

English 151  
Spring 2003  
Prof. J. Haas

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Or by appt.

## **Reading and Writing Popular Culture**

### **The Course**

The purpose of this course is to develop the skills needed to produce college-level writing. However, this course takes as a given that in order to be a good writer, you need to be a good reader, both of conventional texts (e.g. literature, history, philosophy) as well as the texts that surround us all the time and that we constantly “read” without even being aware that we’re doing so. These “texts” of popular culture range from movies and TV sitcoms to music, advertisements and the architecture of the shopping mall. The premise of this course is that all these signs of popular culture have meanings that go far beyond simply attracting paying customers. We will read and discuss a series of essays by cultural critics who present arguments about the meanings of different aspects of popular culture. In your writing you will be engaging with these writers—agreeing, disagreeing, or modifying their arguments—and you will also be learning from them how to read and write about the signs of popular culture.

### **Required Texts**

Maasik and Solomon, *Signs of Life in the USA*, Fourth edition  
Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference* (Fifth Edition)

### **Requirements and Expectations**

**Formal Writing:** All formal papers must be in standard college format: typed (10 or 12 point), double-spaced, with standard (1" to 1.25") margins. You will write four papers for this course. Three of them will be short (3-5pp) essays related to the course readings, and one will be a research project of 6-8 pages. For each of these papers you will be required to hand in a first draft which you will then revise. Only your final draft will be graded, but it will not be considered complete without a first draft. **You must hand in your rough draft along with all final drafts.** Late final revisions will be marked down one third of a grade for each day past due. If I need to return a paper to you for proof-reading, it will be considered late until I get it back. Papers more than a few days late will not be accepted at all. If you fail to turn in any paper entirely, you will not be able to pass the class.

**Informal Writing:** You will write four Response papers. These are one-page, single-spaced, typed responses to the reading due in class that day. These papers should be responses to what you find interesting, significant, confusing, problematic . . . in the reading. These papers may begin with a synopsis of the argument of an essay, but should aim toward something more expansive. You can feel free to use first person and personal experience in these papers. **I will not accept late Response papers.** There will also be occasional, impromptu writing in class. In-class writing assignments cannot be made up.

**Presentations:** At least once during the course you will give a brief (five-minute) presentation of one of the readings presentations. The goal of the presentation will be to address what you

think are the most important ideas and/or themes that the selection raises, make connections to other readings if relevant, isolate specific passages that you think are most important to discuss, and raise questions for the class to follow up on. You don't, by any means, have to have mastered the text. Rather, you might well begin by explaining what is confusing about the text and offering possible interpretations for the class to agree or disagree with. Make sure that your presentation is directed toward the class (not me). While you shouldn't think of the presentation as a lecture, you do need to prepare what you are going to say in advance.

During the week that your research paper is due, you will also give a brief presentation on your research.

**Participation:** You will be expected to share your ideas and questions in the discussion of readings and to work collaboratively with other members of the class on your own writing and theirs. Your participation in class should show that you have done the reading and thought about it. Make sure you come to class prepared with the day's reading in hand (as well as brain) in addition to a pen and notebook. If you show up for class without the necessary materials, I will mark you absent.

**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.

**Conferences:** You are required to meet with me in conference at least once during the course of the semester to discuss a paper in progress. Make sure you come to the conference with a copy of the draft and that you have reread it recently enough to discuss it intelligently.

**Attendance:** Much of the work of this course will take place in the classroom, in discussion, workshop, and writing exercises. You are allowed two absences without an effect on your grade. Three absences will affect your grade, and **more than three absences is grounds for failing the course**. If you do miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out what you may have missed from a trustworthy classmate and to **confirm the assignment for the next class**. If you are repeatedly late or unprepared for class, you will be counted as absent.

**Grades:** First drafts and reading response papers will receive grades of Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory and will be figured in your grade for class participation. Each final revised essay will receive a letter grade, and overall grades for the semester will be totalled as follows:

Essay 1	15%
Essay 2	20%
Essay 3 (Research Project)	25%
Essay 4	25%
Overall participation, including presentations, drafts, peer editing work, and responses	15%

## **Schedule of Assignments (subject to change as needed)**

**Thurs. 1/16:** Introductions

**Tues. 1/21:** “Thinking Well” (handout); bring in a photocopy of a piece of non-fiction writing that you think is good writing (just copy a page or two that you particularly like). Be prepared to explain—as specifically as possible—what, in your judgment, makes it good writing.

**Thurs. 1/23:** Rodriguez, “The Achievement of Desire” (photocopy); Introduction to *Ways of Reading*

**Tues. 1/28:** Fan Shen (613-622); Anzaldua, (575-582)  
RESPONSE PAPER #1 DUE

**Thurs 1/30:** “Consuming Passions (45-54); Goewey (112-121)

**Tues. 2/4:** Davis (93-100);  
FIRST DRAFT PAPER #1 DUE OUTSIDE MY OFFICE BY 4PM

**Thurs. 2/6:** WRITING WORKSHOP; Kron (101-111)

**Tues. 2/11:** Norton (63-69); Hine (84-93)  
FINAL DRAFT PAPER #1 DUE OUTSIDE MY OFFICE BY 4PM

**Thurs. 2/13:** Williams (188-193); Calfee (210-217)

**Tues. 2/18:** Devor (484-489); Wolf (515-525); RESPONSE #2 DUE  
brainstorm research topics

**Thurs. 2/20:** Blum (453-459); Scanlon (472-480) RESPONSE #3 DUE

**Tues. 2/25:** [library activity]

**Thurs. 2/27:** [library activity] FIRST DRAFT PAPER #2 DUE

**Tues. 3/4:** WRITING WORKSHOP

**Thurs. 3/6:** [library activity] FINAL DRAFT PAPER #2 DUE

**Tues. 3/11:** SPRING BREAK

**Thurs. 3/13:** SPRING BREAK

**Tues. 3/18:** Research Question Due

**Thurs. 3/20:** Field Survey Due

**Tues. 3/25:** Annotated Bibliography Due

**Thurs. 3/27:** Source Essay #1

**Tues. 4/1:** Source Essay #2

**Thurs. 4/3:** RESEARCH PROJECT DUE; Research presentations

**Tues. 4/8:** TBA

**Thurs. 4/10:** TBA

**Tues. 4/15:** TBA RESPONSE #4 DUE

**Thurs. 4/17:** Easter Break

**Tues. 4/22:** FIRST DRAFT PAPER #4 DUE

**Thurs. 4/24:** Writing Workshop

**Tues 4/29:** Awards Convocation/No Class

**Thurs. 5/2:** Final paper due

**\*\*If you would like me to mail you your final paper, include with it a self-addressed envelope with the proper amount of postage.**