

ENGCOMP 0006/Composition 2: Spring 2018

T/Th, 12:30-1:50 – 253 Biddle

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The design of this course is based on the premise that in order for students to become critically-minded, both as students and responsible citizens, they must understand how to “see” in a variety of ways. Over the course of the semester, you will be invited to explore a series of cultural productions via a diverse set of critical theories or analytical perspectives. Cultural productions include literature, film, popular music, advertisements, and the like – really, just about any artifact of our society, past or present, is fair game.

Practically, the course will strengthen your writing and research skills; after all, “seeing” more effectively is only part of the challenge of taking up positions regarding the world around us; you must be able to support your inferences and communicate them effectively.

Upon completion of the course, you should be able to –

- read texts critically and analytically;
- frame effective arguments;
- use library resources to obtain topically-relevant materials, both print and electronic;
- integrate the ideas of others and present those ideas effectively in your written work;
- make use of in-text citations and cite sources according to MLA conventions and,
- avoid plagiarism

### Required Texts

- Tyson, Lois. *Using Critical Theory*. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Supplemental Readings (CourseWeb)

### Assignments

The course consists of two distinct yet interrelated foci:

1. The critical reading of both primary and secondary “texts,” and the integration of said texts into a critical argument.
2. Research and research writing skills.

Based upon these two component parts, students will be required to complete the following:

1. **Readings** – Each week, as we attend to new material, students will be asked to address a series of texts. The careful consideration of these works is central to the enterprise of becoming critically-minded. Let me emphasize that you *cannot* be successful in this course without confronting the readings. With that said, it should also be noted that periodic quizzes on the readings may occur, so it is in your best interest to keep up with the assigned work.
2. **Critical Analyses** (3-4 pp.) – As students engage texts critically, they will be asked to write analyses (four) based upon each of the theories we broach. Each analysis is the students’ opportunity to explore topics of interest and showcase their ability to apply the skills and concepts presented in class (see Appendix 1).  
Note: assignment specifics will be distributed as the course unfolds.

3. **Final Research Paper** (7-10 pp.) – once students have been introduced to the various theories and have written the critical analyses described above, they will be given the freedom to select one or more theories to apply to subject matter of their choosing for an in-depth exploration of the topic. The goal of the research paper is to explore chosen subject matter, to know the current perspective that exists on the topic, to form a critical position, and to communicate it effectively to their target audience.
4. **Final Examination** – the final in-class written examination assesses students' ability to apply a theory of choice to inform a well-reasoned argument in-support of an analysis of a cultural artifact of my choosing. Essays will be composed using personal laptops; resources to inform the analysis will be provided.
5. **Presentations** – central to our discussion of each theory and its application are the group presentations. Each group will be assigned a piece of short fiction which they will analyze from one of the critical perspectives. Each group must use the theory in-question to extract meaning from their piece and share their interpretation(s) with the class (see Appendix 2).
6. **Participation** – defined as meaningful contributions to class discussion, whether it is individually or in group session. Participation also means regular attendance, which indicates your commitment to undergraduate study (see "Attendance" below).

### Attendance

You are expected to attend class every day and to have the necessary materials with you (including your textbooks and all of your work). Missing more than two classes, then, will put your grade in jeopardy. You will be penalized 5% per miss beyond two for any unexcused absences. (Imagine that you missed a total of six classes out of thirty; your final grade would be lowered by twenty percent.)

Excused absences are, of course, permissible; however, it is your responsibility to get me the proper documentation and catch up on any work you might have missed. An excused absence does not in any way excuse you from your responsibilities in the course.

### Additional Concerns

**Promptness** – In this course, as in the real world, you must turn in your work on time. All assignments are due to CourseWeb by 11:59 PM on the dates demarcated in the course schedule. Assignments will not be accepted after the due date; no excuses will be entertained.

**Appearance** – All work should be formatted according to MLA conventions and submitted in .docx format. For MLA particulars, see Lester, Ch. 10 and/or the Purdue OWL's supporting material.

**Grammar, Spelling, and Proofreading** – Your final product is only as strong as its most egregious error, so all of your documents for this course should be error-free; even your e-mail correspondence with me should be mechanically and grammatically correct. If you anticipate struggling in this respect, I can recommend some helpful resources.

**Revisions** – Since you will be receiving regular feedback on your writing, you should make a concerted effort to consider said feedback, and apply the suggestions where and when you deem them advantageous. Furthermore, you should apply the strategies of process you explored in Composition 1. As you likely discovered, good writing doesn't typically result when it is pounded out as a single draft mere hours before it is due. Pace yourself, complete multiple drafts, revise diligently, and proof carefully!

**Expectations** – In addition to the aforementioned requirements, you are expected to work until the class period has ended, to help your classmates learn via your contributions to the class and group discussions, and to spend at least ten hours per week outside of class writing and preparing.

## Grades

When grading your essays, I will be asking myself one overriding question: “Does this document clearly deliver its intended message?” (In other words, does the essay deliver the student’s critical perspective in an efficient, cogently arranged, and well-supported manner, complete with proper formatting and appropriate citations?)

To help you understand what you’ve done well and where you should focus your attention in future writings, I will be returning your paper with plenty of commentary. My remarks will help you to refine your writing as we move through the assignments. Note that I encourage additional conversation regarding your writing, both in and out of class. Please use me as a resource as often as is necessary!

Below is a general guide to how your writing will be assessed:

**A** – Superior. The document meets or exceeds the requirements of the assignment; the content is fully-developed, cogently-written and arranged; the document effectively addresses concerns of purpose and audience; the information is well organized, as is the layout; the mechanics, formatting, and grammar are correct.

**B** – Good. The document meets the objectives of the assignment, but it needs some minor improvement in content, style, organization, and/or mechanics.

**C** – Competent. The document meets the objectives, but needs significant improvement in the areas of content, style, organization, and/or mechanics.

**D** – Marginal. The document meets some of the objectives but fails to accomplish others; the content is significantly underdeveloped; the essay contains a profusion of egregious errors in mechanics/formatting.

**F** – Unacceptable. The document is severely lacking in content, does something other than what the assignment requires, or contains major or excessive errors that seriously detract from its readability.

Each of the requirements and their respective weights are listed below:

- Critical Analyses – 40% (4 x 10%)
- Research Paper – 20%
- Final Exam – 15%
- Presentations – 15%
- Participation (includes points for quizzes and my end-of-the-semester subjective evaluation of your performance) – 10%

After all coursework is assessed according to the aforementioned criteria, final grades will be computed based on the following percentages:

94 – 100	A
90 – 93	A-
87 – 89	B+
83 – 86	B
80 – 82	B-
77 – 79	C+
70 – 76	C
60 – 69	D
59 & below	F

### Plagiarism

Because of dishonesty, indifference, insecurity, or expedience, students sometimes have others do their work for them or copy material from published or cyber-sources. Whatever the reasons for doing it, the consequence of getting caught cheating or plagiarizing is the same: failure of the course and pending action by the university as outlined by the Academic Integrity Guidelines. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the university's policy on academic integrity; I recommend you investigate it thoroughly.

### Disability Accommodation

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Office of Disability Services (ODS), G-10 Student Union Building, (814) 269-7119 as early as possible in the term. ODS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

### Appendix 1 – Guidelines for Critical Reviews

The core course requirement asks that you compose four critical essays (3-4 pp.) based upon each of the four critical perspectives we will explore during the semester. During our class sessions, we will discuss each theory, explore said theory via its application to some cultural production, and hear a group presentation on a piece of short fiction (see Appendices in Tyson) that lends itself well to critical analysis. You will then choose a cultural production of your own and engage in a critical analysis via the theory in question.

In order to be successful with these assignments, consider the following:

1. Apply the appropriate critical perspective to your cultural production of choice. *Do not* engage simply describing or summarizing its characteristics.
2. Follow the assignment sheet for each of the critical reviews with care. Be sure not to leave out any important characteristics central to analyzing from the perspective in question (revert back to Tyson).
3. Develop your ideas fully. Do not simply operate at the surface level or make assumptions about what your reader knows. Be sure to provide adequate information so that the reader can clearly ascertain your meaning and is convinced of the plausibility of your analysis.
4. Revise and proof carefully. Each of your submissions should represent not only your best thinking but your best possible presentation of the material. The formatting requirements for the

- papers submitted in this course should be checked against the MLA conventions outlined in your handbook. Again review your work carefully; you need to turn in a grammatically accurate, syntactically correct piece.
5. Be sure to cite all sources, primary and secondary. Be sure to provide a citation for the primary source (if it demands one) as well as for any secondary sources used. (Note that each of the essays has a specific research requirement outlined in its respective assignment sheet. Be sure to meet or exceed that requirement.)
  6. Remember to use what you already know. Each of you have been exposed the fundamentals of argumentation at one point or another (and certainly in Comp 1). Whenever you are writing these critiques, you are essentially presenting a case for your analytical position. It is your job as a writer to take a particular point of view (your interpretation based upon how the theory informs your understanding) and share it with the reader in a convincing way. The key here is to demonstrate your view's *plausibility* to the reader. Even if a reader remains unmoved by your perspective, you still want them to feel as if your reading of the cultural production in-question is logical, intuitive.
  7. Finally, try and enjoy the experience of reading and responding to various cultural productions. Even if you have never enjoyed the act of writing analyses before, the theories will empower you to see a whole new world where you once thought little or nothing of value existed. Separate your mind from grade-related issues, at least for the moment; if you manage to find some pleasure in being critically-minded, you will reap benefits that exceed the parameters of the course.

## Appendix 2 – Guidelines for Group Presentations

The pedagogical reasoning behind the group presentations is that students learn by doing, not by passively observing. So instead of you listening to me lecture on the theories and their application, you'll be engaged in application yourself.

Here's how the presentations will work:

1. The class will be broken into four groups. Each group will help the rest of the class better understand the theory they've been assigned by completing and sharing a critical analysis of a piece of short fiction. Below are the group assignments:
  - Group 1 – William Faulkner – “A Rose for Emily” (Psychoanalytic Response)
  - Group 2 – Alice Walker – “Everyday Use” (Marxist Response)
  - Group 3 – Jewelle Gomez - “Don’t Explain” (Feminist Response)
  - Group 4 - Ralph Ellison – “The Battle Royal” (African-American Response)
2. Each group will present on the day demarcated in the Course Schedule (see the “Due” column).
3. I'm sure at this point you're wondering what you'll be presenting; allow me to clear that up for you. In each chapter, Tyson raises questions and/or issues that you'll use to guide your analysis of your assigned short story. Note that there is a subsection in each chapter that pertains to each of the four stories. Obviously, you'll only need to present on the section that applies to your assigned story. Be sure, though, to review briefly that ways in which the lens is used to read the other stories so you can offer alternative readings of your story, as well.

To illustrate, have a quick look at chapter 4, “Using Concepts from Psychoanalytic Theory to Understand Literature,” in the Table of Contents. Notice that it is broken into five sections. The first section makes an argument for the value of Psychoanalytic theory; the second section introduces the basic concepts of the theory; the third section provides a series of interpretation

exercises; the fourth section discusses application, and the fifth section provides exercises and additional resources.

Now look more closely at section three. Notice that there is a subsection for each of the five pieces of short fiction in the appendixes. Find the one that pertains to your particular story and turn to the relevant page in chapter 5. At this point, you'll want to note that the subsection that pertains to your short story begins by introducing the particular focus you'll be taking, followed by a series of questions for you to answer. *These questions are central to the enterprise of applying the theories and presenting your findings.* You'll need to revisit your story and answer these questions succinctly so you are able to present your thoughts on each.

\*Note that your presentation should NOT merely answer the questions – use the questions to *guide* your analysis, not *frame* your analysis.

4. Once you've re-read the story and answered the questions, you'll want to *meet as a group*. When you do, share your responses, argue for a unified perspective on the story, and take some notes for presentation.

*Note:* if you can't come to an agreement on how the story can be viewed via the lens in question, that's a good thing! Be sure to discuss all the perspectives and prepare to present all views, along with the rationale for each argument. Also invite ideas beyond the scope of Tyson's line of questioning. Share those, too.

5. At this juncture, you'll want to decide who will present on what. Let me point out this is not a formal presentation. I'm not looking for you to use PowerPoint or wear professional attire. You will not be penalized if you say "Umm" or "Like" occasionally. You will, however, be graded on what you (individually) have to offer. *This is not a group grade*, so if you have little or nothing to contribute, your grade will reflect your lack of investment and involvement.

With that said, you shouldn't stress over the presentations. Again, it's not a high-pressure sell. It is simply a means of encouraging student involvement and minimizing the amount of lecturing you must endure. I believe you will find it personally rewarding and engaging.