

Wheaton College
German Department
Writing Across the German Studies Curriculum
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The Wheaton College German Department offers courses in the languages, literatures, cultures and histories of the German speaking countries, and the relationships between these countries and the rest of the world. We view writing as one of the four basic proficiencies in the acquisition of German as a foreign language as well as a crucial part of studying literature and culture. From elementary language learning to advanced study of literature and civilization, writing instructions and assignments serve the common purpose of assessing one's command of the language and comprehension of texts and audiovisual materials, as well as developing one's analytical skills. Although our courses provide different types of writing instruction at each level and include a diverse palette of writing exercises, all writing assignments are drafted and submitted multiple times at all level.

The goal of the German program is to develop "multiple literacies" from elementary language acquisition courses through to senior seminar and capstone experiences of the German Language. The "multiple literacies" (a term coined by Heidi Byrnes of Georgetown University) refers, on the one hand, to the traditional competencies in listening, speaking, reading, writing from a wide range of genres to make students aware of the different registers of language use in German as well as in English. On the other hand, "multiple literacies" also refers to how these structures of the language are always articulated or presented in particular socio-cultural contexts. The aim of the program is to give students an opportunity to develop a bilingualism, which is inherently linked to intercultural literacy.

As a result of the EU and of recent developments in the economies of the World, Germany, along with France, Italy, England, and Europe in general, has become increasingly multi cultural and multi lingual in its national identity. Programs in foreign language acquisition need to take these changes into account. The model of the last generation to have students become clones of the target language or "near-native-speakers", is being replaced by a more critical model of bi-lingual literacy and bi-cultural identity construction. This notion of foreign language study requires critical thinking and promotes an awareness of cultural difference. This new goal for language acquisition can best be understood in Goethe's maxim: 'whoever does not speak a foreign language, does not know his/her own'.

*Wer keine Fremdsprache spricht
Kennt seine eigene nicht.
-Goethe*

100-Level:

At this level, writing assignments emphasize students' ability to perfect the sentence. Listening and speaking are emphasized over writing in order to develop an easy fluency. Good writing, we believe, is close to clear oral communication. But writing is part of the daily activities in class and on homework assignments controlled by cultural contexts and specific linguistic structures being learned. There are, however, also weekly assignments in which students are left more to their own devices and have to begin to be more creative in using the language. These assignments make use of varying genres such as responses to personal letters, descriptions of rooms, autobiographical accounts, reports on interviews of other students in the class, etc.

200-Level:

At this intermediate and advanced intermediate level of German, writing assignments become more demanding as they also vary in genre and style.

G201/202 Intermediate German: students receive writing assignments that require making use of specific grammatical points such as the subjunctive or the passive in the form of personal essays or dialogue sequences which also form the basis of a short video clip they produce at the end of the year. Short writing workshops have become a fixed part of the curriculum in which students' essays are edited by their peers, and grammatical as well as syntactical errors are analyzed together in class. Writing assignments are never corrected by the instructor in their first draft. They are marked by the instructor according to a list of correction codes (which are handed out to students in the beginning of the semester) and checked for grammatical and syntactical errors and overall coherence. Students are then instructed to rewrite their assignments a second time, analyzing their grammatical mistakes and taking into consideration their instructor's comments and suggestions.

G240 Advanced German:

The title for this class is "Contemporary German Culture, Current Events and Politics". In this class the structures of German are not systematically reviewed but rather common or frequent errors are studied, which are typical for this level. Emphasis is also placed on becoming aware of different registers of language and their appropriateness to various communicative contexts in speech and writing. Students learn how to recognize these registers both linguistically and in terms of their socio-cultural contexts and then reproduce them in oral reports to the class and on written

assignments exploring issues of real interests to themselves. In other words, these assignments enlist students to make decisions about what themes and subject matters they want to address.

English-taught literature and culture courses such as G262 and G267:

The writing objectives of these courses, which are taught in English and for which papers are written in English, differ from the other courses in the German department only in so far as the target language has changed. In addition to grammatical precision, syntactical coherence and logical argumentation, ‘critical thinking’ becomes one of the categories by which students’ written work is evaluated and in which students are encouraged to develop their writing proficiencies. Typical assignments in these courses include expository and analytical compositions, reaction essays, journal entries and longer research papers. Some of the formal writing assignments are required to be submitted a second time after the instructor has given the students written suggestions and comments on the overall structure of the paper, syntax, and coherent argumentation.

300-Level:

Students at this level are expected to be able to research and write a longer paper on literary works and/or cultural history. Usually there are at least three 3-4 page writing assignments, all of which are flagged for grammatical and syntactical errors and extensively commented on by the instructor. These papers then have to be redrafted at least one more time. For their term paper, students have at least one individual conference with the instructor where not only irregularities in grammar and syntax are tackled but also arguments are checked for coherence and logic. The Foreign Language Teaching Assistant acts as a secondary human resource for our students.

400-Level:

Students are required to produce a thesis-driven research paper of substantial length (18-20 pages) on a topic of their own design. This final paper is written in stages of which the first (shorter) draft is already submitted by mid-term. Feedback from the instructor is given in form of marginal comments, coding errors, and individual face-to-face consultation. Students then turn in the revised version for a second time upon which the instructor comments on the overall structure and rhetoric of the paper (usually typed). The grammatical and syntactical errors are still flagged one more time by the instructor. Students then resubmit their final version by the end of the term.

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