Home in Chicago

Academic Writing II: Writing for Inquiry and Research

ENGL 161
Professor Heather McShane

Spring 2026

Home in Chicago

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Do you think of Chicago as your home? Your new home? What does "home" mean for people living in Chicago? Historically and currently, housing in Chicago is mired in such controversial sociopolitical issues as immigration, racial segregation, and gentrification. In this section of English 161, we will investigate examples of housing practices by taking field trips to Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, the National Public Housing Museum, and Special Collections in the Daley Library. Additionally, we will look at Chicago-based architecture, art, and literature that show and give shape to Chicago homes, at times constraining people, and at other times, inspiring or even socializing them.

The theme of "home in Chicago" will be considered for the four major writing projects: an annotated bibliography, a literature review, a research paper proposal, and a research paper.

LEARNING GOALS

1. Conduct academic research drawing from multiple sources in multiple media.
2. Read texts in a variety of disciplines and genres, using critical reading strategies.
3. Defend a position in relation to the range of ideas surrounding a topic.
4. Construct a logically supported argument.
5. Demonstrate knowledge of writing as a process, including consideration of peer and instructor feedback, from initial draft to final revision.
6. Demonstrate control over organization and sentence construction.

Integration with Hull-House Materials

(Content adapted from original course syllabus by Hull-House educators to reflect how materials were used for in-class instruction and assignments)

CLASS TOPIC: CONDUCTING RESEARCH

This week of classes will include reflections on and annotations of pieces by Lilia Fernandez (*Brown in the Windy City*) and Hilda Satt Polacheck (*I Came A Stranger*). After discussing student journal entries on the topic and materials, these readings will be integrated with ideas of conducting research, especially through interviews and surveys.

READINGS:

- "Race, Class, Housing, and Urban Renewal: Dismantling the Near West Side" in *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago* (Lilia Fernandez, 2012)
- Selected chapters from *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl* (Hilda Satt Polacheck, 1991)

CLASS PROJECTS

Students will complete seven projects over the course of the semester that could integrate Hull-House sources, along with others from the class, into cohesive applications of their learning objectives. These include an annotated bibliography, interview or survey, literature review, research proposal, research paper, research presentation, and either a research poster or related creative response. Additionally, throughout the course students will be expected to complete journal entries and annotations of class readings.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

You will write two paragraphs about five pre-selected sources from class viewings and readings (including one source from Hilda Satt Polacheck's *I Came A Stranger*), culminating in a minimum 500 word final draft.

INTERVIEW OR SURVEY

You will conduct an interview or survey to help you think of possible research topics for your research paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

You will write an essay in which you summarize and synthesize your research, pulling information from at least four academic sources (probably peer-reviewed articles or excerpts from books published by academic presses) as well as two additional sources, including your interview and another reading from the annotated bibliography.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

To assist you in focusing your research for the research paper, you should write specific, well-developed responses to prompting questions in at least 250 words.
(See "Sample Assignment 2" below for list of questions.)

RESEARCH PAPER

You will write a research paper in which you take a position on an issue related to walking in contemporary literature or art (from 1950s-on) or sociopolitics, which could relate to material or activities at Hull-House. Final drafts should be minimum 2500 words.

RESEARCH PRESENTATION

The research presentation will be a slideshow. You will present the major point and detail the minor points of your research paper in about five minutes.

RESEARCH POSTER or CREATIVE RESPONSE

You have the option either to create a poster (on paper or electronically) on the argument of your research paper or to craft a creative response to the journal entries you've done for class.

Sample Assignment 1

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Purpose of the Assignment:

1. Conduct academic research drawing from multiple sources in multiple media.
2. Read texts in a variety of disciplines and genres, using critical reading strategies.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of writing as a process, including consideration of instructor feedback, from initial draft to final revision.
4. Demonstrate control over organization and sentence construction

Prompt:

An annotated bibliography is more than a list of sources. It is also a way to be critical of sources. You will summarize and evaluate these five sources:

- WTTW "The Boss and the Bulldozer" documentary
- "This is Still My Neighborhood" podcast
- "Nation of Migrants, Historians of Migration" reading
- "Brown in the Windy City" reading
- One of the Hilda Satt Polachek pieces

For the annotated bibliography itself:

- Give the correct bibliographic citation per MLA guidelines for each of the five sources.
- Summarize each source in a paragraph. The first sentence of the summary should include the specific title of the source, give the writer/creator's name, and include a rhetorically active verb that describes what the writer/creator is doing ("suggests that," "argues that," "implies that," "urges that," "claims that," etc.). The other sentences of the paragraph should succinctly and appropriately summarize the source.
- For each source, evaluate the credentials of the author/creator and the publisher/sponsor in another paragraph. What makes them credible? Are they biased in any way? This might require additional research like looking at the About page on the source website or even searching online for more information regarding the author/creator and the publisher/sponsor.

Sample Assignment 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Purpose of the Assignment:

1. Conduct academic research drawing from multiple sources in multiple media.
2. Read texts in a variety of disciplines and genres, using critical reading strategies.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of writing as a process, including consideration of peer and instructor feedback, from initial draft to final revision.
4. Demonstrate control over organization and sentence construction

Prompt:

You will write an essay of at least 1500 words, equivalent to six pages, in which you summarize and synthesize the research that you've done for your research paper related to the theme of "home in Chicago" of interest to you and pulling information from at least four academic sources (probably peer-reviewed articles or excerpts from academic presses) and two additional sources, which should include the interview or survey and can include pieces from the annotated bibliography. In your essay, you will call out the connections you see between the sources in a thesis statement, provide context and summary of the sources, indicate how the sources relate to each other and the topic, and identify gaps in the research. This paper differs from the research paper as you will not be making an argument about the issue in this paper but merely analyzing the potential sources you could use for the research paper.

Sample Assignment 3

RESEARCH PAPER PROPOSAL

Purpose of the Assignment:

1. Conduct academic research drawing from multiple sources in multiple media.
2. Read texts in a variety of disciplines and genres, using critical reading strategies.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of writing as a process, including consideration of peer and instructor feedback, from initial draft to final revision.
4. Demonstrate control over organization and sentence construction

Prompt:

To assist you in focusing your research for the research paper, you should write specific, well-developed responses to the following questions:

1. Research Question: What is the question that you will be trying to answer in your research? This is the most important part of your research proposal because it will determine where you look and what you look for. The question may change as you continue to research, but it is crucial to start with a question and to be aware if your question changes as you learn more. You should not start with a question to which you already have an answer. The answer to the question that you find through your research will become the argument of your paper.
2. Background and Significance: Explain your interest in and experience with this issue. What have you already read about it? How does it fit into the existing academic or public conversation? What made you choose it for your paper? Why are you interested in it? Why is this issue worth considering? What makes it important enough to pursue for this class? What do you hope to learn from it?
3. Audience: While your audience is considered academic, what other details can you provide about the people who could be drawn to read your paper? Is there any demographic information that you should keep in mind (race, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, occupation, religious beliefs, economic status, etc.)? What political circumstances may affect their reading? What attitudes—opinions, special interests, biases—may affect the way your audience reads your piece? What does your audience already know—or believe—about your topic? What do you need to tell them? What is your relationship with your audience, and how should it affect your language and tone? What does your audience need and expect from you? What kind of response do you want? Do you want readers to believe or do something?
4. Sources/Evidence: What kinds of sources and evidence do you anticipate you will need to use to support your argument? What sources from your literature review do you expect to use for your research paper?

In addition to answering the questions, include a separate Works Cited page with at least three sources.

Sample Assignment 4

RESEARCH PAPER

Purpose of the Assignment:

1. Conduct academic research drawing from multiple sources in multiple media.
2. Read texts in a variety of disciplines and genres, using critical reading strategies.
3. Defend a position in relation to the range of ideas surrounding a topic.
4. Construct a logically supported argument.
5. Demonstrate knowledge of writing as a process, including consideration of peer and instructor feedback, from initial draft to final revision.
6. Demonstrate control over organization and sentence construction.

Prompt:

You will write a research paper of at least 2,500 words, equivalent to ten pages, in which you take a position on an issue related to the theme of "home in Chicago." You will have already decided on the issue, and you can use the research you have already conducted in the literature review as well as any additional research. You will write a first draft of your research paper before submitting a second draft. You should write at least 1,250 words, equivalent to five pages, to receive full credit for the first draft. You will be working towards crafting a thesis-driven paper integrating your own ideas about the topic with other support. This is not simply an informative paper, but rather an argumentative paper, meaning that you need to make assertions in the paper and back those assertions up. The issue behind the paper needs to be a debatable one. Come up with an original title for your paper, craft an engaging opening paragraph with a clear sense of the purpose of the paper, be sure that each body paragraph connects back to your thesis, and end the paper memorably, possibly with solutions or a discussion of the implications.

You should put effort into writing the first draft of the paper so that you can have enough time to consider feedback and incorporate changes to your research paper. You will receive comments from me and peers on the first draft on global issues in your paper such as structure/organization, tone, and audience; you should also consider running the first draft by a Writing Center tutor for extra credit. In the first draft, the thesis statement should be underlined. It should not be underlined in subsequent drafts. The minor points of the paper should be obvious and amply supported. You should have summarized, quoted, or paraphrased from at least four academic sources and two other sources. That being so, not more than 25% of the paper should come from outside sources. You should use original language and be insightful about the issue, synthesizing your own ideas with other people's with summaries, paraphrases, and quotations. Cite every instance when an idea originates with someone else.

Accompanying the paper should be a separate Works Cited page listing all the sources used in the paper.

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