Roman Jakobson said:

“A linguist deaf to the poetic functions of language
and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistics
are equally flagrant anachronisms.”

Every art has a medium, and the medium of literature is language. The American educational system, designed in the nineteenth century, teaches its students almost nothing useful about English or any other language. Thus many readers, and would-be writers and critics, find they don’t really understand much about grammar, the medium of English literature; this is roughly like trying to become an artist without ever paying attention to color and shape.

This class exists to remedy this problem. In it you will learn what everybody needs to know about English grammar and how it works. Most of the course will be an introduction to 20th-Century grammar, but there will also be short units on English morphology and phonology, metaphor and idioms, negative polarity, and Grice’s Maxims. The main point is to demonstrate what structure means in terms of English, and to accustom you to noticing the structural patterns of your own and others’ English usage.

Work will include frequent 1-page writing assignments, and frequent homework, including exercises in a coursepack, some based on the textbook, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*. There will be take-home midterm and final exams.