ENG 3001-007: Advanced Composition

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English 3001: Advanced Composition
(Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 1:00 to 1:50)

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Office Hours: MWF, 11:00 to 12:00, and by appointment

Textbooks:

The Blair Handbook, Fulwiler
Online! A Reference Guide to Using Internet Sources, Harnack, Kleppinger

Essays in Course Packet (available at Copy Express in the student union):

"Confronting Class in the Classroom," bell hooks
"The Reciprocal Relationship of Workplace Culture and Review," Susan Kleimann
"White Privilege and Male Privilege: Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies," Peggy McIntosh

COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
(read the following carefully; these words constitute our contract, and I will request your written agreement to them)

Goals: 3001G will enhance your understanding of academic and professional writing and give you practice in producing both. Our subject matter is the world of work, and the place of writing and ideas in the modern workplace. Because this is an advanced composition course, we will focus on honing your editorial expertise, from initiating and designing a research project to an oral presentation of your initial findings to a finished essay.

Our goals include the refinement of skills in the following areas:

1. Critical reading -- improve your ability to read critically, to question, and to evaluate what you read. In order to be a more critical reader, you have to participate in what you are reading, actively deciphering the argument in all its parts, rather than passively receiving strings of words. Active participation in this course will help to improve your ability to summarize what you read and then to evaluate the claims and assumptions on which the argument is based. Although you will be given the chance to express your own opinions frequently in this class, the process of data collection and analysis we are going to be learning is very different from simply “saying what you think” or even “presenting the facts.” Writing of all kinds is less about opinions and
facts per se and more about "reasoned arguments." Knowing the difference between these two forms of discourse is key to success in our class and in college. In my view, it's key to life too.

2. **Constructing arguments** -- improve your ability to construct your own arguments. This skill depends on your mastery of critical reading. The better reader you are, the better writer you can be. Again, one of our aims is to learn to distinguish between "opinion" and a "reasoned argument" based on carefully constructed texts, evidence, and so on.

3. **Using bibliographic research** -- improve your knowledge of how libraries work and how to use them. In addition to extensive on-site workplace research, including but not limited to interviews and observations, you will familiarize yourself with library resources (reference materials, on-line catalogues, periodical indexes, electronic databases, and librarians) and other online information. Reasoned arguments are dependent upon knowing how to find, evaluate, and then use good information. In addition to learning how to find information, you will improve your skills in using that information. You cannot make use of an article or essay if you cannot summarize its basic argument and identify how it is constructed. Therefore, using research means finding materials, and knowing how to read them and incorporate them into your own writing. Incorporating research materials includes knowledge of appropriate documentation styles, as well. There are several of these standardized documentation styles; we will be using MLA, the widely preferred format for business reports (more on this documentation style later).

4. **Collaborative learning** -- improve your ability to learn from and to teach others about your own thinking and about writing. Much of your success in this course will depend on the process of drafting and peer critiques. You will practice forming honest, thorough, and constructive critiques of your writing as well as your peers' writing, and how to make use of what you have learned from your own self-critique and that of others.

5. **Clean, smart prose** -- improve your ability to write clear and meaningful sentences, to compose organized and developed paragraphs, and to identify and address recurring grammatical or mechanical problems specific to your own writing (these vary from writer to writer). We will spend time talking about why so-called grammatical prose is so important to your success in college and in life.

**Major Writing Assignments:**

The course assignments will be divided into three major sections:

A. **The Writing in the Wild Research Project** includes:

- A formal letter confirming the arrangement at your research site.
- A formal one-page proposal for your research project.
- An informal, two-page written report on your preliminary research findings.
- A formal, analytical report (2,000+ words) on your research findings.
A formal, six-page report on the findings of your research.

B. Peer Critiques (300-500 words each):

- On a Draft Proposal
- On a Draft Formal Introductory Letter
- On an Oral Presentation
- On a Draft Formal Report

C. Self-Commentaries (300-500 words each):

- On formal letter and proposal writing
- On the oral presentation
- On the semester as a whole

You final analytic report will be based on ten to twenty hours of observation of professional writing “in the wild”; on interviews with your contact, and with at least two other participants in the writing process; and on a critical analysis of your findings based on your own research. The finished report will be at least 2,000 words long, and it will incorporate our in-class readings and include as well three cited sources that we have not discussed in class.

You will be asked to do research into several key issues relevant to writing in the workplace in contemporary society. You will be introduced to these issues through reading assignments and class discussions. Your oral presentation will explore the preliminary findings of your on-going research.

**Grades—Your final grade will be determined as follows:**

- A formal letter confirming the arrangement at your research site 10%
- A formal one-page proposal for your research project 10%
- An informal, two-page written report on the preliminary findings of your research 10%
- A formal oral report on your preliminary research findings 15%
- A formal, analytical report (2,000+ words) on your research findings 25%
- Average of three peer-critiques 10%
- Average of three self-commentaries 10%
- Miscellaneous writing assignments and class participation (including attendance) 10%

**Other matters:**

**E-Mail Activity:** Enrollment in this class requires an “EIU” e-mail account, and you must check it frequently, preferably every day, for messages pertaining to the course. You will also use this account to use your own course web site (as you’ll discover, you already have one, courtesy of EIU). E-mail is the quickest, easiest way to reach me if I am not in my office; I welcome any and all questions and comments. Getting an e-mail account is crucial for this course—if you do not send me an e-mail message at the above address by Friday, August 24 at 3:00 p.m. to confirm that you have established
an account, I will assume that you have chosen against fully participating in the
course, and I will therefore drop you. In your message, 1) describe yourself in
whatever way you choose, including your career aspirations, 2) list at least two types of
"writers in the wild" whose writing you might like to research during this semester, and
3) write a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with these course
policies and procedures.

Regarding the Writing Center: Tutoring services at the English Department’s Writing
Center are free and students may drop in or schedule appointments during working
hours. If you have had problems with grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc., I would
strongly recommend that you make use of this service.

Classroom Environment: In class, I expect all of you to participate in discussions
(class participation will be figured into your final grade). The best way to demonstrate
that you are an active, engaged, and interested reader and writer is by contributing
regularly to class discussions, and by paying close, respectful attention to what
everyone else has to say. If you have questions, no matter how simple or complicated,
go ahead and ask me, either in class or via e-mail—chances are that other people have
the same question. I do not plan to lecture in this class; I want us to contribute
together to a positive, challenging, interesting learning environment. Finally, you must
also be willing to give and receive constructive, insightful, frank criticism! I’m sure
that all of you will work very hard on your projects, but try not to let criticism of your
work hurt your feelings, and don’t hold back from offering helpful advice because you
think it might hurt someone else’s feelings. (Also, please do not chew gum or eat food
during class, activities which are too distracting to others—drinking beverages is okay.
Finally, no caps, please, but if you want to wear one, turn it backwards so I can see
your eyes.)

Attendance Policy: I will take attendance, and I expect you to attend class every day,
on time, and prepared to discuss the material listed for that day on the “daily
schedule.” If you have more than four absences this semester, your course grade will
drop a full letter grade for each absence beyond four. Also, missing a scheduled
conference meeting without prior notification will result in the automatic lowering of
your grade for the current project by ten points. Call or write to me via e-mail if you
have to miss a conference; I will do the same if I have to reschedule. Regarding
tardiness: this is a small class, so late arrivals are disruptive—if for some bizarre
reason you wish to get on my bad side, you can easily do so by developing the habit of
arriving late for class. If you will not be able to arrive for this class on time
because of other commitments, drop it and take another section. Finally, you are
responsible for all assignments, whether you attend class or not. Get the telephone
number of one or two other students in class so you can find out about missed
assignments before you come to class.

Academic Honesty: I expect you to act honestly and do your own work in this class,
and so does Eastern Illinois University. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself
with the English Department’s policy on plagiarism: “Any teacher who discovers an act
of plagiarism—The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts
of another author, and representation of them as one’s original work’ (Random House
Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.”
Major Steps in the Writing in the Wild Research Project

In this assignment you will produce five separate pieces of writing and an oral presentation:

- a formal letter confirming the arrangement at your research site
- a formal proposal for your research project
- a two-page preliminary research report
- a 10-15 minute oral presentation
- a formal, analytical report (2,000+ words) on your research findings
- a formal letter summarizing the results of your findings, thanking your contact, offering him or her the URL of the final online report, and so on.

Note that we will devote several class sessions to discussing each of these forms of writing in detail. In addition to your textbook assignments, we will be discussing several articles from the course packet. Remember that this is a semester-long research project that you must begin early in order to complete it on time. Finally, the writing of these texts will require several other documents produced in stages over the course of the semester: rough drafts, peer-critiques and self-commentaries. See your daily schedule and course policies for due dates and full details.

Step One: Identifying your research site and your writer in the wild

Part A: Identify a local workplace where substantial amounts of writing are done as a matter of routine daily practice. This could be a governmental agency, a private enterprise, a school, or even a charity or an arts organization. It would probably be a good idea to pick a site that relates to the career that you are considering. However, you may also use this opportunity to explore a kind of work or organization that you would like to know more about. Identify a worker within this site whose writing you would like to study. Although initially you can do much of this stage of your work on the telephone, or through the internet, final confirmation of your project will take the form of a formal letter. Make sure that the logistics are not too difficult—you will be making several visits to the site, and you want to find a place that is easily accessible. To complete the research for this project, you will need to conduct at least three interviews as well as at least ten hours of observation over the course of the semester. Finally, make certain that your contact as well as any other participants fully understand the scope and purposes of your study.

Part B: Writing tasks associated with step one: There are two writing tasks associated with successfully concluding part one. Once you have identified your site and your writer, you will need to write both a formal letter finalizing your access agreement with your contact, and a formal two-page proposal for review and grading. Our first conference of the semester will be devoted to discussion of the draft letter and to getting your web site up to speed, and a second will be devoted to your proposal.
Step Two: Observation and Interviews

Part A. Observations of Writing Processes

There are several kinds of observation and note taking you can do, depending on the particular context of your research site. In each case, remember that if at all possible, you need to obtain copies of all documents involved in the writing process. If you are at a meeting to observe a collaborative writing process, for example, you will want to get a copy of the agenda and other relevant documents as well as take notes on your observations. Don't forget to always record the details of the meeting too--who attended, the purposes, etc.--so that you can clearly explain the context in your reports. On the other hand, at least some writing will entail observing the practices of individuals. In this case, you have several choices. You can ask your subject to explain as he or she goes, or you can ask them to explain what they plan to do, observe, and then ask them to summarize at the end. Again, make sure to record all the relevant facts, collect copies of documents, and so on. If you have questions on these methods, talk to me.

Part B. Interviews of Writers

Depending on the progress of your study and the questions you would like to answer, you have several interviewing options. Your subjects might include: each member of a collaborative team; the writer, his or her collaborator, and the principle audience of the text; and/or the writers and their immediate supervisor. Whatever you decide, I recommend that you only do interviews once you have completed some portion of the observations. In this way you can more precisely identify who you wish to interview, thereby helping to insure that you will get information relevant to the emerging data of your study. On the other hand, interviews can also help to direct your observations and guide your reading, so don't wait to do interviews until you have fully completed observations. Your research will be most productive if you move back and forth among research methods: reading, examining documents, interviewing, and observing, letting each shape the purposes of the others.

Part C. Collection and Analysis of Texts

Again, make sure you collect copies of all relevant texts produced by your writer, either solely or in collaboration with others--in fact, you might want to collect just about all the texts you can get your hands on! Remember, this is an ongoing, evolving process, and you never know what might become central to your research concerns. Make sure you also collect all of the relevant information (author, date of composition, etc.) and spend some time looking over them and taking notes as you go.

Part D. Writing Tasks Associated With Step Two

You will also develop an oral presentation of your research project and a formal written report on your preliminary findings. The formal (preliminary) report, which will both summarize the purposes and methods of your research as well as evaluate your
findings thus far, cannot be longer than two pages. Once you have done the preliminary report and the oral report, you will likely want to return to your site to do more interviews, observations, collection of texts, and so on. Note too that you will have to move back and forth among the tasks associated with parts A, B, C, and D, depending on what you find, your own interests, the state of the project, and so on.

Step Three: the Final Report and the Concluding Formal Letter

Once you have completed the observations and the interviews and collected texts, you will complete a formal, analytical report of your findings and conclusions (2,000+ words). Don't worry about the format; I will provide you with guidelines, and the research findings will have much to do with how you decide to organize the final report. Your final report must cite at least three sources that we have not discussed in class, and that add intellectual substance to your writing; we will discuss, gather and use reliable sources of various sorts throughout the semester, keeping track of them in a working bibliography and a set of online research links. Finally, to conclude your research, you will write a formal letter thanking your contact for his or her participation, summarizing your results, and offering the URL for your online assignment index and research report.

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