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COM 090.03: Composition

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In teaching writing, we are not simply offering training in a useful technical skill that is meant as a 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.

"Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories" James Berlin

Course 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 schema 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.

As 090 offers students strategies and behaviors intended to help them locate themselves as critical readers and writers, the course will also examine itself: despite the theories, pedagogies, institutional motives, and successes surrounding courses such as 090, this kind of 'transitional' course can, intentionally or not, marginalize new members of the academic community. Students will read responses to this issue from writing teachers as well as respond to the topic in their own writing.

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 messy, 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 and 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 and Blackboard) or in hard copy (handouts 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 photo copies of any readings held at the circulation desk.

A major reading goal is to use student writing as one of the 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.

One course goal is a semester-long endeavor: the class will read, *Breaking Clean* by Judy Blunt. This is a book-length collection of essays written by one author. Students will read the complete text and will examine both the themes addressed in the book and the craft of writing produced by the author. The class will begin reading the book shortly after the semester begins. All students are required to purchase the book. (*Breaking Clean* is available at all the local bookstores. The price will vary from $12.95 to $6.95 for a new or used edition. There are two paperback editions, either one will do.)

The use of technology is embedded in 090 classes and assumes a student's working knowledge of basic computer skills. All students are required to understand and use Blackboard and other computer programs, especially *Microsoft Word* and your email program of choice that can send and receive documents. You will need to download the most current version of *Adobe Reader*. This program is free and available on the Web. COM 090 assumes that the student is sufficiently computer-savvy to manage Backboard and the downloading and uploading of writing assignments and reading materials. There are a large number of Blackboard workshops for students, presented during the first weeks of the semester on the COT and Mountain campuses. Students have access to computer labs on both campuses. Caveat: There is no class time allotted for learning technology. Although we will quickly and incompletely discuss some general tech use for this class, responsibility for the knowledge and general management of computer technology rests with the students.

Always lingering on the fringe of a writing class is the grammar demon. Do composition classes, especially an 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." (Beware: "correctness" is a slippery and deceiving creature.) 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 be then grouped in paragraphs, and finally paragraphs corralled neatly into an essay. That's not messy and challenging and fun; that's formulaic. Writing is challenging, messy, and, yes, satisfying, but it is not linear. (If students have doubts about this, listen and map conversations in and out of classes, in the hallways, at work, and at home. No one talks in a linear manner until they are in a formal presentation mode…or angry and/or desperate.) *This does not mean that 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. (*To be clear and fair, I can only answer for my classes, but, if you want to know what my colleagues across campus and across the country say, ask me.)

One final word about 090 and the teaching of writing: inexperienced readers and writers often bring into a writing class myths and/or misconceptions about how writing is produced and how reading renders meaning. With the beginning of the semester, students will examine their perceptions about the reading and writing process. The conversation will continue throughout the semester. Misunderstandings or fallacies about reading and writing cause more damage to inexperienced readers and writers than any lack of knowing the rules could ever produce. Even experienced readers and writers…usually when tired or under a deadline…can be haunted by 'foul fallacies.' Dispelling these myths and beginning to understand what the acts of reading and writing really involve is a first and most significant step in becoming a critical thinker, reader, and writer.

…[inexperienced] writers are limited by the way they imagine writers behave and by their assumptions of how writers think.

Outcomes
An outcomes statement lists proficiencies that students should attempt to develop and/or improve during the semester. Although the list below is tailored for COM 090, it reflects UM standards for first-year writing courses.

Identity as a critical thinker, reader, and writer
By the end of the term, students should begin to:
- Connect critical thinking, reading, and writing to making meaning
- Replace writing and reading misconceptions with clear definitions and effective strategies for multiple literacies
- Understand that writers learn from reading other writers
- Develop and locate an identity as a thinker, reader, and writer in academic and professional communities

Reading
By the end of the term, students should begin to:
- improve their ability to comprehend and interact with a variety of reading material
- summarize, agree and disagree with, and question alternative points of view
- cope with ambiguity and disagreement between opposing views
- read and analyze electronic and visual texts for their rhetorical effectiveness

Writing
By the end of the term, students should begin to:
- build a repertoire of strategies for generating multiple drafts
- develop strategies for generating effective development and support of ideas
- recognize the essential nature of audience in the rhetorical process
- understand the recursive nature of writing
- to develop and define their own writing process
- understand that the writing process grows from "truth-seeking" and an awareness of writing as a social act

Assessment
For grading purposes, I do not attach percentages to the following requirements and assignments. Preparation and participation are organic elements in my teaching model; therefore, no percentage is assigned. However, a lack of preparation and participation always begets lower grades. <u>Your end-of-semester grade must reflect the level of proficiency you have reached as a writer.</u>

To this end, I will employ a basic portfolio model. With each major writing assignment (except the summary), I will give a letter grade and an assessment appropriate to the particular work. At any point during the semester, you are free to visit with me about your progress as a writer.

Although you write one-page responses and multiple drafts of major writing assignments, I will not grade all of this work. They will become a part of your portfolio for final assessment.

Portfolios: All written work must be kept in a portfolio. We will discuss the procedure for this during the first weeks of the semester.

Daily Reading Assignments and Informal Writing Assignments:
With few exceptions, there will be daily reading. Informal writing will generally require 1 or 2-page responses. Although you may not receive individual grades on these assignments, they will count toward your final grade. You will receive full credit by doing each assignment completely and thoughtfully and by turning in your daily assignments on the day they are due.

Small Group Work:
There will be generous use of small-group work environments.

Preparation and participation:
The standards and criteria that will be used to grade participation and preparation are based on the following:

- One hundred percent attendance [If unable to attend a class session due to illness or an emergency, you must arrange with another student to get the notes and be able to summarize and analyze the content of the presentation.]
- Listening carefully, taking notes, participating effectively in group discussions, and asking appropriate questions
- Consideration of community: avoidance of undue claims of time or attention from others
- Awareness of and appropriate response to the learning dynamics required in class
- Participation in peer work and teacher conferences. Attendance is mandatory at peer response sessions.

First drafts, final drafts, and final exam: You will be expected to complete at least one first draft and one final draft of each major writing assignment (along with the daily assignments) per unit throughout the semester. There will be a final exam. Refer to the finals-week schedule, and schedule holiday plans accordingly. http://cyberbear.umt.edu/

Late assignments: No late papers are expected. Exceptions by special arrangement. The grade for any approved late assignments can be subject to a penalty of going down a half grade point for every day past its due date.

The course work and assignments will include:

Blogging	Reading assignments
Journals	In-class writing
Mulitiple uses	Numerous one-page assignments
Small-group presentations	4 major writing assignments
Portfolio	Reading *Breaking Clean*

Grading
As each major writing assignment is presented in class, the class will construct an assignment/ grading rubric. For general purposes, students will need to consider the rhetorical situation for all writing assignments.

COM 090 employs a plus/minus grading system. Valid grades and their point values per credit under the traditional grading system will be:

A   4.00   A- 3.7   B+ 3.3   B 3.0   B- 2.7   C+ 2.3   C 2.0

Please verify grade values for your own records -- http://cyberbear.umt.edu/

A Board of Regents mandate requires that new freshman and other students governed by the 2005-2006 catalog must earn a C- or better in all courses used for General Education and all courses that are required for their major, option, or minor. *An exception at UM-Missoula/COT is a minimum grade of C or better is required in English Composition.*

Because students will be asked to do both expository and argumentative papers, the standards and rubrics for grading will vary. One staple of consistency will apply: the three elements of the rhetorical situation--message, audience, and writer--represent criteria connected inextricably to any act of writing

Please Note: To complicate matters—and to indicate to students the complexity of assessment and grading— all students should be familiar with the "Evaluative Criteria Used in the Upper-Division Writing Proficiency Assessment" The criteria may be viewed at the following web site:

http://www.umt.edu/provost/writingassessment/criteria.htm

Course Policies:
1.   Regular attendance is mandatory and factors into your final grade. Students are expected to arrive on time and to participate constructively in class discussion. It may be possible to perform well in some courses by simply reading the texts and taking tests, but that is not the case in writing courses. Although the reading assignments create a forum, you will come to understand the expectations for your writing through the lectures, discussions, writing activities, and peer responses that occur in class. Much of the course depends on collaborative work, so you must be present to contribute your insights as well as to receive feedback.
Attentive and active participation in class discussion and in group work are required as it is essential for accomplishing the course goals. You will be able to do this if you read the assigned material carefully and respond thoughtfully to that material. Keep current with the readings and writing assignments.
[**Please note:** Everyone suffers a certain amount of reticence when it comes to speaking to a group. Although this is a writing class, expressing your ideas as well as entertaining other points of view in a discussion forum never fails to create at least some fodder for your writing. Students are expected to take a strong interest in group discussions.]

2.   Absences: you are allowed 2 (two) absences for any reason throughout the semester. Absences beyond the two will affect your final grade. You will not be able to pass the class if you accrue more than 4 (four) absences. The bottom line: plan to attend class everyday. Save your 2 allowable absences for true emergencies. [Please be on time for class. If you do arrive late, consider the amount of class time remaining and the amount of disruption you may cause. If you are traveling between campuses, for this course, inform the instructor.]

3.   I will be available to meet with you during conferences and by appointment. You are invited to talk with me about your ideas, about comments you don't understand, about problems you're having with learning in this class. Feel free to email me. I will respond as soon as possible. If you want to discuss any specific grade, please wait 24 hours, giving yourself time to consider the assessment and your response. **Please bring all drafts (with or without grades and/or comments)** to any conference about papers/grades.

    4. All writing should follow the Modern Language Association (MLA) format. An example of MLA format and links to websites for such formatting will be available in Blackboard. Backup all work. Keep copies of all drafts of an assignment. Always keep an [electronic] copy of any work.

5. **Writing workshops will be held on the same day first drafts are due**. You will need at least two copies for these workshops. If the number of students and days of instruction permit, we may do class workshops of specific student papers.

6. Please read the policy statement on plagiarism in the University Catalogue. http://www.umt.edu/studentaffairs/CODE.htm

   In brief, plagiarism is any attempt to misrepresent another writer's work as your own. This includes scooping something off the Internet. It is expected that you will adhere to this policy. Plagiarism of any sort will result in a course grade of F and I will follow the disciplinary procedures as stated in the Student Conduct Code http://www.umt.edu/studentaffairs/CODE.htm *Students may be asked for their research or sources at any time.*

7. COM 090 is only offered for traditional grades, A-F, and I will employees the 'plus & minus' option.   No student taking COM 090 should expect to receive an incomplete.

8. Auditors of COM 0901 must meet all requirements established for traditional-grade students.

9. Reminder: The dates for the last days to drop this class with and without a refund are posted on Cyberbear: http://cyberbear.umt.edu/   Students are responsible for all academic dates and deadlines for the semester.

Disability Services: I am willing to provide accommodations for students with the proper verification from Disability Services for Students.

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Weekly Schedule

Week 1
- Reading and Reading Strategies
  - Facts and myths
  - Strategies

Week 2
- Writing & The Writing Process
  - Facts and myths
  - Strategies

Week 3 and Week 4
- Annotation and Summary
  - Strategies and techniques
  - Writing a summary
    - One as a class; one as the assignment = 2 readings

Week 5 and 6
- Remembering an event

Week 7, 8, and 9
- Analysis
- Anatomy of an argument
- Extended definition

Week 10
- "buffer" week
- Or revision week
- Or conferences

Week 11, 12, 13, and 14
- More argument
- Reading other arguments
- Analysis → Synthesis
- Op/Ed

Week (14) and 15
- Prep and revision of portfolio
- Reflective essay [use journal and bloggings]