

ENGLISH 151: INTRODUCTORY WRITING

Spring 2008 MWF 1:00-1:50 20 Barret Library Section 5 4 units

Negotiating Limits: Self, Society, Nature

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REQUIRED TEXTS

- *The New St. Martin's Handbook*, Andrea Lunsford
- *The Botany of Desire*, Michael Pollan
- *Reefer Madness*, Eric Schlosser
- *Testosterone Dreams*, John Hoberman
- *Into the Wild*, Jon Krakauer

RECOMMENDED MATERIALS

- Notebook for informal and in-class writing assignments
- Computer with access to the Internet for online assignments
- Approximately \$30 for purposes of photocopying your drafts for discussion and peer-review sessions

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class doesn't ask you to think for yourself; it requires it. As part of a community of writers with shared goals and problems, your own experiences and ideas will be fodder for writing, reading, and discussion. Your first task will be a practical, collaborative exploration of how classroom boundaries are set and experienced. Together with your classmates, you will investigate the range of your personal evaluative experiences as you negotiate a self-constituting document for the class. Insights we gain from this process will then be brought to bear on other questions: How can language be both a prisonhouse, constraining our ability to comprehend and communicate, and the key to breaking out? How do societies subsume the identities of the people that comprise them? How does human interaction with nature find limits? Readings, films, and discussion will augment our experience, as we consider such specific problems as the place of performance-enhancing drugs in sports, how people and plants cultivate properties in each other, and if we can distinguish between our role in nature and a responsibility to the environment.

It will come as no surprise that the work of a writing course is writing, so most of this class will be devoted to considering just that—your writing and your classmates', as well as the work of published authors. You will be responsible for handing in a number of "final draft" assignments, as well as several other writing assignments (including rough drafts) leading up to the final draft. Expect to have some sort of written assignment due for EVERY class. These assignments might be in the form of questions based on the current reading, summaries of the reading, reactions to discussions, or preliminary drafts of final papers. (We'll talk about each assignment in class.)

As you write more, you may become aware of recurring “trouble spots” that come up in your work. I will help you identify these patterns of problems and help you work on them. I will not make a practice of editing your work; that is up to you and your classmates. But I can assure you that you won’t get it right the first time, the second time, or possibly even the tenth time. Like many human activities, writing rewards practice.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- To get credit for each final draft you submit, you must write a series of rough drafts.
- You must attend every class and actively participate in class discussions and groups.
- You must do the reading as assigned.

ASSESSMENT

Our first work will be to determine how the final grades for this class will be distributed between such possible factors as the formal essays, in-class writing, participation, and editing quizzes.

I do, however, have strong ideas on what constitutes superior writing and the characteristics that fall within various grades. While many people think evaluating writing is highly subjective – matters of taste and whatnot – the effectiveness with which writers build arguments is objectively measurable to a surprising degree. This is what you can expect:

A

An "A" paper demonstrates a superior, sustained, and consistent level of critical engagement with the issues that the writer addresses. This engagement can be seen in the following ways: The writer's understanding of the text(s), experiences, or subject matter upon which the paper is based is plausible, logical, and thoughtful. The response is thorough, exploring the issues in some depth, advancing reasonable claims, and anticipating counterclaims when appropriate. The central idea, while not necessarily expressed in an explicit thesis, is clear, and perceptive. The paper demonstrates strong reasoning throughout, supported by persuasive evidence and relevant, fully developed examples. Similarly, the paper's organization supports the development of the writer's ideas, and demonstrates effective uses of cohesive devices. The word choice is varied and precise, sentence structure is varied, and only minor errors in grammar and usage are evident.

B

A "B" paper demonstrates competence and an acceptable level of critical engagement with the issues that the writer addresses. This engagement can be seen in the following ways: The writer's understanding of the text(s), experiences, or subject matter upon which the paper is based is plausible and logical. The response is adequate, although its exploration of the issues may be lacking in some details. The central idea, while not necessarily expressed in an explicit thesis, is clear, and not already self-evident. The paper's reasoning is sound, and is based on relevant evidence. The organization of the paper supports the development of the writer's ideas. It generally demonstrates accurate and sufficient use of cohesive devices, although there may be occasional lapses. The word choice is varied and precise, and sentence structure is varied. While errors in grammar and usage may be present, they do not interfere with the reader's understanding of the text.

C

A "C" paper meets the requirements of the assignment. The writer's understanding of the text(s), experiences, or subject matter upon which the paper is based is generally plausible and logical. The response is adequate, although its exploration of issues may be lacking in some details. The central

idea, while not necessarily expressed in an explicit thesis, is clear, although it may be weakly stated. The paper's reasoning is usually sound and is supported by relevant evidence and examples. The writer's plan of organization may be occasionally compromised by insufficient or inaccurate use of cohesive devices. The word choice is varied and usually precise, and sentence structure is varied. There may be errors in grammar and usage, but they do not interfere substantially with the reader's understanding of the text. Neither do they detract significantly from the effectiveness of the paper.

ABOUT WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

I expect you to complete all class assignments on time. If you do not complete all the assignments, you cannot pass. Plan carefully to meet your deadlines. Late papers may receive a failing grade, regardless of their merits.

How you present your work is important, in this and other classes. Rough and final drafts of papers should be typed, double-spaced, in a standard font (e.g. Times) of 12-point size on white 8-1/2 by 11-inch paper. Use page numbers and staple your papers. Each essay deserves an apt title; title pages are not necessary, but please provide all relevant information (your name, the date, draft with assignment number, and title on the top of the first page of your paper).

Daily assignments, such as in-class writing, reading questions, and discussion responses may be handwritten in blue or black ink. Other than that, I encourage you to do all of your work on a computer (and make frequent back-ups), as it makes revision much easier and faster.

REVISION

We'll spend plenty of class time discussing writing processes, but it's fair to note upfront that revision is a crucial component of writing well. Writers rarely get it right the first time; good ones don't take that personally. Revision often entails drastic restructuring and/or re-conceiving an early draft. Don't get too attached to anything you write.

ATTENDANCE

Your timely attendance is required. Should you miss class or arrive late, not only will you risk missing important information, you will deprive us of your contribution to the collective process of meaning-making that is the work of this class. Many of your assignments will be based on insights drawn from class discussions or exercises. Do not miss class, and do not be late.

If illness or other factors beyond your control force you to miss a class, please let me know as far in advance as possible, and I will do what I can to help. However, making up missed work is your responsibility. If you are not in class the day an assignment is due, you are still responsible for getting your work to me on time.

If you miss four classes, your final grade will be lowered significantly. If you are more than 15 minutes late for two classes, that counts as one absence. Six unexcused absences all but ensure that you will fail this course.

GROUP WORK

We will do a lot of work in small groups. Sometimes we'll use groups to give feedback on a particular draft of your paper; sometimes we'll use them to brainstorm ideas about a paper topic. Groups may also, on occasion, report to the rest of the class on a reading selection, an idea, or an issue they have discussed or researched.