

# INTD 105 13 — Writing Seminar: Secrets and Secret Codes

Spring 2014

*Last updated January 20, 2014*

**Time and Place:** TR 10:00 - 11:15, South 328

**Final Meeting:** Tuesday, May 13, 12:00 - 3:00

**Instructor:** [Doug Baldwin](#)

Office: South 307

Phone: 245-5659

E-Mail: [baldwin@geneseo.edu](mailto:baldwin@geneseo.edu)

Twitter: @DougBaldwin5

Office Hours: M 10:00 - 11:00, R 1:30 - 2:30 or By Appointment

## WWW Pages:

Lecture Notes: <http://cs.geneseo.edu/~baldwin/intd105/spring2014/lectures.html>

Exercises: <http://cs.geneseo.edu/~baldwin/intd105/spring2014/exercises.html>

Writing is, obviously, an important form of communication. As a form of communication, good writing requires clarity, sensitivity to one's audience, and awareness of style rules appropriate to the nature of the communication. However, good writing (or good communication in any form) also requires having something to communicate in the first place. A firm grasp on the issues at hand, and an ability to form a coherent, logical, argument are therefore also essential to persuasive writing. This course develops your skills across the entire academic writing process: identifying issues, forming opinions, gathering evidence and formulating arguments in support of opinions, and expressing those arguments in writing.

Issues, opinions, arguments, and writings without a subject are pointless at best. This course therefore uses secret codes and the secrets they protect as a context for writing. Readings involving secrets, codes, and the breaking of codes will provide issues to ponder, discuss, and write about.

## Learning Outcomes

Students who meet my expectations for this course will be able to...

- Form individual opinions on issues related to making and breaking codes, secrets and secrecy, etc.
- Defend those opinions in principled arguments that draw on objective evidence where available
- Clearly express those arguments in writing

- Use library and electronic resources to gather credible evidence to support arguments
- Define honest and dishonest use of other people's creative work, and identify common forms of plagiarism.

## Books and Other Resources

### Readings

We will read the following works in this course. Some are available online, and others in print. I have given URLs for the online readings below. The print ones are available from the College bookstore and other sources.

- Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "[The Adventure of the Dancing Men](https://archive.org/details/returnofsherlock00doyliala)," available online in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* at <https://archive.org/details/returnofsherlock00doyliala> (be careful to read a version of this with illustrations)
- Edgar Allan Poe, "[The Gold Bug](http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/2147)," available online in *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe* at <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/2147> (easiest to read) or <http://www.archive.org/details/worksedgarallan00markgoog> (greater variety of formats)
- Anonymous, "[The Beale Papers](https://archive.org/details/TheBealePapers)," available online at <https://archive.org/details/TheBealePapers>
- Robert Harris, *Enigma*, available in print
- Hugh Whitmore, *Breaking the Code*, available in print.

Our writing style guide will be

- Graff and Birkenstein, *They Say, I Say* (2nd ed.)

It is available in print from the College bookstore and other sources.

You may also find these supplemental readings helpful, and I will probably assign at least parts of them:

- [http://www.simonsingh.net/The\\_Black\\_Chamber/chamberguide.html](http://www.simonsingh.net/The_Black_Chamber/chamberguide.html), a discussion and demonstrations of many classical cryptosystems
- <http://black-face.com/>, an account of the portrayal of African-Americans in American media
- <http://www.codesandciphers.org.uk/enigma/index.htm>, a technical description of the German Enigma cipher and techniques used to break it
- <http://www.turing.org.uk/bio/part1.html>, a short biography of Alan Turing.

### Other Resources

[In-class notes](https://docs.google.com/a/geneseo.edu/document/d/1ixBE_hLZZHebB9Y-LWvHukNpRmAyWtMGCZoIRMwiNkA/edit) that you can contribute to if you wish are at [https://docs.google.com/a/geneseo.edu/document/d/1ixBE\\_hLZZHebB9Y-LWvHukNpRmAyWtMGCZoIRMwiNkA/edit](https://docs.google.com/a/geneseo.edu/document/d/1ixBE_hLZZHebB9Y-LWvHukNpRmAyWtMGCZoIRMwiNkA/edit)

Lecture notes and exercises from [last time I taught this course](http://cs.geneseo.edu/~baldwin/intd105/spring2012/) are available online at <http://cs.geneseo.edu/~baldwin/intd105/spring2012/>

My own [writing advice for students](http://cs.geneseo.edu/~baldwin/reference/writing.html) is available at <http://cs.geneseo.edu/~baldwin/reference/writing.html>

## Course Schedule

The following dates are best estimates. They may well change as students' actual needs become apparent. Refer to the Web version of this syllabus for the most current information, I will keep it as up-to-date as possible:

Jan. 21	Introduction
Jan. 23 -	Substitution ciphers & "The Adventure of the Dancing Men"; writing
Jan. 28	mechanics; essay 1.
Jan. 30 -	Ethics of cryptography & "The Adventure of the Dancing Men";
Feb. 6	forming a thesis; essay 2.
Feb. 11 -	"The Gold Bug" and racism; providing evidence for a thesis; essay 3.
Feb. 27	
Mar. 4 -	"The Beale Papers"; evidence for a thesis; essay 3 revision.
Mar. 11	
Mar. 11	Midterm exam.
Mar. 13 -	<i>Enigma</i> & computational/mathematical cryptography; using external
Apr. 10	sources; essay 4.
Apr. 15 -	<i>Breaking the Code</i> & Alan Turing; organizing an essay into a coherent
Apr. 22	argument; essay 4 revision.
Apr. 24 -	<i>Breaking the Code</i> & Alan Turing; organizing an essay into a coherent
May 6	argument; essay 5.
May 13	Final exam.

## Grades and Such

Your grade for this course will be calculated from your grades on exercises, exams, etc. as follows:

Essays (5 plus 2 revisions)	60%
Midterm	10%
Final	20%
Class Participation	10%

In determining numeric grades for individual assignments, questions, etc., I start with the idea that meeting my expectations for a solution is worth 80% of the grade. I award the other 20% for exceeding my expectations in various ways (e.g., having an unusually elegant or insightful solution, or expressing it particularly clearly, or doing unrequested out-of-class research to develop it, etc.); I usually award 10 percentage points for almost anything that somehow exceeds expectations, and the last 10 for having a solution that is truly perfect. I deliberately make the last 10 percentage points extremely hard to get, on the grounds that in any course there will be some students who routinely earn 90% on everything, and I want even them to have something to strive for. I grade work that falls below my expectations as either meeting about half of them, three quarters, one quarter, or none, and assign numeric grades accordingly: 60% for work that meets three quarters of my expectations, 40% for work that meets half of my expectations, etc. This relatively coarse grading scheme is fairer, more consistent, and easier to implement than one that tries to make finer distinctions.

This grading scheme produces numeric grades noticeably lower than traditional grading does. I take this

into account when I convert numeric grades to letter grades. The general guideline I use for letter grades is that meeting my expectations throughout a course earns a B or B+. Noticeably exceeding my expectations earns some sort of A (i.e., A- or A), meeting most but clearly not all some sort of C, trying but failing to meet most expectations some sort of D, and apparently not even trying earns an E. I set the exact numeric cut-offs for letter grades at the end of the course, when I have an overall sense of how realistic my expectations were for a class as a whole. This syllabus thus cannot tell you exactly what percentage grade will count as an A, a B, etc. However, in my past courses the B+ to A- cutoff has typically fallen somewhere in the mid to upper 80s, the C+ to B- cutoff somewhere around 60, and the D to C- cutoff in the mid-40s to mid-50s. I will be delighted to talk with you at any time during the semester about your individual grades and give you my estimate of how they will eventually translate into a letter grade.

## **Late Policy**

I will accept work that is turned in late, but with a 10% per day compound late penalty. For example, homework turned in 1 day late gets 10% taken off its grade; homework turned in 2 days late gets 10% taken off for the first day, then 10% of what's left gets taken off for the second day. Similarly for 3 days, 4 days, and so forth. I round grades to the nearest whole number, so it is possible for something to be so late that its grade rounds to 0.

## **Policy on Collaboration**

Assignments in this course are learning exercises, not tests of what you know. You are therefore welcome to work on them in small groups, unless specifically told otherwise in the assignment handout — a well-managed group makes a successful, and thus more educational, project more likely.

In order to assure that everyone in a group does contribute, however, I require that each student turn in a solution to every exercise written in their own words. The ideas in these solutions may be developed by a group, but at least the expression of those ideas must be yours. Furthermore, any ideas you used that aren't yours should be acknowledged with a footnote, comment, or other parenthetical remark identifying the person or source from which you got them.

Please note that tests are tests of what you know, and working together on them is explicitly forbidden. This means that if you take advantage of the collaboration policy to avoid doing your share of the work on the exercises, you will probably discover too late that you haven't learned enough to do very well on the tests.

I will penalize violations of this policy. The severity of the penalty will depend on the severity of the violation.

## **Accommodations**

SUNY Geneseo will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented physical, emotional or learning disabilities. Students should consult with the Director in the Office of Disability Services (Tabitha Buggie-Hunt, 105D Erwin, 245-5112) and their individual faculty regarding any needed accommodations as early as possible in the semester.