

Kevin H. Johnson

Mike Q.

ENGL 052
Reedley campus
MWTh 11:00-11:50 in SOC 30
T 11:00-11:50 in INC1
Office: A5
Office phone: 638-3246
Office hours: MT 1:30-2:30 and F 10:30-11:30

Course Description

My instructional approach reflects my strong commitment to a whole language approach to the language arts. I believe that learning a language involves thinking, listening, speaking, reading, and writing; particular emphasis will be given to the relationship between the reading and writing processes, reflecting my belief that the two should be addressed together, as each greatly influences our understanding and practice of the other.

My instructional approach also reflects a commitment to collaborative work. We will regularly work in small groups. Your participation in group activities and class discussions will be essential for an effective class interaction. Frequent peer review activities will foster the emergence of a community of learners sharing common needs and solutions.

Finally, my instructional approach reflects our commitment to students' responsibility for their own learning. Periodic in-class self-assessment will help you monitor and plan your own learning.

Introduction to Course

In his autobiographical book *Brothers and Keepers*, from which the following quote is taken, John Wideman writes this letter to his brother, Robby, who has been imprisoned for armed robbery:

You never know exactly when something begins. The more you delve and backtrack and think, the more clear it becomes that nothing has a discrete, independent history; people and events take shape not in orderly chronological sequence but in relation to other forces and events, tangled skeins of necessity and chance that after all could have produced only one result: what is. The intertwining strands of DNA that determine a creature's genetic predisposition might serve as a model for this complexity, but the double helix, bristling with myriad possibilities, is not mysterious enough. The usual notion of time, of one thing happening first and opening the way for another and another, becomes pretty useless when I try to isolate the shape of your life from the rest of us, when I try to retrace your steps and discover precisely where and when you started to go bad.

*grade scale
drop date
attendance*

1. Paper for class notes and activities
2. Two 3.5" computer disks
3. One 8.5"x11" folder in which you will keep all of your work: journal entries, rough drafts, outlines, and returned papers
4. A dictionary is optional but recommended

Reading and Writing Assignments

Most of your writings will begin with and grow out of your reading of assigned texts. The texts we have chosen are rich and powerful; they resist "easy" readings. In other words, your goal as a reader is not to arrive at some "correct" view of what you have read but rather to form your own views of the issues that seem significant in a text. Your impression of readings, and the meanings that you make of them, may grow in complexity, and even become altered, as you re-read them. Meaning is not in the text alone, but is created through continual interaction between you — the reader — and the text, as well as your interaction with other readers and other texts. This interaction is only possible when you engage the text critically and actively, by paying attention and asking questions and by bringing in your own ideas and experiences. You will be exposed to several reading strategies (previewing, annotating, outlining, summarizing, responding, incorporating sources) that will help you improve your ability to read critically and to integrate what you read into your thinking and writing.

The final draft of each formal essay will receive a score of check minus, check, or check plus. If you revise your final drafts and receive a higher mark, that mark replaces the earlier draft's score. Essays must be two and one half pages minimum, typed or word processed.

For each reading that you are given in class you will be asked to write a response to specific questions asked about the reading, as well as telling the reader your own impressions, analyses, interpretations, and personal responses. These assignments are intended to be the base of class discussions and to serve as material for formal essays. Because they are essential to all classroom activities, they will not be accepted late. Responses will also be graded with a check minus, check, or check plus, and a higher score on a revised journal replaces a lower grade. Journal entries must be one and one half pages in length, but may be handwritten.

Like reading, writing is not a one shot deal. It is a process, which involves continual re-thinking and re-evaluation. I think of the words you write as possibilities—nothing is carved in stone. Language is moldable and often, like a sculptor, a writer realizes what he or she wants to create while shaping it. Therefore, all writing for class (freewriting, journal writing, annotation of texts,

John Wideman is attempting to unravel all of the threads of influence that have created who Robby has become, but realized that this is exhausting work, if it is even possible to complete. In this course we will be asking you to attempt the same exploration, but of another subject — yourself. Have you ever tried to define and describe yourself on a job application, on a financial aid form, or to a new acquaintance? You might have felt that, with so many aspects of yourself from which to choose, how could you narrow your entire being to four or five sentences? Could any written description ever really give the reader a sense of who you felt yourself to be? When push came to shove, how did you decide which points to leave in, which to leave out?

Does one's occupation, or field of study, define who that person really is? In what ways does one's gender, race, ethnicity, economic background, family, friends, experiences, and certain life transitions influence that person's sense of self? Are particular aspects of one's life more important than others in the formation of identity?

Self-definition is a part of our everyday life, though we are rarely consciously aware that we are engaging in it. The very clothes we choose to buy and wear say quite a bit about how we see ourselves, and how we want the rest of the world to define us. Similarly, when we meet new people, we usually introduce ourselves by name, and by occupation; we often also mention where we live now, where we grew up, what schools we have attended or are attending, maybe a few of our interests and hobbies, and often whether or not we are engaged, married, divorced, or single. As we mature, as our personalities, occupations, relationships, and interests change, the ways in which we define ourselves to ourselves and the ways in which we describe ourselves to the outside world change. Self-definition is an ever changing, never-ending process. For example, as a teenager, you might have defined yourself by your gender, the music you listened to, what school you attended, your friends, or your sports team. Now, you may regard yourself more in relation to your current job, your parents' background, your ethnicity and/or race, and your culture (and the different cultures to which you belong may conflict). Simply put, every experience we have, every person with whom we have come in contact informs our sense of personal identity.

Course Requirements

Required Texts: *College Writing Basics* Thomas E. Tyner (available at the college bookstore)

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Grading

1. Meet the attendance policy of no more than 5 absences (unexcused)
2. Complete all work on time.
3. Participate in class discussions and group activities. You will soon find that doing so contributes directly to your own growth and success in the class. My goal is to foster lively discussion and to create an atmosphere in which in which we all feel free to express our views and learn from each other.
4. Pass in three formal papers, typed or word processed, including at least two drafts of each essay with the final draft.
5. Assemble a portfolio consisting of all of the drafts of your two best formal papers and any other work from this semester, which you feel, represents your most effective writing. These portfolios will allow you and your instructor to see the progress of your reading and writing over time and to assess your development in these areas.
6. Participate weekly in our class' e-mailing list and newsgroups, as well as in all instructional technology activities.
7. Pass in all reading journals.

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September 20 (M) Yom Kippur

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