

Syllabus
Critical Reading and Writing Skills
(3 ECTS)

Author, lecturer: Maria Volkonskaya (mvolkonskaya@hse.ru,
<https://www.hse.ru/org/persons/99241561>)
School of Foreign Languages
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1. Course Description

a. Pre-requisites

To fulfill the requirements of the course students need to have a good command of written and spoken English (required CEFR language proficiency level is from upper-intermediate (B2) to advanced (C1)).

b. Abstract

“Critical Reading and Writing Skills” is a two-module course which develops and refines academic English skills of those students who specialize in Arts and Humanities, namely, philology. By combining the basics of academic style, punctuation, and grammar with exploratory reading and writing, this course enables students to gain an awareness and understanding of the key features of writing about their research. By the end of the course, students will be able to write a good academic essay in MLA style.

2. Learning Objectives

The **objectives** of the course are:

- to introduce students to the basic principles of Critical Reading and Academic Writing and to raise their linguistic awareness, comparing conventions in Russian and English writing;
- to prepare students for further academic activities in English as part of their HSE bachelor’s programme (i.e., disciplines in English, Academic English course in their final year of bachelor’s studies, MOOCs etc.) and in a wider English-speaking academic environment;
- to develop and practise students’ skills in the areas of academic essay writing, essay organization, citations, and research.

3. Learning Outcomes

Upon satisfactory completion of the programme, students should:

- **know** the basic principles of English Academic Writing and the most important differences in-between Russian and English writing conventions;
- **be able to** engage in further academic activities in English;
- **develop** research and essay writing skills.

4. Course Plan

Total hours	Contact hours	Self-guided work
	Seminars	
114	56	58

№	Course section	Total hours	Contact hours	Self-guided work
			Seminars	
1	Seminar 1. Course introduction. Why should one study Academic Writing? Recognizing one's audience. Free writing assignment.	2	2	–

Writing: free writing.

№	Course section	Total hours	Contact hours	Self-guided work
			Seminars	
2	Seminar 2. Critical reading as a precursor to critical writing: note-taking, annotating, finding key points, understanding the context, identifying logical structures in argument within every paragraph and within the whole text. Organizing one's glossary of terms.	4	2	2

Writing: a glossary of terms (Greenblatt); a summary (Greenblatt).

№	Course section	Total hours	Contact hours	Self-guided work
			Seminars	
3	Seminars 3 and 4. What is a paragraph? Paragraph structure. Supporting one's statements: evidence, what	8	4	4

	it is, why it is important, and how to provide it. Unity and coherence. Repetition of key nouns, key noun substitutes, consistent pronouns, logical order. Journal writing.			
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Writing: an ungraded paragraph (based on one's free writing assignment) + a peer review; a Reading Journal entry (Greenblatt).

№	Course section	Total hours	Contact hours	Self-guided work
			Seminars	
4	Seminars 5 and 6. Style and register. Expressive means: morphological, lexical, syntactical. Academic discourse. Caution.	8	4	4

Writing: a graded paragraph¹ + a peer review; a quiz.

№	Course section	Total hours	Contact hours	Self-guided work
			Seminars	
5	Seminars 7 and 8. What is a critical review? Its functions, typical structure, and possible focus questions. Evaluating points of view.	12	4	8

Writing: a Reading Journal entry (Stevenson) + a peer review; a glossary of terms (Stevenson); a critical review (Stevenson).

Additional sources: *The Review of English Studies*: <https://www.jstor.org/journal/revienglstud>; *Rhetorical functions in academic writing: evaluating points of view*: <http://www.uefap.com/writing/function/evaluate.htm>.

№	Course section	Total hours	Contact hours	Self-guided work
			Seminars	

¹ Graded papers are underlined.

6	Seminars 9, 10, and 11. Academic writing skills: sentence-level grammar. Types of sentences: simple, compound, and complex. Connecting words and transition signals. Punctuation.	12	6	6
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Writing: in-class writing (punctuation practice).

Additional source (MOOC): *Grammar and Punctuation:*
<https://www.coursera.org/learn/grammar-punctuation/>.

№	Course section	Total hours	Contact hours	Self-guided work
			Seminars	
7	Seminar 12. Single-blind peer reviewing (students' critical reviews).	2	2	–

Writing: a peer review.

№	Course section	Total hours	Contact hours	Self-guided work
			Seminars	
8	Seminars 13 and 14. Using parallel structures and fixing sentence problems. Typical problems: sentence fragments, choppy and stringy sentences, run-on sentences and comma splices.	8	4	4

Writing: in-class writing (editing practice).

№	Course section	Total hours	Contact hours	Self-guided work
			Seminars	
9	Seminars 15, 16, 17, and 18. Logic and relevance. Common knowledge and plagiarism. Generic writing skills: paraphrasing and	16	8	8

	summarizing. Integrating quotations. Reporting verbs and phrases. Using (online) sources.			
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Writing: a Reading Journal entry (Paglia); a Reading Journal entry (a poem of one's own choice).

№	Course section	Total hours	Contact hours	Self-guided work
			Seminars	
10	Seminars 19 and 20. Explication. Reading in slow motion. Explication as argument.	10	4	6

Writing: an explication (a poem of one's own choice).

№	Course section	Total hours	Contact hours	Self-guided work
			Seminars	
11	Seminars 21 and 22. Referencing systems. Documenting sources in MLA style. MLA in-text citations. MLA list of works cited. MLA manuscript format.	8	4	4

Writing: a quiz.

Additional source: *MLA Formatting and Style Guide*: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>.

№	Course section	Total hours	Contact hours	Self-guided work
			Seminars	
12	Seminar 23. Single-blind peer reviewing (students' explications).	2	2	–

Writing: a peer review.

№	Course section	Total	Contact hours	Self-guided
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		hours	Seminars	work
13	Seminars 24 and 25. What is an analysis essay? Essay structure. Developing an argument and drafting a working thesis statement. Writing a formal essay outline. From thesis to introduction. The purpose of introduction and how to achieve it. Types of introduction. Drafting the main body of the essay. Writing an effective conclusion.	12	4	8

Writing: a literary analysis essay (= exam essay).

Additional source (MOOC): *Getting Started with Essay Writing:*

<https://www.coursera.org/learn/getting-started-with-essay-writing>.

№	Course section	Total hours	Contact hours	Self-guided work
			Seminars	
14	Seminar 26. Single-blind peer reviewing (students' literary analysis essays).	2	2	–

Writing: a peer review.

№	Course section	Total hours	Contact hours	Self-guided work
			Seminars	
15	Seminars 27-28. Editing the essay: revision and proofreading. From process to product: finalizing and polishing the essay.	8	4	4

5. Reading List

a. Required:

Bailey, Stephen. *Academic Writing: A Handbook for International Students*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2014. URL: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/hselibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1811067>. ELS ProQuest Ebook Central – Academic Complete.

Murray, Neil. *Writing Essays in English Language and Linguistics: Principles, Tips and Strategies for Undergraduates*. Cambridge UP, 2012. URL: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/hselibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=866885>. ELS ProQuest Ebook Central – Academic Complete.

b. Optional:

MacDonald, Susan. *Professional Academic Writing in the Humanities and Social Sciences*. Southern Illinois UP, 1994. URL: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/hselibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1354549>. ELS ProQuest Ebook Central – Academic Complete.

Murray, Rowena, and Sarah Moore. *Handbook of Academic Writing: A Fresh Approach*. McGraw-Hill Education, 2006. URL: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/hselibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=316307>. ELS ProQuest Ebook Central – Academic Complete.

Oshima, Alice, and Ann Hogue. *Writing Academic English*. 3th ed. NY, Pearson/Longman, 1999.
Swales, John M., and Christine B. Feak. *Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills*. 3^d ed., U of Michigan P, 2012.

6. Grading System

The grade for the course consists of five elements:

Ungraded written assignments (free writing, exercises, peer reviews etc.): 29%

Quizzes: 10%

Critical Review: 15%

Explication: 20%

Written Examination: 26% (**blocking effect**)

The mean grade for every element and the grade for the course are rounded half up (arithmetic rounding) to the nearest whole numerical grade.

Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, plagiarizing, cheating, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor. Students who are found to be dishonest will receive academic sanctions (for further information visit <https://www.hse.ru/studyspravka/plagiat>).

Attendance and participation are required at every class. Students should be in class on time. They are to prepare for every class and to participate actively in class discussions. They will be informed of the tests and important written assignments in advance.

Absence policy. Students should inform their instructor about their **excused absences** before the class (not after) by email, and provide the doctor's notes and other documents about them. An **excused absence** is an absence due to a number of accepted reasons such as a medical or personal issue beyond one's control, participation in a significant extracurricular university event, conference etc. If the absence is excused, students will have an opportunity to make up any quizzes missed for full credit on a date agreed upon by the student and instructor. However, even if a student is absent, they are still responsible for all work. It remains their responsibility to find out which assignments they missed, to acquire the handouts, and to borrow and copy the class notes for the day(s) they were absent.

All of the **written assignments** will contribute to the resulting grade. Students will be closely working on specific writing genres, such as summary, review, explication, analysis, as well as practise free writing activities, such as reading journals. One's written assignments should be either neatly handwritten or typed, and follow basic academic style conventions; otherwise, they are not accepted.

Students should try and meet assignment deadlines by all means. In case one's assignment is 1-2 days late, they lose 50% of their grade. In case one's assignment is 3 or more days late, it is not accepted or assessed – the grade is a 0.

Students should not discard any papers they produce during the year until they receive their final grade.

Plus / minus scale, percentage points, and regular HSE grades

The assessment of **ungraded written assignments** is based on the amount of work done and the effort involved. In evaluating these activities the instructor will use a plus / minus scale:

Plus: assignment meets the expectations for critical thinking, engagement, format, and length.

Plus-minus: assignment is too superficial (no critical thinking) / does not correspond to the task / violates the formatting requirements / is too short.

Minus: assignment is not turned in / is plagiarized (either a part of the work or the whole work).

The total points (all of one's pluses) earned in each module will be converted to a percentage, which will be subsequently translated into an HSE grade according to this scale:

Percentage points	HSE grade
95-100%	10
89-94%	9
83-88%	8
77-82%	7
71-76%	6
65-70%	5
60-64%	4
50-59%	3
31-49%	2
0-30%	1

Quizzes

Students' results for the **quizzes** are scored in percentages, which are then translated into an HSE grade according to the scale above.

Sample tasks for ungraded assignments and / or quizzes

1. Rewrite the following paragraph in better style.

These days a lot of kids are starting school early. Years ago, they began at five, but now it's normal to start at four or younger. Why is this? One thing is that mums need to get back to work. Is it good for the kids? Jenkins has studied this and says that early schooling causes social problems like stealing, drug-taking etc. I think he's right and we should pay mums to stay at home.

2. Paraphrase the following lines:

1. From Book 1 of John Keats's poem *Endymion*, "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever: / Its loveliness increases..."
2. From Sir Philip Sidney's Sonnet 74, "How falls it then, that with so smooth an ease / My thoughts I speak, and what I speak doth flow / In verse, and that my verse best wits doth please?"
3. From William Shakespeare's Sonnet 116, "Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds..."

3. Write the information about each of the following sources in a list in MLA style in alphabetical order.

- An article in a periodical entitled "Love and Masculinity in the Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy" on pages 199-218 of the 50.198, Autumn 2001, issue of *English: The Journal of the English association*. The author's name is Antony Rowland.
- A book entitled *A History of the English Language* by Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable published by Prentice Hall in Upper Saddle River, NJ, in 2002. It is the 5th edition of this book.
- A story entitled *The Pit and the Pendulum* by Edgar Allan Poe published online. The Web site is *The Online Literature Library*. Its address is <http://www.literature.org/authors/poe-edgar-allan/pit-and-pendulum.html>.

Scoring rubric for graded written papers (Paragraph, Critical Review, Explication, Written Examination)

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. For each plagiarized sentence, the essay loses one point (for example, 8 → 7). If there are **more than three** plagiarized sentences in one's work, the grade for the essay is a zero.

Points	0	1	2	3
Content Comprehension and critical thinking, background knowledge, evidence.	Demonstrates limited understanding and superficial handling of the source text, fails to show an understanding of the text's central idea(s), and may include only details without reference to central idea(s). May contain numerous errors of fact and / or interpretation with regard to the text. Very little to no knowledge of the author / period is evident. Little or no use of textual evidence (quotations, paraphrases, or both). May not focus on features of the text that are relevant to addressing the task, or the response offers no discernible analysis	Demonstrates some understanding of the source text, shows an understanding of the text's central idea(s) but not of important details. May contain errors of fact and / or interpretation with regard to the text. Some knowledge of the author / period is evident. Argument is not always clear, often shows heavy reliance on plot summary and / or paraphrase. Some support for claim(s) or point(s) made. Limited and / or haphazard use of textual evidence (quotations, paraphrases, or both), demonstrating	Demonstrates clear thinking and understanding of the source text, shows an understanding of the text's central idea(s) and important details. The response is free of substantive errors of fact and interpretation with regard to the text. Knowledge of the author / period is evident. Relevant and sufficient support for claim(s) or point(s) made. Appropriate use of textual evidence (quotations, paraphrases, or both), demonstrating an understanding of the source text. The assignment is fulfilled.	Demonstrates clear, consistent, detailed, reflective, clearly focused thinking and understanding of the source text, its central idea(s) and of most important details and how they interrelate. Is free of errors of fact or interpretation with regard to the text. The writer has chosen an original topic or has taken a fresh perspective on an already much discussed issue . Good knowledge of the author / period. Relevant, sufficient, and strategically chosen support for claim(s) or point(s) made. Good use of

	(e.g., is largely or exclusively summary). The paper does not fulfill the assignment. It is too off the topic, fails to answer the question and / or is too short (25% or more of the paper is missing).	inconsistent understanding of the source text. The paper minimally fulfills the assignment and / or answers the question only partially.		textual evidence (quotations, paraphrases, or both), demonstrating a complete understanding of the source text. A thorough treatment of the topic.
Organization Structure, logic, transitions.	Writing is disorganized, unclear, and underdeveloped with no / awkward transitions or closure. Paragraphing is confusing and / or inadequate. The work contains logical errors or fallacies.	Writing is confused and loosely organized. Transitions are weak and closure is ineffective. Uses paragraphing, but not always logically. May have abrupt or illogical shifts and ineffective flow of ideas.	Writing is mostly organized and logical. Writing includes a good beginning, middle, and end, with some transitions and a coherent closure. Uses paragraphing appropriately. Reasonable relationships among ideas, though their sequence could be improved.	Writing is consistently well organized and logical. Cogent, progressive and clearly structured argument, well directed to the question. Skillfully manages paragraphing. Writing includes a strong beginning, middle, and end, with smooth and coordinated transitions and a focused closure.
Accuracy Vocabulary and grammar.	Only basic vocabulary which may be used repetitively or which may be inappropriate for the task. Sentences sound awkward, are distractingly repetitive, or are difficult to understand. Numerous errors in grammar, word choice, punctuation, and / or spelling that interfere with understanding and severely distort the message.	An adequate range of vocabulary for the task. The choice and placement of words is inaccurate at times and / or seems overdone. Most sentences are well constructed and have varied structure and length. A few errors in grammar, word choice, and / or spelling, but they do not interfere with understanding.	A wide range of vocabulary used fluently and flexibly. The choice and placement of words seem accurate, natural, and not forced. All sentences are well constructed and have varied structure and length. Rare minor errors occur only as ‘slips.’	
Style Academic style conventions and MLA format.	Fails to follow more than two academic style conventions or formatting requirements.	Fails to follow one or two academic style conventions or formatting requirements.	Follows all academic style conventions and formatting requirements. The paper looks neat and professional. It appears the student spent a lot of effort getting things just right.	

Sample graded assignment

Choose **one** of the following poems and write a 1.5–2.5-page-long explication. Use the handout “Explication-1” for guidance, especially the checklist on pages 113–14 as well as the pre-writing strategies described (annotations, reading journal entries etc.). Do not hesitate to repeat some ideas that you have already expressed in your Reading Journal entry (organization and format make the difference).

- William Shakespeare. “Sonnet 18”; “Sonnet 27”; “Sonnet 65”; “Sonnet 66”; “Sonnet 99”; “Sonnet 139”;
- John Donne. “A Valediction of Weeping” etc.

7. Examination Type

The **written examination** consists of a literary analysis essay (3–5 A4 pages long plus a separate Works Cited page). **It has a blocking effect on the grade for the course.** Each student taking the exam should write their essay during hours of self-guided work. The topics and guidelines will be given during the final weeks of the course.

For the first and second retakes, students have to write another essay according to the same requirements as for the examination itself, but on a different topic.

Sample exam essay assignment

The final essay is a literary analysis essay, the purpose of which is to carefully examine a work of literature or an aspect of a work of literature and to present an argument / claim about it. As with any analysis, this requires the writer to be selective and break the subject down in to its component parts.

MLA-style formatting is required. The students are to use at least 2 scholarly sources (apart from the poem itself) when writing their paper.

The topic is to be devised by the student and discussed with instructors. The work (or works) to be analyzed should be one(s) from the list below:

- William Shakespeare. “Sonnet 18”; “Sonnet 27”; “Sonnet 65”; “Sonnet 66”; “Sonnet 99”; “Sonnet 139”;
- John Donne. “A Valediction of Weeping” etc.

A sample list of problems to address:

(Author)’s Use of (Trope(s)/Symbolism/(Biblical/Mythological) Allusion(s)) in...

Major Themes in.../ The Theme of... in...

The Image of (...) in.../Imagery in...

The Point of View in...

... in the Context of ... / The Biographical Context of ...

... as a Sonnet

8. Methods of Instruction

Instruction includes a seminar style course with a great emphasis put on practical training, journal writing, and peer reviewing. The course draws heavily on the concept of exploratory reading followed by low-stakes writing, see: Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. 2nd ed., Jossey–Bass, 2011, p. 120 ff.

To that end, the course combines both the process and the product approaches to writing. Throughout the course, students first engage with the text informally (usually via their Reading Journals). Furthermore, model texts are read, and then features of the genre under consideration (that is, a paragraph, a critical review, an explication, and a literary analysis essay) are highlighted. Then, students write their first drafts and exchange them so that they become the readers of each other’s work. Improvements can be made based upon peer feedback. The final graded paper becomes the end result of the learning process.

9. Special Equipment and Software Support

Standard technical equipment (PC+CPr) and requirements, including Wi-Fi access.