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Introduction to English 1000

The University of Missouri-Columbia is a selective institution, which means that most of our students have good high school educations. It is also a university with a tradition of assuming that students will use writing as a method of learning in a wide variety of classes, especially through the Writing Intensive courses offered in every department. Considering these two facts, we have concluded that English 1000 shouldn't be a course to *prepare* students to write college papers next semester or next year, but a course in which they write college papers immediately. This means that our English 1000 classes emphasize guided practice more than they emphasize the sort of "textbook" writing instruction we assume most students have already been exposed to in high school. The typical method of an English 1000 class is for the instructor to give students an assignment resembling one they might get in a Writing Intensive class, for the students to plunge into the work, and for the instructor to teach chiefly by coaching. Few of our teachers lecture on general principles of good writing. Instead, they workshop papers in class, write individualized comments on papers, and meet with students in one-to-one conferences. We are less concerned with whether students know how to write, in the sense that they can recite general principles, than whether they can *in fact* write college-level papers.

Many students thrive under this approach, reporting on end-of-semester evaluations that they benefited greatly by being treated as apprentice writers—and as adults—rather than as students being prepared to write in some future course. Some students find the course more challenging than they expected, although most are not unduly surprised. That the GPA in the course (about 2.7 or 2.8, typically) matches the GPA in all freshman courses indicates that we have pitched the course somewhere in the mid-range of academic difficulty.

The first paragraph of this introduction ends with the statement that we are interested in having students write "college-level papers." The phrase needs some unpacking. What makes a paper "college-level": the vocabulary employed, the sophistication or correctness of the sentences, the amount of research involved? An argument might be made for the importance of any of these factors and many others. Our own view, based largely on familiarity with the kind of writing done in a wide range of classes at Missouri, is that a college-level paper generally

1. centers on one or more texts (rather than on personal experience, for example)
2. analyzes the text (rather than, for instance, merely summarizing it), and
3. takes a critical attitude toward the material.

By "text" we don't always mean a written work: we may mean, for instance, a painting, a film, or a piece of music. By "critical attitude" we don't mean simply a negative attitude or even, necessarily, a skeptical one. We mean that the student writer evaluates the text in light of such things as the author's assumptions and likely intentions, the historical and social context in which the text was created, and the relation of the texts to other texts that preceded it or followed it.

This rather abstract definition may be more meaningful if we consider it in relation to two typical Writing Intensive assignments. The first is a short essay (microtheme) assignment from an Invertebrate Zoology class taught by Professor Gerald Summers.

Bio. Sci. 230 INVERTEBRATE ZOOLOGY

Gerald Summers

Microtheme no. 9

In this assignment, you will be discussing experimental evidence relating to an evolutionary question. As you know, the Class Gastropoda is characterized by a peculiar growth phenomenon known as torsion. Biologists have long speculated on the function of torsion and a variety of hypotheses have been proposed. Few of these hypotheses have been tested, however. A recent paper offered experimental evidence relating to proposed functions of torsion, and it provoked a response from another researcher.

Pennington, J.T. and F.S. Chia. 1985. Gastropod torsion: A test of Garstang's hypothesis. *Biological Bulletin* 169: 391-396.

Goodhart, C.B. 1987. Garstang's hypothesis and gastropod torsion. *Journal of Molluscan Studies* 53: 33-36.

Read both papers (on reserve in Ellis Library) and write a 2-page essay discussing the significance of this experiment and the extent to which Pennington and Chia have responded to the question, "What is the function of torsion?" The first draft of your paper is due at the beginning of lecture Monday, 1 December. It will be returned to you in laboratory on the following Wednesday and Thursday and a revised version of your essay is due at the beginning of lecture on Wednesday, 10 December.

Notice that Professor Summers has put his students right into the deep end of the pool. They are expected not only to understand the two scientific papers on which the assignment is based, but also to be able to discuss the "significance" of Pennington and Chia's experiment and the "extent to which" their work properly addresses the question it purports to address. In short, they are being asked to write not as pupils in a biology class, but as biologists, ready to take a nuanced, critical attitude toward the work of other biologists.

Professor Ugarte's Peace Studies assignment is likewise analytic and demanding. Here the paper is of fairly standard length, five pages or longer.

1st long paper.

5 pg. absolute minimum. Due Dec. 3 or 4:

Sales's View of Ecological Violence

How is *Dwellers in the Land* a book about violence? In your reading and lectures you have been learning about the nature and causes of war and violence. One of the threads of much of the reading and some of the lectures has been the view that violence is likely to occur when there is some sort of imbalance: an oppressed minority (Martin Luther King), grossly unequal distribution of wealth (Menchu), an obsession with economic gain (Heller), a foreign policy based on deception rather than reality (Heller, O'Brien, Voltaire). How does that kind of imbalance (an imbalance that leads to violence) manifest itself in *Dwellers in the Land*? First try to come to an understanding of one of the kinds of imbalance mentioned above. Be specific and refer to readings and lectures. Then explain how that particular disequilibrium is part of Kirkpatrick Sales's indictment of what human beings have done and continue to do to the earth.

In this case the student is required not only to understand the argument of Kirkpatrick Sales's book, but also to discuss something the book apparently does not: the relation of Sales's ideas to the ideas of several other writers and to the broad theme of disequilibrium as a cause of violence.

Occasionally students object to the assignments given in English 1000, saying that they are too difficult, or saying that students should be allowed their choice of topics so that they can write about what they know and are already interested in. A partial answer to this objection is that if we are assigning to students the kinds of papers they will write in other college courses, then we need to help them learn to write about *what they don't yet know*—what they are learning about at the time they are writing the paper. An assignment that requires students to develop their interest in an assigned topic and to write at the growing edge of their understanding more nearly parallels what lies ahead in their college careers.

As mentioned earlier, the average grade in English 1000 matches the average grade in freshman courses generally. Very likely the factors that account for students' relative successes and failures in most courses are also the chief factors in English 1000. Students who are self-disciplined and mature generally fare better than those who regard classes as interruptions in their frenetic social lives. Students well prepared in high school find the course easier than those who were not well prepared. There is no great mystery here.

A writing course does, however, make some peculiar demands that are worth mentioning. The first of these is the need to manage time and attention wisely. There is a persistent

myth among non-writers that good writing can be done quickly, in a rush of inspiration, adrenaline, or caffeine. In fact, most writing is more like a marathon than a sprint. And the professional writer who manages to average a publishable page per day (a book or so per year) is doing remarkably well. A steady pace that allows ample time for research, drafting, planning, and revising—and ample time for getting away from the work to regain perspective—almost always gets the best results; in fact, in order to get such results, students should plan to spend about 40 hours per paper, from the first stages of planning to the final submission. Unfortunately, a good number of freshmen papers are written the night before they are due and at a pace almost certain to produce shoddy work. Teachers can do something to encourage students to pace their writing appropriately, but finally students must manage to pace themselves.

The second demand involves attitude. We can imagine, with some effort, a student working a set of algebra problems correctly even while he or she is saying silently, “I hate this, I hate this, I hate this!” We can’t imagine a student writing a good paper under the same circumstances: writers who are constantly reminding themselves to hate writing will produce work no one takes pleasure in. Only a few people find writing the most pleasurable of all activities, but most can silence that side of them inclined to resist writing, and when they shut off the resisting voice, they can take a quiet pleasure from watching their thoughts take shape on the page. In that mood, they can do good work. Part of the student’s job (of every writer’s job, really) is to find in each assignment a way to become interested in the work.

The third demand has to do with the student writer’s relationship with his or her teacher. In broad terms, students have to choose whether to see their teacher as an adversary or as a partner. If they see the teacher as an adversary, they usually end up blaming him or her for everything that goes wrong in the course. The teacher made the wrong assignment; the teacher graded too hard; the teacher didn’t explain things properly. Having washed their hands of responsibility, such students (not surprisingly) don’t improve much over the course of a semester. Students who see the teacher as a partner assume (correctly) that progress depends on both parties taking responsibility for the success of the course. The teacher should be able to assume that on every submission, students have pushed themselves to the limit of their writing ability: otherwise, there is no reason to make any comment but “try harder.” Students must be able to assume that the teacher is genuinely interested in helping them develop as writers, and that the comments in the margin are not merely justifications of a grade, but the well-intentioned guidance a more experienced academic writer offers a less experienced colleague. If the writing process is carried on in this cooperative spirit, the result is typically a steady improvement not only of the paper but also of the writer.

Similarities and Differences Among Sections

When comparing sections of English 1000, looks can be misleading. On the surface, it may appear that each section is different. After all, one class of students may be writing about *The Simpsons* and another about *Dracula*; one class may be immersed in folklore and another in public policy issues; one class is likely analyzing editorial cartoons while another is working with masterpiece paintings depicting moments in history or literature. Gender, race, class, technology, politics, literature, painting, film, advertising, identity and, of course, language itself are all suitable subjects for academic writing. Students will likely find each of these, and more, in at least one section of the nearly one hundred sections of English 1000 offered both fall and winter semesters.

Obviously, paper topics do not form the basis for unifying the many sections of the course. Instead, students will find consistency from section to section regarding the types of writing tasks they encounter, how many papers they write, the length of the papers, the drafting-feedback-revision processes students must follow, and evaluation methods. We think such deep structure correspondences are more important in providing a reasonably consistent experience across sections than expecting all students to write about the same subject. The latter approach can drain university resources when, for example, two thousand students all need the same library sources at the same time. Nor do we want to encourage opportunities for plagiarism that increase when papers written for one section could satisfy the same assignment in another section, perhaps enticing basically honorable students who feel under pressure. One's writing can improve when existing skill levels are challenged and when thoughtful instructor feedback is offered no matter the subject of the paper assignment.

Every section of English 1000 will include at least one paper that fits each of the following descriptions:

- an academic argument grounded in an interpretation or analysis of a single text.
- an academic argument grounded in or concerning the relationship between two texts.
- an academic argument using multiple sources.

The terms *text*, *argument*, and *academic* are applied broadly. That is, *text* stands for more than simply print texts: images, objects, and cultural practices can also be “read” like written texts. *Argument* refers to more than pro and con or controversial issues. Any thesis-driven paper makes an argument (such as those that analyze, interpret, or evaluate). And for our purposes, *academic* doesn't mean a paper directed to professionals in a recognized academic field, but a paper that is representative in form, use of sources, and level of analysis for typical undergraduate classes beyond first-year composition. Papers may be assigned in any order and may be accompanied by other paper assignments.

In addition to writing the same three types of papers, all students will receive feedback on their work—from some combination of peer reviews, small group workshops, one-on-one conferences with the instructor, individual tutorials at the Writing Lab, and written

comments from the instructor—and will revise and resubmit their papers for a second grade.

At least three significant paper projects submitted for a grade, revised and resubmitted, form the foundation for all sections of English 1000. Despite the various subjects about which students write and lesser differences in overall course design, each section is basically structured the same way. Students receive practice in the same sorts of writing processes in order to attend to the same sorts of writing assignments.

What Students Say About English 1000

Course evaluations from a recent semester revealed the following student attitudes toward English 1000.

Student Expectations:

Half of the students who took the course experienced pretty much what they expected (51%). Of course, that still leaves hundreds of students who were surprised in some way by what they found, both for the better and the worse. Out of the total responses, 22% said their experiences were more positive than they expected, usually because they particularly enjoyed the writing assignments or liked the instructor, or because they learned more than they anticipated; 10% simply identified the course neutrally as different from expectations; and 17% were surprised in a negative way. The most common reason behind negative responses was that students found English 1000 to be more challenging than they thought it would be.

Clarity of Grading Criteria:

Most students, 77%, felt they understood the grading criteria used to assess their writing, leaving 23% who were confused or believed such information was not adequately provided. The criteria identified by students as most important in writing a good paper were, in order: (1) providing a thesis; (2) including evidence and analysis to support one's claims; (3) preparing a well organized paper that remains focused on the task at hand; and (4) revealing an understanding of the structure, format, and conventions of academic writing.

Key Moments:

When asked what key moment stood out as affecting their writing performance, 54% of students identified *communicating with the instructor outside of the classroom* as crucial to their success. Most often, this communication took place during scheduled one-to-one conferences, but email exchanges and dropping by to speak to instructors during office hours were also occasions for individual attention that proved helpful. In the next largest category after communicating with the teacher, 18% of students felt that instructors' written comments on graded papers made a critical difference in improving their writing. While other key moments were mentioned by students, no other category amassed more than a small percentage of overall student responses.

Comparison to Other Students' Experiences:

Students in a given section of English 1000 can't really know how the course might have been different in other sections that they never attended. But they talk to friends who are enrolled in the same course with a different instructor and inevitably make comparisons. When asked in what ways they thought their experiences were like or unlike those of students in other sections, only 7% said they didn't know. Most students develop an impression of the course overall and of how their particular experience fits into that picture. While not an accurate indicator of the way sections and student experiences may actually differ, the following responses reveal how students feel about their experience in English 1000: 15% said their experience was probably the same as

that of other students; another 15% recognized that their experience was different from that of other students because assignment topics vary from section to section, but this variance didn't suggest to them that other sections were better or worse; 20% felt their experience was likely worse than that of other students, usually because they believed the assignments or the grading in their sections posed greater obstacles to success than other students faced; and 43%--the single largest category of responses--felt their experience was likely better than that of other students. It may be worth mentioning that, according to the students themselves, a harder class doesn't necessarily mean a worse experience. That is, 6% of students overall (a subset of the 43% whose experiences were "better") were confident their class was harder than other sections, but they still felt they had a more interesting time and came out of the course better prepared than peers in other sections.

Overall Quality:

The aim of English 1000 is to improve students' writing ability, especially their ability to write academic papers for later courses. With this objective in mind, students were asked to rate the overall quality of the course as taught by their instructor. A significant majority of students rated the course better than average. Only 3% identified the overall quality as *poor*; 5% called it *fair*; 13% said *average*; 39% identified the course/instructor as *good*; and 40% evaluated the overall quality of their English 1000 course as *excellent*.

Getting Help

Accomplished writers include other writers at certain points in their writing processes, and as a student in English 1000 so will you. As you research, draft, revise, and proofread an assignment, you will want to consult with your instructor, peer-group members, and the tutors who make up the English 1000 community. Discussing your work with others helps you take into account the experience, viewpoints, interests, and expectations of readers and will make your writing more successful as a result.

Your instructor is a valuable resource. According to many students, communicating with the instructor outside of the classroom proved key to their success in the course. All instructors hold regular office hours during which they are available to help students in person; some are also easily accessible by email. Check with your particular instructor to determine the most suitable times and means for working together outside the classroom. Such information should be given to you in writing in the course information handout provided at the beginning of the semester. In addition to particular times routinely set aside, many instructors are willing to make appointments for other times that may better suit your schedule.

Peer-group members are important partners in the writing process. Since English 1000 emphasizes revision and peer review, you will likely have the opportunity to get feedback from other students, as well as to give them your assistance. Students often have trouble looking critically at the work of their peers because “critique” holds negative connotations for them, or because they simply don’t want to offend classmates by suggesting their work is anything but wonderful. Empty praise, however, isn’t helpful and doesn’t really feel all that good. When providing peer reviews for others, use a constructive tone; don’t just say “good” or “weak” but describe more fully what you do or don’t like, as well as offer suggestions for revision; ask questions of the writer in the margins to help him or her clarify and more fully develop ideas. Your instructor will provide more specific guidelines for responding to classmates’ papers. When you receive a peer review of your paper, ask for clarification if there are comments you don’t understand. View critically the advice you receive, especially when it is conflicting, ultimately making your own decisions. And recognize that you as a person are not being judged. Take and offer helpful criticism in a spirit of team effort.

In the **Writing Lab**, undergraduate students from all classes (except those designated Writing Intensive) can receive writing assistance in 50-minute personal sessions from an experienced staff. These tutors--English graduate students and undergraduates from the Honors College--can talk with you about any aspect of writing, from understanding the assignment and brainstorming, to organizing and developing drafts, to polishing final submissions. If you need to brush up on some fundamental skills, the lab offers workshops in sentence combining, grammar, and punctuation, illustrating these rules in your own papers. In addition, the lab offers consultations on avoiding plagiarism by properly finding, using, and documenting outside sources. The Writing Lab is located on the first floor of the Student Success Center, across from the north entrance to Ellis Library. Call for an appointment, times, or information about satellite locations in

residence halls at 882-2493, or go to <http://web.missouri.edu/~lcwww/appointments> to make your own appointment. To get the most from the Writing Lab, go early in the semester and go often. Students who visit the lab three or more times (or use the Online Writery, described below) report that their grades improved as a result. Be sure to take all relevant materials to your appointment, including the assignment sheet, your draft of course, and any earlier drafts with teacher comments.

The **Online Writery** is an electronic, virtual space where students can seek help via computer. It offers writing assistance similar to that offered by the Writing Lab and from the same experienced staff. It is the goal of the Writery to respond to submissions within 24 hours. When you submit a draft via the cybertutorial form at the Online Writery website, you will describe the assignment along with your approach and concerns so that your cybertutor's response, sent to you as email, can be as useful as possible. As with face-to-face tutorials in the Writing Lab, your active participation is required. Send drafts and questions to <http://web.missouri.edu/~writery/>. Follow the link to "Cybertutorials."

Policies and Procedures (Including Plagiarism)

Absences: With typically no more than twenty students per section, English 1000 may be your smallest class the semester you take it. Lecturing plays little or no role in most sections. Instead, discussion, small group interaction, in-class activities that are integrally related to writing a particular paper, and peer reviews are more common uses of class time. Instructors depend upon students' presence and participation to make the class run effectively. For this reason, many of them have absence policies that they enforce by dropping students who miss too much class. Be aware of the absence policy for your section. A typical absence policy allows 6 absences for a Monday-Wednesday-Friday class or only 4 absences for a Tuesday-Thursday class. Find out if your instructor distinguishes between excused and unexcused absences. Don't assume that since you have a doctor's note your absence won't count against you. There are indeed times when students have good reasons for missing class, but the effect of those absences for the student and for the class are the same regardless of the reason. Keep your instructor informed of extenuating circumstances, and don't use the few allowed absences frivolously.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): Students with disabilities that might affect their work (in or out of class) should both contact Disability Services and notify the instructor. MU can make a variety of arrangements that help insure equal opportunity. The Office of Disability Services is located at A038 Brady Commons or by phone at 882-4696. For resources for students with disabilities, click on "Disability Resources" on MU's homepage. If you have emergency medical information to share or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please inform the instructor immediately. You are welcome to speak to your instructor privately after class or during office hours.

Changing Sections: If you find yourself in an unsuitable section, perhaps because the writing assignments are based upon topics particularly uninteresting to you, limited options for changing sections sometimes exist. For more information, come to the Composition Office in Tate Hall within the first few days of the semester.

Complaints: If you have any concerns about your experience in English 1000, do not hesitate to speak to someone in the Composition Office. Irregularities in a given section can be more effectively handled the sooner we are made aware of the problem. Drop by the Composition Office in Tate Hall, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.; call 882-2356; or email Dana Kinnison at kinnisond@missouri.edu.

Grade Appeals: Only after a student is unable to resolve a grade problem with the instructor should he or she come to the Composition Office where the handout "Grade Reconsideration for English 1000" is available, which outlines the requirements for a grade appeal. The following criteria apply in all cases: (1) students must first attempt to speak with the instructor; (2) if the appeal is not resolved by speaking with the instructor, the student must file a written petition with the Director of Composition; (3) only final course grades may be appealed; (4) appeals will only be successful in cases of arbitrary

and capricious grading; (5) the academic standards of the instructor, when applied to all students and explained in the syllabus, are not grounds for a grade appeal.

Plagiarism: Students who submit as their own work a paper taken in whole or in part from another person's writing without proper acknowledgment are guilty of plagiarism. Make sure you understand plagiarism and how to avoid it. Read the section on plagiarism in the grammar and usage handbook required for your section of English 1000, and pay attention when the matter is discussed in class. Instructors are obligated to report to the Office of the Provost all instances of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism inevitably affects the quality of a paper, likely resulting in a lowered or failed grade, and may lead to harsher penalties such as suspension or expulsion.

Withdrawing from the course: Students should be aware of two deadlines by which they can withdraw from English 1000, with two different outcomes. The exact dates vary, of course, but are available on the University Registrar's webpage (select General Resources). The initial deadline is called the "last day to drop without a grade," occurring roughly five weeks into the semester. Students should receive a paper grade in English 1000 by this date, which may be one factor among others to help them decide whether to remain in the class. Should a student withdraw from the course by this date, enrollment in the course will not appear on a transcript. Further into the semester, should a student withdraw by the "last day to withdraw from a course" a grade of either W or F will be issued. A "W" grade indicates the student was passing at the time of withdrawal. If a student fails to withdraw by this latter date, the instructor has no option but to award the student the grade he or she has earned.

Quiz Yourself on Basic Information About English 1000

1. TRUE or FALSE Good writing comes in a rush of inspiration.
2. TRUE or FALSE Most students find English 1000 more challenging than they expected.
3. TRUE or FALSE Students should plan to spend about 40 hours per paper, from the first stages of planning to the final submission.
4. TRUE or FALSE English 1000 is preparation for writing future college papers.
5. TRUE or FALSE If a student has a doctor's excuse, an absence in English 1000 won't count against him or her.
6. TRUE or FALSE The overall GPA (grade point average) for English 1000 matches the average grade in freshman courses generally.
7. TRUE or FALSE The Writing Lab helps students brainstorm ideas before they begin drafting.
8. TRUE or FALSE Each section of English 1000 is different.
9. TRUE or FALSE Cybertutorials are available to help with English 1000 papers.
10. TRUE or FALSE One-to-one help from the instructor is not possible since so many students take English 1000.

Answers to the Quiz

1.FALSE. Good writing is the result of a steady pace that allows ample time for research, planning, drafting, and revising.

2.FALSE. According to student reports, most found the course to meet their expectations or to be more rewarding than they expected. Only 17% were unpleasantly surprised by the difficulty level of the course.

3.TRUE. Students who plan on writing their papers the night before the due date should not expect to perform well in the course.

4.FALSE. English 1000 does not simply prepare students for college-level writing they will encounter at a future date. The writing tasks in this first-year course are in fact college papers, comparable to writing assignments students can expect in other university courses, especially WI (Writing Intensive) courses.

5. FALSE, or at least not necessarily true. The point is that you should not assume that a doctor's excuse results in an excused absence. Check with the individual instructor and his or her class information/policy sheet.

6.TRUE. The GPA in English 1000 tends to be about 2.7 or 2.8, in the C+ to B- range.

7.TRUE. Tutors helps students with any aspect of writing, from understanding the assignment and brainstorming, to organizing and developing drafts, to polishing final submissions.

8.FALSE, or largely so. It's true that the subjects about which students write vary from section to section, but the types of assignments, number of assignments, writing processes that students must go through, etc. are comparable across sections.

9.TRUE. Contact the Online Writery at <http://web.missouri.edu/~writery/>. Follow the link to "Cybertutorials."

10.FALSE. One-to-one conferences with instructors are a common feature of the English 1000 experience. In course evaluations, students identified time spent talking with the instructor outside of the classroom, more than any other experience, as a key moment affecting their writing performance.