

English 102: English Composition II
Inquiry into Weblogs, Technology, & Imagination
Spring 2008

Section 037: TR 2:10-3:25 EST 209

Section 064: TR 3:40-4:55 EST 201

INSTRUCTOR:

"The idea is to remain in a state of constant departure while always arriving. It saves on introductions and goodbyes." -- *Waking Life*

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

"If you feel you have both feet planted on level ground, then the university has failed you." -- Robert F. Gohen

You have a Facebook account, you post random quizzes to your MySpace "blog", you spend hours hanging out with friends watching comedic YouTube videos late into the evening -- but how else might you actively engage this available technology to explore areas of personal and professional interest, and how might you use the Internet as a viable tool for research and composition? This course is designed to explore such questions of technology, imagination, and inquiry through the active engagement and composition of online texts -- particularly, the public Weblog. At the University of Tennessee, English 102 is designed to give students insight into and familiarity with the ways different expert communities produce knowledge. In our particular section of this course, this "expert community" is comprised of bloggers.

Building on the skills you obtained in English 101, English 102 will maintain a focus on rhetoric by teaching you to identify, analyze, and use rhetorical concepts and strategies to understand, to conduct, and to share research with both general and specialized audiences. Going beyond English 101, English 102 explores some of the ways people conduct research. We'll be posing valid research questions in different electronic contexts, as well as identifying and analyzing good sources for presenting information, analysis, and conclusions to different types of audiences.

In other words, blogs can be useful tools for finding information on your areas of interest, as well as delivering the new knowledge that *you* create. However, they can also distract, complicate, and confuse these goals if not used properly, which is why we're going to devote a semester to reading, writing, and exploring this medium.

COURSE GOALS:

"Believe nothing, no matter where you read it, or who said it, no matter if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense."
-- Buddha

Through varied writing assignments and instruction, students will learn strategies for formulating and investigating questions, locating and evaluating information, using varied sources and research methods, constructing effective arguments on intercultural and interdisciplinary issues from diverse texts (print, digital, multimedia), and writing and presenting research effectively, according to academic discipline and audience.

In other words, by the end of this class, we should be able to:

- Read critically, with an eye to creating questions that cannot be answered within a text, and that will guide your research;
- Create a program (or discipline-based method) of research that will answer your questions thoroughly and efficiently;
- Use a variety of research sources and methods (including interviews, ethnographic studies, as well as historical and academic research) to find, synthesize, and evaluate information;
- Develop an argument that answers your research questions and takes part in a scholarly conversation about the relevant issues;
- Integrate the information from your research effectively into your argument;
- Revise your argument to take into account possible objections/critiques, and to address the appropriate audience/rhetorical situation.

PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

"The future is always nonsense, until it becomes the past." -- *The Seven Faces of Dr. Lao*

An important part of exploring research in any field is being able to situate yourself *within* that research. To do this, you need to have a good understanding of the context of your area of interest, which means getting involved hands-on in the present situation, answering questions by looking to the past, and applying this understanding to the future new knowledge you will be producing.

In our class, we will become "present" in our research through daily readings of our author's blogs, creating and writing our own blogs, and reading and responding to each other's blogs. In addition, we will pose questions directly to the authors we read, in the form of email correspondence, comments, and interviews. In order to better explore the past, we will discuss the history of weblogs (including their evolution from paper journals and letter-writing). We will also examine archives of blog responses to past world events in order to better understand how blogs can be used as tools to respond and share information in times of great importance. All of this, in addition to our exploration of the many electronic research mediums, will prepare you for your final electronic research project, in which you will "enter the parlor" and share your new knowledge with the world.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

"We are here and it is now. Further than that, all knowledge is moonshine." -- H.L. Mencken

Rebecca Blood's *The Weblog Handbook: Practical Advice on Creating and Maintaining Your Blog*

Joe Peacock's *Mentally Incontinent*

Neil Gaiman's *Stardust*

Wil Wheaton's *Dancing Barefoot*

In addition to these texts, we will also be reading the daily blogs of the above authors, the daily blogs of your classmates, and various handouts, documents, links, etc., made available to you throughout the semester, in addition to your own weblog discoveries as you begin to do self-directed research in your own personal field of interest. You will also be asked to reference the Hodges Harbrace Handbook and *Rhetoric of Inquiry* at various points throughout the semester as useful tools to help inform and guide your research, so you should ensure that you have access to these texts, as well.

ASSIGNMENTS & REQUIREMENTS:

"There are things that are so serious that you can only joke about them." -- Heisenberg

You will be required to create and maintain a weblog, which you will update at least once a week. You have the power to choose the intended audience, overall purpose, and unique style of your personal weblog for self-expression, reflection, and inquiry; however, it is your job to build and maintain your ethos over the course of the semester by keeping a consistent tone and demonstrating your credibility as a writer. You will also be required to contribute to the collaborative class community journal once a week, as well. Because you will be writing for a public forum, sentence structure, grammar, and basic stylistic format will be factored into your grade. Each week, one of your blog entries (the collaborative class community journal) will be in response to a class prompt (whether that is response to a reading, reporting on research, etc.), and the other entry (your own personal blog) will be open; you may choose to write a personal entry, a response to pop culture (movie, concert, commercial, sports, etc.), or another response to something in class, but we will be using our author's blogs as models for our format. **Each blog entry must be at least 200 words.** You will have to meet all of these qualifications in order to receive full credit for your blog writing each week. And, of course, you are always welcome to write more than the base requirements, if you wish.

In addition to these weekly blog entries, at the end of Units 1 & 2 you will be asked to write a longer, essay-like blog entry (**600 words**) in response to a specific prompt which deals with the issues and themes discussed and explored in class during that unit. These essay-blogs will also give you the chance to further explore some of the topics you may have already written about, in addition to possibly serving as part of the writing process towards your final research project.

At the end of Unit 3, you will be required to turn in a **hard copy portfolio** of what you consider to be your five strongest blog entries from the semester, edited, revised, and accompanied by a short 1-2 page description of your strengths (and weaknesses) as a blogger, how you have progressed throughout the semester, and what you have found valuable about the blogging experience.

The major research project, which is the largest percentage of your grade, can be related to any of the themes we explore in class which interest you enough to research further. This may include such themes as the history of blogs, journal-writing, the author's writing process, the use of digital media in your particular field of study, negative effects of writing online, etc. **Your project will need to be at least 2500 words**, and will be published electronically in the form of a web site. As such, you will be encouraged to take full advantage of the various media available, from hyperlinks to images, and will want to make some basic visual stylistic choices, as well. The grading scale for this project has been broken down into a series of process steps (proposal, annotated bibliography, presentation, rough draft) which will help prepare you for the final product.

Class participation will include attendance (showing up to class on time) and being present in class discussion, both offline and online -- you will be required to post thoughtful, meaningful comments and questions to your classmates' blogs. There may also be other assignments throughout the semester, such as quizzes and in-class responses, which you will be responsible for.

COURSE POLICIES:

"So it's wonderfully acceptable,' I say, 'to disagree with me. It's wonderfully acceptable to disagree with anyone. Just be agreeable, at all times respectful, in the way you disagree. Be full of thought, and thoughtful in your disagreement."

-- Derrick Jensen, *Walking on Water: Reading, Writing, and Revolution*

- **Mutual Respect:** We're all adults here; as such, we should be ready and willing to treat each other with mutual respect. This includes (but is not limited to) keeping an open mind when listening to and discussing diverse viewpoints, not talking/interrupting whoever has the floor (this includes both students and instructor), arriving to class on time and prepared, and turning in assignments when they are due.
- **Late Assignments:** All assignments will be penalized 5 points (half a letter grade) for each calendar day late. Difficulties can be avoided by contacting me as soon as possible if problems occur and keeping up with the course schedule. **Missed in-class assignments and reading quizzes cannot be "made up".**
- **Attendance:** The activity-based nature of our class community demands good attendance in order to succeed. **Please do not miss more than two (2) days of class.** After the initial two absences are used, students will lose **half a letter grade for each absence.** (For example, for an A student, the 3rd absence would take the grade down to B+, the 4th B, the 5th C+, etc.) **Eight absences will give a student an automatic NC for the course.** If we need to consider extracurricular commitments and personal situations that may interfere with this attendance policy, please see me as soon as possible to discuss our options. **Health emergencies that cause a student to miss more than two consecutive days of class must be accompanied by proper documentation before the student will be allowed to make up the work missed!**
- **Tardiness:** If a student arrives late during an in-class assignment or quiz, that student will not receive extra time to complete it. Also, tardy students are responsible for seeing me at the end of class to ensure they are not counted absent. Excessive tardiness will reflect poorly in class participation grades.
- **Conferences:** Each student should schedule two (2) conference appointments with me during the semester. A missed conference will count as an automatic absence.
- **Honor and Integrity:** English 102 is designed to assist you in the process of creating new knowledge -- not regurgitating what someone else has said. When publishing in

an online public forum, special care must be made to credit appropriate sources for research and information. From *Hilltopics*: "Plagiarism is using the intellectual property of product of someone else without giving proper credit. The undocumented use of someone else's words or ideas in any medium of communication (unless such information is recognized as common knowledge) is a serious offense, subject to disciplinary action that may include failure in a course and dismissal from the University" (11). Specific examples of plagiarism include copying or summarizing phrases, sentences, and ideas from any source without proper documentation; collaborating with others on graded assignments without permission; and submitting work created by a professional service as your own. Feel free to ask me any questions as to what exactly constitutes plagiarism. Please understand that plagiarism not only serves to hurt your personal development as a writer, but also compromises the teacher-student relationship with its inherent deception. We are working to create a trustworthy community of intellectual exchange in this class -- please do not pollute that community with instances of plagiarism.

- **Addressing Special Needs:** If course adaptations or accommodations are needed due to a documented disability, or if there is emergency information that needs to be shared, please contact the Office of Disability Services at 191 Hoskins Library or at 974-6087. This will ensure proper registration of services. Also, please feel free to see me during my office hours and/or email me to discuss any issues I may be able to specifically address.
- **The Writing Center:** All students are encouraged to take advantage of the Writing Center located in HSS 212. Both beginning and advanced writers can benefit from the one-on-one consultations that are offered there. The Writing Center is open Mondays through Wednesdays from 9:00 am to 7:30 pm, Thursdays 9:00 am to 6:00 pm, and Fridays 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. There is also an after-hours Writing Center service available in The Commons at the Hodges Library Mondays through Wednesdays 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm, and Sundays 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm. Please feel free to visit their Web Site at <http://web.utk.edu/~english/writing/writing.shtml>.
- **Maintaining a Sense of Humor:** Perhaps most importantly, we should have fun with this class. Life is too short to take so seriously. Plus, I can't abide a classroom full of miserable students; I might be forced to pelt everyone with hard candies if we can't let ourselves laugh a little.

GRADES:

"There are no mistakes. The events we bring upon ourselves, no matter how unpleasant, are necessary in order to learn what we need to learn; whatever steps we take, they're necessary to reach the places we've chosen to go." -- Richard Bach, *The Bridge Across Forever*

Scale: A=90-100 B+=87-89 B=80-86 C+=77-79 C=70-76
D=60-69 F=59 and below

According to University policy, any student who receives a final grade equivalent to a "D" or "F" cannot receive credit for this course. A student with a final grade below 70, then, will receive an "NC" and must take the course again.

Grades in this course will be determined as follows:

Personal Blog	10%
Class Blog	15%
End of Unit 1 Blog Assignment	10%
End of Unit 2 Blog Assignment	10%
End of Unit 3 Blog Portfolio	10%
Research Project:	
Proposal	5%
Annotated Bibliography	5%
Presentation	5%
Rough Draft	5%
Final Draft	15%
Responses/Quizzes/Etc.	5%
Class Discussion/Participation	5%

I will be using the following scale for the grading of all formal assignments:

A: Superior

To receive an A, an essay must meet the following standards:

FOCUS: Central idea clearly defined and supported throughout.

DEVELOPMENT: Original, careful thought; substantial, concrete support for claims; and critical explanation and analysis of ideas.

ORGANIZATION: Logical progression of ideas by clearly ordered and necessary stages; paragraphs unified and developed with unusual effectiveness; transitions between and within paragraphs clear and effective.

STYLE & DICTION: Clear and coherent sentences; appropriate, fresh, accurate, precise, concise, and idiomatic word choices.

GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, SPELLING: Essay free of serious errors; grammar, punctuation, and spelling help to clarify meaning by following accepted conventions.

B: Good

To receive a B, an essay must meet the following standards:

FOCUS: Central idea defined with more than usual care and clarity and supported throughout.

DEVELOPMENT: Central idea developed fully and consistently; ideas adequately supported with sufficient analysis and consistently relevant detail.

ORGANIZATION: Logically ordered points; paragraphs well-developed and unified; transitions between paragraphs explicit and effective.

STYLE & DICTION: Sentences coherent and easy to follow; word choices appropriate, clear, carefully chosen, and idiomatic.

GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, SPELLING: Except for very infrequent minor errors, grammar and punctuation help to clarify meaning by following accepted conventions; only very infrequent misspellings.

C: Satisfactory

An essay will receive a C if it meets the following criteria:

FOCUS: Central idea adequately defined.

DEVELOPMENT: Central idea developed adequately but with occasional thinness of information; adequate support but with occasional repetition or sketchiness; demonstrates an average knowledge of the subject matter.

ORGANIZATION: Plan, purpose, and methods of essay apparent but fulfilled unimaginatively, mechanically, or incompletely (sketchy paragraphs, for instance); paragraphs unified and coherent but occasionally abrupt or mechanical; abrupt transitions between paragraphs.

STYLE&DICTION: Sentences coherent but occasionally monotonous or ineffective in

structure; word choices usually appropriate, clear, carefully chosen, and idiomatic, but occasionally inappropriate, vague, trite, or unidiomatic.

GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, SPELLING: Except for occasional minor errors, grammar and punctuation help to clarify meaning by following accepted conventions; only infrequent misspellings.

D: Unsatisfactory

An essay will receive a D if it is unsatisfactory in any of the ways described:

FOCUS: Central idea loosely defined or carelessly considered.

DEVELOPMENT: Central idea developed and supported with occasional irrelevance, redundancy, or inconsistency; rudimentary development of the subject; inadequate support for ideas and inadequate grasp of subject matter.

ORGANIZATION: Plan, purpose, and method of essay not consistently apparent; paragraphs occasionally disunified or inadequately developed; transitions between paragraphs occasionally unclear or ineffective.

STYLE & DICTION: Sentences often incoherent; word choices generally inappropriate, vague, or unidiomatic often enough to interfere with the expression and development of important ideas of essay.

GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, SPELLING: Occasional serious errors in grammar or punctuation; frequent minor errors in grammar or punctuation; frequent misspellings.

F: Failure

An essay will receive an F if it is unsatisfactory in any of these:

FOCUS: Central idea unclear.

DEVELOPMENT: Central idea inadequately developed or supported; superficial support for ideas.

ORGANIZATION: Plan, purpose, and method of essay not clearly apparent; paragraphs often incoherent or disunified; transitions between paragraphs inadequate or lacking;

STYLE & DICTION: Sentences often incoherent; word choices generally inappropriate, vague, or unidiomatic.

GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, SPELLING: Frequent serious errors in grammar, punctuation, or spelling that impair readability.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

"The greatest pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do." -- Walter Bagehot

Unit One :: Being "Present" in Blogging: Online Personas, Style, and Presentation.

- Thu Jan 10** First Day of Classes. Introductions. Course Overview.
- Tue Jan 15** Meet in Computer Lab.
Blog creation and set-up.
1st blog assignment - introductions.
Begin *The Weblog Handbook*.
- Thu Jan 17** Meet in Computer Lab.
Blog configuration and userpics.
Discuss/work out technical difficulties, subscribing to RSS feeds and basic formatting.
Read *The Weblog Handbook*. Experiment with technical & formatting skills in blog.
- Tue Jan 22** Discuss *The Weblog Handbook*. In-class Reading Quiz #1.
Prompted blog based on Rebecca Blood's ideas.
Explore rebeccablood.net before class on Thursday.
- Thu Jan 24** Finish discussion of *The Weblog Handbook*.
Discuss exploration of rebeccablood.net.
Personal blog assignment. Begin *Mentally Incontinent*.
- Tue Jan 29** Meet in Computer Lab.
Exploration of Musical Blogs.
Look at blogs by Joe the Peacock, Wil Wheaton, and Neil Gaiman in class. Subscribe to these blogs; encourage further exploration.
Continue *Mentally Incontinent*. Share link in blog.
Handout on Evaluating Sources (Clyde).
- Thu Jan 31** Reading Quiz #2.
Discuss format and writing process of book.
Discuss evaluating sources.
Continue *Mentally Incontinent*; free blog.
- Tue Feb 5** Meet in Computer Lab.
Explore MentallyIncontinent.com.
Discuss writing for an audience.
Share with class blogs that you are reading; Group work examining features and purposes of blogs.
Blog in the style of Joe the Peacock.
Finish *Mentally Incontinent*.
Handout on interview research and methodology.
Brainstorm questions for Joe the Peacock.
- Thu Feb 7** Discuss *Mentally Incontinent* and methodology/etiquette of interview research.
Post interview questions with Joe the Peacock.

Tue Feb 12 Online Class - Review interview response from Joe the Peacock.
Blog response to Joe the Peacock and *Mentally Incontinent*.
Student Conferences.

Thu Feb 14 Online Class - Unit 1 Review, and Comma Exercise.
End of Unit Blog Assignment.
Student Conferences.

Unit Two :: Looking to the Past; History, Origins, and Influences.

Tue Feb 19 Intro to Unit 2; Basic features and general history of the diary.

Thu Feb 21 **End of Unit 1 Blog Assignment due today.**
Visit Special Collections and look through old paper journals.
Keep a paper journal over the weekend.
Readings online.

Tue Feb 26 Reading Quiz #3.
Discuss Special Collections experience.
Discuss similarities and differences between paper journals and online journals.
Read handout on Emerson.
Link to online communities dedicated to paper journals.
Prompted blog in response to assignment.

Thu Feb 28 Discuss Emerson's influence on online diaries.
Brief history of the online diary.
Handouts on online journal history and blog history (Serfaty and Clyde).
Free blog.

Tue Mar 4 Reading Quiz #4.
Discuss History of Blogs.
Discuss Research Project.
Free Blog.

Thu Mar 6 Meet in Computer Lab.
Introduction to Sept 11th Archive and Wayback Machine.
Use the archives to explore entries based on Sept 11th.
Discuss blogs on other world events.
Prompted blog on historical exploration.

Tue Mar 11 Discuss format for research project; ideas, topics, themes, requirements, length, presentation.
Discuss Annotated Bibliography.
Discuss multimedia in terms of blogs and internet delivery.

Thu Mar 13 Meet in Library Viewing Room.
Laurie Anderson's *Home of the Brave*.
End of Unit Blog Assignment.
Start reading *Stardust*.

Tue Mar 18 **Spring Break. No Class. (w00t!)**

Thu Mar 20 **Spring Break. No Class. (Huzzah!)**

Unit Three :: Using the Tools; Imagination, Process, and Purpose.

Tue Mar 25 **End of Unit Blog Assignment Due.**

Meet in Library Viewing Room.
Watch *Stardust*. Blog response.

Thu Mar 27 Meet in Library Viewing Room.

Finish *Stardust*.
Discuss Proposal Assignment.

Tue Apr 1 **Annotated Bibliography Due.**

Discuss *Stardust*, imagination, and blogs.
Begin *Dancing Barefoot*. Blog on imagination.

Thu Apr 3

Discuss blogs as writing process; effect on literature.
Compare style, audience, and tone in *Stardust* and *Dancing Barefoot*.
Finish *Dancing Barefoot*. Free blog.

Tue Apr 8 **Research Proposal Due.**

Discuss *Dancing Barefoot*.

Thu Apr 10 General Q&A on Research Projects.

In-Class Writing Workshop.

Tue Apr 15 **Research Rough Drafts Due Via Email.**
Student Conferences.

Thu Apr 17 **Student Conferences.**

Tue Apr 22 **Meet in Library Viewing Room.**
Presentations on Final Projects.

Thu Apr 24 **Meet in Library Viewing Room.**
Last Day of Class.
Blog Portfolios Due.
Presentations on Final Projects.

Thu May 1 **Final Projects Due.**