

## Welcome Letter for Critical Writing 1

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Hello and welcome to Critical Writing 1!

Hi everyone! If you're reading this letter, then you are enrolled in English 330-80 (Critical Writing I), an online course for the Spring 2011 semester. The course itself won't begin until school starts on January 18, 2011, but I hope you're reading this letter before the semester begins to give you a sense of how my course will work, and so that you feel comfortable with what you need to know before we get started.

I will be using a mix of streaming media, such as online movies, advertising, and social networking sites, and online literature as examples for critical reviews, discussion questions, and your own published blogs. I hope this is what you were looking forward to when you signed up for this critical writing course-practical and useful commercial as well as literary writing skills relevant in real world applications. So, let's get started!

### Expectations

Your first assignment is to read and review our online syllabus and class policies. Once you log onto Blackboard- (Bb), there is a sidebar listing all the links needed to complete this course successfully. Also, you will want to review our other online site <http://www.theprof4you.com> that I write and maintain outside the Bb environment. My commercial site is available 24/7 worldwide without login identification or periodic downtime beginning midnight January 18, 2011. Here you will find the syllabus, major reading assignments, and PowerPoint lectures that supplement the textbook, online discussion questions, and assigned chat sessions that require the Bb environment for group activities and grading.

How does Blackboard work? This course uses Blackboard as a way of posting information and communicating. If you've taken a course (either online or traditional) that's used Bb, you'll probably be pretty comfortable with the way this course works. If you haven't used Bb before, please refer to the Bb website at

<http://bb.wpunj.edu/> or you may want to schedule time for a brief orientation sometime during or before the first week of classes. How does this course work? This course requires you to log onto Bb at least twice a week or more. I will send announcements via e-mail to your WPUNJ inbox telling you when an assignment link is available. This course will include: Five discussion questions (250+ words) - Four Weblog (Blog) critical reviews/analysis (500 to 750+ words each) - One longer online critical book review (1250+ words) - Active participation in groups and online discussions (varies) Discussion questions. DQs will be posted five times over the course of the semester and will ask you to answer questions and respond to what other students think about the reading(s). These DQ discussions are designed to make you think and respond critically about articles, lectures, online segments being read for that week. They are part of our class discussion and participation that allow you interaction with the general class. Every one of you has an opinion! These DQs will be posted in the Discussion Board section of the Bb website. Blackboard will open and close DQs automatically on the following schedule throughout the semester: 1. DQs will load a week after classes begin on Wednesday, January 26, 2011. Reminder e-mails will be sent to your WPUNJ inbox. 2. DQs load on Wednesdays @ 12:30 AM.\* 3. ALL DQs have instructions and point values. 4. Between 12:30 AM Wednesday and 11:59 PM Saturday, you must answer the posted DQ question listed in red. There will be instructions attached to each DQ as a reminder. 5. ALL DQs must be responded to between 12:01 AM Sunday and 11:59 PM Monday. 6. ALL DQ links close @ midnight on Tuesdays, which is the beginning of the Bb day\*\* 7. DQ grades are posted on Tuesdays in the Grading Center, unless noted otherwise. 8. DQs are weighted like a test value in Bb' Grading Center. Please review Class Policies for more details. \*Bb uses Eastern Time Zone for all pre-scheduled applications. \*\*Please note: I will not reopen a DQ link once it closes. Some helpful hints: It is very important that you post your responses on time. Failure to do so will significantly affect your grade. If you have trouble posting your assignment, please send me an e-mail right away. I suggest that you do not wait to post your assignments until five minutes before the deadline. Give yourself more time in case you have technical problems. It's also important that you follow the minimum length guidelines that I give for each assignment. If you post a response that is significantly short of the requirement, you will not get credit. Most of my students do well in this class; however, the students who do not do well often miss several deadlines and post responses that are too short. What do I need to do during my first week of class? You will not be able to log onto the Bb site until school officially begins on Tuesday, January 18, 2011. However, you can go to our class website to review the syllabus and class policies RIGHT NOW! ☺

Week 1 - Read the syllabus and class policies. This course requires you to work on several different pieces of writing at the same time, moving back and forth among them as the semester progresses. The syllabus gives more details about assignments in this course, and the class policies explain how the course grading works, and what you should expect. So, please do take some time to look over the syllabus, and be ready to ask questions if there's something that you don't understand. If you take just a little time to do this in the beginning of the semester,

it will save us both some potential problems. Week 1 - Find your assigned group. I asked Bb to assign each student into a group randomly. I would suggest you find the Group link and click on it to find the group to which you are assigned. Then, send an e-mail introducing yourself to other group members. As a group, you will be helping each other navigate this course, review drafts, and complete group assignments. So, get to know each other well! Week 1 & 2 - Begin assigned readings. You will have assigned readings from Common Culture and discussion questions to answer. Here's what to expect: 1. An e-mail reminder regarding Discussion Question 1 (DQ 1) will be sent to your e-mail inbox. Click on the link provided. 2. Your first graded DQ 1 will open Wednesday, September 8, 2010 in Bb. 3. Read the directions for DQ 1 carefully. 4. Your initial response to DQ 1 is DUE on Saturday, September 11, 2010 at 11:59 PM. 5. Your response to other student posts will be due on Monday, September 13, 2010 by 11:59 PM when the DQ window closes. If you still need to ask me a question privately, e-mail me. An e-mail may be sent through Bb's Course Tools link to All Instructor Users. Finally, no matter what happens during this course, always remember to **KEEP MOVING FORWARD**. Your success in this online course is my success, so let's be successful together!

How is an online course different than a traditional course? If you haven't taken an online course before, you may be wondering about the experience. Online learning is different from a traditional, on ground course, and it requires some different skills sets and attitudes. For instance, the advantage of taking a traditional course is that there is (or should be) a lot of spontaneous discussion and dialogue where your instructor can immediately respond to any of your questions. Answering questions. Online your questions are answered via e-mail. The turnaround time to answer an e-mail may take 24 to 48 hours since I am not available 24/7. However, I do try and respond to my students as quickly as possible I know you can get nervous at times about assignments. Normally, I review and answer student e-mails once in the morning and once in the evening Mondays through Fridays. Please note that I do not use a Blackberry or have a Twitter account. If you use mobile devices, feel free to use them to contact other students in class and our Blackboard class. And, since I do need some downtime, I am not available on weekends. If you have a dire emergency, send me a voicemail, talk to your group, or contact the Help Desk. Flexibility. An online course that gives you a lot more flexibility to work at your own pace becomes more like an independent study. There are still deadlines each week, but if you want to do the coursework at two in the morning, you can. Yes, you do lose some of the back and forth that you'd get in a traditional classroom, but what you gain is time to think about other people's comments and to decide on your own. Participation and tone. Remember, everything in an online environment is written, not oral, and, as the saying goes, "everything can and will be held against you" if your responses are inappropriate. Unlike the traditional classroom, where people's responses are verbally immediate and never thought through carefully, an online classroom response is different. In an online class discussion, your responses must be more thoughtful, more in-depth, and written in a tone that is not perceived as

offensive. Since you have to actively participate by responding to discussion questions I've posted, and to things that your classmates have written, my suggestion is that you review a response BEFORE hitting that send button!

Course methodology. There are no objective tests given in my course! However, I'll be asking you to do a lot of writing - no surprise - in both Bb and on the World Wide Web. Sometimes that writing will come as a response to a discussion question that I have posted or sometimes it will be a response to writing that has been posted by a classmate. I will post a minimum length requirement--from 200 to 1250+ words--it's for a reason, and I will insist that you respect that minimum length in order to receive credit for the piece. In addition, for certain assignments, I use rubrics to assess your writing skills. These rubrics are available for viewing on the class website.

Conclusion. So even though we won't meet face to face during the semester, this online course is quite different from a correspondence course; that is to say, it's not a course that you can do over whatever time period you want at whatever pace that you want. It's not a set of ready-made material and questions for you to answer. Instead, an online course is quite interactive--probably more interactive than most traditional courses. It requires you to log on regularly and to participate in a discussion of the material with other students.

## Texts

Petracca, Michael and Madeleine Sarapure. *Common Culture: Reading and Writing About American Popular Culture*. 6th ed. Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2009.

Solove, Daniel J. *The Future of Reputation: Gossip, Rumor, and Privacy on the Internet*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2007.

## Grading

**Work Load & Grading** This course will require a good deal of reading and writing. Your grade will be based on the following factors: 1. One (1) critical book review minimum 1,250+ words. 2. Substantive contributions to five (5) discussion questions approximately 250+ words minimum for initial response. 3. Four (4) Weblog (Blog) critical reviews approximately 500-750+ words minimum. 4. Active participation in all group assignments. Grading percentages 30% -- One (1) critical book review 30% -- Four (4) online blog reviews 20% -- Five (5) discussion questions 20% -- Active participation (Includes responding to blog forums, group participation, online conferencing, meeting deadlines)

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**How to Access Blackboard:**

To log on to Bb point your web browser to <http://bb.wpunj.edu> and click the Login button in the upper left. Then enter your username and password in the spaces provided and click login again -- you'll find your course Bb sites listed on the right.

Some things to be aware of as you work with Blackboard:

1. You probably won't find all your courses listed; the only ones that will appear are those that have been activated by the professor teaching the course. Professors who don't use Blackboard will not activate their courses.
2. Your username is comprised of your lastname and firstinitial, usually appended with a numeral. If you don't know your WPUNJ system username password you can use the Username lookup link at <http://bb.wpunj.edu> , or go to it directly at <http://www.wpunj.edu/username>
3. If you are already logged in to the WPUNJ system through WPCconnect you won't have to re-enter your username and password -- just click the first login button.
4. Blackboard documentation can be found in two places: at Bb Home, <http://bb.wpunj.edu>, before one logs in, and in the Blackboard Support tab after one has logged on.
5. You can always obtain Bb help by using the Problem Report form at <http://bb.wpunj.edu> , or by going to it directly at: <https://liberty.wpunj.edu/bb/support-center/> .

**WPUNJ Student Email:**

To access WPUNJ Student Email point your web browser to <http://wpcconnect.wpunj.edu>, enter your username and password, then select the **Mail** tab. If you are logging on for the first time you'll be asked to set your time zone and language.

Blackboard courses will use student email; third-party email addresses will not work on Bb

**Good luck and have fun in the course! Rhoda Reynolds**