

English 680 01W – Reading Theory for College English Teachers

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## Welcome

I'm delighted that you've decided to take this course; it's one of my favorites. I know that I say that about all my courses, but I always mean it, and this one is genuinely near my heart because my research is truly grounded here.

This course focuses on what English teachers need to know about reading and the acquisition of literacy in order to do better jobs teaching. My goals for this class are as follows:

- Students will have a better understanding of what the field of Literacy Studies is.
- Students will understand something of the circumstances of their own processes of literacy acquisition.
- Students will understand something of the many factors contributing and impeding others' processes of literacy acquisition.
- Students will begin to apply our reading and discussion to issues they may face in their own classrooms.

I still feel that I'm learning how to teach online—even after 10 years, so, please, any time you have a question or feel confused or see a way I could improve the course, email me! I check my email with great frequency, so I should be able to get back to you fairly quickly.

Required: *Literature as Exploration*-- Louise Rosenblatt

Required: *On Reading*-- Kenneth Goodman

Required: *Ways with Words*-- Shirley Brice Heath

Required: *Literacy in American Lives*--Deborah Brandt

Required: *Defying the Odds: Class and the Pursuit of Higher Literacy*-- Donna Dunbar-Odom

Required: *Identity Papers*—Bronwyn Williams

Required: *Reclaiming the Rural* – Kim Donehower and Charlotte Hogg

Required: *The Elements (and Pleasures) of Difficulty*-- Mariolina Salvatori and Patricia Donahue

## Grading Criteria

Your grade will be determined by your weekly contributions to the discussion, position papers which you will post by Wednesday of each week, a literacy narrative, and a final seminar paper.

Please note that I will **not** be using the Gradebook function on eCollege. I don't think graduate seminars lend themselves to a point system of grading. At any time of the term, if you want to know where you stand grade-wise, just email me. I'll be happy to give you a ballpark grade.

25% - Position papers (7 total – 1-2 pages each)

25% - Literacy narrative (10 pages)

25% - Seminar paper (15-20 pages)

25% - Weekly participation via online discussion

## Classroom activities:

Much of the work we do depends on your "coming" each week, prepared to work. Being prepared means not beginning your discussion until after you've read the assignment. I will do everything I can to make the atmosphere of our discussion a comfortable one; I do not tolerate disrespect, so you can rest assured that at no time will your comments be ridiculed or made fun of by me or anyone else in the class. I want this to be a place where intellectual inquiry is the norm. And if at any time you feel that someone has exhibited disrespect, let me know immediately. We should be able to challenge each other's reading and ideas in professional ways that stimulate discussion, not shut it down.

Each week, I'll get us started in the Discussion arena with some questions; then I'll expect you all to carry the conversational ball. Your first response of the week should respond to my discussion starter and will be due by midnight Wednesday. **Then I'd like you to read each others' position papers (see below) and respond to them.** I don't expect you to respond to everyone's papers, but I do expect you to take some responsibility in seeing that everyone gets a response and that the responses are substantive.

Remember that I expect the "conversation" to be equivalent to a 3-hour graduate seminar--with the exception being that no one can let others do the talking. You will not only be graded on the amount you contribute but also on the quality of what you contribute. The reading we'll be doing is "meaty" and there should be a lot to respond to. I'll contribute as well to keep the joint jumping.

I'm keeping the class as simple as possible because, quite frankly, I'm easily confused.

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

**Position Papers:** You will write a total of 7 one-page position papers in which you focus on one issue that arose in your reading of that week's book (or section of the book). Your position paper should clearly indicate the section of the text that is the subject of your concern or interest. Use page numbers so we can go to that place in the text if we need to or if we want to use it in our own research. You may

use this as an opportunity to try out an argument you have with the book or as a way to explore a way this book touches on a particular teaching or learning experience you've had, making it part of a larger argument. Definitely think of your position papers as possibilities for developing into your final paper (see below). You will use eCollege's Document Sharing function to upload your papers so that everyone can read them. Your position papers must be turned in by midnight on Wednesdays so that others have time to read and respond in the discussion section of eCollege.

Note that I'm requiring 7 position papers, but there will be 11 opportunities to write position papers. So you can choose which ones to skip. If I were you, I'd save it up for the end of the semester when you know you're going to be busy, but if life gets complicated one week, you can skip then. I will not keep track of this for you (although I will have copies for final grades); you will need to do that.

**Literacy narrative:** This paper will be a narrative of some aspect of your own literacy acquisition which will also include references to Rosenblatt, Goodman, Heath, and Brandt. In other words, you will be the star of the paper, but the purpose is to test your experience against and with the experts and what they have to say about learning to read and write. You can expand the short paper you write for Week 4. This paper should not be longer than 10 pages. This paper will serve as a kind of midterm.

**Final paper:** Your final paper will be a seminar-length (15-20 pages) paper developing an argument that arises from the work you do this semester. We will likely "talk" about this some online, but basically the topic is open to anything that you can relate to literacy acquisition and/or instruction on the college level. For example, you could write about something you've observed in your teaching or your work that relates to some of the things we've read. Workplace literacy is a hot topic, so you might think about that--how people are immersed in the specialized discourse of an office work site, for example. If you're teaching, you might consider doing a little ethnographic work to find out your students' reading habits, how much of their reading takes place online, what sorts of reading and writing they do, their perceptions of reading and writing, etc. Another possibility (and this is the assignment my students did the last time I taught this course) is to extend Deborah Brandt's research, using the questions she asked as part of her ethnographic research (and that are included at the end of her book) to interview friends and/or family members. The students in that class found this to be a really satisfying project, and a number of us presented our findings at 4C's in New York that next spring in two separate panels. I will expect that these papers will include some outside research from scholarly journals in addition to drawing from the reading we do for the course itself.

## **POLICIES, ETC.**

**Attendance:** "Attendance" is mandatory. Don't skip a week. I will not let you make up the work unless you experience something dire--and I don't wish that on anyone. The thing with an online class is that there's really no such thing as an absence.

**Late assignments:** You must keep up with the reading. Since you have a week to complete each assignment and you have options for skipping some of the position papers, I will not accept late assignments. If you experience truly exceptional circumstances (e.g. car wrecks, fires, and the like--God forbid), please contact me immediately.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the unauthorized use of someone else's work. I try to come up with distinctive assignments that make it difficult to find appropriate "matches" on the internet or on file here at the university, but I also know that's not always possible. If I find a student has intentionally made use of another's work without giving that person credit, that student will fail the course.

It will be tempting to cut and paste from the internet for some of your responses. Do not. To do so without correct citation will result in an F for the entire course.

If at any time you find yourself overwhelmed by the work required or you find yourself confused, please contact me. Don't feel miserable all by yourself. Share the misery with me!

#### Students with Disabilities:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services

Texas A&M University-Commerce

Gee Library

Room 132

Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835

Fax (903) 468-8148

StudentDisabilityServices@tamuc.edu

Student Conduct: Apparently student behavior in some classes has deteriorated to the point that we have been asked to include statements about appropriate behavior in our course descriptions. Therefore, it is expected that you will be a civil and productive member of this class. Disruption of the class or the interference with other students' learning will not be tolerated. If you are unsure what is expected of you, please email me immediately. As I said above, disrespect of one's colleagues or of me will not be tolerated.

#### **Tentative syllabus:**

Week 1 - Introductions; generally, your first response to the discussion (in the discussion venue) and your position papers (in Document Sharing) will be due by midnight Wednesday. Your final response(s) to each other's' discussion and to each other's' position papers will be due by the end of Week 1. But this week, you're telling stories of your own literacy acquisition and getting going on the reading. No position paper due until Week 2. Weeks are Monday through Sunday.

Week 2 - Louise Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*

Week 3 - Kenneth Goodman, *On Reading*

Week 4 - Shirley Brice Heath, *Ways with Words, Part I*

Week 5 - Shirley Brice Heath, *Ways with Words, Part II*

Week 6 - Deborah Brandt, *Literacy in American Lives*, first half (you judge how much is halfway)

Week 7 - Deborah Brandt, *Literacy in American Lives*, second half.

Week 8 - I'll be at the Watson Conference in Louisville, Kentucky this week and likely won't have time to be online, so take this time to work on your expanded literacy narrative with references to our reading for the semester thus far. Remember that this will serve as a kind of midterm as well as a paper.

Week 9 - Expanded literacy narrative due; Donna Dunbar-Odom, *Defying the Odds: Class and the Pursuit of Higher Literacy* [egotistical move, I know, but I want to get this stuff across without having to write it all out again in a lecture! :-)]

Week 10 - Bronwyn Williams, *Identity Papers*, selections 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12

Week 11 - Donehower and Hogg, *Reclaiming the Rural*, last section (I'll be more specific in our class discussion.)

Week 12 - Salvatori and Donahue, *The Elements (and Pleasures) of Difficulty*

Week 13 — Thanksgiving. Catch up.

Week 14 - I'd like you to use the discussion venue to share with others the topic of your final papers, which texts you've found most useful, what you think your arguments will be, etc. Let's think about which of your papers would fit well together for future conferences because I'd like you all to get yourselves into the academic routine.

Week 15 - Final paper due

Week 16 - Exam week - There will be no final exam. Your paper will serve a more useful purpose.