

What is the Role of Oral and Written Language in Making Knowledge in English and the Humanities?

Professor Anne Ruggles Gere

Dynamic

Literature, broadly defined, represents the best that has been thought and said in the world. The literatures of England and America are not only extremely rich but are also readily accessible. In addition to courses in these areas, the Department offers several multidisciplinary courses as well as courses in film. Study in any of these areas should enable students to enlarge and to discipline their imagination and their emotions to increase their understanding of human problems and character, and to gain aesthetic satisfaction by participating in the ordered experience which the artist presents. (UM English Department self-description 1984-85)

The present study of literature has returned with particular force and new point to a very old consideration—that language and literature are necessarily understood as social products and agents, deeply implicated in the processes and questions that interest and, at times, agitate society more generally. These issues are represented in texts—issues of ethics, of political order, of economic and ethnic differences, of gender, of systems of belief—and recur as a regular feature of discussion in many of our courses. (UM English Department self-description 1994-95)

The Michigan Department of English Language and Literature has long been recognized as one of the top English departments in the nation. As one of the largest departments within the College of Literature, Science and the Arts (LSA), English serves as an extraordinary center of creativity, inquiry, and discovery with a proud tradition of leadership in scholarship and teaching. The Hopwood Writing Program—offering some of the most prestigious financial awards available to students at the University—has helped launch the careers of many respected authors including Marge Piercy, Arthur Miller Nancy Willard and XJ Kennedy. Outreach programs like the New England Literature Program, Bear River Writers' Conference, and the Prison Creative Arts Project continue to lead curricular initiatives, community alliances, and deep learning experiences for our students. With over seventeen thousand alumni, eight hundred students, and nearly three hundred full-time faculty members, lecturers, and graduate student instructors, the Department offers not only opportunities for study of all aspects of English language and literature, but also a well-developed, diverse, and active community within the University. (UM English Department self-description, 2006)

The 2005 Job Information List of the Modern Language Association included three times as many positions in creative writing as in the study of twentieth-century literature

1983-84	BA in Creative Writing 423	MA in Creative Writing 300	BA in British Literature 1261
2003-2004	BA in Creative Writing 1800	MA in Creative Writing 1868	BA in British Literature 887

“We can assume that creative writing will experience a boom—not a creative writing program along the lines of the old MFA workshop model but one for those fascinated by and dedicated to the study of rhetoric—the *how* of writing rather than the *what*.”

Marjorie Perloff

Multiple

English language arts are the vehicles of communication by which we live, work, share, and build ideas and understandings of the present, reflect on the past and imagine the future. Through the English language arts, we learn to appreciate, integrate, and apply what is learned for real purposes in our homes, schools, communities, and workplaces.

Michigan Department of Education

English Language Arts Standards, National Council of Teachers of English

The vision guiding these standards is that all students must have the opportunities and resources to develop the language skills they need to pursue life's goals and to participate fully as informed, productive members of society. These standards assume that literacy growth begins before children enter school as they experience and experiment with literacy activities—reading and writing, and associating spoken words with their graphic representations. Recognizing this fact, these standards encourage the development of curriculum and instruction that make productive use of the emerging literacy abilities that children bring to school. Furthermore, the standards provide ample

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.

7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge

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9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

10. Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.

11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

Multi-lingual

- 50% of English doctoral programs require demonstration of competence in two languages other than English
- 44% require competence in one language
- 6% require no language other than English

National Security Language Initiative

“Learning a language—somebody else’s language is a kind gesture. It’s a gesture of interest.”

» George W. Bush

The decline of the language requirement will have to be reversed if those in the English profession are to treat global and ethnic studies seriously, to refuse to replicate United States isolationism in their work, to research and teach world literature and English-language literature's place in it responsibly, and to enrich their thinking with the extraordinary taxonomies that other modern languages offer.

» Rosemary Feal, Executive Director, MLA

(Still) Tied to Historical Period and Genre

Concentrators must complete 27 credits in English courses 300 or above. The courses must include: three courses on literature written primarily before 1830, at least one of which must be on literature written primarily before 1600; one course in American literature, and one course designated “New Traditions,” focusing on the cultural traditions of women, ethnic groups, and people of color.

» UM Department of English

- In addition to the first-year writing requirement, gateway courses include English 240 (Introduction to Poetry) and English 239 (What is Literature?)
- Prospective teachers are required to take advanced writing and a language course

Canonical

- Literature most frequently taught in high schools in 1987 included:
 - *Romeo and Juliet*
 - *Huckleberry Finn*
 - *Macbeth*
 - *Scarlet Letter*
 - *To Kill a Mockingbird*

- 2005 survey results (271,288 responses)
- *Romeo & Juliet* 69.9%
- *To Kill a Mockingbird* 47.7 %
- *Huckleberry Finn* 24.2%
- *Scarlet Letter* 17.7 %
- *Macbeth* 10.4%

Digital

- 9% of secondary school students in 2004 survey indicated a clear preference for getting information from the library, while the remainder reported a preference for the internet

- CTools is a web-based system for coursework and collaboration at the University of Michigan. CTools integrates features from UM.CourseTools and UM.WorkTools. Now you can access all your courses, projects, and research websites from your private [My Workspace](#), which allows you to integrate and manage your sites.
- For coursework, CTools provides features to supplement and enhance teaching and learning. New [features](#) include:
 - Integrated class schedule in [My Workspace](#)
 - Private student-instructor [DropBox](#)
 - Real-time [Chat](#) for registered students
 - Email notification for Announcements and Resources
- For collaboration, CTools provides tools to help organize communication and collaborative work on campus and around the world. New features include:
 - [Easy access](#) for non-UM participants
 - Permissions control within tools
 - Multiple file upload in [Resources](#)
 - Folders in folders to any level
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Closely Linked to Public Policy

- ACT report “Reading Between the Lines” (issued March 1, 2006) shows that only 51 percent of last year’s high-school graduates who took the ACT examination had the reading skills they needed to succeed in college or job-training programs, the lowest proportion in more than a decade.

ACT College Readiness Standards

- Topic Development in Terms of Purpose and Focus
- Organization, Unity and Coherence
- Word Choice in Terms of Style, Tone, Clarity and Economy
- Sentence Structure and Formation
- Conventions of Usage
- Conventions of Punctuation

Complexities of Reception and Production are...

- Dynamic
- Multiple
- Multi-lingual
- Tied to Historical Period and Genre
- Canonical
- Digital
- Linked to Public Policy