

FAQ - ENGL 4389 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 should be complemented by reading of the web discussion.

What can I expect on a test in a literature 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. Secondary material assigned for reading may also be covered.

What if I cannot develop my own interpretation of a literary work?

Overstressing originality can make the process of developing your own reading seem quite daunting. Please consult the Barnet [Guide to Writing About Literature](#) for tips on developing ideas. Be sure you are reading actively, with a pencil in hand. While reading and during class, be ready to jot down ideas worth further exploration.

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; typically a quiz will be given at the start of a class. Other assignments will be accepted late but with a penalty.

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 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.

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 is a blog?

A shortened form of "web log," used on the internet, it serves as a kind of online journal. If you choose this option for virtual participation, you will set up your own log at www.blogger.com, using your last name, first initial, and 4389 (eg sherwoodk4389). It allows for chronological posts from any computer. You should use it to develop your own thoughts on readings (not class) here, which you can then use to help with paper ideas.

What does the handout option entail?

If the task of weekly/bi-weekly writings doesn't appeal, you may opt to prepare three one-page handouts and reproduce them for your classmates. Each will introduce an assigned poet by presenting an overview of the significance of the author's work (in terms of form, content, and influence), based on reading of criticism and artist's statements. Includes bibliography. Will be due at the prior class.

What do I need a portfolio for?

Less complex than it seems. I will ask you to print, assemble, and submit materials representing your virtual participation at the semester's close. This will allow me to grade students choosing various options in a somewhat organized manner.