

FAQ - ENGL 3300 Spring 2003 UTPB

What counts as good participation?

Comments sharing insights, posing questions, and responding to classmates. Your readiness to participate in class (attentive listening, informed and thoughtful contribution to class and group discussions, raising of questions) is assumed. Informed and attentive participation is the key. Verbal contributions to class may be combined with electronic contributions to the web discussion.

What can I expect on a test in a literary theory class?

Generally tests balance paragraph and essay-length questions. They assess your reading comprehension, assimilation of significant concepts presented in the reading and during classes, and your ability to analyze and interpret texts. I design tests to allow you both: to demonstrate a familiarity with major theoretical concepts/terms; and to apply them in brief analyses of literary texts.

What if my interpretation of a work is wrong?

I like to compare good interpretations to the arguments of good lawyers. Obviously, in an ideal courtroom, both prosecuting and defense attorneys make strong, informed and persuasive claims. They work with the evidence at hand to persuade a judge or jurors. Obviously, only one can have the "right" on his or her side, but both can make competent cases. The analogy is key too, because a good literary interpretation is not just an expression of a reader's feelings or intuitive response to a work; it must be expressed in a way designed to persuade others. Thus ultimately for most literature courses, exactly what your opinion is matters much less than how you arrived at it and how effectively you can communicate your reasoning.

Can I make up missed work?

Students should expect to complete tests on the scheduled date. In cases of extreme illness or family emergency only, students may, upon documentation, complete a test the following class meeting. Minor work such as quizzes will not be made up. Other assignments will be accepted late but with a penalty.

What is marginal notation?

If you have written nothing in the margins of a text, I will assume you have not read it. Almost all good readers literally interact with the texts they read by making notes in the margin. Students sometimes tell me that they prefer not to write in their books because they want to resell them. My first response is, don't! Hold onto them and you may decide to read them again some day. If you can't resist getting \$10 for a \$50 text, then read with an erasable pencil (hi-lighting is useless anyway) or keep post-it notes handy and write on them. Yes, I'm serious about this!

How do I access the class discussion list?

Our class has an online discussion area accessible on a UTPB web server. If you have not previously used WebCT in a UTPB class, you will find it easiest to access the discussion area from my web page (www.utpb.edu/~sherwood), which will also feature links to relevant resources. The discussion is password protected; if you have trouble accessing or registered late for the class, you will need to contact Reach directly for your account information. Consider the discussion list an electronic twin to our classroom discussion, with the advantage that you can work out your thoughts before "sending". Address the texts themselves, points raised in class discussion/lecture, or the ongoing web conversation. You may make an argumentative claim or raise a thoughtful question. Work with your classmates, reading their posts and responding, and you may gain further: picking up ideas for your paper or clarifying your knowledge of a text. I will browse your postings and occasionally participate in the discussion, but I will not grade each individual post. Participate weekly; you should not expect to make up for missed postings in the final week of class.

What does he expect us to do when we read these assignments by ourselves?

First, make marginal notation as you read, recording whatever observations you can on your own. It matters little whether your response is clever or confused; the first step to understanding is having a response. Second, do your best to make some sense of them; reading literature or theory is less about getting the right answer than it is about one's experience of the text; if you wait for the professor to teach it before reading, you miss that experience.