Writing Seminar: Writing in Black and White
Instructor: John Sheehy (office hours)
T-F 1:30 - 2:50, D38

Requirements and Grading Policies

Minimum Course Requirements

- Participation in class discussion
- Frequent short writing assignments, both in and out of class
- Peer reviews of other students' papers
- Three conferences with the instructor
- At least one conference with a writing tutor at the Writer's Block
- Three major papers (two 6-page critical papers based on class texts, and one 8-10 page research paper)

The Grade Contract

When you register for the class, you're agreeing to the following contract:

If you want to pass (with a C- or better), you will . . .

- turn in every draft of every paper on the day it is due;
- make it to all your conferences with me;
- visit a writing tutor at least once during the semester;
- miss no more than four class meetings (including film viewings), and no more than two in a row;
- miss no more than two short writing assignments, and turn in the rest on time.

If you want to get a B+ or better, you will . . .

- earn a B+ or better mathematically (see Grading below);
- turn in every draft of every paper on the day it is due;
- make it to all your conferences with me;
- visit a writing tutor at least once during the semester;
- miss no more than three class meetings (including film viewings);
- complete ALL short writing assignments on time.

Late drafts

Every paper you do for this class will go through at least two drafts: I never grade first drafts, but I will put a grade on second drafts. Because we're on a tight schedule, getting drafts done on time is crucial: for this reason, I will deduct ½ a grade point from the paper grade for each day a draft is late. (That is, a 2.7 – a B - -- turns into a 1.2 – a D -- after three days.) Please turn your work in on time, even if the draft isn't “finished”: give me what you've got on the due date, and I can help you with it.

Grading

- Participation (class discussions, short writing assignments, peer reviews) 25%
- Paper 1 (4 pages) 20%
- Paper 2 (6 pages) 25%
• Paper 3 (8-10 pages) 30%

Papers will be graded on a 4.0 scale (0 - 1.0 is an F, 1.0 - 2.0 is a D, 2.0 - 2.7 is a C, 2.8 - 3.4 is a B, 3.5 - 4.0 is an A). You will revise each paper at least once. First drafts will not be graded. You can revise your papers as often as you want, but you can only revise a paper once to improve your grade.

The Five Criteria

Below I’ve set out the criteria I use when grading your essays; as you will notice, these are simply an abbreviated version of the criteria used in evaluating portfolios submitted for the Clear Writing Requirement. When you get your final revisions (i.e., 1.2, 2.2, 3.2, etc.) back, they will include not only my comments, but also a grid that lays out where the paper stands with respect to these criteria. Pay close attention to that grid: it is meant to help you isolate areas of your writing that you may need to work on when you revise the paper, either for the class or for your portfolio.

1. **Concept** addresses the strength and clarity of the paper overall. Is the paper's topic clearly laid out? Have you introduced your reader to the questions about that topic that the paper is trying to answer? Are your answers to those questions also clear? Is the argument that drives the paper worth making, or does it seem simplistic? (That is, are you arguing that the sky is blue, or that water is wet?)

2. **Analysis** addresses how well you’ve developed and supported your paper. Does the paper make the reader feel that you really know your topic and your sources? Have you followed your analysis of the topic as far as it could go, or have you left your reader saying, "Well, that's true, but what about this?” Have you shown your readers how you arrived at your position, or have you simply told them? Are your assertions backed up with references (in the form of quotes, paraphrases or summaries) to your sources? When you quote a source, do you then interpret the quotation -- or do you leave it sitting there, hoping it will speak for itself?

3. **Structure** addresses how well you’ve led the reader through your paper. Does your paper follow a clear and logical progression from idea to idea? Have you prepared your reader early in the paper for the arguments you are going to make? Do you make logical transitions from idea to idea, or do your peer reviewers often ask you, "How did you get from this paragraph to THIS paragraph?” Does your paper address all the issues you bring up in its introduction? Does your paper conclude, or does it just stop?

4. **Style** addresses how the paper sounds. Does the paper's introduction really introduce the paper, or does it just spin its wheels? Do parts of the paper strike the reader as superfluous, as "dead wood?” Does the paper often rely on the passive voice? Does the paper use the right words at the right time, or does it seem "thesaurused?” Does the paper seem wordy, or its tone overly weighty, to its readers?

**Presentation and Documentation (P&D)** addresses how the paper looks and reads. Does the paper exhibit consistent grammatical or mechanical mistakes (i.e., sentence fragments, clumsy syntax, shifts in tense, incorrect punctuation or spelling)? Are your readers stopped by sentences they either don't understand or have to spend time figuring out? Are your sources clearly and accurately documented in both the footnotes and the bibliography? Does the paper make the reader feel that you are paying attention to details, or that you've rushed to print without reading the paper yourself?