

Shakespeare's Comedies

DR. DAVID WILSON-OKAMURA ENGLISH 3080 SPRING 2017 EAST CAROLINA UNIV.

Jan. 9 M Cancelled for snow
11 W What is comedy?
13 F **First paper due** (750 words); read *Midsummer Night's Dream*, act 1
16 M Martin Luther King Day
18 W *MND*, act 2
20 F Scenes in performance
23 M *MND*, act 3
25 W *MND*, act 4
27 F Scenes in performance
30 M *MND*, act 5
Feb. 1 W *Merchant of Venice*, act 1
3 F Scenes in performance
6 M *Mer.*, act 2
8 W *Mer.*, act 3
10 F Scenes in performance
13 M *Mer.*, act 4
15 W *Mer.*, act 5
17 F Scenes in performance
20 M **Second paper due**; scenes in film
22 W *As You Like It*, act 1
24 F Scenes in performance
27 M *AYLI*, act 2
Mar. 1 W *AYLI*, act 3
3 F Scenes in performance
5–12 Spring Break
13 M *AYLI*, act 4
15 W *AYLI*, act 5
17 F Scenes in performance
20 M *Twelfth Night*, act 1
22 W *TN*, act 2
24 F Scenes in performance
27 M *TN*, act 3
29 W *TN*, act 4
31 F Scenes in performance
Apr. 3 M *TN*, act 5
5 W *The Tempest*, act 1
7 F Scenes in performance
10 M *Tmp.*, act 2
12 W **Third paper due**; scenes in film
14 F State holiday
17 M *Tmp.*, act 3
19 W *Tmp.*, act 4
21 F *Tmp.*, act 5
24 M Scenes in performance
25 T What is comedy? **Final deadline for all work, including late papers and recitations.**
May 3 W Exam-period activity (8:00–10:30 am)

Aims

1. To quicken your powers of observation, inquiry, and argument by study, conversation, and continual practice.
2. To see what all the fuss is about. Everyone is forced to read Shakespeare in high school, often by teachers who don't like him themselves. And now most of you are being forced again, for your major! I am not going to tell you that Shakespeare is great because he teaches us *x* moral or *y* platitude. An author who can be reduced to platitudes might be worth reading, but he shouldn't be a required author (which, for most of you, Shakespeare is). Therefore, instead of saying why you *should* like Shakespeare, we are going to spend the whole semester reading, discussing, and performing his actual words; and by the end of the course you will be able to judge for yourself whether he is really All That. You will not need to take anyone's word for it, least of all mine. Instead, you will feel it on your own pulse, see it with your own eyes.

REQUIREMENTS

Written assignments must be typed and are due at the beginning of the class period. Assignments delivered after that will receive a lower grade according to the following schedule: an A- essay that is delivered up to 24 hours late will receive a B+, an A- essay that is delivered between 24 and 48 hours late will receive a B, and so on.

Quizzes (25%). Monday and Wednesday quizzes are based on the reading for that day. Friday quizzes are based on the previous two days of lecture and discussion; you may use your notes for this quiz as well as your textbooks. Each quiz is worth 1% and there will be 27 quizzes. *There will be no make-ups for missed quizzes.* However, because there are two extra quizzes (#26 and #27), you can miss two quizzes without harming your grade. Think of them as free passes: you can use them to go to the beach, or you can use them when you're sick. Because this system is based on numbers, you don't need to explain why you missed class; the math will take care of it automatically. Of course, you'll still be responsible for the material discussed in class. But once you've used the two free passes, they're gone. My advice is to save them for when you're sick or need to care for a relative.

Recitation (10%). Part of becoming intimate with a play or poem is learning it by heart. For this class I will ask you to memorize two speeches and recite during office hours. Each speech must be twenty lines or longer. At least one of these speeches must be in verse. (Or they can both be in verse if you prefer.) Choose the speeches from one of the plays we are reading this semester. Grades will be assigned on the following basis: you know the speech, but stumble your way through it and don't observe the meter = C range; you know the speech letter-perfect and observe the meter, but haven't done much with pauses, emphasis, tone = B range; you know the speech letter-perfect, observe the meter, and dramatize it with your voice = A range. Don't memorize a speech you don't understand: we'll have a conversation afterward about what it means.

Staged Reading (10%). For each of the plays there will be at least two staged readings of one or more scenes. Over the course of the semester you will be asked to perform in two of these readings as an actor. Some things to consider in preparing your scenes:

- **Blocking.** Where should characters stand? How and where should they move? At what point in the action? Do the words imply gestures that are not specified in the text of the play?
- **Language.** Be prepared to talk about what the words mean. Think about where to put the pauses in your speeches. Which words are you going to emphasize? You don't need to memorize your lines, but you do need to practice them until you can read them smoothly and expressively.
- **Dialogue.** Practice your timing together.
- **Character.** Be prepared to talk about why your character says what he or she says. Think about what your face will look like while you're speaking.

In preparation, you will also type up a couple of paragraphs (250 words) about the language your (main) character uses and what you infer from it; these paragraphs are due at the beginning of your staged reading. Don't write about what your character does or even says; instead, comment on how he or she speaks. For example, what seem to be her favorite words? What words or images does he repeat?

Essays (55%). Over the course of the semester you will submit three essays; due dates are given above. The first essay will have an assigned topic (from the first act of *Midsummer Night's Dream*) and be short (only 750 words). The second essay (1,850–2,000 words) will be on some aspect (you choose) of *Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Merchant of Venice*. The third essay (1,850–2,000 words) will be on *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, or *The Tempest* (your choice).

- Essays should be typed and include a list of works cited in MLA style. (Google it for examples of the format.) Most essays for this course will have only one work cited, an edition of Shakespeare.
- When you're done, have your computer do a word count and write the result on the first page of your paper. This number should not include long quotations and the list of works cited.
- Pages should be (a) stapled and (b) numbered by computer.
- Use spell-check. If you need to review some punctuation or grammar, I recommend *Grammar in Plain English* by Harriet Diamond and Phyllis Dutwin.
- Double-space. Take pity on my eyes and use 12 point Times Roman (or a similar font of the same size).

Midterm and Final Exams. There will be no midterm or final exams in this course. However, all work for this course must be completed on or before the last day of class, Apr. 25.

Please don't read, send, or monitor **text messages** in class. Please do turn off your **cell phone ringer** before class begins. **Laptops and tablets** might be helpful in some courses, but not this one; please keep them shut during class.

Using secondary sources. By this time, you know that random web pages are not considered a reliable or authoritative source – so don't use them. Your main source for this class should be the text of Shakespeare himself; if you absolutely must consult something else, it should be a scholarly book or an article from the library databases.

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is using someone else's words or ideas in such a way that they seem your own. Give credit where credit is due; otherwise, you are cheating. If you plagiarize, expect an F for the course. All plagiarism will be reported to the university, and additional sanctions may be imposed. If you have questions about plagiarism, ask them before the paper is due. Finally, be sure that the paper you do hand in is your final draft. If it's plagiarized, and you explain that you gave me "the wrong draft," I will feel sorry for both of us, but you will still get an F for the course. So check before you turn something in and make sure it really is your final draft. Better yet, avoid plagiarism in all of your drafts.

ACCOMMODATIONS

East Carolina University seeks to comply fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students requesting accommodations based on a disability must be registered with the Department for Disability Support Services located in Slay 138 (Voice/TTY 252-737-1016).

EMERGENCIES, UNIVERSITY CLOSURES, CONTINUITY OF INSTRUCTION

If classes are postponed for any reason, I will give instructions by email. If email is not available, follow the schedule of readings in the syllabus until email service is restored.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

The requirements of this course are impossible to fulfill if you don't attend class. But I don't take roll or require that students participate in class discussion. I might invite you to comment, but I won't insist.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

For this class, you'll need to purchase five plays: *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Tempest*. I'm not picky about which text you buy; just get something with notes on the same page as the text. The Signet editions, which I've ordered from the bookstore, are good for this; so are the Folger editions. Both are cheap.

OFFICE HOURS, PHONE, EMAIL

Office: Bate 2137; office phone: 252-328-6714

Office hours: MWF 2:30–4:20 and by appointment. If you need to contact me on days when I don't have office hours, you can phone me at home. My number is listed, but please: no phone calls after 9 p.m.

Email: david@virgil.org. But instead of exchanging emails, let's have a conversation during office hours.

RESERVE

Bevington, David, ed. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. New York: Longman, 2008. PR2755 .B4 2008.

Bullough, Geoffrey, ed. *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*. 7 vols. London: Routledge, 1957–. PR2952.B8

Writing College-Level Essays about Shakespeare

1. The key to understanding Shakespeare’s characters is not their situation but their speeches: not what they “must” have felt, but what they actually say. You won’t discover their motives by imagining what it’s like to be them, only by studying their language: what they say and especially how they speak.
2. An essay is more than a list of observations. Make sure that no one could title your essay “Some Random Things I Noticed about This Play.”
3. Instead, argue a thesis: one that is *not* obvious to everyone who reads the play. Prove something that needs proving. “Two plus two equals four” is a true statement, but not a good thesis.
4. Avoid clichéd beginnings like “Authors have always…” or “Since the beginning of time…”
5. Instead, try starting your paper with a question or a problem. For example, why does *Romeo and Juliet*, a tragedy, begin with a scene of comedy? Make your reader uncomfortable with *not* knowing.
6. Adding *I think, I believe* or, worst of all, *I feel* to the beginning of a sentence doesn’t make it true. When you find yourself writing those words, it’s usually a sign that you don’t have any good evidence. Erase *I believe* and go look at the text again. You might find some evidence, or you might change your mind; either way, your argument will be stronger.
7. A modest, focused thesis that you give evidence for is more valuable than a big, vague assertion.
8. An essay that cites outside sources is not automatically better than one that only quotes Shakespeare. An essay that cites weak sources is actually worse. (Hint: most Google searches produce weak sources. Strong sources – authoritative, peer-reviewed – can be found in the university library and its journal database.)
9. If you are stumped for a topic, compare one of the plays with its known sources. What did Shakespeare change, add, or delete? Instead of just listing changes, make an argument: what do Shakespeare’s changes add up to? what is their cumulative effect? what was he aiming at?

Essays for this course will be graded on a 10-point scale according to the following characteristics:

Characteristics of an F Paper	Characteristics of a D Paper	Characteristics of a C Paper	Characteristics of a B Paper	Characteristics of an A Paper
Thin or disorganized content. You are embarrassed to turn this in for a college class, but an F is better than a zero.	Thin or disorganized content. You want at least a C, but in your heart of hearts, you hope that “average” is actually better than this; otherwise America is doomed.	Organized, consists entirely of interesting points that would not occur to someone who was just reading a plot summary.	Several interesting points (see previous) are organized to form a larger argument.	Persuasive argument draws on details of language and imagery. How things are said matters as much as what happens.
No word count or too short.	No word count or too short.	Word count >= assigned length.	Word count >= assigned length.	Word count >= assigned length.
If your college admissions essay had been written like this, you would not have been accepted to ECU.	Numerous errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation distract from content; reads like a first draft.	Essay is written in complete sentences, but paragraphs start abruptly; transition sentences are the fix.	First paragraph is an introduction to the paper as a whole. Paragraphs are sequenced to form an argument.	The writing is finely crafted, elegant as well as clean.