

What are we doing?

For this assignment, each group will select a question or problem in the study of the development of modern English, conduct research on their selected question or problem, and present their findings to the class as well as in the form of a tangible product to be submitted to the instructor for evaluation. **Key objective: The in-class presentation and the tangible product must function effectively as a learning tool in the service of helping others to understand a key principle or concept associated with the history of the English language.**

Each group will select one of three format options in which to submit their tangible product: (1.) scholarly research paper, (2.) web resource, or (3.) video resource. More about this later.

Why are we doing it?

This project is an opportunity to apply the skills, theories, terminology, and other knowledge you are acquiring in English 3720 to an original project with the goal of teaching others what you have learned. It is therefore designed to (1.) help improve your own understanding of course content, (2.) result in the creation of new, original educational resources that can contribute to increased understanding for other students of the history of the English language, and (3.) develop your general academic skills, including research, analytical, writing, and presentation skills.

As most teachers know, one of the best ways to master a concept is by having to find a way to understand it well enough to teach it to others. Teachers also know that students have valuable perspectives and insights into how this understanding may best be achieved. A key objective of the collaborative project is to capitalize on both of those often untapped resources. In other words, not only can you learn a lot yourself in preparing to teach others, but you probably also have good ideas for teaching the material you are in the process of learning that might never occur to someone who has been teaching that material for many years. This means that your project can have a real and immediate impact not only on your own learning but on that of others.

How do we do it?

1. **Come up with a topic.** Start with a general topic of interest to your group and work together to develop a specific question or problem to address. Here are a few suggestions for how to get started, including a few ideas for topics. Please note, though, that your group is under no obligation to use any of the suggestions below. The topic is entirely up to the group, with the only qualifier being that **the topic must directly address the history of the English language.**

- Discuss with your group a concept that you might have struggled with initially but then figured out and mastered (such as IPA transcription, the Indo-European hypothesis, the First Consonant Shift, articulatory descriptions, or the characteristics of analytic and synthetic grammatical systems, just to give a few examples). Choose one to focus on and think about how you came to your understanding. How can your group use its project to help others come to their own understanding?
- We've mentioned in class that teachers and students sometimes struggle with the tension between the way language works (i.e. the descriptive-linguistic approach to language study) and the prescriptive rules that are sometimes at odds with what is possible and/or logical linguistically.

Teachers are expected to advocate and enforce prescriptive rules (e.g. prohibitions against multiple negation and ending sentences with prepositions), often without knowing exactly why these rules exist, and speakers and especially writers are expected to follow them. How can these seemingly oppositional positions be reconciled? How might knowledge of the history of the English language be deployed in educational settings to help alleviate some of the confusion?

- English spelling comes in for a lot of criticism, much of it well deserved. Beginning with the fixing of English spelling in the Early Modern English era, many attempts have been made over the centuries to reform the spelling system. In the context of the history of fixed spelling and historical attempts at reform, help your audience understand how they can improve their spelling abilities within the current system, or conversely, make a case for spelling reform, including a plan for how it could best be accomplished and institutionalized.
- Change is a natural state for all living languages, but for some reason, there is often a lot of resistance to change and even fear that it constitutes “corruption” of the language. How might an understanding of the history of the English language assuage such concerns, or at least make the case that resistance is futile?
- The divisions and periodization of the development of modern English are to some extent arbitrary; that is, they are based largely on external – social, historical, political, or otherwise non-linguistic – factors. An interesting project might make a case for an alternative method for periodization, or it might propose a way to come to terms with the way it is generally done now (including in this course), or it could even make an argument in favor of an alternative approach that completely rejects designations such as “Old English,” “Middle English,” etc.

2. **Do your research.** Once you have selected a topic, familiarize yourselves with published scholarship on it. To keep from re-inventing the wheel and to establish their own credibility, researchers need to know the work that has already been done on their topic. This means consulting journal articles and books at every stage of the project. Your work must be informed by existing scholarship on the topic.

3. **Decide on a format.** Think about the best medium to use to teach your topic as well as about the individual and collective strengths and talents of your group. Each of the three format options comes with its own sets of challenges and rewards, so be sure your group makes a thoughtful and well-informed decision.

4. **Get to work.** Conduct research by reading extensively, discuss what you learn with your group, refine your topic, and consult frequently with the instructor.

5. **Put it all together:** Create and refine the final product. See below for specific guidelines and expectations.

What about deliverables and deadlines?

1. Collaborative Project Group Agreement (due Wednesday, March 23). Each group is required to develop and sign an agreement that will govern the distribution of labor and that outlines the group’s collective expectations for communication and other procedures. (Supporting material will be provided for guidance.)

2. In-class presentation (Monday, April 18, and Wednesday, April 20): Groups will present their projects to the class during the last week of classes. Each group will be allotted **25 minutes**, which includes presentation and Q & A. We will determine the presentation schedule – which groups will present on Monday and which will present on Wednesday – at least a week in advance.

3. Tangible product for evaluation (due electronically by midnight on Thursday, April 21): Each group is required to submit a tangible final product and may select from the format options listed below. **Regardless of the format your group selects, your final product must demonstrate clear mastery of course material and rigorous consultation with appropriate published scholarship on the project topic.**

Option A. Scholarly paper (final draft may be emailed). The requirement is a paper of journal-article quality, as appropriate at the 3000 level. A minimum 6-8 pages of text is required, plus works cited page. All the usual criteria for academic writing are in effect, and I will be happy to go over these with you and your group at any point during the course of the project. These criteria include writing quality and clarity; originality and relevance of content; appropriate use, incorporation, and citation of source material; organization; and formatting. The paper should also be interesting, please.

Option B. Web resource (link to final version may be emailed). For web projects, all of the criteria listed above under Option A apply, but because the web is a very different medium from the scholarly paper, the standards for incorporating these elements are in some ways unique to writing for the web. If your group chooses this option, I will help you figure out how to meet the criteria while also producing a real web resource, i.e. one that is not simply a scholarly paper posted on the internet. As with Option A, the web resource should also be interesting, please.

Option C. Educational video (please upload and email link – emailing a large file like a video is likely to cause problems for both sender and recipient). A video project will clearly have to meet a somewhat different set of standards from the more print-centered format options above. For visual media such as video, elements such as writing quality and style are not going to apply in the same ways. However, mastery of course material and evidence of significant consultation with scholarly research materials are equally important. For this reason, groups selecting Option C will be required to submit a works cited list that includes brief annotations for each entry, noting how it was used in addition to the final video product. And just as with the other format options, the video should also be interesting, please.

4. Individual self- and group-evaluation survey (due electronically by midnight on Monday, April 25). Each student will receive a link (via your which email) to participate in a confidential, online survey at the end of the project. The survey will invite you to reflect on your experiences working on the project and to describe and evaluate your own contribution to the project as well as that of each member of your group. All responses will be kept confidential.

All groups should consult with me frequently during the course of the project for feedback. Since this project is a key opportunity for students to demonstrate competencies acquired in the course, my expectations are high, and success at meeting them are best achieved by way of hard work, conscientious effort, open communication, a sense of shared responsibility, and frequent consultation with the instructor.