

Critical Thinking and Writing

ENGL 2

Spring 2026 Section 13 In Person 3 Unit(s) 01/22/2026 to 05/11/2026 Modified 01/16/2026

Contact Information

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Course Information

Section-Specific Course Description

(Un)American: The Politics of Representation

In 1995, researchers asked subjects the following question: "Would you close your eyes for second, envision a drug user, and describe that person to me?" 95% of respondents—no matter their race—proceeded to describe an African-American as the drug dealer they pictured. In reality, as Michelle Alexander notes, "the majority of illegal drug users are white." Where do these kinds of assumptions come from, how might they be different thirty years later, and what real world repercussions are their result? In this class, we will examine U.S. popular culture to see how films and other media shape and, at times, actively resist our (mis)conceptions of race, gender, and sexuality.

U.S. culture often functions as a type of cultural battleground—a site of battle for representation, for whose story gets told and how. We will study this battle, and through the composition of essays, students will join the fight.

Course Description and Requisites

Focuses on the relationship between language and logic in composing arguments. Students learn various methods of effective reasoning and appropriate rhetorical strategies to help them invent, demonstrate, and express arguments clearly, logically, and persuasively.

Satisfies 1B. Critical Thinking and Writing (Formerly Area A3).

Prerequisite(s): Completion of GE Area 1A with a grade of C- or better.

Grading: Letter Graded

Note(s): ENGL 2 is not open to students who successfully completed ENGL 1B.

Classroom Protocols

Generative AI Policy: All use of generative AI/ large LLMs at any stage of your course work is wholly prohibited. This course is designed to improve your skills of analysis and critical thinking, and the use of generative AI is an impediment to these goals. Again, no AI usage is allowed for any coursework in this class.

USE OF AI (CHAT GPT, COPILOT, GRAMMARLY, ETC.) FOR ANY STAGE OF CLASSWORK IS 100% PROHIBITED. You are not permitted to use AI in any context related to this class. Generative-AI usage on an assignment will result in an automatic zero.

Further, in this class, any use of AI will be considered a form of plagiarism, which is a violation of SJSU's Academic Integrity Policy. All student essays are automatically submitted to Turnitin, which scans for AI usage, with final determination of AI usage made by the teacher.

Academic Dishonesty

All students are responsible for knowing and observing University policies regarding academic dishonesty. See University policy: "[Academic Integrity](#)".

Course Content

Diversity: SJSU studies include an emphasis on diversity. You will engage in integrated reading, Writing, and oral assignments to construct your own arguments on complex issues (such as diversity and ethnicity, class and social equality) that generate meaningful public debate. Readings for the course will include writers of different ethnicities, genders, and socio-economic classes.

Writing: You will write a series of essays informed by research and articulating fully developed arguments about complex issues. Assignments emphasize those skills and activities in writing and thinking that produce the persuasive argument and the critical essay, each of which demands analysis,

interpretation, and evaluation. Writing assignments give you repeated practice in prewriting, organizing, writing, revising, and editing. This class requires a minimum of 6000 words, at least 4000 of which must be in revised final draft form.

Logic: You will learn methods of argument analysis, both rhetorical and logical, that will allow you to identify logical structures (such as warrants, evidence, qualification, rebuttal; enthymemes and syllogisms) and distinguish common logical fallacies.

Reading: In addition to being writing intensive, ENGL 2 is also a reading course. You will read a variety of critical and argumentative texts to help develop your skills for understanding the logical structure of argumentative writing.

Oral: You will be presenting your arguments orally to class both as an individual and as part of a group.

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.

Time Commitment

Success in ENGL 2 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.

Final Examination or Evaluation

In ENGL 2, our learning culminates in a digital Reflection and Portfolio Assignment. In this assignment, we will gather samples of our writing that demonstrate our learning; we will write a reflection essay that explains what we have learned, how we learned it, and how we will use it in future learning; and we will submit our portfolio for consideration to other people in the first-year writing program. This is our chance to identify and articulate what we've learned and what we'll take forward with us into future learning/writing experiences.

Program Policies

First-Year Writing policies are listed at the following website:

<https://www.sjsu.edu/english/frosh/program-policies.php>
[\(https://www.sjsu.edu/english/frosh/program-policies.php\)](https://www.sjsu.edu/english/frosh/program-policies.php).

Program Information

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)

GE Area 1B: Critical Thinking and Writing

Area 1B courses develop students' understanding of the relationship of language to logic. By engaging students in complex issues requiring critical thinking and effective argumentation, 1B courses develop students' abilities to research and analyze important topics and to construct their own arguments on issues that generate meaningful public debate and deliberation. Courses include explicit instruction and practice in inductive and deductive reasoning as well as identification of formal and informal fallacies of language and thought. Completion of Area 1A (Written Communication I) with a minimum grade of C- is a prerequisite for enrollment in Area 1B. Completion of Area 1B with a grade of C- or better is a CSU graduation requirement.

GE Area 1B Learning Outcomes

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

1. locate, interpret, evaluate, and synthesize evidence in a comprehensive way, including through library research; and integrate research findings into oral and written arguments through appropriate citation and quotation;
2. use a range of rhetorical and logical strategies to articulate and explain their positions on complex issues in dialogue with other points of view;
3. identify and critically evaluate the assumptions in and the contexts of arguments; and

4. use inductive and deductive logic to construct valid, evidence-supported arguments and draw valid conclusions.

Writing requirement

This class requires a minimum of 6000 words, at least 4000 of which must be in revised final draft form.

Course Materials

You are not required to buy any textbooks.

Readings

All readings are available through Canvas and will be linked through your syllabus. These include:

Richard Newby, "Sinners, Coogler, and Questions of Ownership"

W.E.B. DuBois, excerpt from *The Souls of Black Folk*

Bell Hooks, "Teaching Resistance: The Racial Politics of Mass Media"

Dr. Stacy L. Smith, et al., "Latinos in Film: Erasure On Screen & Behind the Camera Across 1,200 Popular Movies"

Dr. Nancy Wang Yuen, et al, "The Prevalence and Portrayal of Asian and Pacific Islanders across 1,300 Popular Films"

Michelle Alexander, excerpt from *The New Jim Crow*

Aviva Chomsky, excerpt from *Undocumented: How Immigration Became Illegal*

In addition, as a class, we will be analyzing the following films:

Sinners (2025), Ryan Coogler

Candyman (2021), Nia DaCosta

Sleep Dealer (2008), Alex Rivera

Zootopia (2016), Byron Howard, Rich Moore

Parasite (2019), Bong Joon-Ho

Nimona (2023), Nick Bruno, Troy Quane

Course Requirements and Assignments

Reading Assignments: Expect reading assignments for every class. These readings will provide the material for our discussions as well as material and models for your essays. It is absolutely essential, then, that you keep up with the reading.

Each essay will approach the following subjects from the perspective of our class theme, the politics of representation. Specifically, the four essays will break down as follows:

Essay # 1 (Critical): Analysis of a Film

Essay # 2 (Critical): Analysis of a Film

Essay # 3 (Persuasive Argument): Arguing an Issue (Immigration, Criminal Justice Reform, related issues)

Visual Essay (Multimodal): Crafting a Visual Argument (on the theme of Imagining Our Communal Future)

Assignment Word Count and Learning Goals

Assignment	Word Count	GELO
Essay # 1	1,250-1,500	2,3,4,5
Essay # 2	1,250-1,500	2,3,4,5
Essay # 3	1,500-1,750	1,2,3,4,5
Visual Essay	N/A	2,3,4,5

Final Exam or Evaluation

On our class's assigned final date and time, your ePortfolio will be due to Canvas.

✓ Grading Information

Essay # 1 25%; Essay # 2 25 %; Essay 3 25%; Visual Essay 10%; Participation (Module Completion) 15%

Participation will be figured by your completion of each day's modules by the assigned time.

The revision process is central to this class, so you will be responsible for writing a minimum of two complete drafts (more may be required, but never less) for each essay. While only the final draft will be graded, not turning in earlier drafts on time will result in a deduction of up to one letter grade.

Late papers (including drafts) will be docked up to one full letter grade each day they are late. Students must receive a C- or higher to pass the course

About Grades

Requirements for particular assignments will vary, but in all cases essay grades will reflect the paper's effectiveness, which is broken down into three major areas: content (this includes maturity and sophistication of thought), organization, and expression.

An "A" range essay is organized and well-developed, demonstrating a clear understanding and fulfillment of the assignment, written in a unique and compelling voice. It will show the student's ability to use language effectively with a solid command of grammar, mechanics, and usage.

A "B" range essay demonstrates competence in the same categories as an "A" essay, but it may show slight weakness in one of these areas. It will respond to the topic suitably and may contain some grammatical, mechanical or usage errors.

A "C" range essay will complete the requirements of the assignment, but it will show weaknesses in fundamentals, such as development. It may show weakness in mastery of grammar, mechanics, usage, or voice.

A "D" range essay will neglect to meet all the requirements of the assignment or may be superficial in its treatment of the topic. It may lack development or fail to stay on topic. It may contain grammatical, mechanical, and/or usage errors that interfere with reader comprehension.

An "F" essay does not fulfill the requirements of the assignment.

A (92-100); A- (90-91); B+ (88-89); B (82-87); B- (80-81); C+ (78-79); C (70-77); C- (70-71); D+ (68-69); D (62-67); D- (60-61); F (<60)

University Policies

Per [University Policy 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) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change with fair notice.

Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
Jan 26	CLASS ACTIVITY: Introduction to Class and Syllabus; Watch Clips from <i>Reel Injun</i> HOMEWORK: Look through " African American Photographs Assembled for 1900 Paris Exposition " (Online; click "View All")
Jan 28	Analysis & The Politics of Popular Representation CLASS ACTIVITY: Watch clips from <i>Birth of a Nation</i> and <i>The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross</i>
Feb 2	CLASS ACTIVITY: Watch <i>Sinners</i>
Feb 4	CLASS ACTIVITY: Finish & Discuss <i>Sinners</i> HOMEWORK: Post to Discussion Board; Read Richard Newby, "Sinners, Coogler, and Questions of Ownership" (PDF)
Feb 9	CLASS ACTIVITY: Discuss <i>Sinners</i>
Feb 11	CLASS ACTIVITY: Watch <i>Candyman</i> (2021) HOMEWORK: Finish <i>Candyman</i> and Post to Discussion Board
Feb 16	CLASS ACTIVITY: Discuss <i>Candyman</i> , Group Work HOMEWORK: Complete ESSAY # 1 WORKING THESIS
Feb 18	CLASS ACTIVITY: All About Your Essay HOMEWORK: ESSAY # 1 PEER EDITING DRAFT Due Feb 22
Feb 23	CLASS ACTIVITY: Peer Editing HOMEWORK: Complete ESSAY # 1 FINAL DRAFT

Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
Feb 25	<p>CLASS ACTIVITY: Watch <i>Sleep Dealer</i></p> <p>HOMEWORK: Read Aviva Chomsky, Introduction to <i>Undocumented: How Immigration Became Illegal</i> (PDF in Canvas)</p> <p>ESSAY # 1 FINAL DRAFT DUE Feb 27</p>
Mar 2	<p>CLASS ACTIVITY: Finish <i>Sleep Dealer</i>, <i>Undocumented</i> Presentation</p> <p>HOMEWORK: Post to Discussion Board</p>
Mar 4	CLASS ACTIVITY: <i>Sleep Dealer</i> discussion, Group Work
Mar 9	<p>CLASS ACTIVITY: <i>The New Jim Crow</i> discussion</p> <p>HOMEWORK: Read Michelle Alexander, <i>The New Jim Crow</i>, "Chapter 1" (pgs. 20-58)</p>
Mar 11	<p>CLASS ACTIVITY: Watch <i>Zootopia</i></p> <p>HOMEWORK: Finish <i>Zootopia</i> & Post to Discussion Board</p>
Mar 16	CLASS ACTIVITY: Discuss <i>Zootopia</i>
Mar 18	CLASS ACTIVITY: Discuss <i>Zootopia</i> , Group Work
Mar 23	<p>CLASS ACTIVITY: All About Your Essay</p> <p>HOMEWORK: ESSAY # 2 PEER EDITING DRAFT Due Mar 24</p>
Mar 25	<p>CLASS ACTIVITY: Peer Editing</p> <p>HOMEWORK: ESSAY # 2 FINAL DRAFT</p>
Apr 6	<p>ESSAY # 2 FINAL DRAFT DUE</p> <p>CLASS ACTIVITY: Introduce Vision Board for Our Communal Future Assignment / Imagining Alternative Futures</p>
Apr 8	CLASS ACTIVITY: Imagining Alternative Futures Cont.

Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
Apr 13	CLASS ACTIVITY: Watch <i>Parasite</i>
Apr 15	CLASS ACTIVITY: Finish & Discuss <i>Parasite</i> HOMEWORK: Post to Discussion Board HOMEWORK: Submit Communal Vision Board
Apr 20	CLASS ACTIVITY: Discuss <i>Parasite</i> , Group Work
Apr 22	CLASS ACTIVITY: Watch <i>Nimona</i>
Apr 27	CLASS ACTIVITY: Finish & Discuss <i>Nimona</i> HOMEWORK: Post to Discussion Board
Apr 29	CLASS ACTIVITY: Discuss <i>Nimona</i>
May 4	CLASS ACTIVITY: Discuss <i>Parasite</i> , <i>Nimona</i> , and Essay # 3 Intro ePortfolio
May 6	CLASS ACTIVITY: All About Your Essay ESSAY # 3 PEER EDITING DRAFT DUE May 10
May 11	ESSAY # 3 FINAL DRAFT DUE CLASS ACTIVITY: Final Thoughts
May 13	ePortfolio due to Canvas by 12:45 PM, Wednesday, May 13