



A LEADING AMERICAN UNIVERSITY WITH INTERNATIONAL REACH

Welcome Letter for English 300-701: Writing in the Disciplines (Online)

January 4, 2011

Dear Students,

I'm your instructor, Dr. Christopher Ervin, and this welcome letter is intended to introduce you to English 300: Writing in the Disciplines and to describe the expectations I have of students who take my online courses. Combined with the syllabus, this letter tells you what you need to know to get started in the course. Please read to the end of the letter, as it contains important information that will help you determine whether you should take English 300 online this semester or opt for another version of English 300 at a later date.

If this is your first online course, you should understand that not all students are suited to online learning. Non-traditional students who have little experience with computers and technology and students who find it hard to work independently without constant monitoring by a teacher might find online courses more challenging than face-to-face courses. I will do what I can to help you decide prior to the drop date whether an online course is right for you. If, before Monday, January 31 (the last day to drop), you realize this course isn't right for you, **please drop it and try to find a face-to-face section, or take the course at a later date.** Finally, getting a good start in the course is essential to your success, and I want everyone to succeed. So, **if you have not logged in and completed the first week's assignments by Sunday, January 30, I will drop you from the course for non-participation.** I hope these preliminary considerations will ensure that only those students who are committed to succeeding in the course will remain enrolled.

Expectations for Students Enrolled in an Online Course

You should first know that, despite some students' perceptions about online learning, **this course is not easier than the English 300 course I teach in a face-to-face section. In fact, for some students (those who find it hard to organize their time, to meet deadlines, to work independently), the course will be much more difficult.** What this online course does offer is flexibility of *space*—we don't have to gather together in the same room at the same time periodically. So students who do well at organizing their time, at pacing themselves, at setting their own deadlines and meeting them, might find this course just as manageable as a face-to-face version.

Just as important for you to understand at this early point in the term is that the technological skills **you are expected to have upon enrollment in this course** are many. Besides reliable access to the internet (this means you should be able to access your course from home on a daily basis), e-mail, and the world wide web, preferably on a fast internet connection, you will need the following.

First, some basic word processing, internet, Blackboard, and e-mail skills are necessary even to begin this course; you should be able to type, upload and download documents, attach files to e-mails, and manage your e-mail account. You should **already have these basic technological skills** if you are to succeed in this course. You should not be attempting this course if you are going to have to learn some of these basic skills before you will be able to access course content or submit work. If you do not have these basic skills, be warned that you will likely fall behind in the course and miss assignments, which cannot be made up.

Second, there are a few **software requirements** for the course. You should have **Adobe Acrobat Reader** (free download at <http://get.adobe.com/reader/>) installed on the computer you will use to complete work for this course, and you should use **Mozilla's Firefox browser** (free download at <http://www.mozilla.com>) for the best results in Blackboard. Also, you **must** have a **basic word processing program** on your computer (Microsoft Word is preferred). If you do not have Microsoft Word, you should download OpenOffice (free download at <http://www.openoffice.org>), an open source office suite that mimics Microsoft Word. I highly recommend OpenOffice if you use WordPerfect or Microsoft Works, if you have no other word processing program, if you have only a trial version of Word, or if you have only Wordpad (Windows) or TextEdit (Mac), which will not give you the functionality you need to write your papers. **If you do not use Microsoft Word or OpenOffice, you must be able to save files in rich text format.** In the course FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions document) linked in Blackboard, you will find links to instructions on saving WordPerfect and Works files as rich text format. (If none of the preceding paragraph

Time Commitment for an Online Course

In addition to the technological requirements of the course, you will find that the time commitment for this section of English 300 might feel more demanding than your face-to-face courses. That's because I expect each student to spend as much time each week on this course as you would spend in an English 300 face-to-face course. That means the three hours per week that we would usually spend in the classroom are shifted to your "homework" time. Additionally, for each hour of class time in a face-to-face course, I expect my students to spend 3 hours reading, researching, and/or writing. Add all these hours, and you might be surprised at the total: You should be spending around twelve hours (minimum) each week on this course. **If you're not willing or able to make that time commitment, please do drop the course and find another section.**

Course Theme

This section of English 300 is built around a course **theme**, a common thread that runs through all of our reading and writing. That theme is sustainability (in the sense of *environmental sustainability*). Initially, we will all be reading and writing about several common texts that tackle issues pertinent to the theme of sustainability, in particular Lester Brown's *Plan B 3.0: Mobilizing to Save Civilization*. After we read Brown's book, we will move on to shorter scholarly articles and book chapters before you begin to pursue your own project, whose subject will emerge from some aspect of sustainability related to your own disciplinary major. In short, all of your writing assignments and our Blackboard discussion will emerge from some aspect of this course theme.

Rationale for course theme: I structure my writing courses around course themes for specific purposes. First, themes lend a structure and consistency to a writing course that is missing or diminished in "open topic" writing courses. Second, thematic courses encourage a depth and richness in the research, reading, and writing in the course that I've rarely found when I teach "open topic" writing courses. Third, I do a better job teaching writing when the course is structured around a specific theme, and students tend to produce better writing and research when they are compelled to investigate a focused subject within a theme I have chosen. Finally, course themes encourage students to do original work and help students avoid plagiarism. Canned paper topics like "write a paper that explores a current problem in your major" provide opportunities for plagiarism and lead to unsuccessful educational experiences for students.

If you are not certain whether you should remain enrolled in this course, I suggest you complete the first week's assignments as soon as possible (they will introduce you fully to the course theme) and decide prior to the drop date of Monday, January 31 whether to remain in the course.

Expectations for Success in English 300 Online

Major Assignments: You will write summaries (150-250 words each), a proposal for a semester project (600 words), two synthesis essays (1200 words each), and an analysis essay (at least 3000 words). Each writing assignment will contribute to the next; in other words, as you finish your summaries, you will begin incorporating some of that information into your proposal; and some of the material in your annotated bibliography will end up in your synthesis essays, which will, in turn, form the literature review section of your 3000+ word analysis essay.

Other Activities: You will complete several quizzes to determine whether you have learned certain skills and completed certain assignments, and you will complete discussion board postings on various short readings. You will also learn to quote, paraphrase, and complete a bibliography in your discipline's documentation style, and you will learn to locate discipline-appropriate scholarly research and read that research and incorporate it into your writing.

Contacting your Instructor and Getting Help: To succeed in this course, you will likely need to be in touch with me several times during the term, and you might need to seek assistance from other students or the Writing Center. To that end, I suggest you make use of the following: (1) Meet with me face-to-face or in my virtual office during my office hours Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:00-11:00 am. (2) Post questions to the Discussion Board forum titled "Questions and Comments," and regularly check that forum for answers to your questions. (3) Utilize the Writing Center, which is open for face-to-face and online appointments. (4) E-mail me or call me on my office phone (270-745-4650). **The preferred way to get your questions about the course answered is to post them to the DB forum entitled "Questions and Comments." For private matters that should not be shared with the entire class, e-mail is the preferred method of contacting me.**

What Should I Do First?


1. Log in to Blackboard after Monday, January 10 (the first day the course will be available for you).
2. Complete the survey "Am I Ready for Distance Learning?" (link available on the "Start Here" page) to determine whether this online course is right for you. Then decide, based on your score, whether you should continue in the course.
3. If you've never used Blackboard or you think you will need a refresher training session, complete the Blackboard Student User Training (link available in the FAQ and on the "Start Here" page).
4. Download the course syllabus and read it. Note any items that confuse you and any questions you have about policies, activities, or assignments.
5. Take the course tour ("Start Here" page).
6. Review the course schedule. Note any questions you have about the schedule.
7. Post your questions about the course syllabus, schedule, and tour in the "Questions and Comments" forum within the Discussion Board. **Be sure to provide a subject line that describes the content of your question.**
8. If you do not have the following software on your computer already, download and install these programs: OpenOffice (if you do not have Microsoft Word), Adobe Acrobat Reader, Mozilla Firefox browser, and Java. See the course tab "Technological Requirements" for links to these free downloads.
9. Read the Wikipedia entry on "sustainability," linked from the course schedule for week 1.
10. Complete Quiz 1 (course tab "Quizzes"). The first quiz will ask you about this letter, the syllabus, the Blackboard course, and some basic issues pertaining to the sustainability entry in Wikipedia.

Are You Still With Me?

If you've made it to the end of this letter and you're still ready to jump into an online English 300 course that promises to engage you in a rich investigation of issues of sustainability *that are relevant to your current disciplinary major and your future career*, I welcome you to the course.

If you have any questions between now and Monday, January 24, e-mail me.

With best regards,



Dr. Christopher Ervin

English 300: Writing in the Disciplines (3 credit hours), Spring 2011

Instructor: Dr. Christopher Ervin
 E-mail: christopher.ervin@wku.edu
 Phone: (270) 745-4650

Class Time/Location: Online
 Office Location: Cherry Hall 135B
 Office Hours: MW 12:30-1:30 pm &
 by appointment face-to-face
 & in Blackboard (chat)

Course Theme: This writing course is built around the course theme of *sustainability*. Reading, writing, analyses, arguments, and discussion will center on this broad theme, with most of our attention focusing on the following specific topics: constructions of wilderness, eco-tourism, environmental activism (moderate and radical), sustainable agriculture, unsustainable consumption (individual and cultural), marketing of sustainability-related products and practices, and sustainability issues in public policy. While my own philosophy and personal interests have led me to build this interdisciplinary writing course around the theme of sustainability, my personal beliefs will not drive forward our discussions. I will have to support my own positions on course topics, as will you, and I welcome (even insist on) open, honest, and well-supported debate about our course theme.

Students who do not wish to study *sustainability* in an interdisciplinary way should not register for this section of English 300.

Required Texts

Behrens, L. & Rosen, L. (2010). *A sequence for academic writing*. New York: Longman. ISBN 0205674374.
 Brown, L. (2008). *Plan B 3.0: Mobilizing to save civilization*. New York: W.W. Norton. Download for free or purchase a hard copy online at <http://www.earth-policy.org/index.php?/books/pb3> .
 Troyka, L. & Hesse, D. (2010). *Quick access compact*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. ISBN 0205687342.

Various journal, newspaper, and magazine articles and video/audio (online)

Behrens & Rosen and Troyka & Hesse are available in the WKU bookstore, although you might find them cheaper online. Be sure to order your books using the ISBN numbers provided above if you order the books online. Online bookstores: <http://www.amazon.com> , <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/textbooks/> , <http://www.abebooks.com> , or <http://www.alibris.com> .

Prerequisite: ENG 200 or equivalent.

Catalog Description & General Education Goals Met by this Course

Interdisciplinary writing course to be taken in the junior year. Students will read and write about challenging texts from a number of fields. Each student will produce a substantial research project appropriate to his or her chosen field. English 300 helps to fulfill the A.1. (Organization and Communication of Ideas) general education requirement at WKU. The course will help you attain these general education goals and objectives: 1. The capacity for critical and logical thinking and 2. Proficiency in reading, writing, speaking.

Important Dates

Drop/Add Deadline: January 31, 2011
 Last day to drop with a W: March 18, 2011
 FN Date: April 4, 2011

Goals and Objectives

This course gives students advanced instruction and practice in writing and reading essays within the various academic disciplines and makes students aware of how disciplinary conventions and rhetorical situations call for different choices in language, structure, format, tone, citation, and documentation. Students conduct investigations into writing conventions in their fields and receive advanced instruction in planning, drafting, arranging, revising, and editing discipline-specific essays. Reading assignments stress how knowledge is made and reported in various disciplines.

Students learn how to evaluate primary and secondary sources for accuracy, authority, bias, and relevance and how to synthesize different points of view within their essays. Building on skills and experience obtained in lower-division writing classes, this course stresses writing that employs advanced reading strategies, critical thinking, synthesis of various sources, research, and argumentation. The goal of this course is for students to improve both the kind of academic writing they do in college, and the thinking and writing skills necessary for professional and personal development.

By the end of English 300, students should be able to:

- Write longer formal essays that include significant support from appropriate scholarly sources.
- Use a citation style appropriate to their discipline.
- Make choices of voice, tone, format, structure and usage based on an analysis of disciplinary and academic conventions.
- Employ their own writing processes to produce academic and disciplinary texts that include significant and properly formatted sources.
- Work in a collaborative setting with both their own texts and those of others.
- Be able to read disciplinary essays and to comment critically on their meaning and structure.

Grading Scale and Minimum Requirements for Passing This Course

Students who wish to pass this course must first (1) complete and submit all major assignments (annotated bibliography, proposal, synthesis essays, and analysis essay); and (2) submit only writing that has been produced this semester for this section of English 300 (see “Recycled Writing” policy below). Course grades will then be determined based on the following scale:

Assignments		Final Grading Scale
Summaries & Annotated Bibliography	250	1000-900 = A
Proposal for Semester Project	100	899-800 = B
Synthesis Essays (2 @ 100 pts. each)	200	799-700 = C
Analysis Essay	250	699-600 = D
Participation ¹	200	Below 600 = F
Total	1000	

Feedback/Evaluation of Your Writing

I strive to provide timely detailed verbal and/or written feedback on first drafts of major assignments for students who wish to submit them early for feedback. I will provide feedback on second (graded) drafts for all students who submit their work on time. Writing that is submitted late will be returned with a grading rubric only. Shorter assignments (reflective e-mails, discussion board postings, etc) submitted early in the term will receive substantive feedback, but comparable assignments submitted later in the term will be returned with a grade and/or rubric only. In short, I will spend the majority of my time assisting students who want to learn. Students who want constructive, useful feedback on their writing must ensure that they submit early drafts and that they submit final drafts on time; doing so suggests those students take their writing seriously and that they are eager for guidance through the drafting and revision process that will ensure their improvement as college-level writers. Submitting only final drafts or submitting work late suggests that a student does not care whether his or her writing improves or not, that he or she is not invested in the learning process, so I will not spend my time attempting to guide that student through a process that does not seem to hold his or her interest.

A Note on Length of Writing

Writing assignment prompts will specify *word ranges* or *minimum length requirements*, such as “150-200 words” or “minimum of 3000 words.” Grades on assignments that do not meet these length requirements will

¹ Participation includes Blackboard discussion, various short writing assignments, reflective e-mails, drafts of longer writing assignments, and other miscellaneous homework.

be reduced by 25% (see “25% Rule” below). This applies to assignments that exceed the maximum word count when a word-range has been specified.

Recycled Writing: All writing submitted for English 300 must be produced this semester. Students who submit writing completed during previous attempts at English 300 or writing submitted for other courses must rewrite the assignment, and a mandatory 25% penalty will be applied to the new submission. Students who continue to recycle old papers will fail the course.

Participation

For this online course, participation will be defined as submitting assignments (short and longer), including Discussion Board postings. Students who submit assignments on time and post to the DB as directed will be considered “participating” students in the course. Students who stop “participating” on or before the 60% point in the semester will be assigned an FN grade instead of an F. The grade of FN might negatively affect a student’s scholarship eligibility, financial aid, loan repayment requirements, and on-campus housing eligibility, among other things. Students who feel they will not finish the course should withdraw prior to the March 18 deadline.

A warning for students who expect to be “out of town” or in some other way “unavailable” for an extended period of time (one week or more): My advice is to drop the course unless you can continue to fully commit the necessary time and effort to the course while you’re “out of town” or “unavailable.” If you will not have a reliable internet connection and the tools necessary to complete coursework for a period of time longer than five days at any point in the term, you run the risk of falling behind and failing the course.

Submission of Work

All work will be submitted in Blackboard as uploaded documents (not copied->pasted into the text box on the submission page). Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx), OpenOffice (.odt), or Rich Text Format (.rtf) are the only acceptable file formats for document submission for this course. **When submitting an assignment in Blackboard, students must click the “Submit” button to finish uploading the file, not the “Save” button at the bottom of the submission screen.** Clicking “Save” will allow the document to be retrieved by the student, but the instructor will NOT receive the document. Assignments that are late because the students clicked “Save” instead of “Submit” will not receive credit. This is **the most common reason an assignment fails to submit correctly.**

Also note: Do not write a note to your instructor in the “Comments” box on the submission page. If you wish to contact your instructor about your submitted assignment, e-mail your instructor.

Late Work & Make-Up Policy

Online classes require that you recognize deadlines and adhere to them. **Coursework is not accepted late for any reason.** It is the student’s responsibility to keep up with class assignments. The class schedule has a clear due date for each assignment on it. Students are encouraged to work ahead and submit their assignments early rather than late in order to earn the highest grade possible. Students who know they will be unavailable for any reason may arrange **in advance** to submit work according to an appropriate alternative schedule that is agreed upon by the instructor and student. Otherwise, no “make-up” for assignments, quizzes, etc., will be accepted.

The 25% Rule for Assignments that Do Not Meet Basic Requirements

The grade on any assignment that does not meet the basic requirements as listed in the assignment prompt will be reduced by 25% automatically. Examples of “basic requirements” are length, submission deadline, minimum number of drafts, minimum number of sources, and so on. For example, if an assignment has a 1200-word minimum requirement, that means that 1200 words are the absolute *minimum* accepted and that, for example, an 1188-word assignment does not meet the basic requirements. Grades for such assignments will automatically be reduced by 25%, which means the highest grade possible (everything else being perfect) will be 75% C. Another example: if the annotated bibliography assignment calls for ten scholarly sources and only eight scholarly sources are submitted, the grade will automatically be reduced by 25%.

Failure of Technology

Technological failure of any kind is no excuse for submitting assignments late or failing to submit assignments. Students who are not confident with their technology are encouraged to work ahead and submit work early. All students should back up their work on a flash drive or e-mail files to themselves or to english300.assignment.backup@gmail.com (see below).

E-mailing Backup Copies of Your Assignments

Students must not submit their assignments via e-mail. Blackboard submission is the only acceptable method of submitting work to the instructor. That said, students who wish to e-mail their assignments as attachments solely for the purpose of backing up their work may do so by e-mailing them to [**english300.assignment.backup@gmail.com**](mailto:english300.assignment.backup@gmail.com). I have set up this account solely for this purpose. Remember, e-mailing as an attachment to this address is not equivalent to submitting an assignment. In fact, as a rule I will not check this e-mail account at all. Blackboard is the required primary method of submission.

Instructor E-mail

I will usually respond to e-mails within 48 hours or, if received over the weekend, by the end of the day Monday, and I expect my students to do the same. I typically do NOT check e-mail during the weekend or after 4:00 pm on weekdays.

Student E-mail and Blackboard Announcements

All students should check their WKU email accounts and the Blackboard Announcements page at least once each weekday. Not checking email or the Announcements page is not an excuse for not keeping up with course assignments or updates.

When you e-mail me, appropriate etiquette for professional e-mails is expected. Don't take offense if you receive a response to a poorly-written e-mail with a request for you to revise it and send it again. The Purdue OWL (Online Writing Lab) provides a useful set of guidelines for composing professional e-mails at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/636/01/> , and in the course FAQ in Blackboard, I have provided an e-mail etiquette document. Please use it.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism/Academic Fraud occurs when a student knowingly or unknowingly submits another person's published or unpublished (print or web) writing as his/her own, has another person dictate what should be written, has another person write an assignment and submits that work as his/her own, or copies/"borrows" another person's ideas/progression of argument without acknowledgment or permission. Students must complete their own work in this class, and they should not ask for or receive inappropriate assistance on their work. Students who decide to violate this policy should understand that they may automatically fail this course.

On the other hand, students who decide to do their own work will challenge themselves intellectually; these students decide to abide by ethical principles that illustrate they value the educational opportunities presented to them and that they believe the quality of their contributions should be given a fair evaluation. In this course, we trust each other to adhere to the principles of academic integrity discussed in this section of the course syllabus. My assumption is that you will submit work that is your own because you wish to be evaluated on the quality of your own work rather than the quality of someone else's and that you understand that doing otherwise is unethical. However, if I begin to question the integrity of your work, I will submit your work to Turnitin.com, which will generate a report that will help me determine whether your work is original or not.

Plagiarism or academic dishonesty on any single assignment, including quizzes, exams, reflective assignments, outlines, proposals, Discussion Board posts, other short papers, or early drafts of longer papers will result in a course penalty up to course failure. The severity of the penalty will be at the discretion of the instructor, depending on the nature of the violation. Length or nature of the assignment are not factors affecting the course penalty. In other words, plagiarism on a one-page paper could result in course failure just like plagiarism in a six-page paper might; or cheating on a daily quiz could result in course failure just

like cheating on a final exam might.

Research Requirements

Typically, all sources used in this course must be current, relevant, scholarly research accessed from print sources or library databases. Other sources, like credible websites, newspapers, magazines, and the like will be accepted only if the student justifies the use of such non-scholarly sources. Use of scholarly sources constitutes a “basic requirement” on all assignments unless otherwise noted on the assignment prompt.

Extra Credit

No extra credit will be offered in this course.

Writing Center

The Writing Center offers individual conferences (both face-to-face and via e-mail) about writing with our staff of English graduate students. Our services are available to all Western Kentucky University students. The Writing Center’s Spring 2011 hours are listed on the website: <http://www.wku.edu/pcal/writing-center> .

Incompletes

Typically, incompletes will not be granted for this course. When extenuating circumstances arise—for example, if a student in the military and is deployed toward the end of the semester, or if a student has a personal or medical crisis that comes up toward the end of the semester—the student must discuss the situation with me if possible and I will consider an incomplete. I will only consider an incomplete for students who are in good standing (C or higher) in the course.

Respectful Behavior and General Civility

In my classes, I like to have free and open discussions of what we think and feel about the things we read and write. To that end, I ask that everyone be respectful of each other, even if we don’t agree about everything. If someone chooses to use hateful, bigoted, or inappropriate language, I will first consult with that student and, if the behavior continues, I will remove that student from the course.

Resolving Complaints about Grades

Any student who takes issue with a grade or another aspect of a course ordinarily speaks with the instructor first. If the student and instructor cannot resolve the issue, the student may refer the matter to the Department Head, who will assist the instructor and the student in reaching a resolution. If either party is dissatisfied with the outcome at that level, the matter may be appealed further. The Student Handbook (available online at <http://www.wku.edu/handbook/2009/>) outlines procedures for appeals beyond the department level. **I encourage you to ask me about all matters pertaining to grading, fairness, and course policies prior to approaching the Department Head.**

ADA Notice

Students with disabilities who require accommodations (academic and/or auxiliary aids or services) for this course must contact the Office for Student Disability Services, Room A200, Downing University Center. The OFSDS telephone number is (270) 745-5004 V/TDD. Please do not request accommodations directly from the instructor without a letter of accommodation from the Office for Student Disability Services.

Program Assessment Notice

As part of a university-wide accreditation study, a small sample of papers will be collected from randomly-selected individuals in all ENG 300 classes this semester. The papers will be examined anonymously as part of a program assessment; results will have no bearing on student assessment or course grades.

Your continued enrollment in this course constitutes your acceptance of this syllabus as a learning contract. By remaining enrolled in this online course, you agree to abide by the policies outlined above.

Tentative Course Schedule and Assignment Due Dates

To be added.