

Generic Syllabus: Experiences in Literature

Discussion Questions and Responses: For a class that meets twice a week, the homework assignment for every class is to write a 250-300 word response to a discussion question posed by the instructor. (If the class meets once a week, these could be slightly longer responses.) These responses won't be graded (although they will count for credit), and so the focus shouldn't be on precise and well-edited writing. Instead, they're a way to use writing to begin thinking about a reading assignment and/or a topic that's relevant to the course. They're also initial steps towards building up the writing and thinking that will eventually lead to larger papers for the course. These short writing assignments would be shared with the instructor and with other students and would form a starting point for discussing the readings.

Writing Circles: These would meet every fourth class. (Or half of every other class if the class meets only once a week). For writing circles, students are asked to develop drafts of papers (minimally three pages long). Depending on the instructor's preferences, papers for writing circle might be developed from previous discussion responses, they might be more formal assignments the instructor develops to address the readings, or they might be topics of students' own choice. Over the course of the semester, they might be a mix of these things.

Students are asked to bring enough copies of these drafts to share with a writing circle: 2-4 other students. The class is then spent having students read and discuss each other's drafts. Some attention here needs to be paid to guiding students to be able to give good feedback and commit to engaged discussion, not an easy task by any means. It may be useful to model this process by having one student email the instructor his or her paper, making copies of the paper, and modeling the sort of discussion you hope to have as a class before breaking into writing circles. Written guidelines for giving feedback may also be useful—see the attached “response sheets” for one example.

Developed Drafts: At different times over the semester, students are asked to take the rough drafts that they have shared in their writing circles and develop them further into 4-6 page papers. They should attach all rough work to the back of these developed drafts and write a brief cover letter, explaining what feedback they have gotten and how they draft has been revised. They should submit these developed drafts to their instructor for feedback—either written or oral. (Ideally, students should have a chance to get both types of feedback, though this may mean needing to cancel class for a week once or twice over the semester in order to conference with students. Usually twenty minutes is sufficient for each student.)

Possible Schedule of Deadlines for Developed Drafts: Week 5, Week 7, Week 12

Reflective Essays: Because English 1500 is a writing-intensive course, it's particularly important that students are asked to think about their own writing and revising processes. Cover letters are one way of doing this for individual papers. But it's also a good idea to have a separate assignment that asks students to look back over the body of work that they have done over the semester and to make observations about their own writing process. How do they generate ideas? How does sharing their ideas help develop them or change what they think about them? How do they find ways to develop

their thinking in subsequent drafts? What do they notice about places where they get stuck or about instances when they are able to move ahead? How do their expectations about writing and reading differ from their classmates or their teachers? These are some questions that can be used to get students to think more consciously and critically about their own writing process.

Students might be asked to write a brief draft of such an essay near the mid-point of the course, getting some brief feedback from their instructor and/or a writing circle—but no grade. Then they might be required to revisit this essay at the end of the semester and include it in their final portfolio.

Possible Schedule of Deadlines for Reflective Essay: Week 9, Final Portfolio

Final Portfolio: Students assemble a final portfolio which includes two developed drafts that they have worked on and revised over the semester, cover letters and rough work for each of these papers, and their final reflective essay.

One Possible Grading Scheme:

Attendance: Because this is a writing and reading workshop, we believe that a fairly tight attendance policy is advisable. We suggest limiting total absences for the semester to five for a class that meets twice a week or three for a class that meets once a week. Students who exceed these absences could withdraw (if this happens before the withdrawal deadline) or would receive an F for the class.

Discussion Responses: Twenty percent of final grade. (We're not suggesting that instructors grade individual responses. This grade is simply based on students completing these responses on time.)

Developed Drafts: We suggest not grading these drafts. Putting a grade on students' writing at this point suggests that it is done. Instead, it's better to sort these drafts into categories that indicate how close they are to being ready for the final portfolio: "Doesn't Meet Minimum Standards for Credit," "In-Progress," "Almost Ready for Portfolio." We expect that almost all drafts at this point in the semester will fall into the "In-Progress" category.

It is important, however, that these drafts be submitted on time, and instructors might want to penalize late drafts by indicating that they will lower the student's final portfolio grade by one letter.

Final Portfolio: Eighty percent of final grade. Because these are drafts that students have chosen themselves and because they have had an opportunity for feedback and extensive revision, it is appropriate to have fairly high standards for these papers. Here are some possible criteria for grading the final portfolio.

Grading will be based on:

- **Your engagement with the books and films in question.** I expect your papers to analyze literature and/or film—not merely to summarize or to give examples, but to use those examples to raise interesting ideas. You should quote passages from books and/or analyze specific

scenes/characters/dialogue from films. At least one of the papers must deal with a work we have read in class this semester.

- **The quality of your writing.** Since you have gotten feedback to these drafts and revised them, I will expect the quality of writing in these papers to be very strong. There should be few, if any, proofreading errors, and your papers should be clear, well-organized and a pleasure to read. I would strongly suggest reading them out loud to hear how they sound.
- **Your process of revision.** I will look for signs that you have taken the revision process seriously and that you have come away from the class with a good sense of how to see possibilities in an early draft that you can develop and craft as you revise. I will look closely both at the cover letters for what they say about this process and to the different drafts of your papers to see evidence of the process.

Feedback/Response Sheet – Writing Circle #1

If you develop this paper later in the semester, it will be very important to keep track of the feedback you get in class. I will require you to submit this response sheet along with your rough work.

Title of Paper: _____

People in Your Group: _____

For feedback today, what I want you to do is to start a conversation about the content of your paper, not about the form of your paper. In other words, I'm not asking for the usual critique—was I clear enough? What did you like about my paper or not like? What should I write more about? Did I use enough examples? Etc., etc., etc. Boring!

Instead, I'd like you to write out some questions to ask and/or some ideas to talk about. How could you use the content of your paper to engage in a conversation in your group? How could you ask them for their examples, their opinions, and their reactions to what you've said? (Not how you've said it.) This is your paper, of course, but I want to use it as a chance to find out their ideas.

So—take a few minutes to jot down a few notes—comments, questions, talking points. Your paper is a starting point for conversation, and it will be your job to get the conversation started. What would be interesting to talk about?

Your Notes and Questions:

Notes and Ideas You got From the Conversation—Or Ideas You Have after the Conversation is over:
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Feedback/Response Sheet – Writing Circle #2:

If you develop this paper later in the semester, it will be very important to keep track of the feedback you get in class. I will require you to submit this response sheet along with your rough work.

Title of Paper: _____

People in Your Group: _____

What does your paper say about your topic? A slightly different way of putting this: what questions does the paper try to answer? Notice that I'm not asking what your topic is. The question is: what does your paper try to *do* with the topic. What questions does it try to answer?

The questions I'm asking in my paper are:

Here's what I'm saying in the paper—my responses to these questions:

Where else can you go with this paper? Because this paper is only a rough draft, you may need to go further than you have. Use your group to try to come up with some interesting questions, some possible directions to go with the paper, some good passages to look at.

More questions or ideas to explore—

Good passages to look at in the novel--

Other Notes, Comments, and Ideas: