

## English 2 Syllabus

English 2, Section 80817: Critical Thinking and Writing About Literature  
Fall 2008: 9:30-10:45 Tu&Th in Room 801  
Office Hours & Place: TBA

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→Online Reference: [QCounty.com](http://QCounty.com) (follow link to Solano College classes)

**Prerequisites:** English 1 with a grade of “C” or better.

**Visceral Course Objectives:** You may love literature. You may hate it. You may not really know what literature is. You may have discovered literature in the form of a book, a poem, a play and have been exhilarated ever since by your favorite authors. Or maybe you loved one book, once upon a time, and have been hard pressed ever since to find something similar. I don’t like it, you say, each time you pick up a story and begin reading.

Critic Cyril Connolly said, “Literature is the art of writing something that will be read twice,” which is fine, you say, except that what you like to listen to over and over again or read or watch you find not in the classroom but in the movie theater, on TV, on the internet, or in publications your teachers would never assign in class.

As a result, literature may be something oppressive in your life like a hot and humid day when the air is so thick that you feel yourself suffocating as you turn one smog-filled page after another. Or you don’t think about literature one way or the other. It’s a requirement for your degree. You need to take it. But when it’s over, you say to yourself to steel your resolve, you plan to move on from literature without looking back. Or maybe literature is something that you could no more live without than you could live without air and water.

Whatever you think of literature on starting this class, my hope is that as we read, discuss, and write about stories, poems, plays and a novel, you will see literature not as something outside your life, but as an essential element of your life that helps you to understand people and civilizations because, as philosopher Martha Nussbaum points out, literature extends our lives to include others whom we otherwise wouldn’t know or understand: “Our experience is, without fiction, too confined and too parochial. Literature extends it, making us reflect and feel about what might otherwise be too distant for feeling.” You know this already from TV stories and movies that you love, from songs that you play over and over again until you memorize the lyrics. But these, you say, are not literature, no matter what critic Cyril Connolly might say.

How much would you like your favorite shows and songs, however, if you couldn’t share them with others? Would these activities be as interesting if you did them in isolation? Shared reading, Nussbaum says, “. . . brings readers together in a particular way, a way that is constitutive of a particular sort of community: one in which each person’s imagining and thinking and feeling are respected as morally valuable.”

So we’ll read together, discuss, and write about what we’ve read and discussed. And as you learn this critical, shared reading and writing process, my hope is that you will see literature more clearly, perhaps for the first time, and use it as yet another educational tool to enrich and extend your life.

### Required Texts:

1. *Literature and its Writers: A Compact Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*, Fourth Edition, by Ann Charters and Samuel Charters;
2. *A Bend in the River* by V. S. Naipaul;
3. A bound composition book that you will use for your journal;
4. A college-level dictionary.

### Suggested Texts:

1. A Roget’s thesaurus, which is organized by meaning rather than spelling;
2. The grammar handbook by Little Brown, *LB Brief*, which is available in the bookstore packaged with a dictionary for approximately the same price as the handbook alone;
3. *The Elements of Style*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, by William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White, which is a short classic of English rhetoric that can be either intimidating or inspirational, depending on your point of view.

**Specific Course Objectives:** In this composition course focused on literature, there will be many readings from *Literature and its Writers*. You will read short stories and poems. You will also read William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and the novel *A Bend in the River* by Nobel Laureate V. S. Naipaul. While your readings will range from the simple to the difficult, from the humorous to the tragic to the sublime, and while these readings will be chosen

for their creativity, craft, and interesting use of literary forms, the literature you will study will be selected primarily for its intellectual and emotional enjoyment, an enjoyment that will increase the harder you work and the more you become engaged.

To enhance your appreciation of literature and to improve your writing, you will write at least four essays during the semester: one on *Hamlet*, one on *A Bend in the River*, and the remaining on short stories and poems. But don't be intimidated by the writing since you're going to get lots of help from me and your classmates. As part of your writing assignments there will also be a mid-term exam and final exam, both done in class, that will give me a sense of how your analysis and composition skills are progressing.

**Ethical class behavior:** In order for us to cover this material successfully, we have to engage in ethical behavior. By this I mean that in dealing with me and your classmates, treat others as ends, not as means; be happy for others when they succeed and be understanding when they struggle; be respectful of others' beliefs, most especially when they're different from your own; and be true to all these things even when no one is watching.

**Requirements & Grades:** Since your on-time attendance and classroom participation are critical to your success, it is imperative that you be in class from 9:30-10:45, Tuesday and Thursday, ready to work with required texts, a dictionary, and your journal. Because you are allowed by school policy to miss one class for each credit, you have two free passes, but for each additional class missed beyond two, your grade will be lowered by 15 percent.

- 1) **60% of grade:** You will write essays ranging from short reader responses to longer synthesis essays supported by multiple sources. Essays are due on the assigned date. During the first half of the semester if you hand in your paper on that date, you are allowed one significant rewrite, due within a week of receiving your paper back, to which you must attach your original. Since writing is about rewriting, a superficial, quick, maybe-I'll-get-lucky rewrite may lower rather than raise your grade. Essays must be typed, double-spaced, and follow MLA guidelines. As mentioned above, there will also be a mid-term and final exam that will count as writing assignments.
- 2) **15% of grade:** You will keep a writer's journal in which you will record class notes and reactions to your readings through writing, pictures, drawings, photographs—any form that engages you in reading and that helps your writing creativity. To help you with your journal, I will assign study questions as well. I will usually collect your journals near the end of each month and before finals.
- 3) **25% of grade:** There will be frequent quizzes, many of them open-book and open-note, which is another reason your journal is so important.

**Help:** Since one-on-one help can be the best kind of help when everywhere you look there are walls without doors and the sky is falling down, please make an effort to see me during office hours or make an appointment to meet with me.

**Finally, will you be successful in English 2?** Most students who struggle in my classes are trying to do too much because when they get up Monday morning, the week seems long enough to get everything done. Here's a quick calculation to help you determine whether you have enough time to do well in my class.

Expect to spend two hours for homework for each class unit. Also don't forget that you need to sleep, eat, spend time with friends and family, get to all the places you need to go via car or public transportation, and also that you need to exercise and waste time to preserve your mental health. Let's say this is 15 hours each day (8 for sleeping, 2 for eating, 2 for commuting, and 3 hours for other things), which leaves you with just  $(24 - 15) \times 7$  hours per week = 63 hours. Now do the calculation below to see how much time you need:

Hrs of work per week = \_\_\_\_\_

Hrs in class per week = \_\_\_\_\_

Hrs of homework per week = \_\_\_\_\_ units this semester x 2 = \_\_\_\_\_

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Add these to get total hours needed for work+class+study = \_\_\_\_\_

If you need more than 60 hours, you should consider cutting back on either work or school to be successful in English 2 *and* your other courses.