In this course, you will learn how to take a position and defend it. Though this sounds like a simple process, most people don’t find it so. They find that to write a good argument requires practice, patience, and a willingness to question. I can’t promise that by the end of this course you’ll be able to argue like Noam Chomsky or write like Jonathan Swift, but you will take some significant steps in that direction. You should definitely improve in your ability to take a clear position on an issue, find arguments to support that position, organize your ideas effectively, anticipate and respond to counter-arguments, read your own papers objectively and critically, check your own grammar and sentence-structure, and develop strong persuasive techniques. In addition, you will learn to direct your argument to a particular audience – to deal with what rhetoricians refer to as “the rhetorical situation.” I hope that you will also begin to develop your own style, your own voice, so that your writing entertains even as it informs, causing your reader to smile and nod approvingly as, feet on the divan and illegal Cuban cigar in hand, he moves joyfully through your essay.

In addition, by reading the assigned texts and writing the papers, you will learn a lot about educational issues and how to discuss them more effectively. As the course title suggests, you will look at the multifarious relationships involving authority, education, and the creation of a decent, moral, and effective society. The class readings raise some provocative questions about these relationships. You will grapple with these texts and learn to write claim-driven papers in response to them.

**State-Mandated Criteria**

The Colorado Commission of Higher Education has mandated that upper-division writing courses meet key criteria in four areas: rhetorical understanding; experience in the writing process; writing conventions; and advanced comprehension of content within a specific discipline or disciplines. This course will meet these criteria in the following ways:

*Extend rhetorical understanding.* You will work to meet this criterion in at least two ways, one theoretical and one practical. You will read substantial sections of S.I. Hayakawa’s classic, *Language in Thought in Action*, in which Hayakawa explores how language functions in various areas of our lives. Hayakawa not only examines the role of language in various prejudices and
misevaluations, he also offers principles (many of them drawn from general semantics) of sound thinking, evaluation, and communication, paying particular attention to the following: distinguishing among reports, inferences, and judgments; exploring the contexts in which words take their meanings; clarifying the distinction between denotation and connotation; cultivating an awareness of the level of abstraction at which one’s assertions operate; seeing the confusions that often arise from classification and two-valued orientation; and studying the role played by language in various attempts at social control, persuasion, and our ongoing efforts to achieve social cohesion.

You will also do some work, both theoretical and in your own writing, related to syllogisms (or enthymemes, the form syllogisms generally take in arguments) and their role in persuasive writing. You will work, here, with some of the writings of John C. Gage (The Shape of Reason) and Martin Luther King’s “Letter From a Birmingham Jail” (which we will use as an example – a model, really – of an argument that makes careful use of syllogisms and what we might call “syllogistic logic”) and you will apply some principles of classical rhetoric not only in refutation assignments that you will do early in the term, but also in the longer papers that you will do later.

Finally, you will learn to apply many of the principles of general semantics as articulated by Hayakawa and other writers. These principles will prove relevant not only to class discussions and quizzes, but to all of the papers that you write in these classes – in, to use general semantics terminology, the verbal maps you draw and your attempts to make those maps congruent to the territories you wish to map.

**Master writing conventions.** By now you should have mastered the conventions of syntax, diction, and punctuation; this course enables you to hone those skills. If you need work on sentence-structure or other writing conventions, the class should help you to improve in these areas as well. You will work on a variety of writing exercises and in some sentence-level general semantics work which should help you to improve your writing and sharpen your thinking, helping you not just to write strong and clear sentences, but to link those sentences together to form a clear line of thought. You will also see the relationship between sentence-structure and clear thinking, using some of the principles of general semantics to help you hone your descriptions, analyses, and arguments.

**Gain experience in the writing process.** Though a famous writer once said that writing comes “right out of the…gut and onto the…paper,” most writers find that writing involves much reflection, revision, and recursive pondering. Through the workshop process, you will find that most good pieces of writing don’t come together “all in one swoop,” but require much re-writing, re-thinking, and re-considering. You will receive a lot of feedback in this class, both from your classmates and from me. You will write multiple drafts and receive comments both orally and in writing; you will find yourself going back to some of the readings on rhetoric (see “Rhetorical Knowledge”) and applying that material to your writing. As you consider counter-arguments to any of your positions, you will need solid responses in which you demonstrate the relevance of the evidence you present.

When you write arguments, you will have to distinguish between facts and arguments. Though we may think that facts by themselves serve as proof, usually they don’t. In some of your assignments, all of you will have the same facts to work with. When you support your argument, therefore, you will have to do more than offer facts (for your reader will agree with you about the facts): you will have to show why you find those facts relevant.

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1 And that you will have an opportunity to revise later in the term.
Demonstrate advanced comprehension of content within a specific discipline. Your work in this class will involve many disciplines or discourse communities. In offering arguments about educational theory and practice, you may find yourself dealing with issues in any or all of the following areas: economics, parenting, learning-theory, sociology, psychology; child development, politics, international affairs, philosophy, history, and ethics – and possibly others as well. You will need to inform yourself about those issues and learn how to direct your argument toward knowledgeable people.

Because educational questions have relevance to many audiences, you will have to make decisions about which audience to address. Once you make that decision, you will have to do what all writers do: think of the reader. What does your reader know or not know? What assumptions does your reader make or not make? What kinds of questions will that reader see as “questions at issue”? What kinds of arguments will best persuade that reader? You will have reason to recall Gage’s definition of argumentative writing:

…a process of reasonable inquiry into the best grounds for agreement between a writer and an audience who have a mutual concern to answer a question. (The Shape of Reason, page 37)

Finally, you will find that moral questions underlie almost all educational questions. Certainly the writers whose work you will engage see educational questions as moral questions. Even questions that seem to involve only the school budget will have a moral dimension. Those who make decisions about educational priorities have obligations to those for whom (or as whose representatives) they make those decisions, and students and parents have rights in matters-educational. Furthermore, decisions reflect value judgments and lead to consequences with profound implications for all concerned. Because you will find yourself making moral arguments, I will present you with some very practical ways to evaluate moral questions.

Work with varied technologies. You will work actively with the course website: you will follow web-links, turn papers in through the Internet, and exchange papers online. You will use Microsoft Word’s “Comment” function to comment on others’ papers or leave reminders in your own. You will engage in online discussion groups, exchange papers by email and by posting material to the website, retrieve information from online sources, and learn to do web-based research. I encourage you to submit drafts to me as emailed attachments; I will then return them to you with comments.

Course Overview

You will write three major papers (and numerous drafts thereof) and at least two shorter papers. Some of the latter will not deal with educational issues per se, but will help you to work with some of the tools and skills relevant to argumentative writing (e.g. syllogisms, dealing with counter-arguments, appropriate diction and syntax, the ability to distinguish between description/summary and argument). You will also take a number of quizzes on assigned readings.

The papers.

The two shorter papers. You will begin with refutation-assignments, summarizing the assigned arguments and then refuting them. In each case, you will attempt to demonstrate not that the
argument “is wrong,” but simply that it doesn’t hold up. In other words, you will challenge not the thesis of the essay, but rather the way the writer attempts to support that thesis. In doing this, you will examine assumptions, learn to ask straightforward questions about textual material, organize your ideas effectively, and support your assertions. You will not, however, have to come up with your own claim: I will give you the claim (i.e. that the argument doesn’t hold up); you will just have to support it. (See the annotated schedule and the course website (the “Assignments” folder) for details.) You will find, in these as in all assignments, that the principles of general semantics will prove helpful, perhaps even essential.

Major Paper 1: the “plagiarism” assignment. Here you will make a policy argument: given a set of facts about a hypothetical case of plagiarism, what policy-option would you choose from a set of four possibilities? This assignment emphasizes four skills: summarizing (you will have to summarize the facts of the case); distinguishing relevant facts from irrelevant ones; angling your argument to a specific audience; supporting a claim. To do this last, you will have to not only give facts, but also demonstrate the relevance of those facts. Because everyone will have the same facts, simply giving the facts will not suffice as support for your claim. Each person will contextualize those facts differently. You will also have to take into consideration your reader’s knowledge of the case, assumptions, responsibilities (if any), and values.

Major paper 2: Gatto and Hirsch. You will read some of the work of John Taylor Gatto and E.D. Hirsch, two writers who seem, at first glance anyway, to sit on two sides of what we might call the educational fence. (As you look more deeply into these men’s ideas, though, you will see that the two-valued thinking suggested in the previous sentence doesn’t prove very useful.) Having done the readings, you will write an essay in response to one or both, engaging one of the issues they raise and offering an argument of your own.

At this point in the course, you will not only use all the skills mentioned previously, you will also have to come up with your own claim and narrow that claim sufficiently. (Recall that in the previous paper, you had only four choices, and in the two short papers, none at all. Here, you have an infinite number of choices.) Here, then, you will need to ask, “What questions arise as questions-at-issue for my reader?” Once you answer that, you will need to develop a focused enough question to lead into a coherent essay (instead of, say, a two-volume work). To accomplish all of this, you will work in groups as well as on your own; you will have conferences with me, receive feedback on drafts and exercises, and look again and again at your work as you chisel out your paper. You may find that in order to support your claim, you need to do some research, so we will do some exercises related to research, documentation, the integration of source-material with your own writing, and other matters.

Major paper 3: a response to Ivan Illich’s Deschooling Society. This assignment comes very close to the end of the term and will serve many of the purposes of a final exam. Though I will help you with your work here, I will not give you nearly as much as heretofore. I will not offer thesis-suggestions, issue ideas, or direct you to evidence. You will have to apply the skills you’ve developed up to this point. As with the previous assignment, you will have many thesis options and may find that you need to do some research once you’ve developed a sufficiently focused claim.

Quizzes and other work

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2 I have borrowed this phrasing from John Gage.
In addition to writing the essays described above, you will do a variety of exercises and take some quizzes on reading material.

- **The Exercises**

  Some of these will involve sentence structure, linking strategies, paragraph issues, modification, diction, and other matters related to correct writing. We will usually work on these in class.

  Other exercises will come from general semantics. These exercises will focus on the relationship between language and evaluation. For example, you will do at least one exercise that asks you to take a question on a high level abstraction (for example, “Is democracy a failure?”) and reduce the abstraction-level to something more operational – something that lends itself to focused discussion.

- **The Quizzes**

  You will take a number of quizzes on readings that I will assign. Some of these (e.g. Stephen Jay Gould’s “Darwin’s Delay”) will simply serve as models of excellent prose. (Mr. Gould’s writing demonstrates many of the writing-principles that we will discuss in class, as does that of Martin Luther King.¹) Many of the readings, however, will present material directly relevant to the writing assignments. (See the material above on “rhetorical understanding”). Much of this reading will come from *Language in Thought and Action* (see above) in which Hayakawa discusses abstraction-levels and their importance, the distinction between connotation and denotation, Alfred Korzybski’s map-territory analogy, as well as various subjects related to summary, inference, and judgment.

**Texts and Course Materials**

- selections from *A Different Kind of Teacher: Solving the Crisis of American Schooling*, by John Taylor Gatto; available through Norlin E-Reserves
- *The Underground History of American Education*, by John Taylor Gatto; available online
- *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, by E.D. Hirsch; available in the CU Bookstore
- *DeSchooling Society*, by Ivan Illich (You can find a full-text version online. However, I have also ordered some books for those who, like me, prefer reading from a book to reading material on a screen.)
- Selections from *Language in Thought and Action*, by S.I. Hayakawa; available through Norlin E-Reserves
- Other documents available either on the website or through web-links (accessible through the website). To find the exact location, check CU LEARN (the “Practical and Useful Information” folder). On CU LEARN, you can find a document that tells you how or where to retrieve all the materials you will need. Some of these documents contain guidelines to the writing assignments; others contain material about operational prose, moral argument, policy argument, documentation, paper-organization, the fundamentals of argument, and rhetorical awareness.

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¹ See the schedule for the assignment on “A Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”
Teaching Philosophy

The ideas, theories, and techniques associated with general semantics, many of which you will find in the material from Hayakawa, inform much of my teaching. More particularly, I have found that many student writing-problems arise from problems working with abstractions, particularly when the writer doesn’t have a clear sense of what operations lie beneath those abstractions. If we wish to do what we call “critical thinking,” we must have something in the world to think about, but much of that world seems to consist of operations – of people taking various actions – and if we don’t keep this in view in both our thinking and our writing, we will find ourselves in a hopeless muddle. I will encourage you to pay particular attention to your sentence subjects, to ensure that you avoid the kinds of propositions that though grammatically correct, do not contain a coherent idea. This usually occurs when the writer uses a high-level abstraction as a subject. *If we wish to think critically, we must have in view some material – usually some set of operations – to examine; only then can we ask pointed, helpful, and coherent questions about the material-in-question.* To take an extreme example, we could say, “Socialism is bad,” but if we don’t know what operations “socialism” stands for (we can find many states that we might categorize as “socialist,” yet those states employ many different practices, some of which we might applaud and some of which we might criticize), and unless we know what we mean by “bad” (do we refer to principles? obligations? rights? consequences? some combination of these?), we don’t have a coherent thought.

Class Policies

I. GRADES: I will use the following formula to calculate your final grade:

- First major paper - 10%
- Second major paper - 20%*
- Third major paper - 20%**
- Other assignments - 30***
- Quiz on sentence-structure and mechanics - 10%****
- Class participation - 10%

* You’ll have only a couple of weeks for the first paper – not much time. Some of the grades may turn out rather low. If you do better on the second paper, for which you’ll have twice as much time, we can ignore the first grade and have the second paper count 30% as long as I’m convinced that on your first paper you gave what some people in the dim times used to call “the old college try.”
** We may not do very much peer-review for the third major paper. You’ll need to apply to your third paper the skills you’ve developed while working on the earlier papers.
*** This category includes two short essays, a number of quizzes on reading material, and written critiques of other students’ writing. The 30% breaks down into 20% for writing assignments and 10% for quizzes.
**** You’ll have two of these, one early in the term and one at the end. You can take the higher grade of the two. You must get at least 60% on one of these quizzes in order to pass the course. You must get at least 70% on one of them in order to get a “C” in the course.
Grading

A = Excellent
B = Good; superior
C = Average
D = Below average, but passing
F = Not passing

- When I evaluate your papers, I will take into consideration clarity, logic, substance, originality, mechanical correctness, and stylistic grace.
- What kind of paper receives an A? Just as all policies have drawbacks, so all papers have imperfections. Nevertheless, some arguments please even as they convince, providing both aesthetic pleasure and intellectual satisfaction. Those arguments will get an ‘A.’
- “B” indicates superior work. The argument needs to persuade quite well, but if it doesn’t address an important counter-argument or if it contains problems with grammar, mechanics, and sentence-structure, I won’t award an ‘A.’ We might see a B-paper as a paper in need of some polishing, or as a A-paper lacking a key component, or lacking a certain je ne sais quoi that the A-paper possesses.
- I categorize ‘C’ as a commendable grade. ‘C’ means “average”; it does not mean “poor.” You will get a C if your paper has significant problems with grammar, mechanics, and sentence-structure, and if it doesn’t address some of the more important counter-arguments. A C-paper needs to have a clear structure, though, and it needs to take a clear position and offer some support. A C paper must qualify as reasonably competent, focused, developed, and balanced, though it may leave some ideas undeveloped. A pure description will receive a ‘C.’
- A ‘D’ paper contains even more mechanical problems and makes little attempt to deal with the relevant counter-arguments. It makes little attempt to deal with the issue or support the thesis. A ‘D’ paper leaves important claims unproven, often lacks organization, and either contains logical errors or leaves the reader befuddled. However, even a well-organized paper may receive a ‘D’ if it contains too many errors in grammar, spelling, or sentence-structure.
- An ‘F’ paper contains so many mechanical errors that it becomes difficult to understand. Also, a plagiarized paper will receive no credit (0%), as will papers that do not fulfill the assignment guidelines.
- Grading writing assignments often proves tricky, more so than grading math tests. In the latter, everyone agrees that 2+2=4 (in base 10, at any rate), but in the former, not everyone agrees about what constitutes good writing. I make every attempt to grade fairly, and in the end I will stand by my judgments. On the other hand, discussion about your grade(s) can benefit both of us if it encourages us to think carefully about how we evaluate written work. I hope that this course enables and encourages you to evaluate your own writing accurately and honestly. Hopefully we can use the grading process to help us achieve this goal.
- I often tell students that I use the Lapsang Souchong Method of Paper-Grading. After reading an A-paper, I put my feet on the divan and say, “That paper deserves a fine cup of lapsang.” After reading a B-paper, I nod my head approvingly, but I do not feel I

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4 If everyone agreed, editors wouldn’t reject so many worthwhile manuscripts. John Kennedy O’Toole’s A Confederacy of Dunces stands as a case in point. We could cite many others. For example, Herman Melville’s later work – pretty much everything he wrote after Bartleby, the Scrivener – received rather negative reviews from both critics and readers. Today, many critics and readers find that work profound and enjoyable. Go figure.
should celebrate with souchong. While reading a C-paper, I wonder if I need some strong lapsang souchong, with its smoky flavor and strong kick, in order to get through the paper. While reading a D-paper, I find myself wandering toward the souchong after the first paragraph. An F-paper requires several strong cups; without them, I develop nervous tics.

- Early-term grades may reflect nothing more than that you haven’t developed the skills necessary to writing good arguments. Presumably, many of you have decided to take this course precisely because you feel that you don’t have these skills. If your early-term grades seem lower than you’d like, don’t worry too much. Note that I give more weight to late-term papers than to early-term papers. And I reserve the right to put even more emphasis (that is, more than the percentages indicate) on those late-term papers if your grades improve steadily. Furthermore, you will have the opportunity to rewrite one of your early papers. After all, this class has to do with skill-development, not information-retention so your final grade should reflect how well you’ve mastered the relevant skills by the end of the term. If you feel rather shaky in the early going, you may feel disappointed in your grades for the early-term papers; yet if you’ve developed the necessary skills by the end of the term, your grade should reflect the skills you’ve developed by then rather than the skills you lacked early on. So, though you will do no worse than the percentages give you, you may do better.

- I do not grade your drafts. I will offer comments on them, of course, as well as on the final papers.

II. ATTENDANCE: You can miss three classes without hurting your grade. Each absence after the third may lower your final grade: a C might magically transform into a C- if you have 4 absences, a D+ if you have 5 absences, and so on. You must make up all work missed due to absence, but I won’t chase you down to give you the assignments. Those arriving after the roll has been taken may attend class, but every two such instances may count as one absence. If you arrive late, make sure I’ve marked you present.

If you miss a week or more due to illness (thus using up, in one fell but not-entirely-pleasant swoop, all your absences), discuss your situation with me. (See remarks below under “WEBSITE.”)

III. WORKLOAD: You’ll write three major papers and at least two minor ones. You will also have to read several essays and write summaries or critiques of some of them.

IV. LATE PAPERS: I will accept late papers, but I will mark them down at the rate of one grade-increment for every day late. (For example, an A paper due at 10:00 AM Monday magically turns into an A- once 10:00 AM has passed away down the mysterious stream of time. It turns into a B+ once 10:00 AM has done similarly at the same time Tuesday, and so forth.) Writers have to deal with deadlines, so I take deadlines seriously. Sometimes the pressure of a

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5 Contrast this course with a history course. If you take a course in 19th century American history and you don’t do well early on in your test on the Creek Indian Wars or Andrew Jackson’s presidency, your teacher would seem justified in giving that grade equal weight with a later-term grade on the Civil War and the Reconstruction. Your teacher might feel justified in holding students accountable for an entire body of knowledge, and he might feel justified in giving the Creek Indian Wars equal weight with other events. In that class, you don’t so much develop a skill as master and understand information. Our class has a very different emphasis.
deadline forces a writer to produce quality work. (I have heard that the pressure of deadlines has driven some writers to drink, but these cases have occurred mostly on the East Coast.)

V. PARTICIPATION: We will do a lot of workshopping, reading and critiquing student papers. Try to contribute. Why? Oral work can help you to clarify your ideas. Also, it can help your grade. (No-one will lose points for not contributing, however.)

VI. PLAGIARISM: I won’t tolerate plagiarism in any form. If you plagiarize, you will receive no credit for the paper and may have to leave the course. I intend to use turnitin.com.

All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include cheating, plagiarism, academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. I will report all incidents of academic misconduct to the Honor Code Council. Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Additional information may be found at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html and http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/.

VII. SENTENCE-STRUCTURE AND MECHANICS: If your paper contains more than two errors in spelling, sentence-structure, punctuation, or other writer conventions, your grade may suffer. An A paper may magically transform into an A- with the third error, a B+ with the fourth, a B with the fifth, and so forth. Because I don’t grade drafts, students often say, “Oh yeah. I know. I won’t make that mistake on my final paper.” Alas, they often do make “that mistake” on their final papers. Great sadness results! I would therefore recommend that you make every effort to write and spell correctly on your drafts. Like cigarette smoking, good writing is habit forming.

VIII. LIMITS: I reserve the right to limit the number of times I critique your papers. Most likely, I will critique no more than one version of your first paragraph, one version of each of your support-sections, and one version of your conclusion. An in-class critique counts as one of these critiques.

IX. WEBSITE. I will use CU LEARN. This class has a website there. I will use that website for all emails and other communications. You can also find there all sorts of material relevant to the class: schedules, texts, assignment guidelines, various assigned essays; keys to the marks I make on your papers, and other materials. You should browse through that website and familiarize yourself with its contents. (You may find the website particularly useful if you have to miss classes.)

X. SUNDRY: Type all written work (including drafts). Serious and not-so-serious studies have shown that typed work drastically improves the disposition of university instructors, and sometimes the clarity of student writing as well. You will often need to provide a copy of your draft for each class-member. Please turn in two copies – the second an electronic version – of the final version of each major paper.

I may not accept a final paper for which I have not seen at least three preliminary drafts.

XI. DISABILITIES: If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit a letter to me from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs

XII. RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS: Campus policy requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. In this class, I will make every effort to accommodate all reasonable requests as long as you give me some reasonable lead-time. See details of the university’s general policies at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html.

XIII. CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR: Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Students who fail to adhere to behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Faculty-members have the professional responsibility to treat students with understanding, dignity and respect, to guide classroom discussion, and to set reasonable limits on the manner in which students express opinions. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, and nationalities. See policies at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html and http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code.

XIV. SEXUAL HARASSMENT: The University of Colorado Policy on Sexual Harassment applies to all students, staff, and faculty. Any student, staff or faculty member who believes s/he has been sexually harassed should contact the Office of Sexual Harassment at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550. Information about the OSH and the campus resources available to assist individuals who believe they have been sexually harassed may be found at http://www.colorado.edu/sexualharassment/

XVI. Ever since the dim times, course guidelines in American universities have been written to sound harsh and unfeeling. In order to uphold tradition, I have made every effort to make these guidelines sound as harsh and unfeeling as possible. Remember, though, that guidelines exist so that you might master the subject matter of the course and so that we have a basis for negotiation should disagreements arise. Even in the twenty-first century, we should emphasize people more than policies, but sometimes we profit from policies that prod us toward perfection. Still, policies often need tempering, for the vicissitudes of life often bring on the unexpected.