

English 101—Written Communication
Black Hills State University, Spring 2000

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course will focus primarily on analyzing and interpreting non-fiction essays for the purpose of writing about them. Oftentimes ordinary events and thoughts have profound impact on our lives; our reading and discussion this semester will focus on the role of the ordinary in our lives. You will be encouraged to think openly, beyond the boundaries of the field of literature, and to explore materials in other fields, such as philosophy and theology; this has been traditionally termed "history of ideas." We will do a good deal of reading and writing, and we'll look at some film. Since the chief purpose of a college education is to acquire the ability to analyze, we will spend a good deal of time reading texts, some more difficult than others, and then explore issues raised in discussion in the written essay. We will also go over the development and writing of a research paper based on some of the materials we discuss.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: a) Four out-of-class essays (first two essays are 4-6 pages; second two are 5-7 pages) b) Four in-class reading quizzes, unannounced; the lowest of the four will be dropped at the end of the semester; missed quizzes cannot be made up c) One library assignment d) One longer paper (8-11 pages, using at least 3 secondary sources) e) Final Exam

REQUIRED TEXTS: Every effort has been made to keep text costs down.

Sven Birkerts, *Readings* (Graywolf Press)
Nicholson Baker, *The Size of Thoughts* (Vintage)
The Little Brown Handbook (Longman)
A good college dictionary.

.COURSE SCHEDULE,

1/14: Introduction

M, 1/17: No Classes: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

W, 1/19: What is so interesting about the ordinary?

F, 1/21: Birkerts, "The Millennial Warp," 3-21

M, 1/24: Baker, "Changes of Mind," 3-9

W, 1/26: Birkerts, "An Open Invitation to Extraterrestrials," 85-90

F, 1/28: Baker, "Shoelaces," handout

M, 1/31: Grammar Review and Conventions of Essay Writing

W, 2/2: Birkerts, "Against the Current," 111-121

F, 2/4: Baker, "Clip Art," 51-59

M, 2/7: In-Class Writing Workshop

W, 2/9: Birkerts, "American Nostalgia," 22-41

F, 2/11: ****Essay One Due**

M, 2/14: Film: "Sliding Doors"

W, 2/16: Film: "Sliding Doors"

F, 2/18: Film: "Sliding Doors"

M, 2/21: No Classes: Presidents' Day

W, 2/23: Baker, "Discards," 125-181
F, 2/25: In-Class Introduction to the Library and the Internet
M, 2/28: Longer Paper Discussion
W, 3/1: In-Class Writing Workshop
F, 3/3: Review for Rising Junior Exam **Essay Two Due
M, 3/6-3/10: No Classes: Spring Break
M, 3/13: Review for Rising Junior Exam
W, 3/15: Begin Reading Paul Auster's City of Glass
F, 3/17: Auster, City of Glass
M, 3/20: Auster, City of Glass **Library Assignments Due
W, 3/22: Auster, City of Glass
F, 3/24: Auster, City of Glass
M, 3/27: Auster, City of Glass
W, 3/29: Auster, City of Glass
F, 3/31: In-Class Writing Workshop
M, 4/3: **Essay Three Due

SAMPLE ESSAY TOPICS

Essay #1 Choose ONE and only one of the following questions. Answer it in a complete and thoughtful essay. Your essay should be a well-developed, clear, logical and complete idea developed from a definite thesis statement. Use the text in all instances to support your answer, but do not merely summarize plot. Refer to specifics in the text. Your paper should be 4-6 pages in length. Read the questions carefully. Support all answers with examples.

- 1) In "The Millennial Warp" Sven Birkerts argues that our culture moves too fast and has gotten too lazy: "From kneading dough to opening the garage door, and from carrying a suitcase to mowing the lawn, there is scarcely a physical operation that has not been simplified, streamlined, or eliminated entirely by some invention" (10). Given your experience, do you agree or disagree with Birkerts' claims?
- 2) If Birkerts and Baker are correct, then it is beneficial for us to slow down and observe normal everyday events and occurrences. Choose one daily event, an event you have until now taken for granted, and write an essay that discusses that event and its importance in your life.

Essay #2

- 1) "Sliding Doors" is a movie concerned with two versions of reality. Using the film as your "text," write an essay in which you discuss an event which has happened in your own life and what would have happened if the event had transpired in a different way. Remember to talk about the film in your essay as well as your own experience.
- 2) What do you think we get out of going to the movies? Some people are "moviemaniacs"; they see everything that comes out and go to movies constantly. Why do you think they do it? What about the movies attracts them? You can certainly use recent films as examples in your essay; additionally, use your own experiences.

Essay #3

- 1) Write an essay in which you discuss the significance of learning in your early years (let's say up to the age of twelve). How did you do your learning? school? home? television?
- 2) Discuss your impressions of college. What is what you expected? Why or why not? What's different? How have those impressions (accurate or not) changed you?

POSSIBLE LONGER PAPER TOPICS

You may choose any topic you like for this longer paper, provided it is connected in some way with something we have done or will do this semester. This leaves the field wide open: any of the short stories, essays, or films. The paper must use at least three secondary sources and be 8-11 pages in length. But you can't write a paper called "Sliding Doors." Someone already did that, and we tend to believe Peter Hewitt did a pretty good job. What you want to write is something on some particular aspect of the work you'd like to study. The Theme of Deception in "Sliding Doors" would be a possibility. Some others are listed below. These are merely some suggested topics. If you can't come up with something, come and talk to me and I'll help you.

- 1) American Culture's Obsession with Physical Beauty
- 2) Is Technology Overwhelming Us?
- 3) Nicholson Baker and Sven Birkerts: Two American Commentators
- 4) Paul Auster's New York Trilogy: American Fiction?
- 5) Mystery in City of Glass
- 6) How Can Fiction Comment on Society? Paul Auster's New York Trilogy
- 7) How Movies Reflect Society
- 8) Violence and American Culture
- 9) Obsessed With Speed: American Culture in the New Millennium
- 10) The Dying Art of Reading