



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES  
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78712

*Department of English*  
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TO: All new Assistant Instructors and Teaching Assistants in the  
Department of English

FROM: Professor John Trimble, Associate Director of Freshman English

On behalf of Professor James Kinneavy, Director of Freshman English, I want to welcome you to the staff of the Freshman English program. We are delighted that you chose U.T. for your graduate school, and we are proud of you for having won a teaching appointment here. The competition for these appointments was unusually severe this year, so your winning one speaks highly of your professional promise.

Last May, you'll recall, you received a letter of appointment from Professor Rebhorn, chairman of the Teaching Assistant Committee, informing you that a series of orientation talks and meetings was planned for late August. This year's Orientation Week (see program enclosed) has now been set to run from Tuesday, August 22, through Friday, August 25. Please note that attendance is required of all 15 new English Teaching Assistants and all 23 new Assistant Instructors.

Upon your arrival in Austin, I urge you to call or come by the Freshman English Office for details as to the location of the talks. (We are making room reservations at this writing, or I'd give them to you now.) The Freshman Office is located in Parlin Hall 16, one floor below the Main Office of the Department of English. Our phone number is 471-5885; the office is open Monday through Friday, 8:30-12:00 and 1:00-4:30.

The remainder of this letter is addressed chiefly to you new Assistant Instructors (or A.I.'s, as you'll be familiarly called), but new Teaching Assistants might find parts of it of interest to them as well.

Doubtless you have many questions about the course you'll be teaching, the texts you'll be using, the kind of guidance and support you can expect from the Freshman Office, etc. While Orientation Week is designed for the express purpose of answering such questions and easing your transition into your new role of teacher, I might try to anticipate a few inevitable questions in this letter. It seems one can never get answers early enough.

The course you'll be teaching is English 306, "Rhetoric and Composition." Here is a capsule description of it which I hope will suffice until Orientation:

1 [ English 306 is the first course in the required 6-hour freshman composition sequence for all of the undergraduate colleges of the university. (Most of the colleges also require an additional sophomore English course, usually in literature.) ]

2 [ The course provides an introduction to a rhetorical theory of composition and to the practical writing of essays. It includes 8 units, each requiring a major essay of 500-1,000 words. These units are: classification and description, self-expression, persuasion and propaganda, library research, induction, deduction, exposition, and exploring. ]

English 306 is built around a required syllabus and uses three texts--a rhetoric text (Adelstein & Pival's The Writing Commitment), an anthology of nonfiction essays (Decker's Patterns of Exposition, 6th ed.), and a handbook (Corder's Handbook of Current English, 5th ed.).

3 [ Credit for 306 is given to any student who scores 550 or higher on the ECT. About one-third of the entering freshmen exempt 306 in this way and are channeled into special sections of the second-semester course (E.307 or E.308). The Freshman Office also offers sections of 306 especially oriented to the needs of foreign students, but at the present time no remedial sections of 306 are offered. ]

In his letter of appointment, Professor Rebhorn mentioned that desk copies of the 306 textbooks would be mailed to you. Unfortunately, that was inaccurate. The publishers routinely mail us their texts two weeks before classes, around mid-August, which means that you will have to wait until Orientation Week to get them. However, if you come to town a few days early, I suggest that you check in with the Freshman Office. The texts may have just arrived, and if so, you're welcome to pick up your desk copies at that time.

The two chief practical assists that you'll be given to help you teach 306 this fall are a detailed syllabus and a 398T (teacher-training) course. Let me explain.

The voluminous syllabus, which runs to approximately 80 pages, provides the following: an overview of the course; suggested reading and writing assignments, together with a suggested calendar for those assignments; some sample student writings; a variety of possible exercises; and, finally, a highly detailed discussion of the rhetorical theory underpinning each unit in the course, which you are invited to draw upon when presenting these units to your students. You should find this easy to do, for in fact the discussions are already styled as if to be read by the students themselves, not their teachers. (The reason is that we expect to polish the syllabus--still in very rough shape--sometime this fall and then, next spring, publish it, making it directly available to the students at cost through the University Co-op. This should save AI's and regular faculty many hours that are now spent redundantly dittoing up handouts covering such things as the weekly reading assignments, writing assignments, etc.)

As for 398T, which AI's and TA's take in conjunction with the course they're teaching (or, with TA's, only helping to teach), these seminars are taught by

several of the most experienced composition/rhetoric specialists on our faculty. (UT's English Department, it might interest you to know, has perhaps the largest number of nationally known comp/rhetoric specialists of any department in the country.) The 398T seminars are small (6-12 students), and generally meet twice a week--usually Monday and Wednesday afternoons, from 3:00-4:30. The content of your seminar is essentially the content of your freshman course. Most 398T classes will try to stay one week ahead of the 306 syllabus so that you will be fully exposed to the next week's readings and learn strategies for discussing them with your students. The 398T class will also acquaint you with a considerable body of rhetorical theory, teach you methods of evaluating student papers, help you integrate the texts, give you ample opportunities to exchange ideas and questions with other staff-members, and, along the way, equip you with dozens of practical do's and don't's that you'd otherwise have to learn through painful experience.

As much help as the syllabus and 398T seminar provide, you will still be chiefly dependent on your own wits and preparation when you walk into your 306 class each day, so gird yourself accordingly. Spend the two weeks before classes reading--and rereading--the syllabus and three course texts. You need to know them backwards and forwards, as if for a doctoral oral exam. Some veterans of 306 might also recommend that you read Emerson's essay on "Self-Reliance" for additional philosophical support!

Now a miscellany of brief odds and ends:

(1) One of the secretaries in the Main English Office (Parlin 110) will assign you a mailbox in Parlin 202 shortly before classes begin, so check that room regularly. Sometime during the first week of classes you'll also receive a notice in your box of your new office assignment together with a key permit entitling you to an office key. Offices for AI's and TA's are typically shared, and are located either in Parlin Hall (the English building) or three adjacent buildings: Calhoun, Sutton, <sup>Little</sup> and Lee. If your office is in one of these adjacent buildings, you'll also get a permit for a passkey to Parlin so that you can use the dittoing room and pick up mail after hours.

(2) Freshman sections of 306 ordinarily contain 25 students. These students resist easy generalizations. You'll find some who are bright and well-trained, some who are bright but ill-trained, and some who are remedial cases.

(3) The English Department at UT is just about the country's largest. We have approximately 90 professors, 15 instructors or acting assistant professors on one-year appointments, and 150 AI's or TA's--that's approximately 250 teachers in all. But we need them all, for each fall 4500 students take Freshman English alone.

(4) The Freshman English Office administrative staff is comprised of the following people:

Professor James Kinneavy, Director  
Professor John Trimble, Associate Director  
Richard Hart (a senior A.I.), Assistant Director  
Mrs. Sheila Wallace, Senior Secretary  
Ms. Kim Mason, Clerk-typist

All five of us want to get to know you and be of service to you, so please introduce yourself to us when you arrive, and don't be diffident about asking for help.