Hitting Us Where We Live: 
Writing About the Writing Around Us

English 2, Section 302, Fall 2000  
Bennett Hall 319, TR 10:30-12:00

INSTRUCTOR:

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CLASS COMPUTING INFORMATION:

Class home page: www.english.upenn.edu/~esimpson/Teaching/Genome/
Class listserv address: simpson2@english.upenn.edu

DESCRIPTION:

What kinds of writing get produced when a single issue captures the attention of the mass media, Internet chat rooms, literary essayists, and the business community at the same time? This intensive writing seminar will give students writing and research tools with which to find answers to that question. We will start by working through the basics of mechanics and argumentation: students will write short essays, then revise and polish them, both individually and in group writing exercises. Next, the class will undertake a detailed study of writing about the Human Genome Project, analyzing the metaphorical and rhetorical strategies writers use to discuss it. Using both print media and Internet coverage, we will examine literary, scientific, commercial, and journalistic writing to see how writers portray the controversial project's impact on our ideas of biology, of family, of reproduction, and of commercialization. The final part of the class will be driven by the students themselves. Each participant will choose a complicated topic, then scrutinize it with tools learned earlier in the term.

TEXTS

Strunk and White, *Elements of Style*  
Matt Ridley, *Genome*  
*Gattaca* (film)
COURSE CALENDAR

Thursday, September 7

First day of classes.

In Class: Introductions, class overview.
For Next Class: Personal essay assignment. Order books.

Tuesday, September 12

In Class: Overview of the "inspection" process, workshop of sample paper.
For Next Class: Elements of Style assignment, which you will email to the class.

Thursday, September 14

Erik goes to Arizona to give a paper. Students, left in Philadelphia, strive to avoid fainting from sorrow.

In Class: No class.
For Next Class: Take the essay you wrote and apply the "inspection" process to it. Write a brief summary of what you discovered by using the inspection. Bring two copies of your revised essay to class on Tuesday.

Tuesday, September 19

In Class: Discussion of The Elements of Style, peer work on essays. Handout on documentation.
For Next Class: The handout will include a documentation assignment.

Thursday, September 21

In Class: Group exercises on inspection points.
For Next Class: Write an opinion piece with basic quotation and documentation. Details to be announced in class.

Tuesday, September 26

In Class: Peer work on opinion pieces, discussion of what to work on during class on Thursday.
For Next Class: Study for exam, looking for weak points to discuss Thursday.

Thursday, September 28

In Class: Pre-exam drill session, review of results of last Thursday's exercise.
For Next Class: Study for exam.
Tuesday, October 3

In Class: Big Scary Mechanics Exam™.
For Next Class: Do assignment on using search engines (handout), post results.

Thursday, October 5

In Class: Library day.
For Next Class: Do library research assignment (handout) on the Human Genome Project (HGP).

Tuesday, October 10

In Class: Review of exam, introduction to online research.
For Next Class: Do assignment on online research materials (handout).

Thursday, October 12

Note: fall break is coming this weekend, but (you'll be happy to hear) we don't miss a class period.

In Class: Discussion and compilation of online research findings.
For Next Class: Readings from Genome.

Tuesday, October 17

In Class: Introduction to analysis through stakeholders, audience, metaphor, and argument (SAMA). In-class exercise.
For Next Class: SAMA responses about Genome (handout).

Thursday, October 19

In Class: Small group work based on Genome assignment. In-class reading of Lewontin excerpt (handout).
For Next Class: Analysis of Lewontin reading (handout).

Tuesday, October 24

In Class: Peer work on Lewontin assignment, then discussion of HGP readings so far as a whole.
For Next Class: Watch Gattaca, do handout in response.

Thursday, October 26

In Class: Discussion of Gattaca, then some time for questions about the project.
For Next Class: HGP projects due Monday!
Monday, October 30

**Projects Due** by 3:00 in my mailbox on the fourth floor of Bennett Hall.

Tuesday, October 31

In Class: Discussion of and brainstorming for independent projects.
For Next Class: Paragraph-length project proposals.

Thursday, November 2

In Class: No class. Individual conferences about project proposals.
For Next Class: Preliminary bibliography of project sources.

Tuesday, November 7

In Class: Progress reports, sharing of successful methods and interesting sources.
For Next Class: Annotated bibliography of short works.

Thursday, November 9

In Class: Discussion of findings to this point, small-group brainstorming exercise.
For Next Class: Stage one of SAMA work.

Tuesday, November 14

In Class: Peer review of SAMA work.
For Next Class: SAMA focus essays.

Thursday, November 16

In Class: In-class discussion, peer work on SAMA essays.
For Next Class: Full annotated bibliography.

Tuesday, November 21

In Class: No class--conferences on projects and bibliographies.
For Next Class: Prepare a three-minute presentation of your project to this point.

[Thursday, November 23]

No class--Thanksgiving break.
Tuesday, November 28

**In Class:** Presentations.
**For Next Class:** Projects due Friday.

Thursday, November 30

**In Class:** Open class for help and questions.
**For Next Class:** Projects due tomorrow.

Friday, December 1

**Projects Due** by 3:00 in my mailbox on the fourth floor of Bennett Hall.

Monday, December 4

**Projects Returned** by 3:00 with comments and suggestions for revision.

Tuesday, December 5

**In Class:** Open class for project consultation and possibly conferences.
**For Next Class:** Revised projects due tomorrow.

Wednesday, December 6

**Revised Projects Due** by 3:00 in my mailbox on the fourth floor of Bennett Hall.

Thursday, December 7

_Last day of class._

**In Class:** Feasting, tearful farewells, and the like.
Grading Policies

For the exam and the two major projects, a breakdown of grading points will be provided in advance, so that you understand what I'll be looking for and how I'll be weighting my opinions. Your final grade will be determined thus:

20% Mechanics Exam
20% Major Project I: the HGP
15% Major Project II: independent research (first version)
15% Major Project II: independent research (final version)
20% Participation in and preparation for class sessions (oral participation, helpfulness in group work, quality of preparation, punctuality for classes and conferences)
10% Short writing and Internet assignments

How the math works: I build spreadsheets for calculating grades, so the percentages you see here are serious and exact. There will be no extra credit assignments, and grades are non-negotiable unless I have made a mathematical error. (Note, dear students, that the preceding sentences demonstrate the kind of straightforward definitions that make "to be" verbs appropriate or even forceful.) For each section listed above, I will give you a letter grade that will be translated numerically, thus:

- A+ 100% (very rare in any category)
- A  95%
- A- 91%
- B+ 88%
- B  85%
- B- 81%
- C+ 78%
- C  75%
- C- 71%
- D+ 68%
- D  65%
- D- 61%
- F  55%
- 0 0% (For an assignment not completed at all or plagiarized. Bad, bad news)

All grades will be lowered by a notch for every day the assignment is late. I will also penalize you for lateness on ungraded assignments.
Attendance and Timeliness

**Participation in class discussions** is a very important part of this class. If you do not participate, I will lower your grade by at least one notch (i.e., B to B-). If you do a great job of supporting our discussions, I might raise your grade similarly.

**Attendance** is absolutely required. There are no "excused" absences. Because I know that emergencies and accidents do occur during the semester, I will not change your grade for the first two absences, though I will expect you to contact me, to find out what you have missed, and to make up the work quickly. 3-4 absences will lower your grade by 1/3, 5-6 by 2/3, etc. More than 12 absences will constitute failing the course.

**Lateness** seriously disrupts class sessions. When students arrive late, valuable time disappears as we backtrack, distribute handouts, and try to recover the broken rhythm of the class. I will treat lateness seriously, in general counting two late arrivals as one absence. Please save yourself and me the trouble of calculation by showing up on time.
Plagiarism

Plagiarism, according to the Writing Across The University office, “is taking a passage or passages from another person’s discourse, either word for word or in general, and incorporating them as your own into written work you offer for credit.”

That doesn’t mean that you aren’t allowed to use other people’s ideas; in fact, good writing often uses the ideas and words of other writers extensively. This practice becomes a problem when you don’t acknowledge your sources. To avoid plagiarizing, use the following techniques (which I am borrowing in part from WATU):

1. **Direct Quotation**: If you use the exact words or a writer you consulted, you must put their words in quotation marks and tell your reader where the quotation came from.

2. **Indirect Quotation**: When you summarize or paraphrase another writer, use phrases such as “According to . . . “ or “As . . . suggests” to tell your reader what you are doing.

3. **General Acknowledgment of Indebtedness**: When your thinking has been influenced by a source in a broad way, but you don’t have a specific place to acknowledge that influence, you need to let your reader know that with wording such as “Much of the following discussion is based on material found in . . . .” In most cases, though, one of the first two techniques works better than this one to let your reader know exactly what influence the cited writer has had on your writing.

4. **List of Works Cited**: This will allow you to list the specific sources you have used. We will discuss the format of the list later.

Basically, plagiarism ranges from the academic version of forgetting to thank someone who has been nice to you to outright theft. The consequences are serious—any paper that contains plagiarized material **must be given an F** at Penn—so be careful, and ask me if you have any questions about how to handle a given source. In cases of deliberate fraud, I will fail the offending student immediately and refer the case to the university for further action.