

English 151, Fall 2001
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CRITICAL READING, THINKING, AND WRITING

The purpose of this course is to encourage you to develop your own ideas, and to set them down in ways that are clear to other people. The course will not focus on any particular set of forms or conventions for writing, nor the styles and strategies favored by any particular academic subject. It will not provide you with any pre-set formulae for creating your arguments or ordering your ideas (like the "5 paragraph essay" many of us learned in high school). Instead the class aims at improving your writing in ways you can apply to any situation.

There are a number of topics covered in the reading for this course--culture, language, art, interpretation, perception--many of them linked by writer Mary Louise Pratt's idea of "the contact zone": a place where people with different cultural assumptions or values come into (sometimes violent) contact with each other. But the point of the course is not to teach you any particular lesson on these subjects. Rather, these articles will challenge your skill as critical readers and provide you with strong and often controversial arguments to respond to in your writing. I have not chosen these readings because they were "easy" or "designed for Freshmen." In fact these essays are assigned more frequently to graduate students than undergraduates, and they are read and discussed by professors and professionals in various fields. These are the kinds of texts you'll need to be able to work with, in college and after. And we will *work* with them, rereading, reacting, debating. You don't have to like or admire all these readings; in fact I sort of hope you'll dislike some of them, since strong disagreement--or any strong feeling of your own--is the best place to start from when you write. What I do expect, however, is deliberate and consistent work to understand, analyze, and critique these arguments, and to respond with your own.

COURSE MATERIALS:

David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky, eds. - *Ways of Reading* 5th edition

Jamaica Kincaid - *A Small Place*

Diana Hacker - *A Writer's Reference*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Thinking Hard: Writing well is much more a matter of daily hard work than of "genius" or "inspiration." If you want to improve your writing, don't expect any tricks or quick solutions. Think hard about the ideas that come up in readings, in class, and while you're writing. Try to see how they might apply to your own experience of the world, or how they conflict with your own experience and opinions. Develop ideas and arguments you have some passion or love or anger for and commit to writing and rewriting them, until you've worked them out in their full complexity.

Discussions in Class: Discussions are a place to experiment with ideas when you're writing. Speaking is often the beginning of writing; when you sit down to draft an essay,

you'll know where to start if you've talked through some ideas beforehand. But this only works if you are committed to developing **your own ideas**, not just saying what everyone else is saying, or parroting back what the professor tells you. Saying what you really think can be a risky thing, but that is exactly what I expect you to do.

I will also demand a respectful atmosphere where we can disagree and talk about our disagreements, without anyone fearing ridicule. Disagreements and differences in perception and interpretation are the very core of writing; if all perceptions were the same, there would be no need for writing, no need for language at all.

In-Class Workshops: In addition to discussing readings, we will spend time talking about papers written by members of the class. These will be photocopied, and the name of the author will be removed. You can expect to have one of your papers discussed at least once during the semester. The writer will remain anonymous. Again, for these sessions to be useful, you again have to be willing to say what you really think about a paper. This does not mean “slamming” it for the sake of making yourself feel superior, but in an honest way pointing out what you think is interesting or successful in a paper, and what needs more attention, and why. We’ll discuss guidelines for these sessions.

Conferences: At least three times during the quarter, you'll schedule individual 15 minute conferences with me to go over a paper you're working on. These are mandatory meetings and will usually replace one class session.

Presentations: At least once during the course, you will work together with one other person to present one of the readings and guide the class discussion on it. I will go over standards for these presentations.

Writing Assignments: All writing must be non-fiction, computer-printed or typed, double-spaced, and carefully proofread. Keep a back-up copy of everything you turn in. You'll be doing 3 kinds of papers:

1. **Reading Journals.** These are informal, 1-page papers that you'll write on each of the readings. You have two options here:
 - A. You can sit down after you finish reading an article and write down some responses and questions. Again, this is informal writing, for your own use. You can comment on *any* aspect of the thing you've read. However, if your journals confine themselves to the first paragraph of each reading, I will grow suspicious.
 - B. Alternatively, you can type up your notes on the reading, in whatever form you find it most useful to make notes, and turn these in to me. These notes might include comments on important passages, with their page number, questions about these passages, explanations of key points, etc. If you turn in reading notes, just be sure that they contain your own ideas and responses to the article: don't give me just a list of page numbers and 1-word topics.
2. **Essay Drafts.** These are formal papers where I'll ask you to develop a single clear thesis. Even if you are writing about a personal topic or experience, the purpose in these drafts will be to locate and get across the central idea you're interested in. I'll hand out written topics or direct you to questions in *Ways of Reading*.
3. **Essay Revisions.** Four times during the semester you'll revise rough drafts. This will involve not simply correcting the spelling, but actually rethinking the ideas and strategies of your draft to improve the way it presents its overall argument to a reader. This process of revision is the focus of the course, and these revised papers will make up the most important part of your grade.

Grades: I will not assign individual grades to first drafts or reading journals (although your general level of effort and attention in drafts and journals will be part of what I consider in figuring your grade for class participation). Each final revised essay will receive a grade, and overall grades for the semester will be totaled as follows:

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|--|-----|
| Essay 1 (week 2) | 15% |
| Essay 2 (week 5) | 20% |
| Essay 3 (week 10) | 30% |
| Essay 4 (week 14) | 25% |
| Overall participation, including presentations, drafts, and reading journals | 10% |

Late work: Given the amount of writing you do in this class, I don't see any point in penalizing you for a single journal entry or draft that's a day late. 1 or even 2 **ungraded** items that come in within a few days of the due date will be ok. After that, however, each late assignment will lower the grade of your next revision.

Graded revisions have to be complete and turned in on time. Late revisions will be marked down one third of a grade for each day they are late. (E.G. a "B" paper that's 1 day late would become a "B-.") If I have to return a paper to you for proofreading, it will be considered late until I get it back. If you fail to turn in any paper entirely, you will not be able to pass the course.

Attendance:

You may miss two classes during the quarter without penalty or excuse. **Missing three or more classes, for any reason, is grounds for failing the course.** If you do miss a class, it is your responsibility to keep up with any work you may have missed. If you're repeatedly late or unprepared for class—no book, haven't done the reading—don't expect to be counted as present.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

Part I: Reading, Rereading, Revising

| | Reading | Writing | Conference This Week? |
|-----------|---------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| 8/28 | Intro to <i>Ways of Reading</i> | | |
| 8/30 | Pratt | Journal | |
| 9/4 | Pratt, 2nd Reading | | |
| Wed. 9/5, | 10:00 AM on my office door | Draft of Essay 1 | |
| 9/6 | (Workshop) | | Yes |
| 9/11 | Anzaldua, "Entering..." | Journal | |
| 9/13 | - - - | Revised Essay I | |
| 9/18 | (No Class) | | |
| 9/20 | Anzaldua, "How to Tame..." | Journal | |
| 9/25 | Percy | Journal | |
| 9/27 | Walker | Journal | |
| Mon 10/1, | 10:00 AM on my office door | Draft of Essay 2 | |
| 10/2 | (Workshop) | | |
| 10/4 | (No Class) | | |
| 10/9 | - - - | Revised Essay 2 | |

PART II: INDEPENDENT READINGS AND WRITING

During the middle section of the course, weeks 7-11, you will put away *Ways of Reading* and develop a question to pursue in independent reading. You will write a series of short papers stemming from this reading and turn in a final revision of an essay in November. Emphasis will be on your presenting your own argument on the subject you've been reading about. I will provide a detailed schedule of assignments next month.

PART III: VIEWING, REVIEWING

In the final weeks of the course, we will work on Jamaica Kincaid's book-length essay *A Small Place* and on the John Sayles film *Lone Star* (1997).

Part II: Independent Reading and Writing

10/9 --- Revised Essay 2
10/11 Possible Research Question(s)

10/16 (No Class- Fall Break)

10/18 (Class Meets in Buckman, room TBA) Final Research Question

Saturday 10/20: Field Trip to Delta Blues Museum, Clarksdale, MS

10/23 Bring Search Results to Class
10/25 Finished Research Proposal

10/30 Handout on Written Argument

11/1

Fri. 11/2, By Noon at my office Draft of Essay 3

11/6 (Workshop)

11/8 (No Class)

Part III: Viewing, Reviewing

11/13 (Introduction to Film Studies) Revised Essay 3

11/15

11/20

11/22 No Class- Thanksgiving

11/27 Workshop

11/29 (No Class)

11/4 Revised Essay 4