

**Fall 2016**  
English 7/8823: Topics in Composition:  
**Language, Cognition, and Writing**

Mondays, 5:30-8:30  
Instructor: Dr. Will Duffy



**Course Description:**

This topics course focuses on the study of writing and composition pedagogy through the interrelated lens of developmental psychology, cognitive linguistics, the philosophy of language, and neuroscience. Early in its development as an academic discipline, rhetoric and writing studies was heavily influenced by behaviorist and other positivistic approaches to the science of learning, approaches that in turn influenced such things as the field's development of "modes," expressivist pedagogy, and processes theory; its complication of "error"; and its more general understanding of the social dimensions of writing production, among other concerns. Now rhetoricians and writing theorists are turning their attention to the brain sciences to further complicate how we understand writing. Readings in this course will survey early works by psychologists (Skinner, Jung, Freud, Vygotsky) and research produced by compositionists influenced by such work (Flowers, Emig, Rose, Moffett); works from contemporary cognitive psychologists who study language acquisition (Pinker, Lakoff); work in the developing area of "neurorhetorics" and the theories influencing it; and we will consider the impact of debates related to Sapir-Whorf, speech-act theory, and generative semantics on how we approach the teaching of language and writing.