COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Descriptions that appear on Yale Course Search must be relatively short so that readers can skim them quickly. Ideally, the course description should run between fifty and two hundred words. While this length may not do a course full justice, a well-written course description can provide an informative and interesting introduction for students trying to identify the courses they might like to take. They may be able to learn more about courses by referring to online syllabi at the outset of a term and then by narrowing down or confirming their choices in the course selection period; but their attention is drawn to a course, and their first round of selections are made on the basis of the description on Yale Course Search. It is possible to create a longer course description for the course's Canvas site.

Thus the course description ought to be as informative as space will allow. It should indicate the scope and nature of the course, a representative sampling of the topics it will cover, the approach it will pursue, and any special background it presumes. Information about papers or examinations and about the actual mechanics of a course is best conveyed in the syllabus and during the first class meeting. But any unusual feature of a course that students should be aware of, either in its format or in the background it requires, ought to be included, e.g., prerequisites, auditions, and field trips.

In addition to its currently enrolled student audience, course descriptions have a diverse set of non-Yale readers with entirely different interests. High school students who are interested in Yale use the YCPS to form an impression of the curriculum, as do high school counselors. Potential employers use course descriptions to evaluate the credentials of Yale graduates; teachers in other institutions work out norms for courses of their own from information they find on Yale Course Search. These additional functions make it important that every course in Yale College be described in a concrete and meaningful manner.

Course descriptions and titles are sometimes edited for brevity and cogency. In keeping with YCPS style, future tense is changed into present tense and jargon is typically removed. If the editor queries the meaning or tone of a course description or title, the query is often addressed to both the DUS and the instructor. The DUS may be asked to work with new instructors to ensure clear and concise course descriptions and meaningful course titles.

See also Course Titles and Descriptions under Proposals for New Courses and for Changes in Existing Courses.