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ENG 1091G-093: Composition and Literature, Honors

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SYLLABUS
English 1091G Section 093, Fall 2007
Composition and Language, Honors
MW 4:30–5:45pm, Coleman 3150, E.I.U.

Professor: Dr. Letitia L. Moffitt
Office: Coleman Hall room 3821
Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 2:00–4:30pm, or by appointment
E-mail: ltmoffitt@eiu.edu (for questions only; do not e-mail assignments without my permission)

Objectives

In this course, students will: 1) write expository and persuasive papers throughout the semester in which paragraphs, sentences, and words develop a central idea; 2) write purposeful, adequately developed paragraphs and sentences that are direct, economical, free of ambiguity, and structurally appropriate for the ideas expressed and for the audience to whom it is directed; 3) develop skills in critical reading and listening for understanding and evaluating culturally diverse course materials and for becoming more discerning readers; 4) develop research skills, including effective use of source materials and the principles of documentation; and 5) develop the ability to evaluate, criticize and revise their own and their peers’ writing.

Text


Note: I will provide copies of other texts in class from time to time as well; if you are absent from class when I hand out one of these extra texts, it is your responsibility to get a copy. Always bring the appropriate text to class (and when in doubt, bring everything—I will not accept “but I wasn’t sure which text to bring” as an excuse for coming in empty handed).

Grading Breakdown

The top 5 grades of the following 6 papers.................................15% each; 75% total

Paper #1, Abstract—due Wednesday, September 5
Paper #2, Rhetorical Analysis—due Monday, September 24
Paper #3, Theoretical Analysis—due Monday, October 8
Paper #4, Personal Essay—due Monday, October 22
Paper #5, Research Report—due Monday, November 12
Paper #6, Research Paper—due Wednesday, December 5

Draft work and conferences for papers........................................10%

Reading quizzes, participation, and in-class activities.....................15%
Papers

I will provide specific, detailed instructions for each paper, but I won’t repeat anything I’ve already said—that is, for example, I’m not going say every single time that you must double-space; I’m going to assume you’ve learned that already (and I’ll mark you down if you haven’t). As such, refer to this syllabus whenever you write a paper, because many of your questions already may be answered here.

Drafts and conferences: For each paper, you will write a complete draft that you will bring to and discuss in a 20-minute conference with me; you also must hand in this draft with your final paper. Your cumulative draft and conference work accounts for 10% of your final grade, based on how much effort you put into your draft, your conference, and your improvements on the draft as seen in the final. This may seem like a lot of extra work (almost like writing twelve papers instead of six!) but what it really means is you can’t get away with handing in something you’ve dashed off thirty minutes before class—and that’s very much to your benefit. Believe it or not, good writing is a process, and the best writing is not simply written off the top of the author’s head but the result of many rounds of writing, rewriting, revising and editing.

Format: All papers must be typed and printed in readable font (12 pt. Times New Roman or equivalent), normal margins (1 inch top and bottom, 1.25 inches left and right), double-spaced, your name on each page, all pages numbered and fastened together with a staple (don’t do that silly corner-fold-over thing and expect the pages to stay together). Don’t get cute with margins or font size in order to stretch a too-short paper. If you are required to write three full pages, and the third page has any amount of white space, or if the paper fills three pages with a lot of repetition and “fluff,” that won’t be considered three full pages. If you run out of things to say before you reach the minimum page requirement, you need to do a lot more than just fill up the empty space; you probably need to go back and put more thought into your paper as a whole.

Editing: Final papers must be free of hand-written corrections or blobs of correction fluid, and must be thoroughly proofread. Give yourself enough time to correct any errors before you print the final version. If you have a brilliant paper that is unreadable because of grammatical, punctuation, spelling or typographical errors, no one will know or care that it is in fact brilliant.

Deadlines: Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date. If your paper is late by one day (that is, if you turn it in during the middle or end of the due date’s class, after class, or at the beginning of the following class), your grade will go down one full grade level (that is, from A to B, A- to B-, etc.). If you don’t hand in your paper at the beginning of the class following the due date, I won’t accept it and your grade for that paper will be F.

Important notes: Do not e-mail me papers without my permission, or put them in my mailbox or slide them under my office door or leave them in the classroom if I’m not there, because I might not get them this way unless you have made arrangements with me beforehand. I can’t grade a paper that you honestly tried to get to me but somehow got lost; I can only grade what actually exists, in my hands, by the deadline.

I accept no excuses for late papers, and I grant no excused extensions—not even for “good” excuses (illness/athletic event/doctor’s appointment/job interview/wedding/funeral). I am especially not interested in technological glitches (printer not working/computer ate my file/no computers available). Moreover, because only five of the six papers count toward your final grade, you essentially have a “bonus” that can be used in case you miss a deadline for whatever
reason. As such, there should be no reason for anyone to ask for an extension. You all have the
class schedule in your hands right now, so you all know when the papers are due. If you can’t
make a due date’s class, for whatever reason, get a friend to hand in your paper for you. It is not
my responsibility to get your work from you; it is your responsibility to get it to me.

I don’t make these rules to be mean, but because we are on a tight schedule and it is crucial that
you do not fall behind. If you do, you may never catch up again. Besides, handing the paper in
is the easy part; writing it is the hard part. Don’t ace the hard part only to blow the easy part.

**Participation**

Participation means more than just saying whatever you feel like saying, relevant or otherwise.
It is also more than a matter of raising your hand and saying something, anything, just to “get it
over with” in order to get a good grade. Students who come to class on time, listen to others,
help and encourage others, ask or answer questions, contribute to discussions, focus on and
engage in classroom activities—these are students who are actively participating.

**Reading Quizzes**

That got your attention, didn’t it. Don’t worry: this is really easy—if you do the reading. Each
time you are assigned a reading, at the beginning of class I will give a very short quiz (usually
only one or two questions) based on that reading. The questions will be extremely easy, such
that anyone who has read the text all the way through should be able to answer them instantly—but
anyone who hasn’t read probably won’t be able to guess. (There will also be discussion
questions on the quizzes; your answers to these won’t count as part of the quiz, but they will
count toward your participation grade and will form the basis for our study of the text.) If you
didn’t do the reading, please don’t insult my intelligence (and yours) by trying to fake an
answer—and don’t even think of copying someone else’s answer. These quizzes may seem
inconsequential, but cheating is still cheating and still gets you an F.

Final quiz grades will be on a standard percentage: 90–100% = A, 80–89% = B, 70–79% = C,
60–69% = D, lower than 60% = F. We will end up with somewhere in the neighborhood of 20
quizzes total, so this means that each grade level reflects around 2 missed quizzes. I don’t carry
my gradebook with me, and I certainly don’t memorize it, so if you want to know how you are
doing at any point in the semester, you need to keep track of everything yourself (and I’ll always
return your graded quizzes the following class so that you may do just that).

The point of all this, if you haven’t figured it out already, is to ensure that you do the reading.
Students sometimes think reading assignments don’t matter because you don’t have to hand
anything in. That is a big mistake: Reading is a crucial part of this class, and you can’t possibly
succeed if you don’t do it. Every semester a few students skip class and/or neglect to do the
reading and are shocked when they receive less than an “A” for their final grade. They shouldn’t
be shocked at all. Do the math: if you miss one quiz a week, either because you missed class or
didn’t read, you’ll end up with an “F” for your quiz and participation grade. This accounts for
15% of your final grade, so you can’t possibly get anything close to an “A.” Related to this...

**Attendance**

I will not take formal attendance for this class. HOWEVER...! If you got excited when you read
that and figured you’ll only have to show up once a month or so, think again. In every class, we
will do something that counts toward your grade, and most of these activities cannot be made up if you miss them. I will not give make-ups for reading quizzes, for example, and unless you have a time machine, you can’t possibly make up in-class activities such as discussions. Just because I don’t pass around a sign-in sheet or do a “role call” doesn’t mean that your absences won’t matter. People who understand this tend to do well in class. People who don’t…don’t.

I maintain this policy for one reason: in college, unlike high school, the point of coming to class isn’t to “get credit” for showing up. Attendance means substantially more than having a pulse. If you show up to class but then take a nap, text friends, work on assignments for other courses, talk about things that have no relevance to the class, etc., you might as well have stayed home because you aren’t really “attending,” and in fact may be annoying other students. (Look it up in Webster’s: the first definition given for “attend” is “to pay attention,” not “to be present.”)

Sometimes students who miss class are anxious to let me know that they really wanted to attend but couldn’t because of circumstances beyond their control. I understand, but the truth is, the reason you were absent doesn’t matter, because it doesn’t change the fact that you still missed what happened. I don’t want to see notes from your doctor, your coach, your parents, or anyone else, because you don’t need an “excuse” if you are absent; you need to keep up with the work. If you come up to me and announce “I was sick!” and push a doctor’s note at me, all I can say is, “Sorry; hope you feel better,” which does not mean the same thing as, “Don’t worry, it won’t affect your grade,” given that it could very well affect your grade—after all, you are now one class behind everyone else.

Related to this, if you are absent, do not simply ask me “what did I miss” and expect me to tell you in 10 words or less; I can’t condense a 50-minute class into one sentence. If you are concerned that you may fall behind because of an absence or absences, come to my office hours and we’ll see what we can do.

Again, my point here is not that you should slavishly drag yourself to class when you have a fever of 104. It is natural to expect that events may force you to miss class. My point is simply this: attend as many classes as you humanly can (and come prepared); if you miss class, for whatever reason, make sure you keep up with the work, and expect there to be consequences that range from negligible (if the absences are isolated incidents) to severe (if you make a habit of it).

Plagiarism Warning

Plagiarism means word-for-word unacknowledged copying of another writer’s work or unacknowledged paraphrasing of another writer’s ideas. This can range from something as small as copying a sentence from a website without properly acknowledging the source, all the way up to turning in someone else’s paper as your own. The minimum penalty is a grade of “F” on the assignment. In addition, you may fail the course, be placed on probation, or even be expelled.

Most students would never consider turning in a paper someone else wrote. But this is not the only way plagiarism occurs. It is important to understand that plagiarism is based not just on intent but on deed. This means that it is not acceptable to say, for example, “I didn’t mean to plagiarize; it just so happens that what I wrote sounds very similar to this source I read. I went to this website to get ideas for my paper, and what I read must have influenced me without me realizing it.” Does that sound familiar? Well, guess what: that’s still considered plagiarism, because you paraphrased someone else’s ideas without citing the source.
It is very easy to avoid this problem. First of all, most of our papers will not require research, so in these cases there is really no reason for you to look at outside sources. If you do look at any source during the writing process, even “just” a website, be aware of how influential that source may be. If you think the source may make its way into your paper in any way, whether word-for-word or as a paraphrase of an idea, cite the source using proper MLA format (we’ll go over this; ask if you’re not sure how to do this). That way, the worst you can be accused of is not following directions or using an inappropriate source (we’ll go over this as well; again, ask if you’re not sure what this means)—and you aren’t likely to get an “F” for that alone, whereas you will definitely get an “F” if you don’t cite the source.

The bottom line: absolutely do not consider plagiarizing any part of any assignment, ever. It's simply not worth it. If you are having trouble writing an assignment or meeting a deadline, or if you aren’t sure what might be considered plagiarism, please come and talk to me about it.

Extra Credit

There is none—don’t even bother asking. Every semester around Week 14, a few panicky students will realize they’re in danger getting a less-than-ideal grade and will frantically ask, “What can I do to get my grade up?” My advice is that you start asking yourself that question now; don’t wait until Week 14, because...well, duh, obviously it will be too late by then. The semester starts today, so your work begins today, not the last two weeks of class. And what exactly can you do to get your grade up? The answer, I’m afraid, is another “duh”: do the reading, come to class, pay attention, participate, put time and effort into your papers and turn them in on time.

Final Word

This is probably not the most exciting thing you’ve ever had to read, but please: Keep this syllabus! Refer to it whenever you have any questions about the class, because I guarantee you that a good half of the questions that are asked during a semester are already answered here. Do not let this document somehow fly out of your hands the second you leave the room.

Also, if you ever have questions about anything in this document (or, really, anything at all related to the class), ask them. You are responsible for doing what needs to be done in this class; it is not an acceptable excuse for you to say, “I didn’t understand what you meant so I couldn’t do the work.” If you don’t understand, find out. That’s why you’re here, after all!
Grading Criteria for Papers

Purpose:
“A” range: The essay has a clearly focused purpose and is sufficiently narrowed for a short essay.
“B” range: The essay has a fairly clear purpose and, but the writer doesn’t always consistently craft the essay toward that purpose.
“C” range: The essay has a purpose, but that purpose may be too broad.
“D” range: The essay has little clear sense of purpose; instead of focusing on a single topic, the essay jumps from one topic to another and makes no clear point.

Reasoning and Supporting Evidence:
“A” range: The writer provides specific, clear supporting details, offering enough evidence to make a point convincingly. The reasoning is valid, and there are no irrelevant details.
“B” range: Reasoning and evidence are fairly clear and appropriate but not always vivid and convincing.
“C” range: The writer’s evidence may be too general to fulfill the essay’s purpose effectively. The essay may offer a few specific details but not enough to be convincing. There may be a few irrelevant details or flaws in reasoning.
“D” range: Evidence or supporting details are few and possibly irrelevant, and there may be several flaws in reasoning.

Organization:
“A” range: The arrangement of ideas in the essay is appropriate for the writer’s subject and purpose. The introduction is engaging; the conclusion is satisfying. Transitions are effective, clear and varied. The reader can easily understand the direction of the essay.
“B” range: The essay is usually easy to follow, though introduction, conclusion, transitions and/or overall arrangement of ideas may be less than completely effective.
“C” range: Some thought has been given to the arrangement of ideas, but supporting points may not be in their best order. Introduction and/or conclusion are present but not well thought out. Lack of transitions may make the essay hard to follow.
“D” range: Organization is confusing. The reader may have great difficulty following the essay.

Writing Style:
“A” range: Writing is under the writer’s control. Wording is thoughtful, varied, and precise. The writer has obviously edited and proofread, and there are few if any grammatical, punctuation, spelling or typographical errors.
“B” range: Writing is competent, perhaps not varied and accurate enough for the “A” range, but effort is there.
“C” range: Wording is generally correct but “bland,” or perhaps the essay contains exaggerated language, wordy structures, or clichés. The essay also likely contains errors of grammar, punctuation, and/or spelling.
“D” range: Essay bears the clear markings of something the author dashed off without giving sufficient thought (typos, grammatical mistakes, redundancies).

F papers: An “F” assignment either doesn’t exist (meaning that the writer didn’t turn it in on time as specified), or did not meet any of the minimum requirements of the assignment, or was plagiarized (in part or in whole).

Note #1: An “A” grade is the top grade that can be achieved and does not simply reflect good effort; it reflects a combination of strong effort and superlative results. There are no “easy A” grades; moreover, grades you’ve gotten in other classes are irrelevant to your grades in this class. It doesn’t matter if you’ve always gotten “A” grades on your writing before; you’re being graded on your work for this class.
Note #2: All grades are final. I do not negotiate grades.