

Communication 4312 – A Syllabus

Our objectives in this class are to help you improve your writing and to get you started on a lifetime of reading and writing. Notice I say “our” because to succeed we must all be involved. For my part, I will organize the class and try to help through lectures and guests, writing assignments and other matters.

Then, what will be required of you?

A Plan For the Class

To start with, read everything you can get your hands. Read the *Cougar* every day and read the *Houston Chronicle* as much as possible. Watch the news on TV and listen to news on the radio -- especially KUHF and KPFT. In other words, immerse yourself in reading and in paying attention to what’s going on.

Radio programs I like – all on KUHF: *A Prairie Home Companion*, at 5 p.m. on Saturday and at noon on Sunday; *Writer’s Almanac*, at 11:55 a.m. weekdays; *The Engines of Our Ingenuity* with John Lienhard, twice daily; *Fresh Air Weekend* with Terry Gross, at 10 a.m. on Sunday and at 11 daily on KUHF-HD; *This American Life* with Ira Glass, at 11 a.m. on Sunday; Also, you should sign up to receive *Writer’s Almanac* on the web.

Read books. Any books. Of course, I want you to read certain books for class. Those books are *Hiroshima* by John Hersey; *On Writing, A Memoir of the Craft* by Stephen King;; and *The Moviegoer* by Walker Percy. You’re going to have to write about all these books. Make elaborate notes as you go.

I like *The New Yorker*, and this is an excellent time to begin your subscription. Tell your parents it’s required. Find student rates on line. I also like *Vanity Fair* and *Texas Monthly*.

The class almost always will begin on time. I expect you to be in class every day and I expect you to be on time. This is a matter of discipline and respect. It’s something you need to get in the habit of doing.

Get a good notebook and take notes every day. Have a second notebook for when we have guests. And a little notebook to keep up with the assignments. I’ll have a ream or two of handouts. You’ll want to keep them, so find a way to organize them. Get a tape recorder and practice using it in class.

Writing requires discipline, preparation, organization, attention to detail, language skills, curiosity, interest, commitment, patience and a bunch

of other concepts. You can't be a good writer without these skills. I will emphasize these in this class -- over and over.

For us to succeed in improving your writing you must work with me on what I ask you to do. The most significant part of the plan is this: You must come to class every day and you must turn in assignments on time.

I will readily admit that some classes are more important than others. For one reason or another, sometimes I will seem to be treading water. On other days, I'll take a giant step forward. Since you have no way of knowing which day is going to be which, you need to be here.

Class Attendance

A major consideration in my opinion of you will be class attendance. I can accept the fact that situations occur and you may have to miss a class occasionally. Car trouble, illness, etc. If that does happen, you must let me know immediately. If you have enough time to do so, send me an e-mail at dmcham@aol.com. If not, call my office before class: 713 743 2872.

Habitual tardiness will reduce my impression of you. I expect you to be in class when class begins. Often I will give instructions about assignments, etc. at the very start of the class. If you are habitually tardy, you may expect to get something other than a good grade.

As to the assignments: They must be turned in on time !!! Missing assignments is a serious offense. Missed assignment will result in your final grade being lower than otherwise it would have been.

All the assignments are important, but some are obviously more important. You must not lag behind on the major assignments. I want to be able to look over all the work at the same time and comment on it. If you aren't in sync with me, I won't be able to do that.

Please, please, do not ask me to tell you what went on when you weren't here. If you send me an e-mail about that, I may just ignore you. And, please again, don't ask for handouts I may have passed out. You should have someone in the class watch out for your interests if you are unable to attend. That is, a buddy. Or more than one buddy. You can do the same for them.

This is especially applicable to assignments. Please don't e-mail me or come to see me later and ask what the assignment was. If you didn't get it, be sure your buddy did.

In case you didn't pick up my emphasis, I am stressing the fact that you must be responsible and disciplined. As your teacher, I can't do much for you if you aren't doing that much for yourself.

On Grades

I will grade you according to all the criteria I have mentioned. I won't put grades on individual papers. Instead, you'll get a final grade. This doesn't mean you will be in the dark as to how well you are doing as the semester progresses. You can tell by my specific and general remarks. But, if you are in doubt, talk with me about this as we go.

Here's the way I'll grade you: If your overall work is outstanding and you've done everything I've asked of you, you'll make an A. If your work is good but not outstanding and yet you fell down in some areas, you'll make a B. If your work and responsiveness is pedestrian, or average, you'll make a C.

If for some reason I don't think you are going to be successful in the class, I will urge you to drop the course at the appropriate time.

I will have a more complete explanation of grades in a separate handout.

In Conclusion

I am looking forward to our semester together. I think you'll find this to be one of the most rewarding classes of your college career. I really can help you with your writing. But only to the extent you follow my suggestions and work with me. Getting the ground rules straight in advance is important for us all.

Any time you want to talk with me privately, I will be happy to do so. I can meet you before or after class or at other time convenient to both of us. I can communicate with you via e-mail or by phone.

Best wishes for a successful semester.

■ David McHam