

Full Sample Syllabus
Robert Dornsife, PhD

The “advance” in this “advanced composition” course is not incremental, but is exponential.

It will require a certain—and perhaps even “new to you”—spirit—a certain intellectual, artistic, “compositional,” and aesthetic, largesse.

What exactly this “advance” means will largely, if not entirely, be up to you—in, on, through, your own terms; your own mediations.

Each Tuesday, we will go somewhere, or do/read something, or watch something, or discuss something, or encounter/experience something—(you get the picture).

Please bring some sort of notebook with you.

As we are where we will be, and or as we do what we will do, you will take note as to the signs at play.

You will look beyond the surface, even though the surface is not beside the point.

We will take our time. We will “be there.”

On Thursdays, we will discuss, as a group, sign clusters—what signs relate to what other signs and what might (or might not) take precedent—aesthetically, politically—over what; or in relation to what, and so forth. We will not try to reach consensus. We will worry and wrestle. And our definitions may expand or reconfigure, or not.

On Mondays please submit a “remediation” of the previous “Tuesday”—of where you have been, what we have seen or discussed, what you have read---. You will distill Tuesday to its (of course original) insight or insights, and/or to insights *related* to “Tuesday” or that “extend from” “Tuesday.” You will remediate those insights in a way other than their original mediation. For example, if we read a book, you shouldn’t convey your insights via the written word on paper—you will have to find another way. A song? A sculpture? A film? But in any and every case you should strive to convey a remediated insight.

The entirety of your remediation should strive to be insight as insight. Not summary. Not issue. Not anything but insight as insight; insight for the sake of insight. Far more concerned with the rigorous journey than the pat conclusion.

In certain ways, intellectually, this class can’t be “grounded” in any “bound” sense of the term.

Perhaps especially for this reason, logistically, it is especially so: do not be late to class or with papers. In order to pass this course, all work must be submitted, and on time. As of your 4th absence, there is no distinction between excused and excused absence in any case: as of the fourth absence, your course grade is no higher than a D. As of the fifth, it is an F. (I suggest not missing any classes but if you must you might think of being allowed two excused and one unexcused absence before a formal lowering of the grade occurs—obviously missing one, two, or three classes will mean that you can't participate on those missed days.) If you plagiarize—that is, to claim the work of others as your own—you will fail the course as of my first determination that you have done so. Two “lates to class” count as one absence. In sum, don't be late to class or with papers; don't miss class; and don't cheat. I have found without exception that the best students are concerned with their work, not with grades. A grade of C will represent a typical performance in this course. Your Monday compositions will be due each and every Monday, before noon. They are for your benefit. They will not be responded to by me, unless, after you have submitted at least a couple, you elect to make an appointment to talk with me about them. That would be my pleasure.

You will have two major remediations: a midterm and a final. You will receive extensive feedback from me on these. These will be fuller, more nuanced, more deliberately revised than your “Monday work.” You will receive a grade twice in this term—at the midterm, and at the conclusion of the course.

This course will be flexible and strict; intense and relaxed; focused and broad; all but impossible and right there for you.

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Examples?

discussion → song

discussion → sculpture

discussion → painting

film → collage

film → piano piece

street corner → video

song → video

film → paper

song → dance (on tape or performed)

documentary → collage

discussion → series of photos

film → paper and song

song → collage and painting

ad infinitum

Insight. Depth. Substance.

If you haven't yet sculpted, played piano, painted, made video, photographed, sung, danced, (and so on) you may want to adopt a certain "take a stab at it" attitude. Remember, your Monday compositions are not intended to be polished masterpieces. They are instead sites of insight, depth, substance, genuine hard work, investment, engagement, experimentation—and maybe of a "give it a genuine try" attitude.