

Requirements for Titles and Descriptions of Courses

In order to assist the Curriculum Committee and the Faculty Council in bringing requests to the faculty of the College of Arts and Science, departments and programs are asked to prepare proposals with care. We are providing guidelines to assist instructors in preparing descriptions of new courses for the *Undergraduate Catalog* or *Freshman Writing Seminars* booklet. The committee recognizes the impossibility of finding rules which will apply to all course descriptions. It believes, nevertheless, that the following comments will be helpful.

Course descriptions should be clear and concise. Clarity ensures that even the non-specialist can understand the focus and purpose of a course. Conciseness allows all courses to be fairly represented in the catalog. Descriptions and titles that attempt to be overly persuasive are not appropriate for academic publications.

Space for describing *Freshman Writing Seminars* is not as limited as in the *Undergraduate Catalog*. Descriptions of freshman seminars do not appear in the catalog, so they may--and should--be slightly longer than descriptions of other courses. Because the audience is relatively unsophisticated, descriptions of Freshman Writing Seminars may include information on the way they will be conducted, the works to be read, the nature of the assignments, and other aspects of interest to freshmen.

Style and content of course descriptions

Complete sentences are not usually appropriate for the style that has been adopted for the catalog; phrases are more effective. Phrases may be used in parallel construction. Series of phrases containing internal punctuation are set off by semicolons.

Consider the following example:

Instead of writing:

This course will cover the period from 1900 to 1930. Among the several areas of focus will be the novel as a form, how historical events influence the novel, the effects of popular literature, movies, and radio.

use:

The period 1900 to 1930. Topics include the novel as a form; historical influences on the novel; the effects of popular literature, movies, and radio.

or even:

The period 1900 to 1930. The novel as a form; historical influences; effects of popular literature, movies, and radio.

Among the awkward constructions to be avoided are nouns used as adjectives ("modern theory of nuclear war" not "modern nuclear war theory"), parenthetical expressions, and dashes. Note that catalog style requires a comma before the "and". Use technical terms when they would be informative or necessary, but avoid technical jargon.

In addition

1. *Avoid Redundancy and Clutter*: If a phrase appears in the title, it is tedious to repeat it in the description. For example: If the Department of Basketweaving titles a course "Italian Renaissance Baskets for Domestic Use," it is redundant to have the expression "in the Renaissance" appear once more in the description.
2. *Shun Useless Phrases and "Superfluous Verbiage"*: Some unusually unproductive phrases: "Examination of . . .," "Survey of . . .," "Study of . . .," "Analysis of . . .," "Introduction to," "This course considers (or deals with) . . .," "We consider (or deal with) . . ." They are unnecessary because they impart no important information about the course to students.

Additional examples: "Comprehensive," "Detailed," "In depth," "Thorough," "Intensive," "Overview" and "Significant." Are courses unaccompanied by such advertising copy "fragmentary," "superficial," "patchy," or "trivial"? Like the useless phrases that appear just above, they add bulk without sinew.

3. *Limit Lists*: Many course descriptions mention lists of things that students will study: Authors, Nations, Politicians, Artists. No list should contain more than five elements. It is up to the professor to decide which four or five are the most important. The Curriculum Committee can't.

The form of descriptions

Include in order the following elements: Course number and title; A.X.L.E. distribution category; the description; prerequisites, if any; semester(s) offered; credit hours; and instructor's name. Use conventional forms. The following description will serve as a model:

College Studies 100. The College Experience. SBS [body of description]. Prerequisite: 199. SPRING. [3] Doe.

Prerequisites, if any, *must* be included under the course description. If they are offered in the same department or program as the course being described, they are listed by number only ("99" above). If they are offered in another program, the program name is included. The phrase "or equivalent" is no longer used in stating prerequisites; it is always assumed. "Consent of instructor" is included only if consent is *required*, not if it is merely an alternative. The instructor's consent is always assumed to be sufficient even if prerequisites have not been completed. When departments renumber courses, prerequisites must be checked carefully for proper alignment.