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Composition 090 sections
University of Montana-Missoula-College of Technology
Autumn 2005

Office: The Writing Center Trailer
Office Hours: by appointment

In teaching writing, we are not simply offering training in a useful technical skill that is meant as simple complement to the more important studies of other areas. We are teaching a way of experiencing the world, a way of ordering and making sense of it.- James Berlin

Description

As with all first-year, college-level writing courses, a primary goal of COM 090 is to help students come to view critical thinking, reading, and writing as connected and recursive processes. The course will help students recognize these as complex practices, accomplished over a period of time with practice and instruction.

COM 090 students will use inquiry—questioning and analyzing—as a way to make meaning of another writer’s text as well as a scheme to discover and to communicate their own ideas. Students will read and construct multiple texts in a variety of genres, including electronic and visual documents.

Workload and Expectations

COM 090 will focus on reading and writing. The plan is for students to do lots of both. Reading, like writing, is a mess, recursive process. Critical reading is not a matter of reading the text, looking for the ‘answers’ to a midterm or final. Critical reading demands that students ‘converse’ with a text, a conversation—like the kind we have with each other—that is at times clear and concise and at times—and more often than not—confusing muddled. The goal of critical reading is to make meaning of a text. Students will read a variety of challenging non-fiction texts. These readings will come from a variety of sources and will be available either electronically (electronic reserve) or in hard copy (handout and COT Library Circulation Desk). There is no “traditional” text. Students will be required to bring a copy of all assigned readings to class. Options will be to print out an electronic text here on campus or from your home printer. Students will make photocopies of any readings held at the circulation desk.

A major reading goal is to use student writing as one primary text. 090 will employ workshop models with small groups and with the class. This will demand that students begin to understand and to become comfortable with the workshop process. Peer response to a writer’s draft is an essential part of the writing process. The basic aim of writing is to communicate, and sharing drafts with readers will help the writer assess a work in progress. The general purpose is for the class to offer critical responses and suggestions that will help the writer write that next draft clearly and effectively. The second value of the workshop method is its reciprocity: as reader-writers critically read

and evaluate another writer's work, they are developing language and lenses that can be used to evaluate their own writing.

Composition research argues that students develop writing proficiency by writing multiple drafts in a variety of genres. To that end, students will write extensively both in and outside of class. The writing will be informal and formal, represent a variety of genres, address issues relevant to university students, and be constructed traditionally and electronically. As stated above, 090 will employ different workshop models for responding to student writing. Workshop requires students to bring copies of a text for peer assessment. Please understand that this does not mean students must bring copies for everybody each time we workshop. We will vary the kind of workshop and the need for copies. However, at least once during the semester, each student will need to bring copies for all classmates. Most times, students will bring 2 or 3 copies for peer-editing in small groups.

Always lingering on the fringe of a writing class is the grammar demon. Do composition classes, epically a 090 class, teach grammar? Yes and no. No, it never or rarely gives grammar 'lessons.' They were deadly 50 years ago, and they are still deadly boring. Yes, there is instruction about sentence-construction and boundaries as well as about the effective use of writing conventions for clarity, conciseness, completeness, and, alas, for "correctness." Writing is not a linear process, and neither instruction nor construction begins with rules which precede words that will be systematically gathered into sentences that will then be grouped together. That's not messy and challenging and fun; that's formulaic. Writing is challenging, messy, and, yes, satisfying, but it is not linear. *This does not mean writers do not strive for arrangement that is clear, logical, and artistic.* They do. Seasoned writers want that more than anything else; they just know it does not shape itself easily into a pretty package.

Course Policies

Class participation includes class attendance and your commitment to class and peer workshop, conferences, etc. The success of our community will depend on your presence in class. Students are expected to arrive on time, stay for the entire class period, and be prepared to participate in class discussions based on the readings. You may miss two classes without penalty; any absence after two will lower your final grade by half a letter grade. (Ex: You get an A in the class, but miss 3 classes. Your final grade is A-, no questions asked.) Department policy states that your fifth absence results in an automatic failure.

Class preparation and attentiveness are also crucial factors in this class. If you have arrived to class unprepared, which is to say you haven't done your assignments or you have not brought your materials, you are essentially choosing not to be present. Therefore, **any student unprepared for class will be asked to leave and marked absent.** Similarly, students engaging in other activities during class time (i.e., talking, reading the newspaper or magazine, sleeping, etc.) will be asked to leave and marked absent.

If you must miss class, **it is your responsibility to contact a classmate to find out what you missed and what homework I assigned.** Please do not come to me and say, “I’m sorry I missed class, please tell me what you did.” This requires me to repeat my notes, usually at a time when I’m preparing our next class, and I do not like to do this.

Additionally, if you must miss class, **you are still responsible for turning in your homework on the due date and for making sure you are prepared for the next day’s class discussion.** For example, if you miss class on a Monday, you should arrange to get the notes as well as the reading and writing assignment from a classmate on Monday night in order to prepare for Wednesday’s class.

Tardiness: Please respect this class and the learning environment of your classmates by making every effort to arrive on time. In an effort to facilitate this, I have enacted the following policy: **Students arriving to class more than 15 minutes late will be marked absent, regardless of whether or not they choose to stay.** Additionally, I will request a private meeting with those students who have a chronic tardiness problem.

Computer Literacy Policy: All assignments (formal and informal) must be typed, double-spaced, in a 12-point Times New Roman font with margin of 1” or less. Although this is a writing course and not a computer course, you will be expected to work with computers for class assignments. Most specifically, you will be expected to retrieve required reading assignments via electronic reserve, while I will do my best to explain the processes, please do not expect extra time in class for any learning curve you might face with technology. Likewise, please do not expect any extensions on due dates for assignments because of technical difficulties. Back-up all work. Keep copies of all drafts of an assignment. Always keep an electronic copy of any work.

Late work: I do not accept late daily assignments for any reason, including computer malfunction. If you missed class, your late work will only be accepted if it is turned in before the next class period. (If you miss class on Thursday, you must turn in the missed work on Tuesday PLUS the assigned work for Tuesday, or I will not accept it.) Additionally, all formal papers should be turned in at the beginning of class on the day they are due. Papers will lose a full letter grade for each day they are late. A paper turned in after class on the day it is due will lose a full letter grade, as it is technically late.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is very easy to detect. It occurs when a writer appropriates or passes off someone else’s writing as his or her own. All work submitted in this class must be your own and must be written exclusively for this course. Failing to acknowledge and document sources represents the serious crime of plagiarism, and can result in an automatic failure for the course. For the potential consequences of academic dishonesty, refer to the Code of Student Conduct.