
HOW TO EXCEL IN ENGL 231

some helpful hints for a *large lecture* literature course



my large lecture literature courses do not . . .

- * require students to complete as many pages of reading as they would in a smaller class in which each student also joined a group of 3-5 students to read and write about novels not on the “path 1” calendar
- * provide regular writing opportunities. This means you will not be able to demonstrate your writing prowess by creating essays, a term paper, or long responses on an exam. I also will not have the opportunity to work with each of you to help improve your writing
- * give students many opportunities to get to know me, or me them. Students are not required to complete office visits, and cannot feasibly be invited to my house to watch film versions of novels they have read

my large lecture literature courses do . . .

- * challenge students to work hard to excel (remember Cal Poly's *two hours per unit per week* formula)
- * require that students wishing to pass the course actually keep up with the readings so they can pass the (12-question, scantron) reading quizzes that occur during most class sessions
- * minimize the effectiveness of cramming for the three exams, since there is so much material covered in this literature survey course, and since quizzes collectively count for as much as the final exam (30%)
- * save the university money

Preparing for Class (Quizzes & Discussion)

- * examine the “points of reflection” *before* reading the assigned texts
- * read the assigned readings slowly more than 24 hrs before class
 - * look up any words you do not know
 - * paint each scene, character, and detail in your mind’s eye
 - * underline passages, write observations & questions in the margins
 - * listen to online recordings of the readings, when available
- * read the assigned readings again the night before class—you will make thematic & stylistic connections you did not the first time
- * skim the material the 10-15 minutes preceding class

Studying for Exams

- * listen to any available, online recordings of assigned poems, fictions, and non-fictions *throughout the quarter*
- * look closely over the online PDF versions of the various mini-lectures I deliver *throughout the quarter*
- * discuss relevant “points of reflection” with a friend
- * throw select literary passages at classroom peers to see if they can identify the author, title, and significance of particular passages
- * share class notes with someone else
- * make flash cards to help distinguish among the various authors, titles, themes, events, terms, and stylistic innovations we encounter

Suggestions from Some Successful Students: Example 1

* “To prepare I reviewed the text a couple times each, listened to recordings and made flash cards. On one side of the flash card I wrote the title of the piece, on the other side I wrote the author, year of publication, key facts (rhyming scheme, type of poem, important historical events surrounding it, narrator/auditor, or operating images), and then a quote that I felt hit the main point, or if I felt familiar with the piece, a quote that I would probably not recognize right away.”

Suggestions from Some Successful Students: Example 2

- * “I go to every class having completed the reading and underlined passages I thought would turn out to be important, and during class I write in my book, making note of passages we focus on in a different color than I use when I read on my own. Then to study for the test, I read back through all the slides, and glance back over all the poems, and the notes I took.”

Suggestions from Some Successful Students: Example 3

- * “Each day in class, on the margins of the text I write down summaries of the poems Dr. M provides in each lecture. Other things I write down are author information, author comparisons, and literary terms. A few days before the test, I reread all of the poems and my notes in the margins. Then I go over the Powerpoints online.”

Suggestions from Some Successful Students: Example 4

1. “Pay attention in class. Professor Marchbanks goes over most or all of the main ideas of each poem/piece of literature. Write notes in the margins of your books and underline key phrases. Then go back over the poems and reread them. I find that reading out loud when you are alone forces you to slow down and truly read the text.”

Suggestions from Some Successful Students: Example 4

2. For each class day, I make a Word document that lists each poem and the title, the author, the page numbers, and the questions that pertain to it. I read the poems before the day they are due, and try to answer all of the questions. Then, when it comes time to review for a test, I make sure the questions are up-to-date, and I go back and reread each poem (yes, every single one) and edit my answers to reflect things we discussed in class, notes written in the margins, etc. For the rest of the literature, there might not be enough time to reread everything, so I flip through the books, rereading underlined passages of importance, and the notes I have in the margins. Right up until the test, I reread poems or passages at random.

Suggestions from Some Successful Students: Example 4

3. I also keep an extra Word document filled with random trivia such as what *terza rima* is, history we've gone over, etc. Sometimes I also write comparisons out, such as how Wordsworth and Coleridge see nature differently. This helps to cement in my mind the specific styles of the authors, their life stories and how it affects their literature.