



English 200: Foundations of Literary Study, *(Un)Commonplaces*

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commonplace, *n.* and *adj.*

Etymology: A rendering of Latin *locus communis* = Greek *κοινὸς τόπος*, in Aristotle simply *τόπος*, explained by Cicero as a general theme or argument applicable to many particular cases.

Life in a box is better than
no life at all, I expect. You'd
have a chance at least. -Tom Stoppard

English 200 is a foundation course, which means it concentrates on the fundamental components of literary study: reading, writing and research. A varied selection of course texts—poems, plays, fiction, essays—should spur productive conversations about rhetorical practices and research processes, as well as invite participants to discuss and discover the methodologies that English majors have *in common*. The course adopts the phrase *(un)commonplaces*, however, as its subtheme, because even as we acquaint ourselves with the common practices of English study, we will read authors who take the idea of the commonplace and de-familiarize it. The commonplaces of the course texts, that is, prove inhabitable—expansively so!—at the same time as they prove precarious, oblique, runny or *wrecked*.

Arguably (we'll definitely argue it, believe me), the place English majors inhabit in the current cultural moment is as hazardously hospitable as the intricate *topoi* of the course readings. We'll make room in this course to examine the scope and scale of the commonplace procedures, habits, timelines and professional boundaries of literary study, and we'll consider the collective (pre)occupation among humanities students, instructors and departments to articulate our common-place in educational, political and cultural environments.

Course Materials

Texts to purchase

General Textbook

This Thing Called Literature (Bennett & Royle ISBN-13: 978-1408254011)

Poetry

Plainwater (Anne Carson ISBN-13: 978-0375708428)

How to Be Drawn (Terrance Hayes ISBN-13: 978-0143126881)

Essays

A Field Guide to Getting Lost (Rebecca Solnit ISBN-13: 978-0143037248)

Fiction

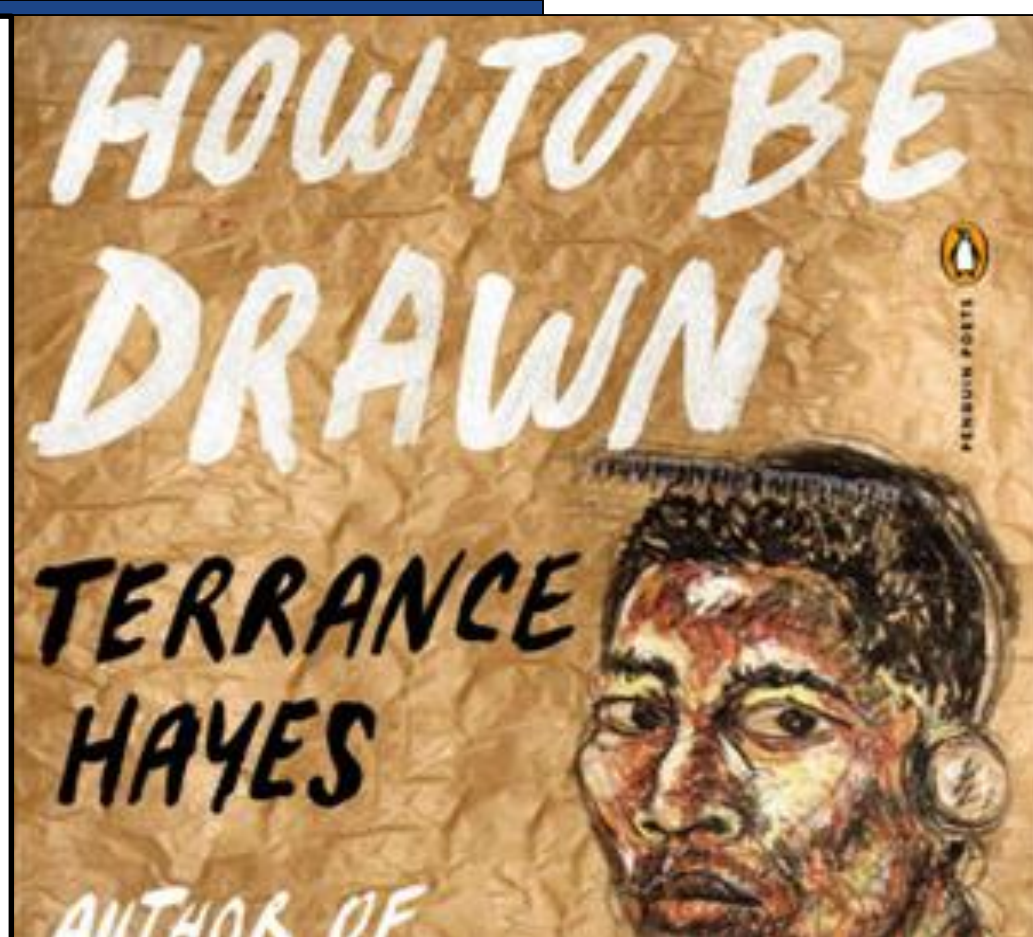
Wittgenstein's Mistress (David Markson ISBN-13: 978-1564782113)

House of Leaves (Mark Z. Danielewski ISBN-13: 978-0375703768)

Drama

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead (Tom Stoppard ISBN-13: 978-0802132758);

Other readings may be made available online



Learning Outcomes

- Learn and analyze conventions of traditional literary genres
- Draw and articulate connections between texts and genres
- Contribute meaningfully to conversations about the social impact of English studies
- Practice rhetorically effective writing and communication, through both traditional, thesis-driven argumentation and creative, speculative, multimodal experimentation

Coursework

Class Participation	100
In-Class Writing	100
Guide to Getting Lost Presentation	50
(Un)Commonplace Book	250
This Thing Called Lit., Report	200
Midterm Exam	150
Final Exam	150

Grading Scale

Assignments add up to a total of 1000 points. Convert point totals into percentages, and the letter grade equivalents are:

A=90-100; B=80-89; C=70-79;
D=60-69; F=0-59

Brief Assignment Descriptions *(detailed guidelines coming soon on separate ecampus pgs)*

Guide to Getting Lost Presentation

After reading selections from Solnit's *Field Guide to Getting Lost*, you'll choose a common place - on campus or in your hometown, the more familiar or mundane the better - and then present to the class your own field guide to getting lost in that place. Making the common uncommon is one of the most fundamental components of English studies.

(Un)Commonplace Book

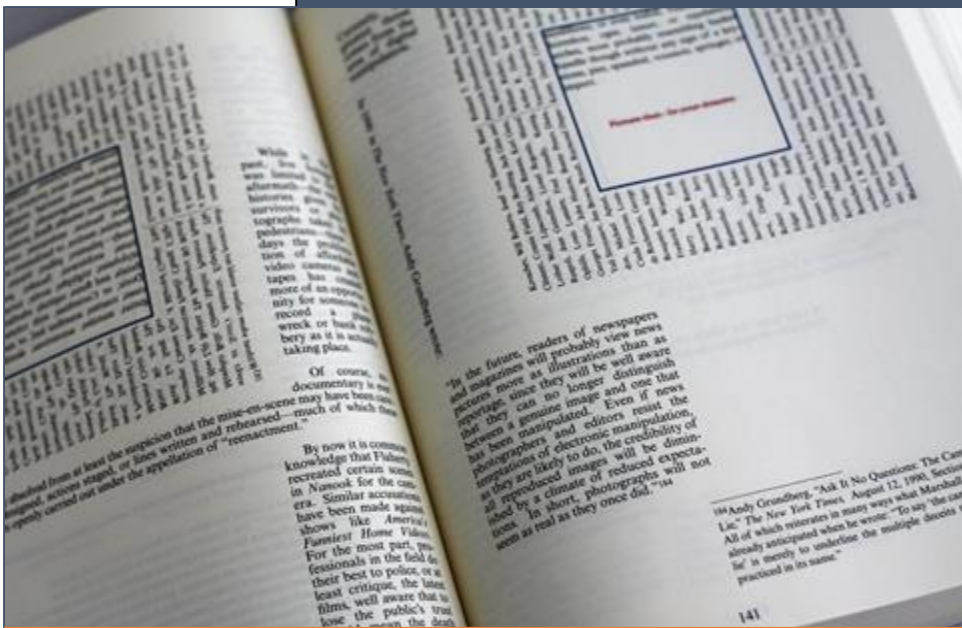
You'll construct a book in which to gather material over the course of the semester; part scrapbook, part commonplace book, this text will ultimately be transformed into an art piece to display at the end of the course.

What is This Thing Called Literature, A Report

Assemble a report on the place of the English discipline within the current cultural moment. Think of this as a researched response to the several articles we'll read regarding the state of ("crisis in") the humanities.

Exams

The midterm and final exams will test foundational skills of the major, including especially research processes and close reading.



Little solace comes

...

when thoughts keep drifting
as walls keep shifting

Mark Z. Danielewski

Laptop Policy

I'd prefer that you put away laptops and smartphones during class and not take them out again unless I ask you to do so for a class exercise. But obviously if you are using etexts, I will be flexible on this policy. Just stay on task, or you may lose participation points.

In-Class Participation

I will keep track of your verbal participation, awarding 7 points every week to students who contribute substantially to class discussion. We meet 3 days a week; speak up twice per week and stay engaged in the discussion every day (that means staying alert and off your phone), and you'll receive full credit. (Plan ahead for weeks when we don't meet all 3 days.) Discussion-based classes work best when a lot of people talk, but I sympathize with students who are less comfortable speaking up in class. If you don't get the chance to participate verbally, you can make up the points by submitting to me a written response (of at least 100 words) to something specific from the day's conversation at the beginning of the next class period.

Attendance & Make-Up Policies

Four classes may be missed without penalty, regardless of the reason. Your fifth absence will subtract a third of a letter grade from your final course grade, again, regardless of the reason for the absence. Students who miss nine or more classes will fail the course. Note that there are always consequences to missing class, even if you have a reasonable excuse. I don't need to see any doctor's notes or other documentation; giving me a document doesn't mean your absence isn't still an absence. However, if you know you'll be gone for an exam, do let me know. Exams can be made up/rescheduled in special circumstances (e.g. school-sponsored trips, Days of Special Concern), but in-class exercises and participation can never be made up. I suggest getting notes from a classmate if you miss class, and/or coming to office hours to talk over any questions or comments you have.

General Grading Rubric (may be modified for certain assignments; for example, written assignments will not include a Design

component)	Insubstantial (D/F)	Competent (C)	Mature (B)	Exemplary (A)
Rhetorical Awareness Considers audience, purpose, stance and support; states an argument, provides evidence, articulates implications	Argument/context unclear and/or elements of the rhetorical situation neglected; arguments undeveloped and unmemorable, with no specific support or analysis, and few to no quotations from the text	Elements of the rhetorical situation examined, but arguments not fully coherent or developed; arguments may rely on vague, insufficient, unconvincing support due to misinterpretation of the text(s)	Elements of the rhetorical situation examined with confidence; arguments unified and coherent; arguments may rely on specific support from the text(s), but analysis may be unsophisticated or clichéd	Elements of the rhetorical situation examined with confidence and sophistication; argument expert and inventive, with plenty of relevant, engaging and specific support
Design Adds features to enhance audience engagement	Design components missing, illegible or inappropriate; features conflict with or ignore the assignment parameters	Some design components included, but awkwardly or weakly integrated; features match imprecisely with content	Design components included and synthesized appropriately; features suit the genre and content	Design components provoke distinct visual appeals; features integrate with content seamlessly and innovatively
Organization Clear structure moves from topic to topic, or observation to explanation	Structure illogical and dis-unified with weak or missing transitions; logic of arguments impossible to follow	Structure of arguments somewhat clear but missing several transitions between ideas	Structure clear but predictable, utilitarian; arguments logically, coherently developed, but somewhat repetitive or monotonous	Structure clear but complex; ideas organized to achieve maximum coherence and momentum
Conventions Adheres to grammar and usage standards	Content distorted by excessive or consistently distracting errors	Content occasionally interrupted by minor grammatical issues and/or awkward language	Content clarified by appropriate grammar and language throughout	Content enhanced by sophisticated use of rhetorical devices, with no sentence-level issues