

# Some Quick Facts About English 120

**Several years ago, thirty-five English instructors met to develop a rubric and to make decisions about what the course should emphasize. As a result of these discussions, English 120 has several components teachers ought to keep in mind while planning the class.**

## **I. We Conduct an Article-Based Common Final.**

Students write this essay in class during their regularly scheduled finals. Although they are given only ninety minutes to write, they have a week to prepare margin notes on the articles. Two weeks before the end of regular session, teachers receive article packets and instructions to give to the students. The articles in the packet have the same general focus, e.g., immigration issues, the effects of television etc. The articles present facts and contrasting viewpoints.

At this point in the class, students should take over most of the preparation. Although they are not given the exact essay topics until the day of the final, they are allowed to make any margin notes they wish and bring the article packet to the final (no other pages of notes will be allowed). As part of the support for their ideas, they will be expected to make and cite references to the readings. Teachers may answer clarifying questions about the articles, such as what a statement means, but it should be up to the students to read, identify issues, discuss, debate, write thesis sentences etc. This is because the course heavily emphasizes efficient study skills and analysis of readings as a preparation to write.

## **I. The English 120 Course Emphasizes Two Writing Processes.**

The 120 course outline requires half of the essays to be written in class. This is simply because students will encounter two obvious kinds of writing settings in the future, ones in which they will have a lot of time to work on their writing and ones in which they will not. Just as obvious, each setting requires a different process of preparation.

### **The process of in-class writing includes:**

- the ability to write clear, grammatical sentences on the spot;
- the ability to anticipate what sort of writing will be required in a setting;
- the ability to read and take notes efficiently, to put information into a useful form in both margin and outside notes in order to work quickly;
- the ability to brainstorm when necessary to get ideas and prevent getting stuck;
- efficient, useful patterns of writing on which students can rely when they have little time, including the traditional thesis/ topics sentences/ support pattern.

### **The out-of-class process includes:**

- the ability to write clear, grammatical sentences on the spot;
- the ability to anticipate what sort of writing will be required in a setting;
- how to gather information, that is, do research;
- the ability to read and take notes efficiently, to put information into a useful form in both margin and outside notes;

- how to think through issues and ideas and consider evidence carefully;
- several possible approaches to critical thinking and development.

## **II. English 120 Has a Research Component.**

The students should be taught the skills necessary in research, but teachers may choose to do this in at least two shorter papers or do this as a unit leading to one longer research essay.

The college library has excellent on-line research data banks available to all students on and off campus, accessed through the library home page.

## **IV. English 120 Strongly Emphasizes Grammar and Sentence Writing.**

The course outline requires at least twelve hours of instruction in grammar and sentence writing. Although a majority of teachers opted not to assign a maximum number of grammatical errors student writers may commit, The English 120 Rubric contains a breakdown of errors considered “major” and errors considered “minor,” and “C” essays must contain “few major errors.” Distortion in essays due to grammar errors has been the problem most frequently cited by English 101 instructors.

## **III. The English 120 Rubric is Intended for Both Students and Instructors.**

The rubric, which can be accessed on-line through the English Division Home Page, contains a good deal of specific information about what constitutes a passing essay and samples with commentary. The rubric is especially useful while students are preparing for the final exam, since they can use the rubric to evaluate their own and others’ essays.