

English 1A: Beginning Composition

A HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO NIGHT VALE Absurdity, Existentialism, and New Media

University of California, Riverside
Winter 2016

Instructor: Ms. Butler

Email: [REDACTED]

Course Number: ENGL 001A-030

Class Website:

<http://hitchhikersguideto1a.tumblr.com>

Class Time: MW 5:10 – 6:30 pm

My Office: [REDACTED]

Class Location: [REDACTED]

Office Hours: [REDACTED]

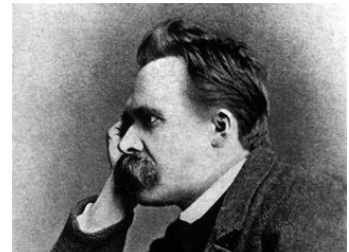
Course Description:

English 1A focuses on narrative, descriptive, and expository writing. The class is a general introduction to many important reading and writing strategies and genres. Our work is both creative and analytical; it is designed to develop the critical thinking and writing tools that you will need for future success in college and your personal and professional life.

Course Theme:

English 1A is designed to teach students to read and write stories that are meaningful, both in terms of personal and real-world significance. But what *is* meaning, and how do we find it? These are the questions the existentialists asked, and we can use their answers to make traditional English class skills relevant to today's techno-centric world and job market.

In this class, we will turn to a variety of materials, both old and new, to engage with storytelling and meaning-making in multiple ways. We'll use traditional Existentialist and Absurdist philosophers to help us read Douglas Adams's hilarious and impeccably-written novel *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*—an interesting and meaningful story that, in all its absurdity, prompts us to really think about how writing and language make a story interesting and meaningful. We'll also apply what we learn each week to auditory storytelling, via the intellectually complex podcast *Welcome to Night Vale*, and reflect on our thinking and writing through mixed-media posts on a class Tumblr site. This hybrid traditional/digital experience allows learners of all kinds (audio, visual, interactive, and more) to create our own meanings and take responsibility for our educations.



"The surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in higher esteem those who think **alike** than those who think *differently*."

—Friedrich Nietzsche

Course Goals:

According to a 2015 survey, the following are the **top 4 skills that employers look for** in college graduates. Here are descriptions of these skills, and how you will learn them in my class:

1. **Communication Skills: Verbal, Written, Listening, and Teamwork**

In this class, we will read an award-winning literary novel that teaches us how to understand deeply intellectual texts, and articulate our interpretations of those texts through lively verbal in-class discussions. We'll also learn the technical writing skills to communicate our thoughts clearly and grammatically through the textbook *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing* and supplemental lessons from *The Elements of Style*. We will practice our listening skills by incorporating the podcast *Welcome to Night Vale* into our discussions of existentialism, absurdity, and the basics of composition. Additionally, through our four class papers, you'll gain valuable strategies for every step of the writing process—brainstorming, planning, writing, and editing—and our peer reviews, small/large group discussions, and online interactions will teach us to work together in all sorts of environments and capacities.

2. **Analytical/Research Skills**

English teachers and employers alike use the term “critical thinking” a lot. Thinking “critically” means that you're able to bring your own perspective into the way that you think about and respond to any given question, concept, or situation. By submitting your own discussion questions to the class, and keeping a personal blog about your learning experience, every student will be able to analyze and research the class assignments in their own unique way.

3. **Computer/Technical Literacy and Independent, Self-Motivated Learning**

Before I became a teacher, my first two jobs straight out of college both required the ability to manage a website and effectively use social media for marketing purposes. Since media technologies change so rapidly, though, the most marketable skill you can gain in this area is the ability to figure out or eventually “intuit” new digital interfaces and platforms on your own: take the website's tutorial, guess and check, Google it, **take initiative**. This class will require you to use the blogging site Tumblr, and also submit your assignments to UCR's iLearn website. Although I will provide enough instruction for you to *understand* your homework, I expect you to **take responsibility** for your digital assignments and online presence. By teaching yourself to use these platforms *and* make them look the way you like/do what you want, you'll gain computer and technical literacy that will also translate to future digital platforms.

4. **Flexibility, Adaptability, and Multitasking Skills**

Does it sound like there's a lot going on in the class? Are the texts, themes, or assignments outside of your comfort zone? That's OK. It's a different kind of learning experience, but there's a reason for that. Working with new media while also successfully gaining traditional reading and composition skills will teach you, through experience, to adapt, learn, and multitask in truly productive ways that will provide countless benefits for your future endeavors. So, come on board! Commit fully to doing something new and exciting. And through this commitment, learn to be flexible and adapt to whatever your college experience or future career may throw your way. This is my favorite class to teach; I love working with students and I am truly here to help you have a better college experience, gain useful real-world skills, and even have a little fun.

Required Texts:

- *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing, 10th Edition* – Axelrod & Cooper (2013)
- *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* – Douglas Adams (originally published 1979)
 - Any edition (including ebook) is fine, but I will be using page numbers from the 1995 mass market paperback by Del Rey publishers, ISBN 978-0345391803.
- *Welcome to Night Vale* podcast – available for free on iTunes, YouTube, or your Podcast app.

Course Requirements:

NOTE: You must turn in every paper assignment, including rough drafts, otherwise you *cannot* pass this class. If you fail to turn in a rough draft entirely, I will not grade your final draft of that paper and will simply give you a zero (see my “late work” policy). When it is time to turn in your final draft, **you must do three things: 1) turn in your paper online to SafeAssign, 2) turn in your paper in class as a hard copy, and 3) include all required pre-writing, peer edited rough drafts, and peer editing worksheets as a packet with your final draft.** I do not accept late work (see policy).

My grade distribution is listed below. Since I know that you are still learning and will improve greatly throughout the quarter, I want to reward you for your hard work and have weighted your assignments accordingly. Papers 1 and 2 are worth fewer points, which will help your overall grade.

Participation (in class and homework)	10%
Paper 1	15%
Paper 2	15%
Paper 3	20%
Paper 4	20%
Final Exam	20%

Important Note about Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory, and you must actively participate to get credit (see “participation” below). *I do not allow make-ups and it will affect your letter grade substantially if you miss essay due dates or peer review days, no matter what your reason is.* However, I know things can come up. If something does, you can miss one or two classes for any reason without impacting your participation grade *as long as you don't miss a day that you have a due date or peer review.* **After your second absence, though, I will deduct 2% from your entire class grade for each day you miss. If you miss six or more classes, UCR's Writing Program mandates that you fail the course.**

Participation: Class Discussions and Homework

Participating doesn't *just* mean showing up. You must make an active effort to join our discussions every day of class. If you are quiet/shy, feel free to talk to me so that we can find a way to work on that together—but no one is excused. Also, if you are more than 5 minutes late or leave/pack up early, **if you are using your cell phone for ANY reason, or if you are using the internet for anything not directly related to class, I will automatically give you a zero in participation for the day.** I may also ask you to leave the class. Additionally, participation points include all homework and take-home assignments. If you show up to class but aren't working at home, or do your homework but don't speak up in class, *you*

will not get a good participation grade. Our homework assignments will mostly be on Tumblr, which means they are short, open-ended, and graded for completion. Don't miss out on participation points!

Participation: In-Class Quizzes and Writing

Quizzes can occur any day, at any time, with or without warning—they exist to reward students for doing the reading. If you have been doing your homework and participating in class, don't worry! You will do fine on the quizzes. In-class writing refers to any in-class written assignments, such as brainstorming/writing exercises and responses to in-class questions. Again, put in your best effort for all your classwork to earn these points. **If you miss an in-class quiz or assignment, you CANNOT make it up later.** If you know in advance that you will miss a class (for example, if you have a documented Dean's Excuse), you must speak to me BEFOREHAND as soon as you know there will be a conflict.

Class Etiquette and Decorum:

We will all participate appropriately and as adults during class discussions. We are a diverse academic community, representing different lifestyles, ethnicities, sexualities, faiths, and cultures. At times, we may discuss controversial issues in class, so it is important that you show open-mindedness and respect for your fellow classmates. Likewise, you are expected to respect your professor by **treating email correspondence professionally**. Feel free to be informal on Tumblr, but emails must include a proper opening/closing, grammar, mechanics, and content. I will not respond to unprofessional emails.

Required Papers:

Paper 1: Tell a Story

Write a personal narrative of a "remembered event" that finds meaning/significance in an experience from your everyday life. Based on Chapter 2 of SMG. A more detailed prompt will follow.

DUE: January 20. *4-6 pages, minimum 1200 words.*

Paper 2: Write a Profile

Use the character analysis skills we've gained in class to write a profile of a significant person in your life. Based on Chapter 3 of SMG. A more detailed prompt will follow.

DUE: February 3. *4-6 pages, minimum 1200 words.*

Paper 3: Explain a Concept

Write an expository paper that explains an abstract or challenging concept in an interesting and meaningful way. Based on Chapter 4 of SMG. A more detailed prompt will follow.

DUE: February 17. *4-6 pages, minimum 1200 words.*

Paper 3: Compare and Contrast

Find philosophical "common ground" between our two existential/absurd texts, *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and *Welcome to Night Vale*. Based on Chapter 5 of SMG. A more detailed prompt will follow.

DUE: March 2. *4-6 pages, minimum 1200 words.*

Final Exam: Your final exam will take place on campus Monday, March 14 from 11:30AM to 2:30PM. The final will require you to demonstrate proficiency in all the skills you've learned during the quarter, and mastery of the course content and texts. *More information TBA.*