The main focus of this course is on the relationship between a writing system and the language it represents. Some of the things you will learn in this course are:

- Who invented the idea of writing—where, when, and how?
- Where, when, and how was the *alphabet* invented? (Not the same as the preceding question!)
- How do writing systems change over time?
- How are Egyptian hieroglyphics read?
- Is there such a thing as pictographic writing?
- How have people deciphered ancient writings?
- What writing systems been invented and used in Africa and pre-colonial America?
- Which is the most complex writing system in regular use today?
- Do Chinese characters represent ideas directly?
- How does Japanese writing differ from Chinese writing?
- In what way is Korean writing unique in the world?
- How did English spelling get to be so inconsistent?
- Can a single language be written with two different writing systems?
- Which types of writing systems are the most efficient? What would we mean by "efficient," anyway?

**Learning Outcomes**

Students will

1. understand the typology of writing systems that have existed in languages around the world and the advantages and disadvantages of each.
2. be familiar with the most important historical writing systems.
3. be able to analyze and describe the relationship between a writing system and the sounds and words of the language it represents.
4. be able to identify the patterns that exist within modern English orthography.
5. be aware of the relationships and interactions between writing systems and the cultures of the societies that use them.

**Textbooks**

Required:

Recommended:
**Requirements and Grading**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>10 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First paper</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second paper</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100 %</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Papers**

In this course you will write two research papers, of around 8 to 10 pages each, one in mid-semester and one at the end. The aims and requirements will be described later on. For each paper you must submit your proposed topic in writing for approval in advance, and a draft of the paper for my feedback. The draft must look like a completed paper, well proof-read, with appropriate format and references to your sources of information; the only difference between a draft and a completed paper is that after handing in the draft you will have additional time to read, think, add, and revise before handing in the final copy. The papers must be written in good English, be well organized, and comply with the format requirements that I will give you. The deadlines for the topic proposals, drafts, and final papers are strict, and your grade will be reduced if you miss any of them.

It is especially important to make yourself aware of plagiarism with respect to the final paper assignment. It is extremely easy for us to detect plagiarism, using internet search engines, the on-line archiving of articles, and specialized software. So be sure to write these papers in your own words and cite your sources appropriately; do not copy and paste from sources or simply paraphrase whole sections of original sources.

**Homework**

Problems will be assigned once or twice a week. Assignments will usually be discussed in class on the day they are due, and no assignment will be accepted for any reason after it has been discussed in class (other than long-term illness). However, we will drop each student’s three lowest homework grades, giving a cushion for those rare times when you just can’t get the assignment in. If you cannot come to class, you should e-mail your homework to the graduate TA before the class begins. You may, of course, hand in homework early. There may occasionally also be in-class writing assignments, which will be graded as homeworks.

**What the Homework Grades Mean**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Not handed in, or made no sense. (Equivalent to F.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Made some sense in relation to the assignment, but did not have the basic idea, or it's hard for me to tell whether it had the right idea. (Approximately D.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Had the basic idea, but not developed correctly, or a significant part is missing. (Approximately C.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Good: clearly understood the point of the assignment and carried it out well, included what was necessary. Some <em>minor</em> errors, misunderstanding, vagueness, irrelevant parts, or omissions are allowed. (Approximately B.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Excellent: a complete and correct execution of the assignment; clear, to the point, and concise, with no vagueness. (Approximately A.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 Superb: had all the qualities of a 4, and in addition had something extra and truly outstanding of your own, such as synthesis, comparison, or critique — something that wasn’t asked for or expected. This grade will be given rarely. (A++)

On the day the homework is due it will normally be collected at the beginning of the class and discussed during the period. Since you will already have handed in your work at the time it is discussed, you must keep a copy or at least detailed notes on your work, so you’ll be able to participate in the class discussion and benefit from it.

Exams
There will be a mid-term and a final exam, consisting of fill-ins, short answers, terms to define, and problems to solve; they will not be multiple choice. The final exam will also include essays, and will cover the material of the entire course.

Course web site
The course web site on Blackboard will contain copies of material that is handed out in class; occasional notes related to the lectures, such as some of the displays shown in class; and links to a variety of other web sites that relate to our topic. You should make a point of checking the site at least once a week, and it is the first thing you should do if you miss a class.

Collaboration with other students
Although we expect that students will discuss the homework assignments with each other—in fact it’s an excellent way to learn, and highly recommended—you are strictly forbidden to work together in writing up answers or to copy answers; either of these constitutes improper collusion. You may work together with other students on understanding and solving the homework problems, but then you must separate and, each student working individually, write up your own answers in your own individual way. If we find clear cases of copying or collusion on homework or exams, all the students involved will be reported to the Academic Judiciary Committee of the college.

STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY OFFICIAL NOTICES

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES (DSS)
If you have a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services (631) 632-6748 or http://studentaffairs.stonybrook.edu/dss/. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.
Students who require assistance during emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and Disability Support Services. For procedures and information go to the following website: www.stonybrook.edu/ehs/fire/disabilities/asp.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person’s work as your own is always wrong. Faculty are required to report any suspected instance of academic dishonesty to the Academic Judiciary. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty, please refer to the academic judiciary website at www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary/.

CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT
Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of Judicial Affairs any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, and/or inhibits students' ability to learn.