

English 131 Portfolio: Cover Letter

engl 131 / sec. A3 / spring quarter 2005-06 / chang

Your cover letter should be yet one more example of your ability to make claims, to utilize evidence, to analyze that evidence, and to draw pertinent conclusions. Your cover letter functions as a kind of academic, intellectual, and rhetorical self-assessment of what the writing you have selected do (and do not do), and a self-reflection of how you see yourself participating (or not participating) in the class and classroom. A superior cover letter will incorporate the language of the course outcomes, the course description, the assignment sheets, as well as cite your peers' and my assessments of your work to support your self-assessment. Strategically (and briefly) quoting or paraphrasing passages from your own work (both strong and weak samples) is another way to make your argument concrete.

Your cover letter must be 2-4 pages, single-spaced, in business letter format and should selectively include, describe, synthesize, and critique the following:

- makes a claim about your experience, your exploration, and your progress in English 131
- identify, explicate, and demonstrate how you understand the key English 131 concepts
- discusses your writing process, engagement with the course texts, and research
- engages how you participated in the class and in the academic arena
- outlines how each portfolio assignment arguing for each paper's strengths, value, and possible weaknesses
- uses the language of the course outcomes, the assessment rubric, and the assignments
- offers a final self-assessment in terms of evaluation and grade

Cover Letter Tips

- Don't start from scratch here! Utilize my comments, course materials, blog posts, and any previous peer reviews to help frame and enhance your cover letter. The more that you can draw specifically from examples, the more that you will reveal to me your intertextual use of your previous thoughts (e.g. reference your responses to either or both instances here).
- Consider how you built on your specific weak points (mention these and locate them within a specific paper) to become a stronger writer.
- Use a critical and intertextual discussion any cultural artifacts that you chose and the sources that you utilized.
- Argue how your writing within the entire portfolio represents the progress that you have made and illustrates the specific changes that you have undergone in your move from high school to college writing.
- Identify general issues regarding how you achieved progress throughout the quarter. You will want to talk critically about how you enacted significant revisions within your paper. Also, be sure to discuss the number of times that you went to the Writing Center (with dates) or any other tutorial help that you received—whether that be extra peer edits in class or other tutorial departments that you received help.
- Discuss how a use of cultural studies (analysis of affects of language use within the media, various readings of visual texts, and an examination of communities, conflicts, and language) within the course done to your own creation and dedication to your work? How might you extend these issues (both your critical awareness of these issues and your increased writing ability) to your other classes?
- How what you have learned in this class builds on the knowledge that you came to the class regarding writing and creating a paper (e.g. what you know about organization, claim development, revision, grammar, and so on—you may utilize the rubric here to help frame this part of the portfolio letter)
- How what you have learned in this class acts as a foundation for the type of writing that your degree field requires once you leave the university and enter the work world.
- When you talk about your portfolio papers, you should directly address what points you decided to incorporate based on the comments that both your peers and I suggested and talk about how you have decided to incorporate or not to incorporate within your final portfolio paper. In addition, you should discuss what attempts you made to help mold your paper closer to the image of the superior portfolio by drawing on the language of the rubric. These papers should represent the progress that you've undergone throughout the quarter and are thus a big part of the weight of the portfolio, so you will want to spend some time on this portion of the letter.
- The cover letter should be in-depth and reflective, rather than a mere description of what your papers are saying.

Understanding Your Final Grade

These guidelines will give you an idea what I look for when I grade your final portfolios. Keep in mind that first-year college English grades tend to be lower than what you are used to receiving in high school. The average grade for English 131 at UW is around 3.1. That is the average; some will be above that, some below. Here are three ways to think about your assessment.

English 131 Assessment Rubric

Outstanding (3.7-4.0): Offers a very highly proficient, even memorable demonstration of the trait(s) associated with the course outcome(s), including some appropriate risk-taking and/or creativity.
Strong (3.1-3.6): Offers a proficient demonstration of the trait(s) associated with the course outcome(s), which could be further enhanced with revision.
Good (2.5-3.0): Effectively demonstrates the trait(s) associated with the course outcome(s), but less proficiently; could use revision to demonstrate more skillful and nuanced command of trait(s).
Acceptable (2.0-2.4): Minimally meets the basic outcome(s) requirement, but the demonstrated trait(s) are not fully realized or well-controlled and would benefit from significant revision.
Inadequate (1.0-1.9): Does not meet the outcome(s) requirement; the trait(s) are not adequately demonstrated and require substantial revision on multiple levels.

Alternative Descriptive Assessment Rubric

3.5-4.0 An exceptional, exigent accomplishment A score in this range indicate true proficiency and superior achievement: the portfolio is interesting, fully developed, insightful, and perhaps even provocative. Your essays may take a new approach to the topic, or add new depth and complexity to an old one. The use of sources and supporting material is smooth, complete, and persuasive, and the organization flows logically and clearly, showing readers exactly how the different parts of the argument fit together without being obtrusive. Sentences are skillfully formed, and give readers a strong sense that they are in the hands of a skilled writer.
2.5-3.4 Good solid work A portfolio in this range displays clear, solid competence in all the criteria set forth in <i>Academic Discourse</i> . Your essays are clear, easy to read, logical, and make a substantial point about the topic, though they may not demonstrate a full awareness of its complexities or be as original as those in the 3.5-4.0 range; or, they make particularly insightful or challenging arguments that are a little hard to follow because of organizational problems and/or because of the difficulty of the issues they tackle.
2.0-2.4 Competent A score in this range is perfectly respectable, and means that you have achieved some degree of skill in all areas. You may have written essays with interesting and persuasive content that are weakened by problems with grammar and style (grammar errors, wordy or awkward sentences, inappropriate or vague word choices). Or your essays may meet the formal and organizational conventions and standards of good academic writing, but be lacking in originality, depth, or complexity. For example, your thesis may be too simple, general, or obvious; you may not have supported your claims in enough detail or related each claim clearly to your thesis.
1.7-1.9 Almost there A grade in this range means that you have almost achieved what you needed to, but the portfolio does not yet demonstrate consistent college level work. You are on the right track, but more substantial work has needed on one more of the necessary criteria, or you may have been extremely sloppy in presentation, or not quite gotten the hang of the assignments. Or you may need to improve the flow and clarity of your sentences. If your final grade is in this range, you have officially passed the course, but you will not receive writing credit for a grade under 2.0.
0.5-1.6 Unsatisfactory A portfolio in this range shows some effort, but does not meet the minimum standards or the basic requirements of the assignment. Usually, a score in this range means that at least one of the six criteria from the assessment rubric in <i>Academic Discourse</i> is missing entirely; often, essays in this range do not have a thesis, or the thesis fails to address the terms of the assignment.

Converting from Letter Grades <http://www.washington.edu/students/gencat/front/Grading_Sys.html>

A	4.0-3.9	
A-	3.8-3.5	
B+	3.4-3.2	
B	3.1-2.9	
B-	2.8-2.5	
C+	2.4-2.2	
C	2.1-1.9	To receive C credit for 131, a student must earn a minimum of 2.0 in the class.
C-	1.8-1.5	
D+	1.4-1.2	
D-	0.8-0.7	Lowest passing grade.
E	0.0	Failure or Unofficial Withdrawal. No credit earned.