

English 101 - 30222
Critical Thinking and College Composition
Part I: August 26 - October 14

Room: D-128

Schedule: Tuesdays and Thursday 11:00 - 12:30 August 26 through December 20 - 2010

Instructor: Glenn Cheney (860) 822-1270 glenncheney@comcast.net (see cheneybooks.com for more information.)

Office Hours: By appointment, preferably immediately before or after class. Phone calls accepted 8:00 - 6:00

Course Description

This course prepares students for the rigors of thinking, reading and writing not only in the pursuit of education but also in their participation in democracy, society, and life. It endeavors to establish the links between critical thinking, critical reading, and critical writing, each of which should affect the others. Lectures and assignments will cover the proper use of English, the application of critical thought to the process of reading and writing, techniques for research and documentation, standard academic presentation of research papers, and the nature of truth.

Course Overview

In this course students will be asked to expand and improve their ability to think critically, and they will be asked to put thought to work. They will be asked to apply thought to what they read. In so doing, they should strive to turn information into knowledge and knowledge into understanding. They will learn to avoid or overcome obstacles to critical thought, such as myth, prejudice, fear, and attitude. They will learn to write better sentences and express more coherent and comprehensive ideas. They will become more powerful.

The main text for this course is *Rereading America*. Students will read passages, glean from them ideas and information, and write short essays about them. The reading, gleaning, and writing should all involve critical thinking.

This course will demand quite a bit of writing. It will come in three forms:

- **Research Papers:** Students will be assigned two formal research papers of 4-6 pages. These are formal, academic papers based on at least three sources properly documented in MLA format. They should include a bibliography in MLA style. They should also include the outline that was used to plan the paper. (The outline need not follow any formal structure, and it need not be typed. whatever works is good.) These papers must be typed in a word processing application.

- **Essays:** Students will be asked to write two formal essays of 3-5 pages. These are formal pieces of writing based on readings and topic assignments. They should exhibit critical thinking and should be organized enough to present an idea. They must be typed, and the length should be 3-5 pages. Essays should be clipped to a page or more of outline, verbal explorations, lists of ideas, previous draft(s), or whatever other technique the writer has used to prepare for the writing of the essay.

- **Journals:** These are informal writings. They will not be graded by content or form. Rather, they will be graded by the appearance that thought has been applied to writing, and that writing has been used to lead to thought. In some cases, journal entries will be assigned. In others, students are free to write whatever seems to them to be *relevant to the class*. Journals need not be (but can be) typed. If handwritten, the writing should be easily legible. Journals should be either spiral notebooks (for handwritten journals) or 3-ring binders (for typed journals). You can staple typed pages into spiral notebooks. Be creative with these journals. Use them to explore ideas and be creative. The only way you can do this wrong is to not do it.

- **Letters to the editors** of newspapers and magazines: Students should expect to write and send at least 3 letters by December 1. Successful publication of a letter, however, will exempt a student from writing more letters. The letters should be about an editorial or opinion piece or column that appeared in the publication, and it should demonstrate critical thinking clearly and succinctly expressed. The letters and a copy of any published letter should be included in the portfolio. Letters may be sent in by mail or email, but in either case they must be presented in business letter format and printed out for the portfolio.

The formal and informal writings will add up to a portfolio of writings that will constitute the basis of about 80% of a final grade. (Research papers: 30%. Essays: 30%. Journals: 20%.) Class participation and workshop participation will add up to another 20%.) Students should save all Papers, Essays, Letters to Editors, and any notes, drafts, or outlines for presentation in the middle and end of the semester. Clip outlines and notes to their respective final drafts. Journals will be collected occasionally for review.

Grading of Writings

Formal writings will be graded on the following qualities:

- Organization and presentation of thoughts and ideas;
- Grammar, spelling, MLS citations;
- Efforts at revision.

Journals will be graded very subjectively according to volume, relevance to the class, evidence of planning, outlining, exploring, and indications of the serious treatment of ideas and their expression in writing. The journal should be evidence that says, "I think. I write."

Class Reviews

Each class will begin with a review of the previous class. These reviews should show evidence that the reviewers have put some critical thought into what they have learned.

Eight teams of 3 students will present these reviews. One will give a brief (3-5 minutes) oral report on what was discussed in the previous class. One will present the class with a single page of typed notes that review the same material. (This document should be emailed to the professor before class for subsequent distribution to the class.) One will explain to the class what this information is good for in real life — at a job, in the democracy, in a family, in school, or anywhere in life. This presentation need not take more than 3 minutes. The class will have an opportunity to ask questions.

These teams should meet shortly after the class they will report on so they can organize their thoughts. While each will give a distinct presentation, all three should work on all three presentations. These presentations will be considered part of class participation.

OBJECTIVES

After completing English 101, you should be able to

Read and think critically

- Demonstrate an understanding of the intrinsic connection between reading, critical thinking, and writing.
- Demonstrate the ability to read and understand academic writing with differing points of views and be able to recognize and analyze the merits of each position.
- Evaluate the accuracy and validity of a specific perspective or argument.
- Understand how audience, purpose, genre, and context shape the meaning and effectiveness of all texts, especially texts presented in college settings.

Write critically and analytically

- Demonstrate an understanding of the organizational skills required for academic writing, such as pre-writing activities, outlining, paragraph development, revising, and the ability to thoroughly edit.
- Demonstrate in reading and writing an understanding of the rhetorical concepts of audience, invention, style, organization, and delivery.
- Develop your own perspective into an academic argument that reflects critical analysis.
- Feel more comfortable about writing while at the same time taking it seriously.

Demonstrate information literacy

- Conduct research using library tools, print and electronic media, and any other sources that enhance academic writing.
- Evaluate sources for accuracy, validity, and academic relevance.
- Use information to support and develop your assertions through paraphrasing, quoting, and summarizing.
- Cite sources using MLA citation style.
- Employ strategies for avoiding plagiarism.

Apply the foundations of strong academic skills

- Develop and use academic reading and speaking vocabularies.
- Use tools appropriately related to reading and writing, such as dictionaries and writing handbooks.
- Utilize word processing programs, including proofreading software, in the writing process.
- Produce documents according to MLA formatting conventions.
- Employ strategies for effective editing, including attention to grammar, mechanics, usage, and the conventions of standard American English.
- collaborate with others in developing points of views and analyzing writing

- Employ effective annotation skills.
- Use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating in a college setting.
- Formulate appropriate questions and hypotheses.

Required Texts

- Columbo, Gary, et al, eds. *Rereading America: Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing*
- Faigley, Lester *The Brief Penguin Handbook*
- Strunk & White, *The Elements of Style*
- A dictionary

Optional Texts

- Cheney, Theodore A. Rees, *Getting the Words Right*

Workshops and Peer Review

This class will involve workshops and peer review. In workshops, groups of 4-5 will comment on each other's essays or research papers or plans for same. We will also use one-on-one peer review to help each other probe for ideas, avoid problems, improve writing, and so on.

Course Outline

Part I (August 26 - October 14)

(subject to change)

August 26

First class. Introduction of the concept of Critical Thinking. Discussion: What is thinking vs. critical thinking? What helps critical thinking? What obstructs it? What good is it? How is it connected to reading and writing? What good is writing? Homework: Read "Critical Thinking" in Wikipedia and write journal entry on the topic — anything you feel like saying about it. Team 1 will review this class.

August 31

Discussion of Wikipedia article and sharing of journal entries. Discussion and analysis of Norman Rockwell paintings in *Rereading America*, pp. 22-24. What are the different aspects of these paintings that we can look at? (e.g. social, economic, historic, the past vs. the present, what's invisibly present in the picture, and what else can we consider?) Signs and their significance. Letters to editors. Editorials and op-ed pieces. Homework: 1) Read "What We Really Miss about the 1950s." 2) Write journal entry on some element of the '50s that was assumed to be good then but would be bad if it existed today. Please write this in paragraph form, about a page. You may be asked to read it in class. 3) Write a letter to an editor and bring typed copy to class to hand in. Team 2 will review this class on Sept. 7.

September 2

Learn the Library Day. Meet at the Reference Desk at the library. Homework: Read Chapter 1 of Penguin book (pp. 1-6)

September 7

Discussion of journal entries on the 1950s. What are some myths of the 50s? What are some myths about today? When people look back on 2010, how might they remember the times? What will they completely forget about? Do we already have myths about the current decade? Discuss Chapter 1 of Penguin book. Homework: Read “Girl” (p. 524). Write a similar story about your own mother or father. Write fast. Don’t think. Be truthful. Don’t stop until you realize you have arrived somewhere you didn’t expect to go. Read parts a, b, and c of Chapter 2 of Penguin book. Team 3 will review this class.

September 9

Discuss “Girl” and values and where they come from and what they’re worth. Homework: 1) Read “The Power of Cultural Myths” and “Cultural Myths as Obstacles to Critical Thinking” (pp. 2-6 in *Rereading America*). 2) Essay on Hypocrisy in the 1950s and 2000s. Group Discussions to explore the topic. (3-5 pages. Don’t do an overview of hypocrisy. Pick a value and focus on how it is promoted yet ignored. Maybe compare a value or two from the two periods. Cite at least 2 sources.) Draft due Sept. 21 for peer review. Final draft due Sept. 28. See Chapter 5 of *Penguin* book for ideas on research. See “MLA” section on how to cite. Team 4 will review this class.

September 14

MLA citations. Discuss cultural myths. Discuss progress on and problems with essays. Homework: Read “Active Reading” in *Rereading America* (pp. 10-14). Work on essays for drafts due next class. Team 5 will review this class.

September 16

Discuss Active Reading. Peer Workshops. Option to hand in draft as final. Final draft due in one week. Writing: the use of transitions. Read: “Serving in Florida” (p. 290) for discussion in next class. Journal entry on employment suggested, perhaps with personal experience. Also, note the transitional elements between paragraphs. Team 6 will review this class.

September 21

Discuss work and wages: myths and presumptions, problems and solutions, fair pay, living wage. Homework: Essays due next class! Read: “From *Ragged Dick*” (p. 258) and “Horatio Alger,” p. 272. Team 7 will review this class.

September 23

Discuss “Horatio Alger” and career fairness in America. Does the Alger myth make America better or worse? Thoughts on better writing. Homework: Write a brief (no more than a page) plot for a Horatio Alger story as you think it would happen today. No need to write it well. Just generate a plot. (Model it after someone you know or a personal experience, if that helps.) Team 8 will review this class.

September 28

Share Horatio Alger stories. Analyze them for various signs (of the times, of culture, of myth, of prejudice, history, economics, etc.) Homework: Study pictures in “Visual Portfolio,” pp. 439-447. Pick one, write a page or so about what it makes you feel. Then for a page or two analyze what in the picture makes you feel that way. (Pay attention to such things as facial expression, eyes, wrinkles, background, signs of economic class, zeitgeist, body language, any signs of

struggle, love, hope, despair, history, conflict, peace, achievement, or any other concept you can perceive through signs.) Team 1 will review this class.

September 30

Discuss analyses of photos. Share ways that deeper critical thought could explain more about emotional response. Homework: Read “Two Ways a Woman Can Get Hurt: Advertising and Violence” (p. 575). Find an ad in a magazine. Cut it out or copy it, stick it in your journal and apply some critical thinking to it. What are its unstated messages, its signs? What does it say about a certain kind of person (e.g. person of a given class, gender, race, education, culture, nationality) or myth about today? Team 2 will review this class.

October 5

Planning and outlining an essay: looking for ideas, thinking about structure and transition, using critical thinking to arrive at a new conclusion. Homework: An essay on advertising and values, just 2-3 pages. No citations necessary. In this essay we will be looking for how organized your thoughts are. Do some thinking. Figure out what you want to write about. Do a rough outline. Use transitions between your paragraphs. See where the writing takes you. Then write it again. Due Oct. 12. Team 3 will review this class.

October 7

Better writing. Homework: A letter to the editor of the New York Times main editorial of October 13. 150 words max! Try for under 100. Submit the letter to the editor of the Times before 2:00 p.m. of that day by email (letters@nytimes.com) with Blind Copy (bc) to glenncheney@comcast.net. Be sure letter includes your name, address, email address, and phone number. No grade except to pass for doing it or fail for not. Team 4 will review this class.

October 12

Discuss NY Times editorial and review letters to the editor. Portfolios due. Team 5 will review this class.