

## Writing a Course Description

**A course description must include the following elements:** the course number, course title, the body of the description, course requisites (if any), and credit hours in brackets [ ]. Use a period at the end of a description and to separate its different elements except for the credit hours.

**EXAMPLE: College Studies 1001. The College Experience.**

Academic and social life on college campuses. Prerequisite: 1000. [3]

**Titles of courses should convey a clear sense of the course's overall purview,** and, where appropriate, the level of instruction in a skill-based course. To conserve space in the *Undergraduate Catalog* and to facilitate the listing of titles on transcripts, course titles should be as concise as possible.

**EXAMPLE:** Instead of writing “Bedtime for Bonzo: Reagan Movies in the Fifties” or “Twiddly Dee, Twiddly Dum: Children’s Literature in the Twentieth Century,” use “Reagan Movies in the Fifties.” or “Twentieth-Century Children’s Literature.”

**EXAMPLE:** Titles that reflect appropriately the level of instruction in a skill-based course include: **Beginning** Tai Chi, **Second-Year** Russian, and **Intermediate** Filmmaking.

**Do not repeat the title of the department or program in the title of the description** unless the use of that word is essential. Use the space to convey other information about the content of the course.

**EXAMPLE:** Instead of writing “The History of American Masculinity” or “The History of Human Biological Enhancement,” use “American Masculinities” or “Superhuman Civilization” as titles. The departmental abbreviation preceding the title will identify them as history courses.

**Courses that cover a significant period of time** should designate the timeframe for the course in the first line of the body of the course description.

**EXAMPLE:** “From the seventeenth century to the present.”

**Complete sentences are not appropriate** for the telegraphic style that has been adopted for the *Undergraduate Catalog*; phrases are more effective.

**EXAMPLE: African American and Diaspora Studies 2004W. African American Children’s Literature.** From the seventeenth century to the present. Oral and written; fiction and non-fiction. Major works, writers, and genres. No credit for students who completed 2002 section 01 in spring 2015. [3]

**All descriptions should be clear and concise.** Remember that the purpose of a title or course description is to convey to general readers the content of a proposed or modified course.

**Do not repeat phrases that appear in the title in the body of the description.**

**EXAMPLE:** If a course is titled "Italian Renaissance Baskets for Domestic Use," it is redundant to have the expression "in the Renaissance" again in the description.

**Proceed from the general to the specific in describing the content of the course.** Describe the timeframe, broader concepts, and more important ideas that will be examined in the course first. List specific topics closer to the description's end.

**EXAMPLE: Classics 2230. From Late Antiquity to Islam.**

The Eastern Roman Empire from Constantine to the Arab conquests. Political, social, cultural, and religious history, including monasticism, barbarian invasions, and the changing roles of the Emperor and Church. Special attention to developments in urban life and landscape. [3]

**Avoid unnecessary words or phrases that are characteristic functions or attributes of college-level courses.**

**EXAMPLE:** "Examination of . . .," "Survey of . . .," "Study of . . .," "Analysis of . . .," "Introduction to . . .," "This course considers (or deals with) . . .," "We consider (or deal with) . . ."

**EXAMPLE:** Commonly-used descriptors such as "Comprehensive," "Detailed," "In depth," "Thorough," "Intensive," "Overview," and "Significant" should be used sparingly.

**EXAMPLE: Arabic 2200. Intermediate Arabic**

Practice and development of all language skills at the **intermediate-advanced** level. **Intensive** work in spoken Arabic with emphasis on vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and writing skills. **Advanced** grammar, modern Arabic word formation, verb aspect usage, and structure of complex sentences. Three hours of class work per week with an additional two hours per week of individual work in the language laboratory. No credit for students who have earned credit for a more advanced Arabic language course. Prerequisite: 2100. [4]

**Listing more than five terms in a series is not encouraged.**

**EXAMPLE: Anthropology 2501. Anthropology of Healing.**

**Ritual, symbols, belief, and emotion in health, illness, and therapeutic processes.**

Practices and politics of healing in western and non-western societies, including **shamanism, faith healing, ecstatic religious experience, alternative medicine, and biomedicine. Mind-body interactions, medical pluralism, relations between patients and healers, and implications for improving medical care.** [3]

**Consult the Vanderbilt University style guide** for general guidelines on appropriate grammar and style for Vanderbilt publications: [www.vanderbilt.edu/publicaffairs/styleguide.pdf](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/publicaffairs/styleguide.pdf)

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