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## ENGL 151-10, Negotiating Limits: Self, Society, Nature, Fall 2008

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| Item Type     | Syllabus  |
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| Publisher     | Memphis, Tenn. : Rhodes College   |
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## ENGLISH 151: INTRODUCTORY WRITING

Fall 2008 TuTh 11:00am-12:15pm Clough 300 Section 10 4 units

# Negotiating Limits: Self, Society, Nature

William Dolphin | 672-7687 | dolphinw@rhodes.edu  
309-B Palmer Hall | 843-3416 | TuTh 1:00-2:00 by appt.

### REQUIRED TEXTS

- *The Everyday Writer*, Andrea Lunsford
- *The Botany of Desire*, Michael Pollan
- *Reefer Madness*, Eric Schlosser
- *Testosterone Dreams*, John Hoberman
- *Into the Wild*, Jon Krakauer

### OTHER 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 assessment is constructed 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: To what extent are people and plants codependent? What are the limits of medical manipulation of athletes and average citizens? Why are some social problems solved with criminal penalties? Where are the boundaries of human interaction with nature?

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 completing 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 by consensus how the final grades for this class will be distributed between such possible factors as the formal essays, in-class writing, participation, and quizzes. We'll do quite a bit of writing and discussion investigating what makes good and bad grades as we work toward a common understanding of what will best reflect your accomplishments in this class.

I do, however, have strong ideas on what constitutes superior writing. 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. And papers that receive particular grades have remarkably similar characteristics.

This is the evaluative standard I employ:

### **A**

An "A" paper demonstrates a superior, sustained, and consistent level of critical engagement with the issues that the writer addresses. The writer's understanding of the text(s), experiences, or subject matter 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 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. The writer's understanding of the text(s), experiences, or subject matter 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 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 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**

Deadlines are important. Plan careful to meet them. I expect you to complete all class assignments on time. Late papers may not receive a grade, regardless of their merits.

How you present your work is important, in this and other classes. To receive a grade, you must submit your work 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. While title pages are not necessary, please provide all relevant information at the top of the first page of your papers: your name, the date, something indicating what stage the paper is at (e.g. Rough Draft, Revised Draft, Final), and an apt title).

I encourage you to do your written 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 you should know 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**

I expect everyone to attend every class and arrive on time. 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. Without your presence and input, this class cannot work. For everyone's sake, 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 completing that work getting it to me on time.

## **GROUP WORK**

This class requires everyone to work together. Sometimes that will mean consensus decisions by the whole class; sometimes it will be reading someone's paper or providing feedback on topic ideas. We're here to learn together and help each other be better writers, working together on challenging ideas and finding the words to describe and discuss them.