Teaching with

The Norton Anthology of

English Literature

EIGHTH EDITION

A Guide for Instructors
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Teaching with
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A Guide for Instructors

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Instructors reading this guide face a challenging and exciting task: that of shaping successful undergraduate survey courses out of the vast resources of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (NAEL). Chances are good that the scope of the course extends beyond any one instructor’s expertise; that preparation time—time to read through the mass of materials, to plan the course, to prepare individual classes and assignments—is short and that students will arrive with little or no background in literature, and skeptical about its potential for pleasure and interest. The purpose of this guide is to help instructors succeed at the task. To that end, it offers practical, focused help, from syllabi for courses using NAEL, to teaching strategies for individual authors and texts, to assistance with exam preparation, essay topics, and study questions.

Reconceived, reformatted, and substantially rewritten to make it easy to find help quickly, the guide includes the following features:

**Help with Planning and Managing Your Course** From pacing, to designing assignments, to using technology in the classroom, the first four chapters cover the pedagogic challenges—some perennial, some new to our electronic age—that teachers face in planning and managing a course. Collaboratively written by the guide authors, this material reflects decades of experience teaching undergraduates in different institutional settings.
Sample Syllabi  To help instructors envision different kinds of courses, from seminars to lectures, from a one-semester Middle Ages–Twenty-first Century survey to less rapidly paced period courses, Chapter 2 of the Guide provides ten sample syllabi.

Teaching Clusters  For each period, the guide offers several Teaching Clusters that give instructors thematic maps to navigate groups of texts. Each Teaching Cluster is described in general terms in the “Introducing the Period” section and then treated more specifically in relevant Author/Work entries. The clusters are general enough to let teachers explore their own and their students’ interests, but connected enough to convey a sense of development among the texts within them. Whether exploring recurrent themes and ideas, studying the development of particular genres, examining successive cultural moments (and the disruptions that lead from one to another), or investigating literary, cultural, or social history, the Teaching Clusters will help instructors present both the importance of a theme and the unique way each text addresses it.

Author/Work Entries are designed for reference and usually include a teaching “hook”—an idea about how to begin a class, which passages might be good to focus on, and what questions are likely to elicit interesting responses. “Quick Read” sections offer a refresher list on the basics of a literary work—brief summary, form, key passages, and the like. “Teaching Suggestions” call out interesting textual or contextual aspects of a writer’s works and offer pedagogic strategies. Discussion questions include both questions that teachers can pose in class and questions that might accompany a reading assignment. Where appropriate, the questions connect NAEL’s print and media selections.

Media Guide and Syllabus  In addition to cross-references to the NAEL media in the period chapters, the guide includes a separate chapter (Chapter 4) and syllabus suggesting ways to integrate the NAEL online topics and archive selections with the print selections and how to use these materials in traditional or distance-learning courses.

Sample Essay Topics and Exam Questions  focus on individual authors and on links and larger themes.

The guide has been a collaborative effort from start to finish. The guide authors and NAEL editors are indebted to previous guide authors, notably Alfred David, whose work is woven throughout this edition. Elizabeth Fowler, with contributions from James Simpson and Alfred David, wrote the chapter on the Middle Ages. Philip Schwyzer wrote the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Century sections and Chapter 4, “Teaching with Norton’s Online Media Resources.” Laura Runge wrote the chapters on the Restoration and the Eighteenth Century, the Romantic Period, and Chap-
ter 1, “Getting Started.” Sondra Archimedes wrote the chapters on the Victorian Age, the Twentieth Century and Beyond, and Chapter 3, “Using Technology in the Classroom.” All authors contributed syllabi and exam topics and questions. The NAEL editors advised and commented on the chapters for their respective periods.

Stephen Greenblatt  
General Editor
CONSTRUCTING YOUR SYLLABUS

Congratulations! The first step in designing a course is selecting the text, and if you are reading this you probably have already identified NAEL as your starting place. Because there is no way you could possibly teach everything in NAEL in one course, the next step is to select the literary works you want to teach and to organize them into an effective pedagogical schedule. There are, of course, many methods of selection, and the wealth of literature contained in the anthology’s pages may at first seem overwhelming. What follows are some practical suggestions to help you make choices that feel right and that take advantage of all that the anthology has to offer.

Primary Considerations

Good teaching is a product of many variables, and what works for one teacher may not always work for another. The art of teaching capitalizes on the individual strengths of the instructor. Become cognizant of your teaching style and learn to develop courses that correspond to it. For example, if you are a phenomenal orator and vastly entertaining, you probably will be an effective lecturer, and so your syllabus might contain as many works as you can adequately discuss in a class period. If you excel at leading discussions, your classes might spend an entire hour discussing the implications of a few lines of poetry. Your syllabus should be devoted to deeper coverage of fewer works.

Remember that good teaching also considers the many different learn-
ing styles of students. Some students prefer the organized, outlined lecture from which they can derive reliable notes and further their understanding of the literature on their own outside of class. Other students will be bored by this one-way flow of information; they might benefit from thought-provoking discussion questions, oral processing of information, and collaborative activities in the classroom. Some students demonstrate their mastery of the course material best by independent writing assignments outside of class, taking advantage of technologies such as discussion boards; others prefer to answer questions in class and raise points about which they are curious or uncertain. Effective teaching tries to reach as many different learners as possible, and so we recommend that you incorporate a variety of teaching strategies in your courses. Most of the Author/Work entries contain a “hook” and interesting textual issues around which to organize lectures; they also contain discussion questions and some creative assignments.

After accounting for teaching and learning styles, you will want to consider what your course should achieve or the learning objectives the students should reach when they complete your course. At this point it is appropriate to consider how you will be testing your students. The wording of your objectives depends closely on what your evaluative measures will be. Unfortunately, a full discussion of evaluation is beyond the scope of this guide. In general, you should consider how you will test or measure a student’s competency in achieving the course objectives. For example, if you want students to demonstrate knowledge of the literature of the twentieth century, you might use a series of essay exams to test their general familiarity with a wide range of texts from the period. See Chapter 12 for some sample test questions. On the other hand, if your objective is “to introduce students to the literature of the Middle Ages,” you can be satisfied that the students have met the objective if they have read the works on the syllabus. This can be evaluated through informal writing or discussion.

It is also important to consider the relationship between how you teach and what you expect the students to learn. For example, if yours is a collaborative or discussion-oriented classroom, it’s unfair to test the students on a set of received ideas that they may not have learned. Rather, you might design writing assignments that allow for independent analysis or exam questions that pick up on some of the issues that were central to class discussion. Again, you will find suggestions for assignments in Chapter 12. Most of the sample syllabi in Chapter 2 include course objectives related to the reading. Your course objectives should include expectations about skills beyond reading and comprehending, such as writing about literature, analyzing literature, and so on. These will relate specifically to the assignments you make, such as journals, bibliographies, research papers, exams, and close-reading exercises.

Most instructors who use NAEL will be teaching a survey course, but chronological scope and focus can differ widely. The first objective,
therefore, will probably include some aspect of coverage, whether it is to introduce the literature to the students or to have students demonstrate particular knowledge of it. Now the process of selection begins. It is sometimes helpful to identify objectives keyed to your interests in the range of literature for which you are responsible. Objectives that contain words that inspire your love of literature or your particular angle on literature are useful guides for selecting which texts to teach. For example, if you are interested in gender, popular culture, and class, the following might be one of your objectives: To learn about issues of gender, popular culture, and class in Victorian literature. Or, if you are particularly interested in book history: To understand the history of books and publishing as it relates to the literature of the Romantic period. Then you can choose works with themes or subjects related to your interest or that provide good examples for your teaching angle.

In other cases, however, you may have to design a course to fulfill a department’s requirements, but you can certainly make this imposed structure work with your objectives. For example, if the course must cover “major works and major authors,” you can include the objective “To become familiar with major works and major authors of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century.” Your selection of works will then conform to your understanding of what is “major.” On the one hand, this might eliminate more marginal voices from your syllabus; on the other, contrasting different types of texts might create the opportunity to explore what “major” means. Similarly, you might be expected to teach genres, in which case you might include the objective “To become familiar with the genres of epic, lyric, and romance in the literature of the Sixteenth Century.” Or epistolary novel and travel narratives; or tragedy and comedy; or autobiographical writings and religious tracts—the possibilities are many. These objectives will help clarify which works to include, and they will make the syllabus seem far less arbitrary to your students.

Pacing the Course

Before you struggle in vain for complete coverage of any era, you should know that coverage is a mythic ideal. Though the NAEL editors have put together a balanced, up-to-date, and coherent anthology of English literature, they would be the first to admit that much literature lies beyond the book’s scope and purpose. The process of selection has already begun, therefore, before you start making your syllabus. As you plan your course, remember that you cannot include everything and that often the most difficult choices have to do with what not to cover. The Author/Work entries in this guide can help by giving you insights into the teaching strengths and challenges of particular texts.

The most common problem that new instructors have is trying to do too much. In general, you will be more effective in getting your students to achieve your objectives if you limit the materials you include. Keeping
in mind that different courses and teaching styles call for different reading assignments and evaluative measures, the following points may provide some practical advice for pacing your course.

You alone know how much you can teach in one class period, and this knowledge comes with experience. When you are starting out as an instructor, keep a few things in mind. Some people believe a lecture for a fifty-minute class should include no more than three major points. That is all that students are likely to take away from it. (It can be sobering to read the notes a student takes during your lectures.) Most students cannot absorb new material after fifteen minutes of lecture—if they can stay focused that long. This suggests that you might want to introduce important concepts and ideas at the beginning of class. It also suggests that you may want to break up the one-way flow of information with discussion questions and other forms of active learning. Don't let the students remain passive in their seats for too long; you may lose them.

It is ludicrous to believe that you can teach the full significance of a major work, with the possible exception of a lyric poem, in one class sitting. Consequently, you must decide what points, passages, and themes you want to highlight. The “Quick Read” sections can give you a sense of how to break down a work for teaching. You might introduce the form—mock-epic, for example—with definitions and examples from the work on the syllabus. Then you might introduce key themes and offer a lecture/discussion around the passages that develop the theme. Finally, you might conclude with discussion based on the questions you provided in advance. Keep your students engaged by presenting them with opportunities to analyze the passages or perform close readings of the lines. Be attentive to how the students are responding and learn to read their capacities so that you can push them just a little farther.

Be prepared at the start of a course to spend time on general concepts of reading and responding to literature, such as summary, paraphrase, close-reading, analysis, and evaluation. As the students become more practiced in these skills, you can move more quickly through the demonstration of them in class. Make sure the students know when you’re paraphrasing a text or breaking down a metaphor into its parts and drawing out the implications and connotations. Provide opportunities for them to model the skill in class. As the course progresses, the students should become more adept at reading the literature, and you will find that they can cover more in one class. You may want to schedule your readings accordingly, with shorter, more accessible works at the start and increasingly long or complex works later on. You can always assign more reading than you will discuss in class, but it might be productive to highlight on your syllabus which works you will be addressing at length. In part, the objective of teaching literature is to give students the skills and the desire to read more literature on their own. So, point out additional works for their pleasure, but keep the assigned readings to the maximum you can adequately discuss. You can also get students to begin active reading before the class by assigning reading questions with each work. Requiring infor-
mal responses to the reading to be submitted to a discussion board before class can facilitate active reading, prompt discussion in class, and increase the likelihood that the students are doing the reading.

Finally, you should maintain realistic expectations about how much information you can relate or solicit for any given work. If you are teaching a longer survey course covering several hundred years, attention to detail will necessarily be somewhat cursory. If you are teaching a period course, you can likely afford to spend more time on a given work. Keep in mind the objectives for the class and plan to allot a reasonable amount of time to each text. Assign sufficient material to meet the objectives without overburdening the syllabus. It is better to teach one work well than three works poorly. Also keep in mind the difficulty and length of the works you are assigning, being careful not to assign three epics or novels in succession. If you expect students to read the texts, you need to pace the class so that they have the time. You might consider bracketing complete works of substantial length with shorter poems or excerpts from NAEL. Be sure to alert the students to upcoming long works well in advance of covering them in class so that they can devote time to reading them.

Organizing the Readings

Traditionally, survey courses are organized chronologically either by author or by work. NAEL is organized chronologically by date of author's birth and date of publication, so it lends itself easily to this type of course. The guide follows suit in featuring the work of each author in the same order as the Anthology. There are obvious benefits to structuring your course this way. The students approach the literature in the same historical direction that it was produced in, so they are more likely to appreciate allusions and parodies that draw on the work of previous years. You can also feature the role of literary influence by tracing the impact of a work on following generations of writers. There are drawbacks to this structure, however. If you focus on one author per class or week, you may end up teaching a range of works written throughout the author's lifetime. The next author may have been born later but have written earlier or at the same time as the previous author. In this case, strict chronology is violated, which might be confusing. Also, publication dates do not always correspond to dates of composition, and this can affect the way you teach the poems.

Following a chronological order may also affect which authors you include. If you focus on authors and make your decision based on the overall achievement of his or her oeuvre, you may neglect some excellent pieces of literature produced by otherwise minor writers. You can include a wider variety of authors in a chronological survey if you organize the syllabus by the date of the work. However, this structure will affect the amount of biographical information you bring to each work. In this case you may be teaching several poems by different authors in one class, and so time will be spent on the works rather than on the achievements of the
individual authors. Also in this structure, a major author may appear on a syllabus at several different points in the course. Allowances need to be made for the weaknesses of each method of organization.

In general, NAEL is ideally arranged for a chronological survey. The detailed introductions to each historical period, including a helpful timeline, provide broad overviews that touch on each author and illuminate the cultural and frequently political context in which to situate the works. The headnotes to each author and before each major work provide additional biographical and historical information to round out a student’s understanding of the author’s or work’s significance in the chronology.

As practical as they may be, however, the pedagogical benefits of chronological surveys may be limited by the fact that many students fail to take their courses in chronological order. Moreover, recent literary studies place greater emphasis on cultural trends and thematic issues than on traditional studies of allusion and influence. In light of this, the organization of a survey course by theme or topic can be another productive way to teach. With this structure you can target exactly the works that address a given subject regardless of chronology or author, and so you can teach a wider range of works, including excerpts, without creating a sense of disorder. This is a particularly useful strategy for incorporating some of the newly recovered voices in literature, such as early women, Anglo-African, working-class, and colonial and postcolonial authors. Not only does this shift the focus of study from a dominant tradition of influence, where such writers presumably have little impact, but also it provides opportunities for illustrative groupings that cross chronological barriers. For example, you might cover representations of slavery in early modern Britain and include Behn’s *Oroonoko*, Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative*, and Wordsworth’s sonnet “To Toussaint l’Ouverture.” Thematic organization allows for a variety of methods of teaching. Or you might thread a thematic contrast through the course by pairing writers who represent different cultural positions, such as a male and a female, or an aristocratic and a working-class writer, or English and Celtic. Such pairings highlight the distinctive choices of individual authors and provide clear entries for class discussion. Over the course of a term, the class accumulates a fairly solid understanding of the writings from diverse cultural perspectives. For suggestions on period topics, see the Teaching Cluster suggestions in Chapters 5–11. These describe a topical focus that emerges from the period’s writings and identify different ways an instructor might expand on the theme or subject. The Teaching Clusters also list works suitable for the topic. You will find additional ideas for creative groupings in the author entries.

One may find with thematic organization, however, a lack of awareness of the actual order of literary production. You think it is obvious that Shakespeare wrote before Milton, but your students probably don’t know it. The effect is greater for writers of less fame—Jonson or Johnson, Behn, Barbauld, Bowen . . . One way to counter such confusion is to require students to keep their own timeline of the works and authors.
Given the strengths and weaknesses we've just been discussing, you may find it useful to combine approaches. You can divide the syllabus into short chronological periods within which you can address a variety of authors and works in thematic groupings. Such an organization moves away from the “major authors” approach but retains the sense of chronological order. To challenge traditional literary categories, you might pair works that in author surveys would not be taught together, such as John Webster’s *Duchess of Malfi* and Elizabeth Cary’s *Tragedy of Mariam*, or Pope’s *Epistle to a Lady* and Mary Leapor’s *Essay on Woman*. This organization benefits from the historical context provided by *NAEL*’s introductions as well as the illustrative contrasts produced by the creative pairing.

**TEACHING CLUSTERS, NORTON TOPICS ONLINE, AND IN-TEXT TOPICS**

While the organization of *NAEL* facilitates the chronological approach to literature, the guide, *Norton Topics Online*, and the anthology all have features that can aid a thematic approach. As mentioned above, this guide identifies a variety of Teaching Clusters to help you select texts for thematic treatment. In fact, you could design an entire period course around two or three clusters; for an example, see the syllabus in Chapter 2 on Romantic literature: “Innocence and the Child; Sin and the Outcast.” When planning a longer survey, you might connect Teaching Clusters from period to period, particularly when they continue a subject. For instance, one can link the clusters on religion from the Middle Ages through the Victorian era or create a series of clusters around questions of exploration and science from the sixteenth century through the nineteenth.

Often the *Norton Topics Online* complement the Teaching Clusters identified in the guide, and an instructor can incorporate additional information on context, texts, and relevant illustrations by assigning readings from the Web site or introducing them in the classroom. If this is the first survey you’ve taught, you might explore the topics suggested either in the Teaching Clusters or on *Norton Topics Online* and organize your readings around these themes.

The anthology also includes sections of “in-text topics,” which, like the Teaching Clusters, focus on issues from the literary discourse of the era. These are designed to re-create a dialogue about a pressing cultural issue, such as war and conflict (“Crisis of Authority” in the Early Seventeenth Century, “Voices from World War I” and “Voices from World War II” in the Twentieth Century) or gender issues (“Women in Power” in the Sixteenth Century, “The Gender Wars” in the Early Seventeenth Century, “Debating Women” in the Restoration and Eighteenth Century, “The Woman Question” in the Victorian period). Each in-text topic begins with a brief historical overview of the subject that offers ways to understand the significance of the works included. Many times the in-text topics include excerpts from longer works of cultural—if not always literary—
importance. In this way, the anthology is able to present significant works that would otherwise be too long for inclusion in the book. The editors have selected excerpts and works that complement one another and teach well as a group. Generally, you could devote a class to the readings in the in-text topic and bring in additional information on the subject through lecture or outside readings. The guide provides suggestions for readings and illustrations from *Norton Topics Online* that can supplement the in-text topics. Alternatively, you might use the in-text topic to introduce a subject before assigning a full-length text. For example, following the in-text topic “Literary Gothic and the Development of a Mass Readership” in the Romantic section, you could assign any one of a number of gothic novels to round out the picture suggested by the anthologized works. Each of the in-text topics has an entry in this guide, with discussion questions and suggestions for how to teach the section.