English 1101: English Composition

Issues in Contemporary Media Studies, Fall 2004

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Course Description
The goal of English 1101 at Georgia Tech is to improve students' written and oral communication skills through a rhetorical focus on argument. In this course students explore a variety of non-fiction arguments within the discipline of science, technology and culture studies. Students learn how to read critically and write effectively as they examine how arguments develop within social, political and historical contexts. To enhance their understanding of a variety of communication modes, students learn how to expand and support their written work with oral presentations, and they explore visual as well as textual arguments. Additionally students learn how to improve their writing through their engagement with a variety of educational technologies. Working independently and collaboratively, students improve their composition skills while gaining a deeper understanding of audience and the contexts that inform effective communication.

In this class, you will improve your reading and writing skills as you immerse yourself in the discourse surrounding various media. By first reviewing the traditional strategies of effective argumentation and by then identifying those strategies in published essays, you will become a skilled rhetorician and a knowledgeable participant in an on-going exchange about contemporary media. You will also review some fundamental writing and speaking skills to guarantee that all your arguments, written and oral, are polished and audience-friendly.

Ultimately, our aim here is to make visible the ideological processes that construct meaning and lead us to assume our biases are natural. If you aren't interested in thinking about issues surrounding the news, film, and television, this may not be the class for you. If you are interested in discussing these topics in class by offering thoughtful opinions and responding to the opinions of others, this may be the class for you. If you are interested in questioning assumptions and thinking originally and creatively about the contemporary American political and social environment in which we live, this is definitely the class for you.

Texts
All are available at Engineers Bookstore, 748 Marietta Street NW (404-221-1669).
• Work in Progress by Lisa Ede.
• The St. Martin's Handbook by Andrea Lunsford.
• Introducing Media Studies by Ziauddin Sardar.
• Course packet.

Assignment Descriptions
Day-to-Day Work—Quizzes and Class Participation: You should attend every class with all your homework completed because you can’t really learn from this course if you come to class
unprepared. Furthermore, daily work such as quizzes and class participation determine a large part of your grade. Collegial, respectful class participation is required. Expect a quiz about the assigned reading material everyday at the beginning of class. The quizzes aim to reward you for doing the daily reading. If you do the reading carefully, you should get an A on each quiz. You may drop three quiz grades.

**Group Discussions/Presentations:** All students will form groups that, on assigned days, will lead the class discussion; the goal is to create a presentation that teaches the day’s topic by offering some additional information and mostly by engaging students in discussion. These performances are an important part of a well-rounded education because they give you experience speaking in front of a group while challenging you to make your audiences engage your topic (two tasks you will likely have to perfect in your professional life). Beyond these lessons, the presentations promote the class’s learning by presenting the material from students’ point of view. These group discussions/presentations should last ten minutes (but they can go overtime if they are actively engaging the class) and can take any form the group thinks will be the most interesting and educational for the class. See the last of this syllabus for some tips.

**Projects**

**Papers:** Completing your major papers will involve a process of discovery where you begin to see how you feel about an issue because you force yourself to think about it, test out various possibilities, and eventually settle on one or two conclusions (at least temporarily). You and I may not agree about your conclusions, but that is to be expected because there is never only one right way to address an issue. But make no mistake; there are wrong ways and superficial responses. So be sure to provide strong evidence to support your points. The key to completing these assignments successfully can be summarized under the following rule of thumb: question your presumptions; take nothing for granted.

At a minimum, all of your papers (and web projects) should introduce a clear thesis, support the argument with relevant evidence, respond to counter arguments, revise to guarantee logic and cohesion, and edit for flawless presentation. Note: **any assignment with more than two spelling errors will receive a failing grade**; a paper that is riddled with spelling errors demonstrates a lack of respect for your own work. **Keep a copy of your papers** in case either of us loses the first.

**Web Project:** To help you think about the differences between traditional literacy (writing papers) and e-literacy (writing web documents), you and other students will work together on a collaborative web site.

**WebX Postings:** In addition to in-class discussion, you will participate on our online bulletin board in Web Crossing (WebX). In your posts, you will reflect on issues raised in assigned readings and offer your own supplementary examples to assist your peers in their critical understanding of course material. These posts should total about 200 words (or so) and should be written as mini essays—that is with a topic sentence/thesis and following the guidelines of standard written English.

**Grades**

- Quizzes, WebX posts, and Written Homeworks 15%
- Class Participation 15%
- Group Discussions/Presentations 15%
- First Project: General Media Paper 10%
- Second Project: News Media Paper 15%
- Third Project: Open Source Media Encyclopedia Web Site Entries 15%
All English 1101 classes must require writing to total about 6000 graded words (twenty-five pages) by the end of the semester. Project One should be 750 words. Project Two should be around 750 words. Project Three should total around 1500 words. Project Four should be around 1000 words. You will fulfill the rest of the requirement through quizzes, WebX posts, rough draft editing, summaries, and in-class writing. Grading: A+=95, A=90, B+=85, B=80, C+=75, C=70, D+=65, D=60, F=50.

You can earn an A if you show originality and thought in your work, come to class prepared, and participate respectfully and actively in class discussion. You will absolutely help your grade by asking questions, offering useful comments, and taking an interest in the material and your assignments.

Policies

Attendance: You are allowed three unexcused absences; beginning with the fourth absence your final grade will be dropped half a letter for each day missed. Excuses must be from a medical doctor or a recognized Insitute organization. If you are not present at the beginning of class, it is your responsibility to make sure your attendance is recorded. You are only allowed three tardies; each subsequent tardy will be recorded as an absence. Quizzes cannot be made up. Homework will only be accepted on the day it is due unless you bring in an excuse for an absence.

Students With Disabilities: Any student who needs an accommodation for any sort of disability, please make an appointment to see the instructor during office hours. Students with disabilities should also contact Access Disabled Assistance Program for Tech Students (ADAPTS) to discuss reasonable accommodations. For an appointment with a counselor call (404) 894-2564 (voice) / (404) 894-1664 (voice/TDD) or visit Suite 210 in the Smithgall Student Services Building. For more information visit the following website: http://www.adapts.gatech.edu/.

Academic Honesty: All work you turn in for this class must be your own work, with all outside reference sources properly cited and acknowledged. All written assignments for this course will be turned in through the anti-plagiarism program “Turn It In” (http://www.turnitin.com).

The "Student Conduct Code of the Rules and Regulations" (Georgia Institute of Technology General Catalog, Section XIX) states, “Academic misconduct is an act that does or could improperly distort student grades or other student academic records” and offers the following descriptive list:

- Possessing, using, or exchanging improperly acquired written or verbal information in the preparation of any essay, laboratory report, examination, or other assignment included in an academic course;
- Substitution for, or unauthorized collaboration with, a student in the commission of academic requirements;
- Submission of material that is wholly or substantially identical to that created or published by another person or persons, without adequate credit notations indicating authorship (plagiarism);
- False claims of performance or work that has been submitted by the claimant;
- Alteration or insertion of any academic grade or rating so as to obtain unearned academic credit;
• Forgery, alteration, or misuse of any institute document relating to the academic status of the student.

The Code continues, “While these acts constitute assured instances of academic misconduct, other acts of academic misconduct may be defined by the professor.” Consult the Honor Code online at “http://www.honor.gatech.edu/” or in the General Catalog to remember your primary commitment to academic honesty. Students who engage in academic dishonesty may receive a 0.0 on the assignment or fail the course. In addition, the instance will be reported to the Dean of Students who may take further action.

**Software/Computing Resources And Requirements:** We will meet regularly this quarter in a multimedia computer lab, and we will make use frequent use of Internet applications in the lab and from remote locations (i.e. your home or dorm room). I assume all students enrolled this quarter will meet the technology requirements for incoming freshmen at GT. *You must have access to your own computer with Internet capabilities to complete the work in this class.* We will use e-mail applications, Web browsers, and Web Crossing (WebX) as a means of communicating both in- and out-of-class. These tools will enable you to communicate with your peers and engage in electronic “bulletin board” discussions (email, WebX), and to participate in website critique. You will receive detailed instructions within the first weeks in class about how to access and use WebX. Previous knowledge of Internet research, e-mail, and conferencing software is not a prerequisite for this course.

**Course Schedule**

*All assignments should be completed by the day listed on this syllabus. Readings not in the textbooks are in the course packet. This schedule and the syllabus in general are subject to changes and revisions.*

Monday, 8/16: Introduction.


Friday, 8/20: Getting your writing started. Scan St. Martin’s *Handbook* p. 57-70.

**Introduction to Reading, Writing, and Giving Presentations**

Monday, August 23: Introducing Writing—*Work in Progress*, p. 23-35.

- Do the two “For Exploration” assignments on p. 28-29. (Your letter should be around 200-words long.) Answer questions 3, 9, 10, and 11 on pages 35-36.

Wednesday, August 25: Introducing Reading—*Work in Progress*, p. 54-57 and 334 (bottom)-341, 345-348 (top). Create groups in class.

- Answer questions on p. 57 (including the re-reading assignment) with thoughtful, grammatically accurate, complete sentences.

Friday, August 27: Reading Visual Texts—*Work in Progress*, p. 59-67.

- Do the “For Exploration” assignment, but find your own ad and bring it to class with your response.

Monday, August 30: Reading Strategies—*Work in Progress*, p. 68-79 and (Skip “No ‘There’ There” article and the “For Explorations” assignments.) Bring *Introducing Media Studies* to class.

Wednesday, September 1: *Introducing Media Studies*, first half. Group One.

**Introduction to Media Studies and Academic Writing**

Friday, September 3: *Introducing Media Studies*, second half. Group Two.
Monday, September 6: Labor Day holiday.

Wednesday, September 8: Understanding Rhetoric—Work in Progress, p. 157-175 (top half).
Do the “For Exploration” assignments on p. 159, 166, 175 with thoughtful, complete sentences. In class, we’ll discuss the rhetorical situation of academia.

Friday, September 10: Drafting an Essay—Work in Progress, p. 247-265 (top).
Do the “For Exploration” p. 251; you can skip the others.

**Note: I recommend that you work seriously on your papers over this weekend so that you'll have specific questions to ask on Monday’s open class session.**

Monday, September 13: Q and A Day—Bring in any questions you have about media studies in general and your papers in particular.

Bring a completed and self-edited draft of your paper to class. (I will give you a quiz grade for your draft, so make sure it’s completed and ready for revision.) A classmate will evaluate your paper based on the questions on Work in Progress, p. 309-310 (top). Bring the St. Martin’s Handbook to class as a reference for grammar edits.

Friday, September 17: Papers due. In-class lesson on Turn It In and plagiarism.
Submit your papers to turnitin.com by the end of the day.

Monday, September 20: Writing and grading workshop. No homework.

Wednesday, September 22: WebX instructions.


**Media Studies I: News**


Wednesday, September 29: Selection from Robert McChesney’s The Problem of the Media. Group Four.

Friday, October 1: Readings about the coverage of the Gulf and Iraq Wars, available through the library’s electronic reserve. Group Five.

**Note: The registration deadline to vote in the presidential election is October 4. You may register to vote in Atlanta even if your permanent address is elsewhere.** You can get the forms on-line at [http://justvote.org](http://justvote.org). Registration forms must be postmarked by the October 4 deadline. For more info, call 404.656.2871.

Monday, October 4: Selection from Eric Alterman’s What Liberal Media? Group One.


Friday, October 8: Watch documentaries in-class.
Write a WebX post in response to an issue raised in the class videos.

Monday, October 11: Group Three discuss Friday’s documentaries.
Respond to a student’s WebX post.
Wednesday, October 13: Each group bring in your own article to discuss. Bring in four copies of it and develop some discussion questions about it that will encourage lively discussion and exchanges of opinion. Make appointments for paper conferences.

Friday, October 15: Meet at the library for lesson on library research. Continue making appointments for paper conferences; sign-up sheets are on my door.

Monday, October 18: Fall break.

Wednesday, October 20: Paper conferences. No class. Come to my office at your appointed time with a thesis statement, a detailed thematic outline of your paper, and a copy of whatever research material you’re using in your paper. (I will give you a quiz grade for your outline and thesis.)

Friday, October 22: Paper conferences. No class. Come to my office at your appointed time with a strong thesis statement and a detailed thematic outline—as opposed to traditional Roman numeral style outline—of your paper. (I will give you a quiz grade for your outline and thesis.)

Monday, October 25: Paper and peer review due (peer review to be done outside of class but following the same standards as the one for the first paper).

Introduction to next unit. In class, plan to choose a blockbuster film to watch and discuss, and commit to following the election-night coverage on a particular TV network or website.

**Media Studies II: Film and TV**

Wednesday, October 27: “Television Representation” from An Introduction to TV Studies. Group Four.

Friday, October 29: Talk and Reality TV—“Rats for Ratings” and “The Oprah Winfrey Show and the Talk-Show Furor.” Group Five.


Wednesday, November 3: Watch November 2 election coverage and discuss it in class. Extra credit opportunity for a group that wants to lead the discussion.

Write a WebX post in which you discuss some aspect of the election coverage—either from election night or in general about the election season. Be sure to make your points in relation to the medium or media on which followed the election, i.e., TV, web, radio, newspaper, etc.

Friday, November 5: TV Standards and Practices—“You Can’t Say That.” Group One.

Monday, November 8: “Six Stages of Media Production” from Media Student’s Book p. 223-232 and discuss chosen blockbuster. Group Two.


Friday, November 12: Independent Film—Run Lola Run, available through library reserve or at most video stores. Group Four.

Monday, November 15: Youth-oriented TV and Movies: Watch Merchants of Cool in class.

Compose a WebX post about Merchants of Cool. Suggestions (if you can’t think of an arguable topic: consider controversies surrounding the mook, the midrift, the ability or inability to resist the commercialization of music, the susceptibility of teens to media manipulation, or the influence of media on identity formation.
Wednesday, November 17: Discuss Merchants of Cool in class. Group Five.
Write an intelligent post responding to another student’s WebX post.

Friday, November 19: In-class lesson on using Dreamweaver.

Find an actual website that works stylistically and one that doesn’t and bring the URLs to class. Be prepared to discuss the site in terms of style.

Wednesday, November 24: MOOSE entries due by the end of the day.

Friday, November 26: Thanksgiving Holiday.

Monday, November 29: Paper conferences. No class. Come to my office at your appointed time with a thesis statement, a detailed thematic outline of your paper, and a copy of whatever research material you’re using in your paper. (I will give you a quiz grade for your outline and thesis.)

Wednesday, December 1: Paper conferences. No class. Come to my office at your appointed time with a thesis statement, a detailed thematic outline of your paper, and a copy of whatever research material you’re using in your paper. (I will give you a quiz grade for your outline and thesis.)

Friday, December 3: In-class assessment. Last day of classes.
Final project and peer review due in my office noon, Tuesday, December 7.

**Tips for Group Discussion/Presentations**

**Grading Criteria**
The presentation should
- engage the class.
- offer fresh perspectives on the material.
- promote intelligent discussion that challenges the class.
- provide opportunities for all students to discuss the assigned texts.

In addition, you must email me about two days in advance of the presentation with a detailed plan of your presentation including strategies for eliciting discussion. If you do not email me in time, you will be able to earn no higher than a C. Please cc. all group mates in the emails. If you do not get a response with feedback from me, you should assume that I have not received your email and that you need to email me again.

**Presentation Ideas**
Remember, presentations should last ten minutes (but they can go overtime if they are actively engaging the class). The presentation’s form depends on what your group thinks would work and what the texts lend themselves to. Another consideration is the kinds of presentations other groups have already done; in other words, if several groups have adopted a particular presentation technique, you should take a different approach because the class will be bored.
It is always a great idea to develop your own discussion/presentation ideas, but if you need some help, here are a few ideas from past groups:
- break the class up into groups and have the small groups do a project or answer
questions.

- ask people to pick sides on an issue (or assign them to sides) and debate or discuss aspects of the texts. (These have been debates between two groups or discussions among classmates broken up into several groups based on their opinions of the text.)

- ask the class their opinions on key issues and have them register their agreement or disagreement and explain why.

- put the class in a circle and discuss key questions as a group.

- have the class enact and/or discuss various scenarios.

- create a kind-of game show asking questions about the texts.

**Asking Questions**

The way you phrase questions and discussion topics is critical to the success of the class discussion. Say you were to lead a discussion/presentation on *The Simpsons* (just to offer an example from a show we all know). A weak question to ask would be, “Is it good or bad that *The Simpsons* is a cartoon?” This question is weak because “good” and “bad” are very vague terms and asking this question doesn’t lead to many interesting insights. If you wanted the class to discuss animation you could ask questions like “What does animation allow *The Simpsons*’s writers to accomplish with the story lines?” That question could then lead to a discussion of the social commentary the show makes. The point is that your questions and discussion topics need to open the class up to productive conversation that challenges students to consider the material in ways that aren’t obvious.