Matt Paproth
ENGL 120-003
Spring 2006
TR 2-3:15
Pull 0118

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FANER 2234
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Texts
- Anne Frank. Diary of a Young Girl. Bantam, 0553296981.

Course Description
This course provides an opportunity for students in the top ten percent of the English section of ACT or with the qualifying score on the CLEP to fulfill the six-hour Foundation Skills requirement in Composition with an Advanced Freshman Composition course. The course offers a reading and analysis of five critically important books addressed to the general reader. The books represent the following categories: autobiography; eyewitness reporting; an intellectual discipline; politics and the public good; and a book of fiction. Writing assignments involve rigorous critiques of each of the assigned books.

The focus of this class will be on understanding how and why we make the choices we do when we present an argument. We will study various methods of argumentation – though the readings are wildly different in both style and approach, each presents an argument. Through carefully reading and responding to each of the primary works, you will become familiar with analyzing and practicing various methods of argumentation.

Course Requirements
Daily responses: 20%
Essay 1: 20%
Essay 2: 20%
In-Class Presentation: 10%
Essay 3: 20%
Essay 4: 10%

Submitting Work
No late work will be accepted in this class.

Attendance
Students are required to attend all class meetings. Attendance is essential for discussion courses. For each absence over three, your overall grade will be lowered by one letter grade. I will enforce this policy, so please be aware from the start that attendance in this class is important. In addition, anyone who misses class is liable for any missed work or work not turned in on time.

Office Hours
Although I have designated office hours, it would be to your advantage to let me know ahead of time if you plan to stop by. That way I will be at my desk and prepared to meet with you about any concerns you may have regarding the class. Furthermore, e-mail is the most efficient and effective way to communicate with me outside of class. Calling my office or the English department office often results in lost messages and miscommunication. However, if you e-mail, we both have a record of your attempt to communicate with me, and I check my e-mail regularly throughout the day.
Plagiarism
Each student will receive and is expected to abide by the English Department’s official policy statement on
and description of plagiarism, which can be found on the Internet at
http://www.siu.edu/departments/english/writing/plagiarism.html. Essentially, plagiarism is the use of
someone else’s words or ideas as your own without giving the appropriate credit or without the person’s
consent to use his or her words or ideas without acknowledgment. The consequences of plagiarism can be
serious. In the work world, it can result in legal action. For student writers, it can result in a failing grade,
disciplinary reprimand, censure, probation, and even suspension or dismissal from the University.

Sexual Harassment
Sexual harassment of any kind under any circumstances will not be tolerated.

Open Door Policy
I am available to speak with you during my office hours, or at other times by appointment, about any issues,
problems, or concerns you might have regarding the class. If you and I have a disagreement and cannot settle
it to your satisfaction, you may contact my supervisor, the Director of Writing Studies, in the Writing Studies
Office (Faner 2390, 618-453-6811). Students pursuing complaints may request anonymity from the director.

WebCT
This course will operate largely through the use of WebCT. You are expected to check WebCT regularly, as I
will often announce changes to the schedule there and will post all assignments and class handouts there. If
you do not know how to use WebCT, get more information at:
http://webct.lib.siu.edu/webct/public/home.pl

Miscellaneous Debris
If you are having trouble with the writing assignments at any point during the semester, I encourage you to
visit the Writing Center, located in Faner Hall, Room 2281. They can give the kind of one-on-one instruction
that we may not have time for in class.

If a cell phone or any other electronic equipment interrupts my class, or if I see you using any such
equipment, I will ask you to leave class and you will not receive credit for the day’s classwork.

Just because your spellchecker doesn’t underline something for you, that doesn’t mean it’s correct. Read
threw your papers before turning them in.

On that note – I care about minimum page requirements. 3 ½ pages is not 4 pages. I also care about
formatting. Papers must be typed, printed in Times New Roman 12-point font, with 1-inch margins and
normal text spacing. None of this please. I will deduct points for these things, usually
10% of the grade.

No matter how nice the weather is, we won’t be having class outside… unless it’s really nice, and you really beg
me.
Writing Project 1

For this assignment, you will be writing an argumentative essay that relies heavily on personal narrative. In class we have read lengthy personal narratives by Elie Wiesel and Anne Frank through which they have presented arguments about the Holocaust. We have also read humorous essays by David Sedaris in which he presented his observations about the world and arguments about how to survive the perils of a relationship.

You will be writing an essay that uses personal narrative to support an argument. An important part of the assignment is learning to use style to support your point – in other words, write in a style that is appropriate for your subject matter. I want these to be interesting, compelling, and well written. The point: style matters.

I don’t care about page length, though the papers should be in TNR 12pt. font, double-spaced with 1-inch margins. Be sure that there is a thesis, a point, underlying the essay (though it is not necessary to state it directly).

When I grade these, I will ask myself the following questions:
- Does this essay use personal narrative as a means to present an argument (or to endorse a viewpoint)? In other words, does the underlying thesis of the piece resonate and become clear as a result of the story?
- Does the style of writing help the writer create an appropriate identity for the subject matter?
- Is this essay compelling and interesting in terms of both plot and style of writing?

Due Date: Thursday, February 9

Writing Project 2

For your second writing project (worth 20% of your grade), you are to write an analytic essay in which you in some way engage with Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and a number of other critical essays that also deal with *The Prince* (which I will assign in class). Your goal in doing this is to practice being part of a discourse community, to position your voice alongside the voices of other people who are responding to the same primary source material.

In your 5-6 page essay, you may either make a claim that uses Machiavelli’s ideas as a basis (such as the Machiavelli and Superman suggestion made in class), or make a claim specifically about Machiavelli’s ideas. Whether you use *The Prince* as the primary source of your claim (for example, “In *The Prince*, Machiavelli proposes a form of government with the self as the center…”) or as a secondary source (for example, “In Superman, Lex Luthor is based on the Machiavellian concept of authority…”), you must engage with at least two non-Machiavelli sources in the essay. Beyond that, it’s up to you.

An “A” essay will:
- Engage with Machiavelli in an interesting way
- Position itself among other critical responses to Machiavelli
- Use a formal, academic style (including MLA formatting, etc.)
- Include a properly formatted works cited page
- Be grammatically correct and all that…

Due Date: Thursday, March 2
Essay 3: Group research project

For this assignment, you will work on constructing larger arguments (similar to the type of argument made in Stephen Jay Gould’s *The Mismeasure of Man*). In your essay, you will attempt to support a claim that is too large to prove fully in the course of one chapter; in other words, you must have a thesis that is fairly difficult to prove and that requires a good deal of discussion that will be presented in a series of smaller essays/chapters.

The Groups

To accomplish this, I will break you into groups of three. Each group will design a research project with a broad scope that will eventually be turned into a 25-30 page research essay. Your cumulative essay will consist of an introduction, three “chapters”, a conclusion, and a works cited page. You will each be responsible for one chapter, and you will be graded collectively on the overall project (more on that later). If you wish, I will happily let you form groups among yourselves – if you don’t care, I will form groups randomly.

The Topics

I honestly, honestly, honestly don’t care what you write about. What I’d like, though, are topics that are broad enough to warrant the approach that you are required to take but that aren’t so broad that you can’t cover them definitively in thirty pages. I’m also requiring at least twelve sources total for the paper – how you divide those among your chapters is entirely up to you. The point is that the paper should in some way be grounded in research. It should be academic (don’t prove, for example, that your roommate sucks) and lend itself to being broken up into chunks. I will meet with groups during the brainstorming sessions and help you as much as possible in choosing your topics. Please feel free to be creative with your topics, but not so creative that the essay becomes impossible to write.

The Grading

You will receive two grades for this assignment – an individual grade (10% of your total class grade) and a group grade (10% of your total class grade). The individual grade will be for the chapter with your name on it – the group grade will be for the project as a whole. Thus, everyone in your group will receive the same group grade, but not necessarily the same individual grade. On the last day of the project, you will fill out confidential evaluations of the other members of your group.

The Presentation

On the day that your paper is due, your group will give a 15-20 minute presentation. In it, I would like you to present the main points of your argument in a creative and interesting way. Like previous presentations, I’m not requiring anything superhuman or overall complicated – just a relaxed, comfortable, confident presentation of your paper.

Due date: 4/18 (turned in during class, after your presentation)
Essay 4: Fiction

In class we will be reading Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* and several other short pieces of fiction. We will be discussing how fiction-writing differs from various other types of writing that we have read and practiced this semester. Then, as your final essay for this class, you will be writing a piece of short fiction in which you put into practice some of the techniques that we have learned.

Fiction writing is all about authorial intention – you have an idea, and you do something in order to present that idea to your audience in an interesting, original way. It’s about showing rather than telling – as opposed to academic writing, where the goal is to present your thesis clearly and prove it with evidence. Here you are allowed, even encouraged, to force your readers to work in order to uncover your meaning/intention. You will use tools like metaphor and character to help create a compelling piece of short fiction.

I don’t in any way want to stifle your creativity with this assignment, so, if you can generate your own idea for a short story, then run with it. But my idea is that we will do several in-class brainstorming activities that, hopefully, will lead you to an idea for your short story. You will then develop the in-class brainstorm into a full-fledged short story.

Now, what constitutes “short”? I really don’t care. Whether it’s two pages or eight, it’s your call. What I am asking for, however, in addition to your story, is a 1-2 page justification/explanation of your story in which you present your rationale for creating your story in the way that you created. In other words, unpack all the writerly tricks that you employ your story and justify the creative decisions that you made.

You will be graded on these two pieces of writing collectively – in other words, I’ll read your short story, then your justification, then decide on a grade. Obviously, then, your goal is to present two clean, thoughtful, polished pieces of writing.

Due date: Monday of Final’s Week; I will be in my office, Faner 2234, from 12-4PM
Essay Writing Tips

• Come up with an original, interesting title. This title does not need to be underlined, or italicized – merely centered. Be sure to check MLA Guidelines if you have questions on this (or other formatting questions).

• Purchase a dictionary of literary terms. I will give you a list in class.

• Write an identifiable thesis that makes a specific, arguable claim. If you can’t imagine someone reasonably taking the directly opposite viewpoint to yours, then you aren’t writing about an arguable thesis.

• Staple your papers. Some teachers prefer paperclips – and these are usually for longer papers – but I prefer staples.

• Be direct. Avoid the words “appears,” “seems,” “almost,” “I think,” “I believe,” etc. in sentences where they are unnecessary or where you don’t need them. Saying that a director “seems almost angry” is much weaker than saying that he/she is angry. And I know that you think these things, because you are writing them.

• Write a strong introduction and conclusion. Your argument means nothing if it is not put into context with a strong intro and conclusion. In most cases, you should spend as much time on your introduction as you do on the rest of the paper.

• Insert your name and the page number in the upper right hand corner. It’s MLA format and it makes it easier to know where I am when I’m reading your paper. If possible, remove it from the first page (though that’s admittedly difficult using MSW).

• Do not mess around with formatting. It is soooooo obvious when your paper looks different than others – this includes spacing, text size, font, and margins.

• Avoid generalizations and assumptions – these weaken your argument. If you can’t prove something with specific evidence, you probably shouldn’t be saying it.

• If you use evidence – if you go to a website, if you get an idea or a fact from someplace – then you must cite it. If not, it’s plagiarism.

• Avoid colloquial or “cute” language. Unless you are using it for a specific reason, this language is distracting and disrupts the academic tone that your essay should strive for.

• Check all your facts, including the spelling of all names, titles, and other proper nouns. Also be sure you understand terms and concepts that you refer to in your paper. If you don’t understand something, look it up. If you’re writing a film analysis paper on genre, for example, look up journals that publish film analysis essays. Read one that’s about genre.

• Do not capitalize words that do not need to be capitalized. If you’re unsure, find an online source that uses the word, and see if it’s capitalized. If it’s not, then don’t capitalize it.

• Learn about punctuation rules that you don’t know. Please, please, please learn about apostrophes. They’re really, honestly, not that difficult.

• Beware of stigmatizing errors. If you know that you have problems with things like this, visit the Writing Center or find someone knowledgeable to proofread your paper.

• Finally, proofread your papers. Do this both on the computer, where Microsoft conveniently underlines things in red or gray that need attention, and on your hard copy, where you are more likely to notice errors that the computer missed or awkward sentences that you may want to change. Read your papers aloud – you will find errors and bad sentences that you might miss when reading in your head.