversity: SJSU is a diverse campus. As such, our course includes a diverse range of voices and viewpoints. We will engage in integrated reading and writing assignments to broaden our experience and clarify our own thinking on complex issues. We'll read writing from a variety of cultural backgrounds, perspectives,

human conditions, and time periods.

Writing: Writing is at the heart of our class. Our exploration of writing will allow us to prepare ourselves and each other for academic and real-world writing scenarios. Assignments give students repeated practice in all phases of the writing process: prewriting, organizing, writing, revising, and editing. Our class requires a minimum of 8000 words, at least 4000 of which must be in revised final draft form. More specific descriptions and instructions will be distributed for all major assignments in class.

Reading: There will be a substantial amount of reading for our class, some of which will come from texts I select, and some of which will be from sources you locate.

Final Experience (First-Year Writing Assessment): At the end of the semester you will participate in a First-Year Writing Assessment by preparing a portfolio with samples of your writing that demonstrate your learning; you will write a reflection essay that explains what you have learned, how you learned it, and how you will use it in future learning; and you will submit your portfolio for consideration to other people in the first-year writing program. This is your chance to identify and articulate what you've learned and what you'll take forward with you into future learning/writing experiences. We will talk more about the First-Year Writing Assessment in the final weeks of the semester.

### **Time Commitment**

Success in ENGL 1A is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally three hours per unit per week) for instruction, preparation/studying, or course related activities, including but not limited to internships, labs, and clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.

### **Faculty Web Page and MYSJSU Messaging**

Course materials such as syllabus, handouts, notes, assignment instructions, etc. can be found on the Canvas Learning Management System course login website. You're responsible for regularly checking with the messaging system through MySJSU to learn of any updates. For help with using Canvas see Canvas Student Resources page.

### **Program Policies**

First-Year Writing policies are listed at the following website: <https://www.sjsu.edu/english/frosh/program-policies.php> (<https://www.sjsu.edu/english/frosh/program-policies.php>)

## Program Information

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**Welcome to this General Education course.**

SJSU's General Education Program establishes a strong foundation of versatile skills, fosters curiosity about the world, promotes ethical judgment, and prepares students to engage and contribute responsibly and cooperatively in a multicultural, information-rich society. General education classes integrate areas of study and encourage progressively more complex and creative analysis, expression, and problem solving.

The General Education Program has three goals:

**Goal 1:** To develop students' core competencies for academic, personal, creative, and professional pursuits.

**Goal 2:** To enact the university's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and justice by ensuring that students have the knowledge and skills to serve and contribute to the well-being of local and global communities and the environment.

**Goal 3:** To offer students integrated, multidisciplinary, and innovative study in which they pose challenging questions, address complex issues, and develop cooperative and creative responses.

More information about the General Education Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) can be found on the [GE website \(https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php\)](https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php).

## Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

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### GE Area 1A: Written Communication I

Written Communication I courses cultivate an understanding of the writing process and the goals, dynamics, and genres of written communication, with special attention to the nature of writing at the university. A grade of C- or better designates that a student has successfully oriented reading and writing practice in English to support college level research and learning and to share learning with others. Area 1A is a prerequisite for Area 1B: Critical Thinking. Completion of Area 1A with a grade of C- or better is a CSU graduation requirement.

### GE Area 1A Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of an Area 1A course, students should be able to:

1. demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the content, context, effectiveness, and forms of written communication;
2. perform essential steps in the writing process (prewriting, organizing, composing, revising, and editing);
3. articulate an awareness of and write according to the rhetorical features of texts, such as purpose, audience, context, and rhetorical appeals;
4. integrate their ideas and those of others by synthesizing, explaining, analyzing, developing, and criticizing ideas effectively in several genres; and
5. demonstrate college-level language use, clarity, and grammatical abilities in writing.

### Writing requirement

Area 1A courses require a minimum of 8000 words, at least 4000 of which must be in revised final draft form.

## Course Materials

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Do we have an assigned textbook?

Yes. Two, in fact.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

- *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White (4th Edition). You'll find many editions of this classic book, but preferable for our class is the Fourth Edition. Also preferable is that you have the book in paperback (many copies are for sale online for \$5 or less). E-book versions are OK too, but there's nothing like having the book in hand for reference during class discussion.
- *They Say, I Say* by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. This book is likely to prove helpful to you throughout your whole First Year Writing experience and beyond.

I've asked the SJSU campus bookstore to order these books, but you'll also find inexpensive copies readily available for order online.

## ENGL 1A Course Readings

Much of our reading will consist of short stand-alone texts that I provide on paper and/or as PDFs.

### Do I need any other materials to succeed in this course?

Yes:

- A notebook and writing implements (you'll be expected to take notes during all our class meetings)
- A readiness to read, write, and learn together! Bring your own inquisitive, engaged, and imaginative self to each class meeting and assignment.
- A dependable place to store our course materials, handouts, etc.
- A personal laptop, desktop computer, or chromebook. We will seldom use devices during class meetings, but you will need one for some writing you will do outside of class.

## Course Requirements and Assignments

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### What's required to succeed in this course?

Read on!

- Engagement (~30-40% of final grade)
- Original Composition Drafts & Mindful Responses (~30-40% of final grade)
- Forums and Reflections (~10% of final grade)
- Final Project (~10% of final grade)
- Quizzes, etc (~10% of final grade)

**ENGAGEMENT (~30-40% of final grade):** *Engagement is critical to the learning we will do, and you will receive credit each week for your engagement. Lack of engagement will impact your grade. You should attend all class meetings and arrive on time, not only because you're responsible for material we'll discuss in class, but because active engagement is essential for the maximum benefit of all class members.* You will fulfill the Engagement requirement by attending class meetings on time, taking notes and participating constructively during class activities, completing reading assignments and attentively engaging with each text, offering constructive critiques of classmates' writing when called to do so and in keeping with peer critique guidelines, and participating in all discussions and forums.

**ORIGINAL COMPOSITIONS & MINDFUL RESPONSES (~30-40% of final grade):** You will fulfill this requirement by completing rough drafts during in-class writing sessions, and turning each writing assignment in *by the due date*. Writing assignments will include your Mindful Responses (averaging 500 words each) on class readings, your work on generative or analytical prompts, and also your longer essay drafts.

**FORUMS, REFLECTIONS, & PEER FEEDBACK (~10% of final grade):** You will fulfill this requirement by responding to all peer feedback assignments and forum, discussion, and reflection prompts by the due dates, and by demonstrating thoughtful engagement with classmates, and/or with texts in each response, including meeting minimum word counts.

**FINAL PROJECT (~10% of final grade):** You will fulfill this requirement by turning in, at the end of the semester, an edited and polished example of your ENGL1A writing, and a course reflection for the First-Year Writing Assessment. This assignment will document your awareness and fulfillment of our course learning goals. I will provide further details.

**QUIZZES, ETC. (10% of final grade):** You will fulfill this requirement by completing in-class and/or asynchronous quizzes by the due dates and with satisfactory results.

### **NO TECHNOLOGY USE DURING CLASS**

In this course we will strive to be entirely present and attentive to one another in our shared physical space. Because chargeable gadgets work against our mindful presence in the classroom and serve mainly to distract us from our coursework and one another, the use of phones, tablets, laptops and all other electronic devices is prohibited during class meetings. I ask that you silence and put away phones and other devices before entering the classroom.

On some occasions we may use electronic devices to access course material. At all other times, Seize the opportunity to go gadget-free for a blessed hour!

### **ATTENDANCE & TARDINESS POLICY**

As noted in the Engagement requirement above: you should attend all class meetings and arrive on time, not only because you're responsible for material we'll discuss in class, but because active engagement is essential for the maximum benefit of all class members. Lack of engagement, consistent tardiness, and consistent early departures will impact your grade. (Please note: Class rosters are often full and include waiting lists. Instructors are permitted to drop students who fail to attend the first scheduled class meeting and who fail to inform the instructor of the reason for the absence.)

### **\*COURTESY AND RESPECT IN CLASS DISCUSSIONS, WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS AND FORUMS**

Students are expected to take part in a classroom environment conducive to learning. Disruptions to this are behaviors that a reasonable faculty member would view as interfering with normal academic functions. Examples include, but are not limited to: persistently speaking without being recognized; interrupting other speakers; behavior that distracts the class from the subject matter or discussion; peer criticism that is non-constructive due to its pointedly personal nature; in extreme cases, physical threats, harassing behavior, or personal insults. I expect students to engage thoughtfully with course content, and to remain respectful of

their classmates' right to read, absorb, and respond independently to each text or item of visual content. Our class is a positive community environment, and in our group discussions, whole class discussions, and explorations of each text we will express ideas in the respectful manner of real dialogue and with regard to the wellbeing of our classroom community. In their in-person and online communication with instructors, students should demonstrate consideration and professionalism. Students are held to San Jose State University student conduct policies. These policies can be found at:

<http://www.sjsu.edu/studentconduct/policies/>

### **CHEMICAL ODOR POLICY**

For the wellbeing of yourself and our class community, if you arrive in class smelling strongly of cigarettes, vapes, or other chemical substances, you may be asked to leave the classroom.

### **LATE POLICY**

All assignments have specific due dates, and it's your responsibility to track these. Late work will not be accepted. If at any point you have concerns about your progress in this course, please communicate with me. I'm here to help you succeed.

### **\*PLAGIARISM & "A.I." POLICY**

**Plagiarism:** All work you submit for this course will be your own. Any work that is intentionally plagiarized will receive a failing grade. Because plagiarism is an extremely serious academic offense, this is a zero-tolerance policy. Plagiarism means using someone else's exact words (in a direct quote) or their ideas (in a paraphrase) as your own without proper citation. Or, as SJSU's Academic Integrity Policy puts it, plagiarism is "the act of representing the work of another as one's own without giving appropriate credit, regardless of how that work was obtained, and submitting it to fulfill academic requirements." It is also unacceptable to recycle your own work from other courses. See the SJSU Academic Integrity Policy here: <https://www.sjsu.edu/studentconduct/docs/SJSU-Academic-Integrity-Policy-F15-7.pdf>

**"A.I.":** Because the text generated by A.I. algorithms is never wholly original but relies on phrases harvested without credit from pre-existing texts on the Internet (a kind of *plagiarism by patchwork*), you are not allowed to use ChatGPT *or any other* generative "artificial intelligence" (AI) and/or Large Language Model tools at any stage of your work process for ENGL 1A, including preliminary stages. Doing so is a violation of SJSU's Academic Integrity Policy, will be considered plagiarism, and will be subject to the zero-tolerance policy outlined in the prior paragraph. Please note that using Grammarly is likely to put you at risk of violating this A.I. policy. In this course you will hone your writing, analytical, and critical thinking skills, and express your creativity – none of which a robot can do for you!

(Please note that different classes at SJSU might implement different AI policies, and it is your responsibility to abide by the expectations of each course.)

### **ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION AT SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY**

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities

requesting accommodations must register with AEC to establish a record of their disability. The Accessible Education Center (AEC) proudly presents its vision of redefining ability at San Jose State University by providing comprehensive services in support of the educational development and success of students with disabilities. Learn more: <https://www.sjsu.edu/aec/index.php>

## ✓ Grading Information

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To pass the First-Year Writing course, students must earn a grade of C- or higher. The ENGL 1A grading process focuses on the *effort* and *progress* you demonstrate, with final grades to be determined by the following criteria:

**A = 90-100% (Excellent):** Meets all criteria for a B, and ... all written assignments are of *excellent* quality and clarity in content, meaning that the work is fully developed and free of formatting and spelling errors; shows evidence of exceptional growth of critical thinking and writing skills over the course of the semester. Engagement is consistently excellent.

**B = 80-89% (Satisfactory):** Written assignments are of *satisfactory* quality and clarity in content; thoroughness in participation; all work turned in by due date; shows evidence of growth of critical thinking and writing skills over the course of the semester. Engagement is consistently satisfactory.

**C = 70-79% (Partly Satisfactory, Partly Unsatisfactory):** A mix of *satisfactory* and *unsatisfactory* quality and clarity in the content of your written assignments, and in your participation; meeting the minimum requirements. Engagement is partly satisfactory, partly unsatisfactory.

**D = 60-69%, F = 59% or below (Unsatisfactory):** Written assignments are of *unsatisfactory* quality and clarity in their content; not meeting minimum requirements. Engagement is unsatisfactory.

## University Policies

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Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

## Course Schedule

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\* This is a tentative schedule to provide a general idea of how we will structure our time throughout the semester. Changes to this schedule are inevitable. \*

### WEEK 1: PRELUDES

Introductions, Reading & Discussion, In-class Writing & Reflection



HW: Mindful Response 1

**WEEK 2: PRELUDES, contd.**

Syllabus Overview, Reading & Discussion, HW: Mindful Response 2

Reading & Discussion, HW: Mindful Response 3

**WEEK 3: PILLARS OF MINDFUL WRITING**

Pillar 1: Reading & Discussion

Pillar 2: Reading & Discussion

**WEEKS 4-5: PILLARS OF MINDFUL WRITING, contd.**

Pillar 3: Reading & Discussion; Listening, Viewing, Reflection; In-Class Writing, HW: Mindful Response 4

Research Questions, Citing Sources, HW: Annotated Bibliography

Composition 1 Drafting Sessions

**WEEK 6: MINDFUL ARRANGEMENT.**

Composition 1 Drafting Session

**WEEK 7: MINDFUL ARRANGEMENT, contd.**

Rough Draft Typescript & Work Cited due in Canvas: Composition 1, Class Visit to Writing Center, Peer Feedback Guidelines

**WEEKS 8-9: MINDFUL PERCEPTION**

HW: Composition 1 Reflection

Connecting the Parts

Peer Feedback: Composition 1

Writing & Discussion

HW: Reading and Perceptual Experiment

Film Viewing

**WEEK 10: MINDFUL PERCEPTION, contd.**

Film Viewing, contd.

Film Viewing, contd.

**WEEK 11: NO CLASSES - SJSU Spring Recess**

## **WEEK 12: MINDFUL PERCEPTION, contd.**

Composition 2 Drafting Sessions

## **WEEK 13: MINDFUL EXPRESSION, contd.**

Composition 2 Drafting Session

Reading & Discussion: Springboard Texts, Composition 3

## **WEEK 14: MINDFUL EXPRESSION, contd.**

Rough Draft Typescript due in Canvas: Composition 2

Rhetorical Strategies & Analysis

Reading & Discussion

## **WEEK 15: MINDFUL EXPRESSION, contd.**

Composition 3 Drafting Sessions

## **WEEK 16: WRAPPING UP**

Composition 3 Drafting Session

Rough Draft Typescript & Work Cited due in Canvas: Composition 3

Final Portfolio Guidelines and Prompts

Review

## **WEEK 17: Finals**

FINAL PROJECT due in Canvas