

SYLLABUS
EMS Freshman Seminar
Fall Semester 1998

Course Number: EARTH 297A
Location: 14 Deike Building
Meeting Time: TuTh 9:45—11:00

Instructor: Derek Elsworth
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Office Hours: TBD

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Science Matters, by Robert Hazen and James Trefil. (This book is available at the bookstore)

The Environmental Predicament, by Carol F. Verburg. (This book is available at the bookstore)

The Elements of Style, by William Strunk and E.B. White. (This book is available at the bookstore)

Style for Students, by Joe Schall. (This book will be distributed in class and is provided at no cost by the College)

Deep in Thought, by Thomas Tyner. (This book is available on “reserve” in the E&MS Library and is *optional*)

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

The ability to find, analyze, and synthesize information are essential skills, and being able to communicate your thoughts effectively is crucial to your success as a professional. Toward this end, the goals of this course are:

- to help you learn to formulate, analyze, and communicate ideas effectively;
- to promote comprehension, evaluation, and critical thinking skills;
- to help you articulate, write about, and orally present your ideas;
- to promote good study habits and a work ethic that will foster your future success;
- to introduce you to the key ideas of engineering and science;
- to give you practice at working in groups and peer review;
- to help you begin to view yourself as a professional;
- to introduce you to those college and university resources that you can use in other research and writing courses, including word processing, graphics, writing tutoring, the libraries, and on-line resources.

Your previous experiences with writing may have focused on documenting what you have learned from others. In this course, the emphasis will be on writing as a process that promotes thinking. Through the process you will synthesize the linkages between your thoughts and information that you have acquired. As you do this, you will sharpen, refine, and extend your ideas. Once captured in concrete form, others can analyze, evaluate, and react to your thoughts.

BASIC EXPECTATIONS:

- Complete all readings on time, and be prepared to discuss them. This is crucial to your success in this course. You must complete the assigned readings before the class in which they will be discussed.
- Submit all assignments on time. If you miss class, you are still held to the deadline.
- Respect copyright law, and the intellectual property rights of others. Do not plagiarize anything, or you will fail the assignment, and possibly the course.
- Conform to the style guidelines set forth in Chapter 6 of *Style for Students*, using either the author-year system; always include a References section at the end of your paper to cite sources.
- Follow the format prescribed for the assignment; otherwise your grade can be lowered.
- Behave in professional manner, and respect the rights of others to express ideas and opinions that are different from your own.

COURSE CONTENT:

The course is a collection of readings and activities that are aggregated into major units, which correspond to major types of papers, known as definition, analysis, proposal and advocacy. A detailed outline is included in the attached schedule. Note that the due date for most assignments is given.

FINAL GRADE:

The final grade consists of the following components:

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| Definition Paper | 5% |
| Analysis Paper | 10% |
| Proposal Paper | 15% |
| Final Paper with Introduction, Advocacy, and Conclusion | 20% |
| Oral presentations of paper | 20% |
| Debate | 15% |
| Attendance, Class Participation, Effort | 10% |
| Resume | 5% |

Papers. Detailed information will be distributed in class to explain the requirements of the papers. Papers will be graded on both content and style. The three assigned papers will be combined into a single final paper, complete with introduction.

Oral Presentations. Discussion is an integral part of the course, and you will be graded on the *quality* of your class participation. In addition to the informal discussions that will occur everyday, there will be at least two graded oral presentations. These will be described in class.

Assignments will not be accepted after the due date, unless prior arrangements have been made.

SUMMARY OF ORAL COMMUNICATION ASSIGNMENTS

EARTH 297 -- Elsworth

Oral Presentation #1. Each student is assigned one chapter of the book, *Science Matters*, and they must give a four to five minute summary of the content in their assigned chapter. Following each presentation, all students are required to list the strengths and weaknesses of the presentation, and to submit these to me at the end of the class. I then meet with the presenter within one week of their presentation, to discuss both my evaluation of their presentation and the comments of their classmates. I try to give each student specific suggestions for improving their next presentation. In general, one student will give a presentation each period, starting with the second week of classes and ending by the middle of the semester. Periodically, I discuss with the class, their ideas of the things that contribute to effective and ineffective presentations.

Oral Presentation #2. Each student is required to give a three-minute oral presentation on some aspect of Chapter 14, "earth cycles," of the book, *Science Matters*. They are required to prepare and use vu-graphs to improve the delivery of information, and approximately half of their grade is based on the quality of the vu-graphs. Afterwards, we review the effectiveness of the vu graphs.

Oral Presentation #3. Each student selects an undergraduate program within the College, and their assignment is to interview a faculty member, in that program, to determine general information about the "major" and the current frontiers of the discipline. They also have to obtain background information from the "web" and the library. They are then required to write a one page summary of their findings, and to give a two minute oral presentation to the class.

SUMMARY OF WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

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Major Writing Assignments

Essay #1. This is a definition essay, utilizing the general guidelines established by Joe Schall. The required length is three to four pages.

Essay #2. This is an analysis essay, utilizing the general guidelines established by Joe Schall. The required length is four to five pages.

Essay #3. This is a group project, and includes a proposal/advocacy essay, utilizing the general guidelines established by Joe Schall. A minimum of five pages of text is required, in addition to figures, tables, and bibliography.

Minor Writing Assignments

Assignment #1. They write a three-paragraph essay addressing the following three questions: why did you choose to study at Penn State; why did you choose your major; what are your expectations of the College and your program?

Assignment #2. They view a 60 minute video on *Catastrophe Theory*, and then write a one to two page critique identifying the logical fallacies of the presenter's case.

Assignment #3. The written component of Oral Presentation #3 (see attached "Summary of Oral Communication Assignments")