

## ENG 201: Introduction to Critical Methods

North Central College :: Fall 2017

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“The great thing about human language is that it prevents us from sticking to the matter at hand.”

“The capacity to blunder slightly is the real marvel of DNA. Without this special attribute, we would still be anaerobic bacteria and there would be no music.”

—Lewis Thomas  
*Lives of a Cell*

“Do you like to fool around with words?” —W.H. Auden

When asked what **one** question he would ask a would-be writer to determine whether he would succeed. See Supplement 3 below.

### TEXTS:

Lynn, *Texts and Contexts* (**TAC**)

Guzman, *Black Writing from Chicago* (**BWC**)

Halpern, *The Art of the Story* (**AOS**)

*101 Great American Poems* (**GAP**)

...plus various other reviews, articles, and essays

### GOALS:

ENG 201 introduces students to the major methods of reading “texts” and arriving at meanings. Through reading, discussion, and writing assignments students should improve their abilities to analyze and write about texts—primarily literary texts, but many other texts as well. Another feature of this course will be its emphasis on reviewing as the major ways we usually produce and consume criticism. Students will be required to attend at least two Film Central showings.

### TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

The following gives an overview of the class’ general topics and readings from the main text, Lynn’s *Text and Contexts*. Reading assignments from our other texts and online sources will be given week by week depending on the needs of the class.

Sept.	11	Intro. The importance of seeing contrasts.
	13	More on contrasts, and other Logical Forms. Tour of critical methods. <b>TC: 3-35.</b>
	15	<b>TC: 3-35</b> (contd). Methods vs. The Review
	18	<u>New Criticism</u> . <b>TC: 36-63.</b>
	20	<b>TC: 36-63</b> (contd.)
	22	Critical methods and the art of reviewing.
	25	New Criticism exercises.
	27	New Criticism and the review. *Paper 1 due.
	29	<u>Reader Response</u> . <b>TC: 64-101</b>

- Oct. 2     **TC:** 64-101 (contd.)  
4     Reader Response exercises.  
6     Reader Response and the hybrid personal/critical essay. Read Adrienne Rich on Emily Dickinson (my website: Supplements)
- 9     Structuralist and Deconstructive Criticism. **TC:** 102-137  
11    **TC:** 102-137 (contd.)  
13    No class
- 16    Reading Derrida (read “Structure, Sign, and Play” on my website)  
18    Structuralist and Deconstructive exercises.  
20    Deconstruction and the “Review.” Read Nora Ephron (my website) \*Paper 2 Due
- 23    Historical, Postcolonial, and Cultural Studies. **TC:** 138-189  
25    **TC:** 138-189 (contd.)  
27    Historical...Postcolonial exercises.
- Nov. 30    Putting together *Black Writing from Chicago*. **BWC:** xi – 2, 14-28, 38-45  
1     **BWC:** Intros and Expanded Intros. Readings TBA  
3     **BWC:** Readings TBA
- 6     Group Meetings (1 & 2).  
8     Group 3 Meeting. \*Paper 3 due.  
10    Feminist, Postfeminist, and Queer Theory. **TC:** 218-253
- 13    **TC:** 218-253 (contd.)  
15    Psychological Criticism. **TC:** 190-217  
17    Psychological...Feminist exercises. Wrap-up.

Paper #4 will be due at the beginning of our Final Exam time: Monday, Nov. 20<sup>th</sup>, 3:00 p.m.

**GRADES** will be based on:

- 1) **Participation.** It is very important that you come to class having read the assignments with care, and being willing to share your comments, insights, and questions. This also includes being a good member of the groups you’ll be divided into for discussion of various topics (75 pts.)
- 2) Completion of four, relatively short critical analysis papers:
  - a) A New Criticism paper (2-3 pages, 50 pts.)
  - b) A Structuralist/Deconstruction paper. (2-3 pages, 50 pts.)
  - c) A Historical, Postcolonial, or Cultural Studies paper. (4-6 pages, 100 pts.)
  - d) A “hybrid” personal/critical essay. (3-5 pages, 100 pts.)
- 3) Completion of three short reviews. To be assigned during the first seven weeks of class. (500 words each / 50 pts. each)

4) Completion of any short exercises needed by the class. This includes posting, as assigned, to various forums I'll assign to your groups. (Usually 5-10 pts. each)

## EXERCISES IN SEEING CONTRASTS

— two by William Carlos Williams

### This Is Just to Say

I have eaten  
the plums  
that were in  
the ice box  
  
and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for breakfast  
  
Forgive me  
they were delicious  
so sweet  
and so cold

### The Red Wheelbarrow

so much depends  
upon  
  
a red wheel  
barrow  
  
glazed with rain  
water  
  
beside the white  
chickens

### The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock — T.S. Eliot

*S'io credisssi che mia reposta fosse  
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,  
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.  
Ma per cio che giammai diquestio fondo  
Non torno viva alcun, s'I'odo il vero,  
Senza tema diinfamia ti respondo.*

Let us go then, you and I,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky **.....STOP reading here! What do you think should follow?**

Like a patient etherized upon a table;  
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,  
The muttering retreats  
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels  
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:  
Streets that follow like a tedious argument  
Of insidious intent  
To lead you to an overwhelming question.

Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"  
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo...

## FOUR BASIC LOGICAL FORMS

The logic of CONTRAST  
The logic of ILLUSION / REALITY  
The logic of COMPARISON (Metaphor, Similie—see *Tropes* below)  
The logic of CLASSIFICATION and DIVISION

### The Four Basic Literary “Tropes” and Their “Consequences”

**METAPHOR.** Comparing two unlike things: Love [tenor] is a Rose [vehicle].

Season: Spring Plot: Romance Explanation: Idiographic Ideology: Anarchist

**METONYMY.** Substituting something not an actual part of: White House for Presidency

Season: Fall Plot: Tragedy Explanation: Mechanistic Ideology: Radical

**SYNECDOCHE.** Representing with an actual part of: Wheels for Car

Season: Summer Plot: Romance Explanation: Organicist Ideology: Conservative

**IRONY.** Conveying the opposite of what’s literal: Verbal, Situational, Dramatic

Season: Winter Plot: Satire Explanation: Contextualist Ideology: Liberal

## A POSSIBLE STRUCTURE OF CREATING AND “READING”

### CONNECTING

To culture, history, suffering, joy...Beauty

### CREATING

Exploration, *Lateral* Thinking,  
Chaos-Randomness-Letting Go,  
*Playing*, Finding *Content*

### ORDERING

Logical forms, Traditional  
story and poem structures and  
“tropes,” Finding *Form*

### COMPRESSING

Finding vivid, expressive language

## On Writing

One of the central values of the college is *writing*, and it mandates that 1/3 of the grade on any formal written assignment be on the quality of the writing. In this literature class we'll lean towards more vivid, expressive language, even when we're writing analysis. *Write something you would be excited to read yourself.* Following the guidelines below will help you write more readable prose—and poetry.

### A. Vary your sentence lengths structures

- Rule of thumb: Don't write more than three sentences in a row that have roughly the same length or structure.

### B. Eliminate the following words *as much as possible* (can't get rid of them all). Doing so usually cures 70% of wordiness and awkwardness.

- “To be” verbs (*is, was, were...*)
- Prepositions (*in, of, up...*)
- Relative pronouns (*that, which, who...*)

(You can read about these techniques and more in Richard R. Guzman's *Writing Well Wherever You Work*, available on his website.)