

Course description guidelines, College of Arts & Science

The quickest way to familiarize yourself with Arts & Science course descriptions is to peruse existing course descriptions in the undergraduate catalog at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/catalogs/documents/UGAD.pdf>

A course description includes number, title, body, credit hours, and AXLE category.

COURSE TITLES

1. **Convey content.** Titles appear on transcripts, and should be informative rather than clever.
2. If a course covers a **particular time period**, include that period in the title or first phrase of the description.

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

The descriptive body for most courses is limited to 50 words. Descriptions for First-Year Writing Seminars (FYWSs) may be as long as 100 words.

1. **Use phrases, not complete sentences.**
Exception: Course descriptions for FYWSs are written in complete sentences.
2. Focus on what the course will cover, rather than what it might include.
3. Avoid repeating title words.
4. Avoid unnecessary words “emphasis on. . .” , “survey of. . .”, et al. Be brief and specific; do not say: “This course will cover . . .,” “we will discuss . . .,”.
5. Use the Oxford comma: “w, x, y, **and** z.”
6. Keep lists to a modest number. Arrange in alphabetical or chronological order.
7. For courses in language departments, state clearly if the course is taught in English: “Taught in English.”
8. Reserve syllabus details for the syllabus. Statements such as “three papers required” or “essay-based final exam” are not appropriate in a course description.

COURSE REQUISITES (BASIC INFORMATION)

Courses may require prerequisites, co-requisites, both, or neither. Requisites must be clearly stated and any requisite listed must be required, not just recommended.

Descriptions for courses taught in a language other than English must have a prerequisite to indicate the level of language proficiency required.

If having a certain skill or a background will improve students’ chances of performing well in a course, the course description may include: “Familiarity with” or “prior knowledge of [that skill or background] is expected.”

CREDIT HOURS

Credit hours are bracketed, e.g. [3]. Variable credit hours are rendered as a range, e.g. [1-3].

AXLE DISTRIBUTION CATEGORY

Every undergraduate course description must end with an AXLE designation, even if the course does not count toward AXLE. The AXLE category is listed in parentheses at the end of a description, e.g. (INT). The codes are HCA, INT, MNS, P, SBS, US, or No AXLE credit.

Courses that carry fewer than three credit hours or that are 5000-level or higher (graduate level courses) cannot count toward AXLE. In general, Special Topics and Selected Topics do not count toward AXLE.

The proposed AXLE distribution category for a course must be reasonable; a faculty member or department may be asked to provide a rationale for the proposed classification. Once an AXLE designation is decided, it cannot be changed without approval by the AXLE Implementation Committee:

<http://as.vanderbilt.edu/docs/Changing%20the%20AXLE%20category%20of%20a%20course.pdf>

Descriptions of the AXLE distribution categories appear in the “Overview of AXLE” section of the *Undergraduate Catalog*:

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/catalogs/undergrad/UGAD.pdf#ascommunity> (beginning about page 50)

REPEAT / PARTIAL CREDIT / NOT OPEN TO statements

Course descriptions should include the number of credit hours a student may receive if a proposed course is similar in content to either an existing course or a current or previous special topic offering. Options include repeat credit, partial credit, or ‘not open to. . .’. If you have questions about which option to pursue, consult Racquel Goff in the Arts and Science Office of Academic Services at 2-7937.

1. *Repeat Credit* applies only when the newly-proposed course will replace entirely the course for which it serves as repeat credit. If a student takes a course for repeat credit, the grade earned in the most recent course counts and the student earns no additional credit.
 - a. The standard language is “Serves as repeat credit for students who have earned credit for ####.”
 - b. An example of standard language for a course repeating a special topic is “Serves as repeat credit for students who have earned credit for #### section ##, offered fall 2018.”
2. *Partial Credit* should be used when the content for one course partially duplicates the content for another course. Please specify the number of credit hours a student will either forfeit for a previous course or earn for a current course.

EXAMPLE: CHEM 1602L. General Chemistry Laboratory. [Formerly CHEM 104B] Laboratory to accompany 1602. One three-hour laboratory per week. Satisfies the AXLE lab course requirement when completed with 1602. **Students who have earned credit for 1020L will forfeit credit for 1020L upon completion of this course.** Prerequisite: 1601L. Corequisite: 1602. [1] (No AXLE credit)

EXAMPLE: MATH 1100. Survey of Calculus. [Formerly MATH 140] A basic course in the rudiments of analytic geometry and differential and integral calculus with emphasis on applications. Designed for students who do not plan further study in calculus. Students who have earned credit for 1200 or 1300 will earn only one credit for this course. **Students who have earned credit for 1201 will earn only three credits for this course.** [4] (MNS)

3. *“Not open to. . .” statements* should be used when the content for one course duplicates the content for another to the extent that a student cannot earn credit for both courses; and students having one course should not seek to register for the other course. This option can also be used to prevent a student with credit for a higher-level course from earning credit for a lower-level course in the same subject.

- a. The standard language is “Not open to students who have earned credit for #####.”
- b. An example of standard language for a course repeating a special topic is “Not open to students who have earned credit for ##### section ##, offered fall 2018.”

PASS/FAIL OR GRADED BASIS ONLY

Student Option Basis: Most undergraduate courses in Arts and Science may be taken on either a graded or pass/fail basis. For these, no particular grading statement is needed. (Graduate coursework is assumed to be offered on a graded basis, and so no grading statement is needed.)

Graded Only Basis: An undergraduate course to be offered as graded only (no pass/fail allowed) has at least *one* of these characteristics specified in its proposal:

1. Group projects or assignments in which efforts of one student may affect the grade of another student.
2. Specialized, designated resources, such as lab equipment, art studio space, etc.
3. Other activities, such as individual student presentations or service work, which make an individual student’s effort an essential part of the collective pedagogy of the course.

EXAMPLE: ARA 3301. Arabic of the Qur’an and Other Classical Texts. [Formerly ARA 250] Syntactical and morphological features of Classical Arabic. Differences and similarities with Modern Standard Arabic in vocabulary usage, semantic extensions, and context; vocabulary borrowing. Texts drawn from the Qur’an, Hadith, and Sira (biographical) literature. Offered on a graded basis only. Prerequisite: 3201. [4] (INT)

EXAMPLE: CMA 2100. Intermediate Filmmaking: Alternate Forms. [Formerly CMA 175] Topics vary. Motion picture production and analysis of nonfiction and experimental forms. Development of conceptual and technical skills for making individual and collaborative film projects. May be repeated for credit more than once if there is no duplication in topic. Students may enroll in more than one section of this course each semester. Offered on a graded basis only. Prerequisite: 1500. [3] (No AXLE credit)

Pass/Fail Only Basis: Mostly restricted to internships. Consult Racquel Goff in the Arts and Science Office of Academic Services at 2-7937 if you plan to propose a course that is offered pass/fail only.

PARTICULARS OF COURSE REQUISITES (DETAILED INFORMATION)

Basic information on including requisites in course descriptions appears in section C.

1. The basic types of requisite statements used in Arts and Science courses are
 - a. **Criteria to enroll:** To limit enrollment in a course to a specific category of students such as majors, minors, or those having a certain class standing, use the following language: “Open only to history majors and minors.” “Open only to juniors and seniors.” “Open only to junior and senior history majors and minors.”

b. **Prerequisite:** Courses that a student must complete before beginning the proposed course.

c. **Corequisite:** Courses that a student must either complete before OR take concurrently with the proposed course.

2. List requisite courses offered in the same subject as the proposed course first and by number only.

3. List requisites from multiple departments or programs with requisites from the home department or program first, followed by requisites from other departments or programs. Do include the appropriate subject abbreviations for courses outside the home department.

EXAMPLE: BSCI 2520. Biochemistry. Prerequisite: 1510 and either CHEM 2212 or 2222. [3] (MNS)

4. Take care when stating complex or nested requisites. The use of both “and” and “or” in a complex requisite statement can result in ambiguity. For example: “Prerequisite: 1001 and 1002 or 1003” could be interpreted in either of two ways:

- (1001 and 1002) or 1003: A student must have completed both 1001 and 1002, or the student make take just 1003.
- 1001 and (1002 or 1003): A student must have completed 1001, and also either 1002 or 1003.

“Both/and,” “either/or,” and punctuation can make the intent clear:

- “Both 1001 and 1002, or 1003” if the first interpretation is intended.
- “1001, and either 1002 or 1003” if the second interpretation is intended.

5. Although a course may require a sequence of prerequisites, only the last is listed. Prior prerequisites are assumed.

EXAMPLE: ECON 3150. Topics in the Economic History of the U.S. Analysis of major issues and debates in American economic history. **Prerequisite: 3010.** [3] (US)

[Note: ECON 1010 and 1020 (and a semester of calculus) are prerequisites for 3010, but are not listed as prerequisites for 3150. Any student who has earned credit for ECON 3010 has also earned credit for the earlier (implied) prerequisites.]

6. The phrase “Continuation of” or “Normally accompanied by” in a course description does not mean that the course referenced in the statement is a prerequisite or a corequisite for the current course.

7. The phrase “consent of instructor” should be used in a description only if an instructor’s consent is actually required for a student’s enrollment in the course. Any instructor may waive any and all course requisites for a student who has not met them.