

Effective Writing Instruction: Syllabus

Dates of Course: This course is set to run TBD.

Course Description: Articulated by Francis Christensen, Marilyn Martin Munson and their colleagues, this program provides a systematic plan of introducing the concepts which regulate the formation of the English language sentence and paragraph structure coupled with practice strategies that lead to mastery and assimilation. As Christensen contends, the key to a successful writing program is a carefully planned sequence, first presenting a crucial concept followed by focused practice exercises before moving on to the next concept. The practice is cumulative, building on what comes before. Examples are taken from the work of professional writers. Nothing is watered down, which would only serve to delude the student into thinking the process is easy. Besides, the aim of this program is to enable the student “to say well whatever it is [he/she has] to say.” Using the work of professionals will also help students “see what there is to say about the world” through exposure to the writing of others because “a writer is not just a person who writes, but a person who knows what to write.” Teaching strategies include Consistent Terminology, Analyzing Levels of Generality, Slotting, Transformation, Structural Rearrangement and Experimentation, Sentence Combining, Modeling, Culminating Activities, Integration and Reinforcement. A perk resulting from learning Christensen Rhetoric is that the student (and her teacher) will become better readers as well.

Goals:

- To introduce teachers to teaching strategies that will improve their students’ sentence structure and paragraph organization
- To assist them in creating lessons which will accomplish the first goal

Outcomes:

- Analyze how English language sentences and paragraphs are structured, including how modifiers are created and arranged within the sentence.
- Study the strategies used in instructing students to understand and use Christensen Rhetoric and create lesson plans accordingly.

Objectives:

- To define the concepts of Embedded Modifiers vs. Free Modifiers and Modifier Placement as applied to standard English language sentences

- **To demonstrate an understanding of the concept of Levels of Generality as applied to standard English language sentences and paragraphs**
- **To analyze how standard English language sentences are structured**
- **To analyze the relationship between one sentence and those adjoining it**
- **To define the relationship between a modifier and that which it modifies**
- **To demonstrate the methodology for creating phrases and modifying “clusters”**
- **To define the standard practice for the placement and punctuation of these phrases and modifying “clusters”**
- **To demonstrate the methodology for creating modifying clauses**
- **To define the standard practice for the placement and punctuation of these clauses**
- **To identify the needs and capabilities of the participant’s students regarding their rhetorical skills**
- **To demonstrate such strategies as slotting, transformation, structural rearrangement and experimentation, sentence combining and modeling for instructing students**
- **To develop lesson plans, including practice exercises and authentic assessments, suitable for the participant’s students**
- **To develop lesson plans, including practice exercises and authentic assessments, suitable for the participant’s students**
- **To revise lesson plans and assessments**
- **To create culminating activities to assess student progress**
- **To develop plans to reinforce the strategies throughout the school year**

Instructor:

With a BS from SUNY Fredonia and an MA from SUNY Cortland, George Lohmann has taught English for thirty-four years. Over the course of that time he has taught grades seven through twelve, including nine years of AP Language and Composition for which he served three years as exam reader. In the past thirty years part of that instruction has included the Christensen Rhetoric Program, the basis for this course.

Learning Standards Addressed:

ELA Standard 1: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.

ELA Standard 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

ELA Standard 3: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation.

ELA Standard 4: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for social interaction.

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Prerequisite Skills/Requirements: A willingness to take a careful analytical look at English language sentence structure

Required Software: Microsoft Word

Determining Recommendation for In-service Credit:

Each assigned task will be given a point value by the instructor based on its complexity and/or value, along with a scale which indicates an assessment value. These tasks will be assessed as follows:

| Percentage | Grade | |
|---|--------------|--|
| 90-100 | C+ | Well done, including response to another student if required |
| 80-89 | C | Adequately done, including response to another students if required |
| 70-79 | C- | Adequately done but without required response |
| 40-69 | INC+ | Not fully developed but includes required response |
| 30-39 | INC- | Not fully developed and without required response |
| 20-29 | NS+ | Not submitted but with required response |
| 0 | NS- | Not submitted and no required response |
| 20% deduction from the scale above for work submitted late | | |

At the end of the course, the total points achieved will be divided by the total possible point to arrive at a final assessment score. In other words, if the student earned 823 points out of a possible 1000, his final assessment score would be a C. Assessments of C- or better will be recommended for full in-service credit. Those assessed at INC+ and INC- will receive partial in-service credit. Anything less will receive no in-service credit.

Target Audience: English language arts teachers and anyone who would like to improve his writing skills are the primary target but others, particularly

social studies, Spanish and special education teacher, have also found the course to be worthwhile.

Hours: 15 hours

Appropriateness for Online Delivery: The Read/Write Web is the perfect venue for this course because teachers anywhere can take advantage of strategies that can be explained in print, modeled by the instructor as much as necessary and practiced by the student with immediate and frequent feedback from the instructor.