

UofM First-Year Writing Program

CAPster



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Happenings & Accomplishments

*Keep up to date with the going-ons of the English department by visiting the [News and Events](#) page!

Writing Group

Faculty and graduate students are invited to join a pomodoro-based writing group that meets **every Wednesday** from 12:30 – 3:00pm in PT 227. The goal of the group is not to work with faculty but alongside faculty as a means of accountability. Refreshments will be provided in the form of tea and coffee. Bring your own mug! For further information, email Dr. Robertson at: crbrtsn9@memphis.edu.

Honors Colloquium

The English Honors Colloquium is a series that invites faculty, staff, graduate students, undergraduate majors and minors, and anyone interested in English Studies to gather in fellowship to hear about and discuss the cutting-edge work being done by our faculty.

- On Monday, October 5th, Dr. Shiva Mainaly will discuss "Sovereign Loops: SMLs as Infrastructure for Epistemic Self-Determination" in PT 456.
- On Monday, October 26th, Dr. Lindsay Helms will discuss "Classroom to Clinic: A Task-Based Approach to Language for Healthcare" in PT 456.

The Pinch Presents Ryan Teitman

Join us for a poetry reading and Q&A with author Ryan Teitman on Tuesday, October 20th at 6pm in PT 456. Ryan's work has appeared in Gulf Coast, The Southern Review, The Threepenny Review, and The Yale Review!

Book Talk: Catherine John-Camara

On Wednesday, October 21st, Catherine John-Camara, Department Chair of Africana Studies at the University of Rhode Island will be discussing her latest book, [Afroindigenization: A Theory of Grassroots Cultural Practice](#) at Rhodes College (Blount Auditorium) at 6pm. This event is free and open to the public!

Grad Students vs. Faculty Kickball Game

Come join the friendly competition and meet some new faces! The game will start on Friday, October 23rd at 4:00pm at Tobey Park (2599 Avery Ave) Field #2. Even if you don't play, we need a cheering section!

Naseeb Shaheen Memorial Lecture Series

[Dr. Zahid R. Chaudhary](#) (Princeton University) is presenting on themes in his recent book, [Paranoid Publics: Psychopolitics of Truth](#), on Thursday, October 29th at 6:00pm in UC 300 with a reception prior to the lecture at 5:30pm. This is a great opportunity to hear cutting-edge research in English studies. Check out this [Q&A](#) with Dr. Chaudhary about Paranoid Publics. A graduate student workshop will follow the lecture on Friday, October 30th. More information to come via email!

1010 Resources: Discourse Community

Are you teaching 1010 this semester? Check out some [Discourse Community resources](#) shared by other TAs!

We would love to celebrate your accomplishments or spread the word about your events! Please send your upcoming conference presentations, publications, and defenses to Lindsay Helms (lldailey@memphis.edu).



EGO News

English Graduate Organization – Annual Meet & Greet

[The English Graduate Organization \(EGO\)](#) Annual Meet-&-Greet is Friday, October 7th from 4:30–5:30pm in PT 403 (the Faculty Lounge). Join the English Graduate Organization and your fellow grad students for our first event this semester: a friendly, low-key party to celebrate the new EGO team, socialize with other peers across concentrations, meet student-focused faculty, and learn more about what EGO can offer to you this year. You are invited to come and go as you please, stop in for a snack before class, or come early to get to know someone from the department better with a conversation. Hope to see you then!

Vote for Vice President

Please take a moment and [use this link to vote](#) for who you would like to be Vice President of English Graduate Organization this 2026–27 academic year. There are two students to choose from who are running for office: Abdulwahab Alshehri and Mary Lothrop. Voting will be open until Friday, October 2nd.



ReCAP: Reading Strategies for the Writing Classroom

On Tuesday, September 1st, part-time faculty member Dr. Terie Box from Writing and Communication Services came to share some reading strategies that we can work into our first year writing courses. Dr. Box informed us that some UofM students are entering our classes with lower than optimal reading levels and little confidence in their reading abilities.

As we all know, students who can't read well, can't write well. To succeed in our courses, our students need to be able to compare and contrast, identify purpose, navigate different genres, differentiate between fact and opinion, etc. Teaching reading strategies during our class time instead of simply assigning reading tasks as homework can increase student learning. Three primary strategies that Dr. Box mentioned are:

1. Skim, Scan, or Read?

Students need to be taught that they do not always need to read every word of an assigned text. Oftentimes, text book chapters or scholarly articles include extraneous information that is not necessary to grasping the concepts that will be discussed in class. **Skimming** (quickly glancing over headings, bullet points, abstracts, etc.) is used to familiarize yourself with a text and get a basic overview of what the text is about. **Scanning** (reading specific parts of a text) can be used to review a previously-read text or find specific information (ex: looking for answers to a discussion question, identifying a thesis, searching for definitions or keywords, etc.). **Reading** an entire text is great if the purpose of reading is to analyze the text and involves close attention to details such as rhetorical elements, word choice, organization, etc.

2. Annotating Texts

To get our students to engage with the text, we can teach them how to effectively annotate for main ideas and arguments as well as record their thoughts on the text as they read. Students can highlight, underline, make notes, etc. Lindsay teaches annotation in 1010 by assigning a group of students a section of Brandt and having them identify the main idea, a key quote, and write a short summary of the section to present to the rest of the class.

ReCAP: Reading Strategies for the Writing Classroom

3. Summarizing Texts

Paraphrasing or summarizing is beneficial in testing students' reading comprehension as well as teaching students how to introduce outside sources and information in their own writing.

Students can now [make an appointment](#) with Writing and Communication Services specifically for “Reading Strategies” by selecting that option from the services on the dropdown menu on Navigate.

New Appointment

Please use the filters below to select the type of appointment you wish to schedule.

If you do not see any filters or scheduling options, please visit the [Academic Advisor Directory](#) to find the advisor for your major so that you can call or email to

[Show More](#) ▾

What can we help you find?

What type of appointment would you like to schedule? *

Tutoring and Academic Support

Service *

Reading Strategies Assistance

Academic Coaching

Academic Skills One on One

Writing & Communication Services

English Language Assistance

Help With a Speech/Presentation Prep

Help With a Writing Assignment

Reading Strategies Assistance

Other Options

[View Drop-In Times](#)

[Request Appointment Time](#)

[Meet With Your Success Team](#)

Low-Tech Classrooms

With the advent of AI and the host of concerns it brings to education, instructors are looking to adjust the way that they have taught for years. One way that some have adjusted is by implementing low-tech, tech-lite, or tech free classrooms. For example, a [psychology professor at Stanford](#) has recently implemented a “tech-free policy” in all of his courses, asking students to write their answers to exams in old school “blue books” which, according to an [article in the Wall Street Journal](#), have made a resurgence in higher education in an attempt to tamp down on cheating with AI.

The [Center for Teaching Innovation](#) at Cornell University lists several reasons why professors are considering cutting devices out of the classroom:

- » Students who use devices in class are reported to have poorer academic success ([Glass & Kang, 2019](#); [Kraushaar & Novak, 2010](#); [Walker, 2017](#); [Wood et al., 2012](#)).
- » Digital devices cause distractions for users and other students in the classroom ([Hall et al., 2020](#); [Sana et al., 2013](#)).
- » Unauthorized use of AI is hard to control with the use of personal devices ([Chapman & Dalgarno, 2026](#)).
- » Students in screen-free classrooms have been reported ([by instructors at Cornell](#)) to have more in-depth discussions and overall engagement than in classrooms that don’t have low tech or tech free policies.

Some of our very own UofM first-year writing instructors (Lindsay Helms, Grace Gal, and Monique Bain) have opted for similar policies and teaching strategies in their own classrooms.

Since the terms “tech-free” “device-free” “tech-lite,” “low-tech” etc. can all be defined differently, check out these example policies:

Low Tech Classroom Policy (Lindsay)

In this course, the use of laptops, tablets, airpods/headphones and phones is prohibited, with the exception of certain class sessions when we will use laptops for learning activities as noted in the syllabus. Select technology may be allowed with approval from the instructor for an extenuating circumstance. If a student needs to use technology for a personal reason during class time, they must leave the classroom.

Policy on the Use of Electronics in the Classroom (Grace)

Laptops, tablets, and phones must be put away while class is in session. We will use laptops during writing workshops and other in-class activities when typing is part of the work. I will announce these activities in advance. Electronic devices can be distracting not only to the person using them but also to classmates and the instructor. Limiting their use during class helps everyone stay focused. If you need to use your phone or are expecting an important call, simply step outside and return when you are finished.

More Practice than Policy (Monique)

With the move to textbooks in 1020, Monique thought it would be a good practice to give students more opportunities to write by hand in class as well. While she did not implement a formal policy, she uses a “less tech and more handwriting approach” to help students practice reading, responding to and thinking through ideas through writing, and preparing for thoughtful discussions in class. This approach is particularly useful at the beginning of each class session to prepare students for the topic or discussion.

Example Device-Free Classroom Policy

Our class is a shared learning space, and everyone will benefit if we keep our focus on the learning experience and on our interactions with one another. Therefore, our classroom will be a device-free classroom. This means you will be required to turn off smart phones, “Air Pods,” headphones, laptops, tablets, smart watches, smart glasses, and other electronic devices and store them in your bag during class time. Laptops and tablets can be used at appropriate times as indicated by the professor, and exceptions to this policy will be granted on a case-by-case basis or to conform with DRS accommodations.

Example Tech-Lite Policy (Cornell University)

In this class, the use of laptops, tablets, and phones is prohibited, with the exception of certain class sessions when we will use laptops for learning activities. Research shows that the use of laptops and phones in class can have negative effects on learning because of the potential for distraction. If you have particular needs for using a device in class, please come talk to me separately.

Here are some tips in case you are considering a low tech classroom:

- Before implementing a low-tech policy, make sure you **have an honest and open conversation** with your students about why you are implementing the policy. [“Education: Attentional Disarray”](#) by Sherry Turkle could be used to introduce a device-free policy. Lindsay prints off the low-tech policy and allows students to read it and voice their concerns. Grace has conversations about AI literacy with her students. Since she is prohibiting them from using it in their writing, she wants them to understand what is at stake if they do rely on it too much (e.g., cognitive offloading, skill atrophy, environmental impact, etc.)

- **Start small.** The first semester that Lindsay considered implementing a low tech classroom she simply had the students put away devices for five minutes at the beginning of class while doing their free writes. Then they talked about whether they felt less distracted or if they experienced any anxiety. This daily assignment helped students open up about their device use and discuss how it impacts them in courses and everyday life.
- **Be sensitive to your students' accommodations.** Realize that some students have accommodations for using electronic devices in class. This semester Lindsay had a conversation with the director of Disability Resource Services (DRS) about how to structure her policy (below) so that she didn't single out any students. She also reached out to each DRS student with those specific accommodations before the first day of class to tell them that they were not required to adhere to the policy.
- **Have a routine.** Monique establishes her low-tech approach at the beginning of each class. At the start of class, students answer an attendance question (See Sam's spotlight) on an index card and then they talk to each other about it. After a few volunteers share their responses, all students are asked to write in their reading response journals (by hand) for 5-8 minutes. She also plays a little lo fi music while they do so.
- **Write by hand in class and make ongoing feedback part of the writing process.** Some professors use "blue books" that students can purchase from the bookstore. Grace and Lindsay both require their students to handwrite their drafts in a designated notebook that is collected periodically. Lindsay writes notes in her students's notebooks, engaging in a conversation about their work. During workshops, Grace walks around, reads what the students are working on, and gives them feedback in real time. You can also have students respond to assigned readings. Grace assigns "daily writings" throughout the semester that asks students to explain ideas from the assigned readings in their own words or respond to specific passages. She then uses their responses to check their understanding and decide what needs to be addressed during class discussions. Monique also uses notebooks in which students write their responses to readings or in-class discussions.

- Be prepared to **adjust your expectations of students' final drafts.** Switching to pen and paper has some limitations. One challenge is deciding how students will revise and turn in the final product. Lindsay has students type and print for the final iteration of the assignment. Grace does the same, but emphasizes to her students' that final drafts must be consistent with what they wrote in class. They can still revise at home, but they have less flexibility to make substantial changes. The assignments might be a bit more “rough,” but Lindsay finds it refreshing to read something “human” after reading so many perfectly polished essays from large language models (LLMs).
- **It's worth it!** Lindsay has already seen much more engagement this semester and higher quality writing. Grace has found that a low-tech approach makes students less likely to rely on GenAI. Monique has found that her new approach reduces the immediate “laptop” pull from students' backpacks, and her students are actually talking to each other more at the beginning of class instead of sitting in silent silos.

If you are interested in implementing a low-tech policy in your classroom, we would love to chat!

Lindsay Helms, lldailey@memphis.edu

Grace Gal, aggal@memphis.edu

Monique Bain, mgbain@memphis.edu



Student Resources for Physical and Mental Health

At this point in the semester, the adrenaline of the first couple of weeks has faded, and the rubber has met the road. To take care of yourself, it might be beneficial to review these resources offered by the UofM. And feel free to share with your students!

Getting sick is the last thing you want to deal with when the semester is full steam ahead. If you are feeling under the weather, the [Student Health Center](#) might be able to help. The center offers a variety of healthcare services, including flu and COVID testing, and vaccinations. Most of their services are free of charge.

When you feel overwhelmed, taking time to exercise and maintain a healthy diet can help you manage stress and recharge. [Campus Recreation](#) offers a fitness center, a food lab where you can take cooking classes, an aquatic center, and much more, all free with your UofM student ID.

For emergency situations, during the business hours (Monday-Friday, 8:00am-4:30pm), you can call the Counseling Center (901.678.2068) or enter the [virtual waiting room](#). If your emergency occurs after hours, you should contact the [Tiger Care Line](#) (901.678.3068, extension 2) to speak to a crisis counselor. Another Crisis Line is the [Alliance Healthcare Services](#) line (901.577.9400).

Students can also take advantage of the [Relaxation Zone](#) in Brister 302 and UC 227. The Relaxation Zone offers a space to decompress and relax with massage chairs, sand trays, coloring stations, Buddha boards, and much more. You can walk-in or make an appointment either by phone (901.678.2068) or email (relaxationzone@memphis.edu).

Finally, here are some [resources specifically for graduate students](#) such as webinars about mental health, self-care tips, and information on how to cope with burnout and imposter syndrome.

TA Spotlight: Sam Williams

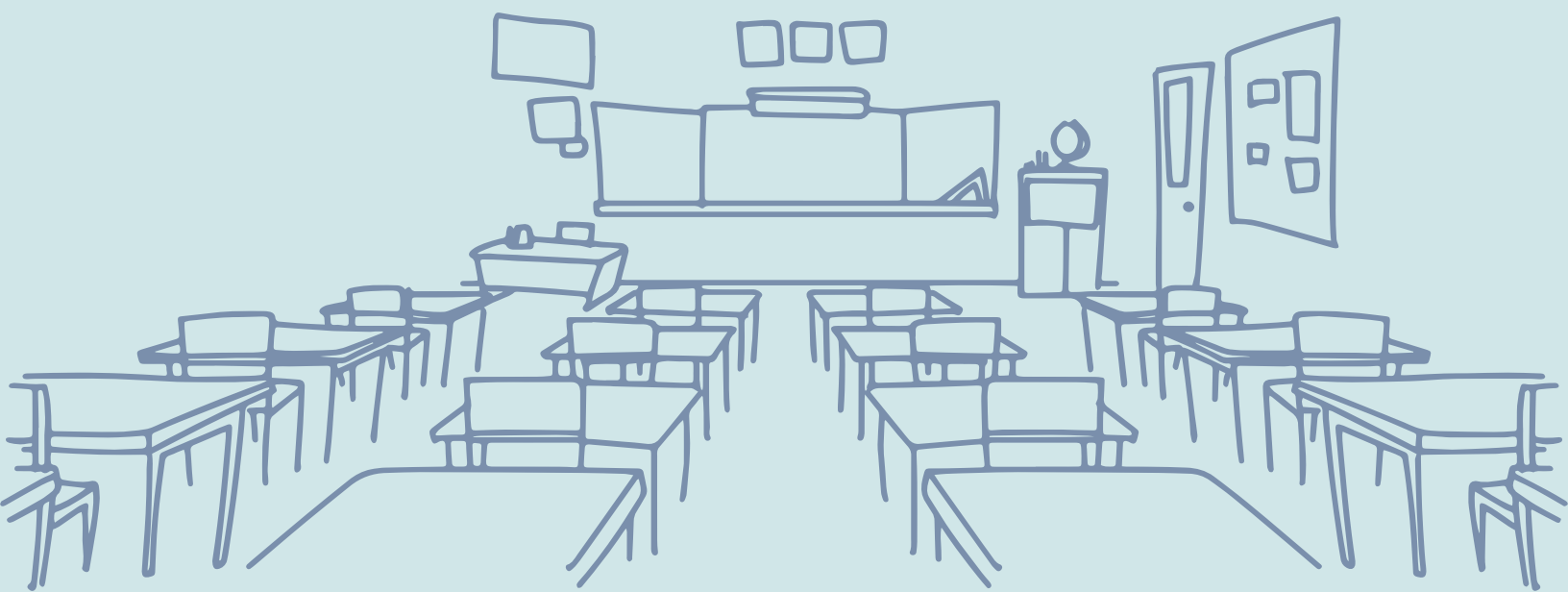
Sam Williams is an MFA candidate (Fiction) at the University of Memphis and has been a T.A. with the FYP since August 2025. She is also last year's winner of the Dr. Reginald Martin Teaching Award Teaching Award. We asked Sam what she has learned about teaching in her time here:

The thing they don't tell you about teaching is that it is just like anything difficult—you don't get it until you're in it, and the only way out is through. It seems obvious in hindsight, but when first beginning, I needed to know everything. What to expect from the students, how to answer all their questions, when to move on from one topic to the next, and so on. In the week leading up to my first semester, I was assured I would know what to do and how to do it, but when it came down to it, I could only learn by doing. What a terrible answer for an overthinker! And yet, it was the truth. As classes commenced, and I introduced myself to my students, I found the rhythms and routines which worked best for me. What worked and didn't work. The trial and error that is integral to discovery did indeed prove fruitful, and, luckily, without any great catastrophe. I account this, however, to a [philosophy of fostering community](#) and approaching the students as humans before their roles in the classroom.

In my first year of the master's program, I took a course with Kendra Vanderlip, wherein, every class, they began with an attendance question. Sometimes, it was something innocuous, such as, "Do you like pancakes or waffles?" Other times, it was more outlandish: "Who would you call in class for help during the zombie apocalypse?" All of these, though, sparked some form of discussion from everyone in the room, and what, at the start of the semester, was a reticent interaction, focused on the instructor, [became a communal experience](#) all of us participated in with one another.

I had not realized, as a student, what something as simple as an attendance question was doing for class rapport, but as an instructor, I recognize that it **fosters an environment of connectedness and intimacy**, even if the questions are surface level and voluntary. I have incorporated attendance questions in every class I have taught since the Fall of 2025, and while it does require a sacrifice of class time at the start of the hour, I have never found that to be a regret of mine, because the dividends it pays in making students comfortable with me, first, and their peers, later, are worth their weight in dry erase markers. This is why I also take steps to incorporate other community-focused elements within my pedagogy, such as small groups for discussion.

What I have found, most importantly, is that offering answers, myself, as well as my own thoughts when engaging with small groups, allows the students to **feel as if we are meeting one another at the table**. It is a discussion, not a lecture. They find they have more power over their learning experience, and I find, as always, I have much to learn from them. So, while the only way out might be through, it is one which we traverse together.



CAP Calendar

All CAP events are held on Tuesdays from 4:15–5:15. All events can be found in the [Fall 2026 CAP Schedule](#).

October 6th:

- First-Year CAP in Cadres
- Teaching CAP in Cadres

October 13th:

- NO CAP – FALL BREAK

October 20th:

- First-Year CAP in PT 456
- Professional CAP in PT 215

October 27th:

- All CAP in PT 456

