Course Learning Outcomes for Unit I

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Apply research strategies and methods for finding information.

3. Apply the steps of the writing process and appropriate research and citation methods to write essays, literary analyses, and research papers with identifiable thesis statements.

Reading Assignment

_The Curious Researcher: A Guide to Writing Research Papers:_

Chapter 1: The First Week

_The Little, Brown Compact Handbook:_

Chapter 1: The Writing Situation

Chapter 2: Invention

Chapter 3: Thesis and Organization

Unit Lesson

Welcome to English 1020! You are thinking, “It has been a long time since I have written a research paper; there is no way I will do well in this class.” This class will prove you wrong. Even if you experienced challenges in previous English courses, you do not need to worry. Your writing does not need to fit into a mold. You will definitely not be writing a cookie cutter, five-paragraph, standard essay in this class. This process should not be a chore that you just hope to get done with. Rather, this course is about discovery on a topic you do not know too much about and discovery of yourself and interests. This course is an exploration rather than a reiteration of mere facts. You are encouraged to ask questions and take chances. Go somewhere no one else has gone before. Find your own voice and identity through your claims and analysis.

Okay, so I know that your first ultimate fear is that of the blank page. You are saying to yourself that you cannot think of anything that interests you enough to write about. Well, think about your daily life. Where do you work? Is there something that you feel could be changed in that workplace? What are your hobbies? If one of them is music, do you feel that the quality of music is diminishing? Do you have an idol from the past? Was he or she somehow misunderstood? Ralph Waldo Emerson once stated that “To be great is to be misunderstood.” What greatness did this person hold that no one else saw? Perhaps you are interested in science, and perhaps we are getting closer to a cure for common ailments. Perhaps there are controversies about medicine that you want to explore. There are so many options for you; there is no doubt you can find something interesting and original—something that gets your fires blazing! Remember, writing is not meant to be a chore, so find something that is uniquely you and will keep your interest. The more interested you are in the topic, the more interested your audience will be to read it.

Keep in mind, however, that you cannot just write a paper of opinions that you hold on the topic. That is why you are asked you in your assignment to list presuppositions and knowledge that you think you already have on the subject. Everyone comes into situations with presuppositions. It is unavoidable. You need to learn to cast those aside in order to be more open in your research. You may have to revise your thesis later because of something new you have found that will change the direction of your paper. Do not get frustrated when your
assumptions have been proven wrong. Instead, see it as a learning experience. You may find many surprises in your research. Also, do not get anxious, as you will have many opportunities to go back and revise, revise, and revise. Writing is a process; many first drafts require revision.

Again, emphasizing the mutability of the paper, you will go ahead and write a research proposal as part of the assignment as well. It does not have to be too formal. Just give the information the exercise asks, such as the following information: presiding question that the paper will answer, tentative thesis statement, assumptions you have, etc. We are just at the beginning, and I just need to know where you are. Besides, just having something already written about your actual research paper will make your transition into the academic paper more fluid and less strenuous. Again, do not be scared! This is a process!

So anyway, this is week one, and you have a lot of work. But, you will discover more of yourself by examining your life and what makes you tick. Do not be scared! This should be somewhat enjoyable! Above all, this is a class of self-discovery and passion. How can you show who you are through this research project? Be original and powerful! I cannot wait to work with you!

Click here to view the interactive tutorial titled “Understanding Research.”