

Feb 28, 1983

Dear Freshman English Policy Committee:

I understand that next year incoming Freshmen will no longer have the option to read literature for a composition course. I have been teaching E 307 for six years, and I believe that an interesting and effective composition course can be taught using fiction.

Enclosed is a sample syllabus and 3 paper assignments for the course I would like to teach. I feel that this course has been successful in the past. (My evaluations have been good) I believe that I can teach all of the essentials normally taught in a 306 course in this course, and I would like to offer it next year. Also, by that time, I should have a computer program operating to teach organizational skills for the thesis paper that I use in the course.

Thank for considering this proposal,

Marshall Alcorn.

Marshall Alcorn

**SYLLABUS AND COURSE PROPOSAL
FRESHMAN ENGLISH
ALCORN**

SYLLABUS Tests: Norton Reader, Norton Anthology of Short Fiction
Little Brown Handbook

Hemingway , "Hills Like White Elephants"
Roth "Conversion of the Jews"
Fitzgerald "Babylon Revisited" Using concepts to
to analyze a narrative

From Reader
Orwell "Shooting An Elephant" Personal Experience
Milgram "The Perils of Obedience"

Faulkner "A Rose for Emily"
Baldwin "Sonny's Blues" Character Analysis
Chekov "Lady with the Pet Dog"

Lawrence "Rocking Horse Winner"
"Horse Dealer's Daughter" Writing a Parody

Tolstoy "The Death of Ivan Ilych" 3rd Analytical Essay

Swift "A Modest Proposal"
O'Connor "A Good Man is Hard to Find" Using and Recognizing
Forster "The Road to Colonus" Irony
Joyce "Araby"

"The Dead" Final short paper

Other options: Heart of Darkness
O'Connor "Parker's Back"
Porter "Flowering Judas"

This course is designed to improve student writing in two areas: developing a logical argument and persuasive support (in relation to a thesis paper), and developing effective style (in relation to other more imaginative assignments).

I am enclosing the outline that I use for the thesis paper. Students must write three of these papers, and before each assignment I isolate specific aspects of the paper--thesis formulation, focus, support--to discuss. These papers give me the opportunity to emphasize the need for a variety of skills that are traditionally taught in the first semester Freshman English course: skills such as definition of terms, intelligent systems of classification, and effective strategies for support and persuasion. I feel that writing these papers is central to our over-all goals in education. Students must learn to use concepts responsibly, to articulate relationships between concepts, and to subordinate certain more specific ideas in order to develop a clear and effective argument.

For the more imaginative papers, I emphasize the importance of stylistics. Sentence variety, verb choice, syntactical options are necessary for effective and interesting writing. In the parody paper students are encouraged to imitate the syntactical constructions of the authors that they imitate, and in the personal experience papers students learn how critical syntactical decisions serve to emphasize and accentuate the key elements of their experience.

Close to half of the course is devoted to discussing short stories. These discussions interest students, but they also help to define the use and range of abstract thinking. Narratives are concerned with specific events happening in time. Analysis is concerned with seeing relationships and specifying the kinds of relationships seen. The stories also help me to teach stylistics. Students are subjected to a variety of different styles, and they learn to examine how focus and emphasis is important even for writing purposes that seem the most informal and "undisciplined."

SHORT STORY PAPER 2-3 pages
DUE Feb.7

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1. clear thesis
2. close focus
3. good support

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Writing the thesis paper

1. It must be clear from your paper what exactly your thesis or argument is. This thesis must sum up IN ONE SENTENCE the entire argument of the paper. Every paragraph in the paper must be devoted to proving the thesis. Your entire paper is logically organized around the thesis, and the thesis idea becomes a kind of lens in terms of which you will examine, analyze, and discuss the story. Usually your thesis sentence is the last sentence of the first paragraph. If you put your thesis elsewhere make sure you inform your reader so that he knows what your thesis is. For example, you may want to say: "This paper shall argue....."

2. Thesis wording. It is important to take a great deal of care in wording the thesis. Be fully alert to the definition and implication of every word you write in the thesis. The words commit you to your argument. If you misuse a word or don't understand its meaning, your paper will be confusing and your grade will suffer.

3. The thesis must be an argument about, or an interpretation of the text. Papers that merely give a plot summary of the story do not earn decent grades. Never take advantage of an opportunity to tell your reader "what happens next" in the story. All of your quotations from the text are used in order to support your thesis argument. Thus quoted material should be used in direct relation to claims you are making about the text that help to prove your thesis.

4. Your thesis must be supported by evidence from the text. Suppose, for example, your thesis is that "Charlie in Babylon Revisited is unable to escape the past." Notice that you have an important term "escape the past" This term must somehow be used to make sense of what happens in the story. Thus the story must be understood in relation to the idea "escaping the past. But what does it mean to escape the past? You must define this for your reader. Since we all have memories, it may be literally true that people "escape the past" only when they die. But this isn't what you mean. THUS you must define what you mean. And then, in terms of your definition, various incidents of the story will be interpreted in a certain way. Look for action that seems to be important to your thesis. Use your thesis to understand this action in an original way__your contribution to our understanding of the story. For example, Charlie's encounter with old friends will be meaningful in terms of your thesis. When you quote a phrase like "ghosts from the past" you are beginning to discuss what Charlies must escape from. Look for other scenes like this. You will probably discover that you need to list various things that charlie must escape from in order to "escape the past." Make a list of these things and organize the list in relation to paragraphs that you intend to write. This list may include things like guilt, temptation, irresponsibility. These terms_guilt temptation etc.-- are new analytical terms that help you to make sense of the story in relation to your thesis. These terms DEFINE YOUR THESIS, and they they will also help you to

Define terms!

Use the text!

Deduce concepts

clear thesis

Charlie

analytical

select what you need to quote from the text to support your thesis.

5. You will need to quote an example of Charlie's escaping guilt. Show clearly that WHAT CHARLIES LITERALLY DOES IN YOUR QUOTATION IS AN EXAMPLE OF "escaping guilt." Don't assume that a quotation will obviously support your argument. People do things for many different reasons, and People may do something for a variety of reasons. Don't base a central argument of your paper upon only a plausible interpretation of one action.

6. Each paragraph needs a topic sentence that summarizes the major idea of the paragraph. You should be able to look at each of your topic sentences and sense the general organization of your paper. Paragraphs that begin "then, when, or after" are often plot summaries, and need to be attached to some claim pertinent to your thesis.

A checklist for proofreading your paper:

1. Is the thesis clear?
2. Is it an argument about the story or a summary of the story?
3. Sum up the argument of the second paragraph of the paper. Does this argument relate to the thesis? Does it help to prove the thesis. Randomly skip to another paragraph. Look at the topic sentences. Is it clear how this paragraph will support the thesis?
4. Are all the arguments in the paper logical?
5. Does the author frequently refer to the text he is discussing?
6. Does the author know all the important incidents in the story that he needs to know in order to competently support his thesis? Is the author aware of the incriminating evidence that he must "explain away" in order to securely establish his own argument?
7. Is the paper analytical? Does it break large and general ideas down into a set of more specific concepts in order to more carefully understand the material?
8. Is the thesis original of a summary of class discussion?

* Sample paper
John Fitzgerald's short story, "Babylon Revisited," has for its setting a scene now little remembered, the Paris of the twenties. Written sometime after the depression, Fitzgerald's remarkable story reveals the tragic aftermath of a life filled with dissipation. With gripping intensity Babylon Revisited portrays Charlie's determined struggle to regain the custody of his daughter, Honoria.

The scene opens in a bar where Charlie is asking about the whereabouts of his old friends. Not even his favorite bartender, however, is present. The old times are over and Charlies must learn to roll with the punches. To some extent, Charlie himself has changed. He hardly drinks at all anymore, all he seems to want is to regain possession of his daughter.

Charlies lost his daughter because when he was sick and

thesis?
what would
support be
like?

discovered that he had lost his money and his wife was mad at him, he thought it would be best to hand over the legal guardianship of his daughter to his sister-in-law, Marion. Marion, partly because she had always disliked Charlie, then makes it very difficult for Charlie to have his daughter back, even though Charlie has pretty much changed. Marion does at one point agree to give Honoria back, but then Charlie's old friends, Dunc and Lorraine come barging in, and Marion, insulted, renigs on her promise.

The story ends as Charlie returns unhappily to his favorite bar. You can't help but feel sorry for Charlie. He really had changed, and he deserved to get his daughter back. [REDACTED]

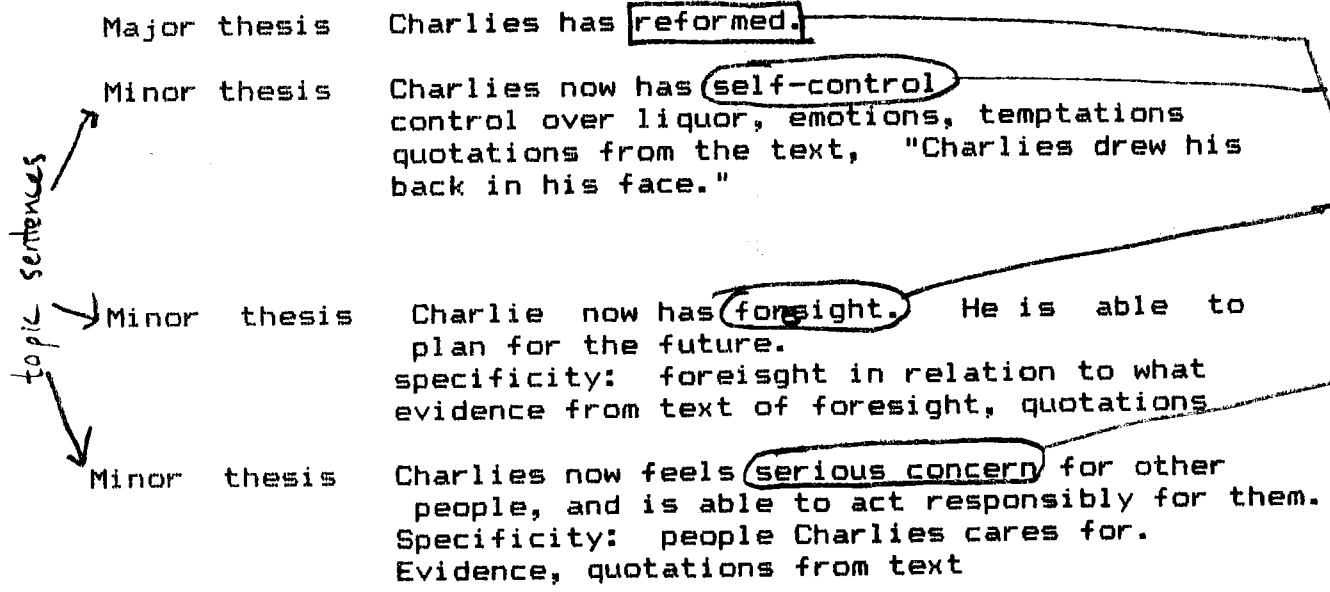
Avoid a plot summary

Don't summarize anything from the story, and don't quote anything from the story unless it will help you to support or prove the argument of your paper. The paper must have an argument. This is your thesis. Be aware of your thesis continually. When you write your last paragraph, ask yourself how that last paragraph helps to support the thesis. If your last paragraph doesn't relate to your thesis. Get rid of that paragraph, or change your thesis. A big part of being successful in this assignment is knowing how different ideas are related to each other. These are broad arguments that relate in specific ways other subordinate ideas that you have in your paper.

write your drafts

It may help to think of your paper as having an organization such as below:

Notice organization is built around a logical strategy to prove an argument.



Conclusion: I have defined what reformation means. It is clear that Charlies has reformed.

Sample paragraphs

Charlies in "Babylon Revisited" will never get his daughter

back. Charlie is given an opportunity for a second chance, but he's still, basically, the same person he always was. Charlie can't escape the past because he still wants some of the "magic" of the past. He's a born party person and he can't change.

Set in pre-war Spain, Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" concerns itself with abortion. Hemingway's interest in the subject, however, is not so much moral as psychological. Short in action and brief in scope, the story carefully discloses the rhythms of human tension. By alert attention to the dialogue and the currents of emotion, the reader can discern the true feelings of the two would-be lovers. I shall argue that the man in the story hypocritically manipulates his girlfriend.

In the story, "Conversion of the Jews" Philip Roth uses the characters to illustrate different aspects of religious belief. Each character is symbolic of a different attitude toward what it means to have religious faith. *specific*

There is no real action in Hemingway's story. The author seems interested in what people talk about. The man in the story keeps bring up the same thing every chance he gets. The story was written in the 30's and at that time people felt that abortions were very immoral things.

1. The first part of the document is a letter from the Secretary of the State to the Governor, dated the 10th of the month of the year 1860. The letter is addressed to the Governor and is signed by the Secretary of the State.

2. The second part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the State to the Governor, dated the 10th of the month of the year 1860. The report is addressed to the Governor and is signed by the Secretary of the State.

3. The third part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the State to the Governor, dated the 10th of the month of the year 1860. The report is addressed to the Governor and is signed by the Secretary of the State.

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12. The twelfth part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the State to the Governor, dated the 10th of the month of the year 1860. The report is addressed to the Governor and is signed by the Secretary of the State.

13. The thirteenth part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the State to the Governor, dated the 10th of the month of the year 1860. The report is addressed to the Governor and is signed by the Secretary of the State.

Sample:

After three summers in the flatlands of Dallas, I took it upon myself to return to our family's cabin in the beautiful Rocky Mountains. My vacation lasted for five relaxing days. One of these days I decided to climb the mountain which could be seen from the cabin's large window. I got out of bed, packed a lunch, and was on my way up the mountain.

In the beginning the walk was easy and enjoyable because the paths were very smooth and wide. With every step, the detailed scenery caught my eye, especially when I looked straight up at the blue skies and the tall, green, pine trees. Everywhere, I could see all types of wildlife, from jumping deer to furry chipmunks. Further on my journey, I drank from a clear fresh stream.

Up above the timberline, the scenery was not as picturesque as the beginning. The path got very rocky and my feet began to prind. The climb got harder, and I was out of breath. It seemed as though I would never get to top of the mountain. The temperature changed rapidly. The sun was shining, but I was getting ever colder.

At the top of the mountain, I forgot all my aches and problems. The scene was more than breathtaking, and the mountains seemed close enough to touch. The thick clouds became a light mist. Most of all, I felt like I was the only person in the world, and that I had conquered this mountain. Realization struck me, and I saw a thick black rain cloud. The rain fell and I began to walk down the mountain. For some reason, the rain had no effect on me. I did not have a care in the world. I skipped down the bottom. At the bottom of the mountain, I looked at my conquest and felt good inside.

1. Write carefully and concisely. Work hard to describe in detail what happened to you. Use metaphors and effective detail to make your writing convincing, and to evoke the feelings and impressions that are unique to your experience, but hard to communicate. Use participles and strong verbs to keep the action moving vigorously.

2. Write about something that you care about. Perhaps it was a certain stage in your development as a person. Perhaps it is some commonplace event that becomes important, humorous, and dramatic in your eyes.

3. Give your paper an intelligent focus. Use traditional story-telling elements--anticipation, surprise, recognition, effectively. Plan your prose development in relation to the over-all effect of your work. Don't just tell "what happened next." Certain scenes in your work will, for various reasons be more important than other scenes. Develop these scenes carefully in relation to the overall impression you want to convey in this piece.

4. Craft your prose style to emphasize your subject matter. Pace the rhythm of your prose in relation to the rhythms of your action.

Parody paper

Write a parody on one or more of the stories that we have read so far. A parody is composition in which an author's characteristics are ridiculed by imitation. Your paper will be evaluated in relation to 1. The success of your imitation. Pay close attention to the details of prose, characterization, setting, etc. which distinguish your author from other authors. 2. Your own prose clarity. Your style must be effective for your purpose, clear, without serious grammatical error. 3. Your humor or dramatic skill.

2. Pay close attention to the balance, rhythm, and complexity of the sentences you wish to imitate. Faulkner writes very differently from Hemingway. Lawrence differs from Fitzgerald. Model your sentences upon those of your author. Try to imitate the memorable and important sentences which we have discussed in class.

3. Experiment with parallel and reverse parallel development in matching your plot to that of your author. Lawrence writes about a young man who rides rocking horses. You can write about a sorority girl who drives her father's BMW. Babylon Revisted gives you a glimpse of the Parils in the late 30's. Your paper can reveal Odessa Texas in the 80's, 50's etc. You didn't meet your friends in bars, but at the dairy queen. Here as elsewhere detail is very important. It makes your story convincing. But choose detail carefully. Choose detail to develop the overall effect of your work.

4. Good stories develop in relation to carefully controlled elements of anticipation, recognition, irony, or surprise. Don't just put these elements anywhere. Work to develop them. Develop them in relation to other important aspects of writing--detail, style.

5. This paper should be fun to write. But to earn a superior grade you must do some earnest work. Elegantly crafted sentences take time. Take the time.