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ENGL 151- 09, Critical Thinking and Writing, Fall 1998

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English 155, Section 9
MWF 1:50-2:50
Palmer 203
Office Hrs: MW 3:00-5:00 & by appt.

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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 out in ways that are clear to other people, both in spoken discussion and in writing. 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: art, history, perception, interpretation, education. 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, controversial arguments to respond to in your writing. I have not chosen these readings because they were "easy"; 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. Learning to work with these articles--and we will work with them, rereading, reacting, arguing, critiquing--will prepare you for the most difficult aspects of college work. It helps when you confront a challenging piece of writing to realize that *no one ever fully* understands a difficult reading. What most effective readers learn to do is to grasp the things they do understand when they read, and to begin building, out of these individual moments, a sense of an author's overall argument. If you can do this, you can begin talking about a writer's ideas and responding confidently with your own. You don't have to like or admire 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.

As you work to build opinions about these readings, you will be, at the same time, practicing the most fundamental skills of writing, since writing well involves the same process you go through when you read: you build a complex idea--your argument or thesis--out of a series of smaller individual ones. In writing the art of carefully ordering and explaining individual ideas, so that they lead a reader step by step to your thesis, is called rhetoric. The assignments in this class are designed to increase your rhetorical skill.

Course Materials

- David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky, eds. - *Ways of Reading*
- Diana Hacker - *A Writer's Reference*
- A dictionary - several available at the campus bookstore if you don't own one.
- A pocket folder for turning in assignment sequences.

All of these materials are required.

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.

Reading Assignments: Working with difficult reading requires that you read *actively*. Read with a pen in your hand, and make notes in the margin or on a separate sheet to record your reaction as you're reading. Mark sections of the readings that seem important to you or that you don't understand; bring these up in class, and go back to them in your second and third readings.

Good critical reading means *rereading*, just as good writing means rewriting your rough drafts to refine their rhetorical strategies. In this class I've made time specifically for second readings of each article. The readings are all short; since you don't have a lot of pages to cover, I expect you will work on these readings with care and intensity.

Discussions in Class: Class discussions are a place to experiment with ideas when you're writing. It makes it a lot easier to write when you sit down to draft an essay 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 also expect a respectful atmosphere where we can disagree and talk about our disagreements, without anyone fearing ridicule.

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.

Presentations: Once during the quarter, each of you will bring in discussion questions on the readings. You'll use these questions to lead the discussion. You'll also make a brief but formal presentation on the reading and writing you're doing during the independent research section of the course.

Writing Assignments: All writing needs to be non-fiction, typed or computer-printed, double-spaced, and carefully proofread. You'll be doing 3 kinds of writing assignments:

1. Reading Responses. These are informal 1-2 page, very quick papers that you'll write after you've read an article once. Here I'd like you to write as if you're talking to someone. You can comment on *any* aspect of the thing you've read; you can say anything it makes you think about. In general, though, students find these most useful when they try to explain to themselves what they think an author is trying to say. Try to spend no more than 15-20 minutes writing these (followed, of course, by a session of proofreading).
2. Essays - First Drafts (4 pages). These are more formal 4-page papers. The purpose of these is for you to develop a single clear argument or thesis that you feel strongly about and to get this down on paper. Even if you are writing about a personal topic or experience (which is sometimes fine), the purpose here is to locate and get across the central idea you're interested in. I'll hand out written topics.
3. Essays - Revisions (5 or more pages). Four times during the quarter 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 reading responses or to rough drafts. These are places for you to experiment with ideas and strategies for writing them. When you revise an essay, at the end of a sequence of reading and writing, you will turn in a folder with all the work you've done in that sequence, and I will assign an overall grade. I'll be looking at the quality of the intellectual work that has gone into the entire process of responding to readings, experimenting with ideas in a draft, and revising that draft.

Late papers: **Any late assignment will bring down the overall mark for that sequence by one third of a grade for each day late.** If you fail to turn in any paper entirely, you will not be able to pass the course.

I will calculate your final grade as follows:

First Revision Sequence	15%
Mid-Term Revision Sequence	20%
Revised Research Paper Sequence	25%
Final Revision Sequence	30%
Participation in class and peer groups	10%

Attendance:

You may miss three classes during the quarter without penalty or excuse. **Missing more than three classes is grounds for failing the entire course.** If you do miss a class, it is your responsibility to keep up with any work you may have missed. To be counted as present you need to have with you: book(s) assigned for that day, material for taking notes.

Schedule of Assignments

Part 1: Readings and Discussions

	Reading	Writing	Conf this week?
8/28	Freire	response	
8/31	Freire, 2nd reading		
9/2			
9/4		essay on Freire	
9/7 (no class)			
9/9			yes
9/11			
9/14		First Revision due	
9/16	Berger	response	
9/18	Berger, 2nd reading		
9/21		essay on Berger	
9/23	Walker	response	
9/25	Walker, 2nd reading		
9/28		essay on Walker	optional
9/30			
10/2			
10/5		Mid-Term Revision	

Part 2: Independent Readings and Research

During the middle section of the course, you will put away *Ways of Reading* and develop a question to pursue in independent reading. You will write a series of papers stemming from this reading, and turn in a final revision of an essay on Friday November 6. I will go over a detailed schedule of assignments in early October.

	Reading	Writing	Conferences this week?
10/5		---	
10/7		Research Question	
10/9		Research Proposal	
10/12	(Meet in Library)		
10/14	(Meet in Library)	Library Reference Assignment	
10/16	Hacker Section "M"	Library Reference Assignment	
10/19 (no class)			
10/21		(continue research)	
10/23			
10/26		3 Source Critiques and begin Presentations	
10/28		Continue Presentations	
10/30		Complete First Draft of Research Paper	
11/2		prepare drafts for workshop	yes
11/4			
11/6		Final Research Revision	

Part 3. Reading, Rereading, and Revising

In the final four weeks of the course, we will return to articles from *Ways of Reading*; I will hand out a detailed schedule early in November. Your final exercise for the course will be a revision of a paper on one of these articles. It will be due on the last day of class, Wednesday December 9, in class. There will be no final exam.

	Reading	Writing	Conferences this week?
11/9			
11/11	Limerick		
11/13	Limerick		
11/16		essay	
11/18	Douglas		
11/20	Douglas		
11/23		essay	
11/25 (no class)			
11/27 (no class)			
11/30		4 copies of draft you will revise for final paper	yes
12/2		prepare drafts for workshop	
12/4			
12/7			
12/9		Final Revision due in class	