English 1023 is our second sequence writing course with an emphasis on the analysis of literature and the research process. Building on the fundamental skills of grammar, logic, and document organization taught in English 1013, it is a course on college-level standards for composing arguments on the significance of texts with appropriate support from secondary sources. The contribution that this core course makes to the rest of the student’s coursework is that it prepares him/her to read a variety of challenging texts with a greater appreciation for the subtleties of meaning and rhetorical persuasion, and then to respond critically in an extended argument that clarifies the issues raised in the primary text. Students learn that analysis requires looking beyond their feelings or initial impressions in order to ascertain the contextual clues, both historical and within the primary text, that work in collaboration to create textual meaning.

I tell my students that if they are able to examine and explain the minutiae of linguistic techniques employed by a writer to reinforce his meaning and so influence the reader on that level, then the skills students develop in the poetry explication essay ought to be transferrable to other courses where they may be asked to analyze and/or critically evaluate the efficacy of a published article on an issue of politics, history, ethics, economics, etc. Whether on the job or in personal witnessing as a Christian, students will need to articulate a compelling argument for their informed opinions backed up with ample evidence and sound reasoning.

All the assignments on the English II syllabus are geared toward equipping the student to compose more sophisticated critical arguments on the meanings of texts. Pop quizzes and occasional in-class writings hold students accountable for the daily readings and test their comprehension of the material. Web reports, consisting of a brief paragraph posted once a week on Blackboard, fill a similar role, but require a more substantial response, thus enabling students to practice analysis of texts by pointing out relations of parts to the whole. I also assign a number of homeworks to prepare them for the essays: a writing questionnaire, a grammar refresher, library research exercises. The midterm and final exam test students’ ability to form a topic sentence and support it in order to clarify passages from their readings, as well as to compose one brief essay in response to a comparison/contrast question on the literature. On the final, I also require students to reflect on their growth as a writer and the habits leading to it.

The writing process itself of drafting, revising, and further revision is given ample emphasis in the course by the two Peer Review days held in class before each of three major essays is due. Students earn credit by bringing drafts, providing critical feedback to a neighbor’s paper, and doing an audio-visual demo of at least 1 paragraph to elicit suggestions for revision from the whole class; the latter activity is one of the most constructive methods for making students aware of grammar pitfalls and other composition concepts, as students routinely report at end of term.

The three major essay assignments take the lion’s share of the grade determination for the course. Each deals with analysis of the literary elements (techniques) of the major genres, building on the skills practiced outside of class and discussed daily in class: there is a short story analysis, a poetry explication, and a drama or novel analysis. My rubrics show students from the outset the specific areas on which their writing will be assessed, with a top-down order of document priorities going from appropriate content and analytical approach on down to the mechanics of spelling and formatting. I also provide a variety of my own handouts, basically
mini-tutorials, that pinpoint concepts from their grammar handbook on effective and appropriate citation and the academic conventions for papers of literary analysis.

**Masterpieces (EGL 4003)** makes a significant contribution to our core curriculum as a senior capstone course that integrates JBU’s three-fold educational distinctive: students draw upon the expertise gained in their major studies and in literary history learned from the course (head), while cultivating a life-long appreciation for diverse literary texts, comparing such readings with their own faith (heart), so that they will be equipped to face such challenges within their future vocations and ministries (hand).

In particular, I expose students to elements in world literature such as the depiction of the gods, heroes, women, cosmology, and the afterlife, and how those elements evolve over the centuries due to major ideological, political, religious, and cultural trends or shifts. The course lectures and discussions, assignments, and exams allow students to engage a variety of cultural perspectives as represented by prominent literary spokespersons, then to formulate responses to those ideologies from a Christian worldview, and finally to apply this process of engagement within their chosen profession.

Since the course is reading-intensive, the number of assigned papers and exams has traditionally been kept at three apiece, so as to encourage fuller participation in readings, discussions, and note-taking both in and out of class. Pop quizzes are frequent, sometimes twice a week, not only as a tool for keeping students accountable for course material, but also as a preview and springboard for lectures and discussion.

The three papers assigned in Masterpieces are short critical essays (3 to 5 pp. each) in which the student demonstrates a keen understanding of the fictive world posited by an author as well as the real-life cultural milieu out of which the text was produced; the student then applies the insights gained from this analysis to their own cultural situation and argues the relevance for us today. Although not full-fledged research papers, these critical essays must include background information on the historical context from lectures and cite any editorial commentary from our anthology or other texts in footnotes. These papers assess how well our upperclassmen are able to articulate a compelling argument on the meaning of texts that may nevertheless challenge their beliefs.

The three exams assess student comprehension and retention of literary concepts and terms, major themes across the readings, and the broad historical sweep of authors, dates, and literary works. All three exams are structured to test student learning on various levels, requiring a variety of study skills and modes of critical thinking: listing and multiple choice sections call for memorization of key facts, terms, names, and concepts in the literature, while identification of quotes and short essays (1 or 2 paragraphs of substantial response) require students to pinpoint the emblematic moments in readings and analyze how those parts relate to the whole. Students briefly argue how prevalent imagery, major events, or important speeches in a single passage elucidate the larger implications of the work. Elements of choice (e.g., 5 out of 6 options) appear in most sections of the tests. The final exam, worth slightly more, comprehensively (though not exhaustively) revisits semester highlights, but is weighted toward the final unit of readings.