

HOW ENGLISH 3600 ONLINE WORKS

Hello! My name is Dr. Alf Seegert and I teach this course, **Introduction to Critical Theory Online**.

What is this class about?

- In this class we will study multiple theoretical orientations related to the study of literature, including **Russian Formalism, New Criticism, Reader-Response Theory, Structuralism, Poststructuralism/Deconstruction, Postmodernism, Psychoanalytic Theory, Marxism, Feminisms, Queer Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Ecocriticism**.
- The goal of the class is for you not only to understand these diverse theoretical perspectives, but also to be able to apply them to your own readings of texts.
- Theory is challenging. To help make sense of the often difficult readings, I'll offer detailed lessons with abundant examples, including multimedia clips (music videos, comedy sketches by Monty Python, clips of theorists like Slavoj Žižek, etc).
- To make theory especially accessible and fun I'll ask students to apply theory to the readings of poems, short stories, and films. Films include Tarsem Singh's *The Fall*, Tom Tykwer and The Wachowskis' *Cloud Atlas*, the Bollywood film *Lagaan*, and the episode "Darmok" from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

Why should I take this class online?

My **ONLINE** version of the course offers several important features:

- You won't need to lug any assigned textbooks for this class to campus and back (the assigned texts in this class are **heavy!**) 😊
- The online format allows me to teach challenging theoretical material in a highly detailed way through typed lessons. I can offer more detailed examples in writing than I might in the classroom.
- This format also allows time for students to ponder the material and respond accordingly on their own schedule. Prior students in this online class have noted that being able to read and re-read lessons and then "compose their responses" is a big advantage when discussing the nuances of critical theory.
- I use many movies and multimedia clips from popular culture to help explain critical theory, and the online medium works especially well for making these available.

These features will count as big "benefits" to many students. That said, this course is not for everyone! Keep reading to find out if it is a good match for you. I hope it is.

Here are some important things for you to note about the online format of this course. In some ways it is similar to other online courses -- and in some ways similar to traditional courses -- **but it differs from both** in some crucial ways. (!)

1) **The class meets *almost* entirely online (I'll explain the "almost" in a second).**

There are no requirements that the class meet together at any particular place or at any particular time. However, there are still specific deadlines for assignments.

Online discussion is a crucial component to the class, so we will go through the material together session-by-session in a two-day-a-week format. We will all post comments and replies back and forth as we go along, in many ways like a traditional classroom setting.

The only exceptions to the "entirely online" structure of the course are the Midterm and Final Exam. These will require your physical presence at an approved Testing Center (including Marriott Library and approved proctoring locations off campus) during assigned windows of time, one roughly mid-semester and the other during Finals Week.

2) **Consider if this course's discussion-based approach suits you.** Some students absolutely love it, and some... don't. My course differs radically from those online courses that allow students to finish work at any rate they choose, and which create individually packaged experiences separate from all other students in the course. **I don't do it that way.** I believe that literature and theory only come alive through close attention via vigorous discussion and interaction, so I need to emphasize that we will be working on the material **together** in this course. **Your regular participation in online discussions will be required.** If this approach does not appeal to you, please seriously reconsider if this is the right course for you.

3) **The biggest difference between our course and one conducted in a traditional classroom is that you can do all the work on your own time when it is convenient for you.** All postings will happen online asynchronously (i.e., there is never any **specific** time you have to be online so long as you read, participate, and submit work before each deadline).

Other important things to consider:

- **Prerequisite. Please note that, as listed in the Catalog and Class Schedule, ENGL 2600: Critical Introduction to Literary Forms (or equivalent) is an official prerequisite for this class.** Take this prerequisite seriously. If you have not taken ENGL 2600, I earnestly suggest that you do so before taking 3600. It provides crucial literary background both in content and in method. (If you have acquired this literary background via other means, you might be okay, but still reconsider.) I won't kick you out of this class if you haven't taken 2600, but please consider yourself duly notified. This class is hard enough even with 2600 as background! ☺

- **Technology.** Because this is an online, computer-mediated course, you will need basic computer literacy skills. We will use Canvas for everything. Because the course will include many multimedia components, you will want to make sure that you have access to a computer with a solid internet connection and decent quality audio/video. We will be watching films and video clips that are streamed for the class. Slow internet connections will make this process painful, if not impossible. (All campus computers should work well.)
- **Self-motivation.** Because this course is taught entirely online, responsibility falls entirely to YOU to make sure you keep caught up. This is a course for people with strong self-direction and serious self-motivation. I will definitely be “present” to provide lessons and feedback on your work, but ultimately YOU will be the one who needs to make sure you stay caught up with the reading and writing assignments, as well as engaged with the online discussions. If any of this is a problem for you, save yourself some hassle and drop the course right now—I don’t want any of you to be miserable.
- **Challenge.** Critical Theory is not an easy subject. In terms of content, the difficulty of this online course is pretty much on a par with that of a traditional English 3600 course, which is to say that it will be highly challenging but also (I hope) highly rewarding. **Many students find the traditional English 3600 course to be the most demanding class in the entire English curriculum – you will need to study hard to do well in this course. This class is time- and brain-intensive.**
- **Ask yourself: do you like the online medium?** The online form of this class will appeal to some students more than a traditional classroom would—and to some students it will appeal less. Some students find the online medium a joy because it gives them extra time for reflection before submitting their responses (unlike the real-time demands of a traditional classroom). Others find the online medium unpleasant or alienating and do not enjoy it because they miss the spontaneity and fleshly interaction of sitting in a physical classroom with other students. The online medium, in short, is a mixed bag.

I’ve found that **“the Zen you find is the Zen you bring with you.”** Students who enjoy this course tend to be those who bring a lot to it, and those who put a lot into it are generally those who find an online medium suitable for the way they like to learn things and express themselves. Think over your own modes of learning and self-expression and see if they match this course’s format.

I use multimedia examples whenever possible, but the actual lessons and discussions will be presented in typed format – I don’t do video lectures. In other words, prepare for a lot of reading and typing if you take this class. Student feedback from my prior online courses has been overwhelmingly in favor of this method of online

instruction.

I hope this course proves a good match for you. I enjoy teaching it, and my past students have seemed to enjoy it. **It's a highly demanding but also highly rewarding course.**

Many thanks! I look forward to the opportunity to work with you this semester!
Alf

Dr. Alf Seegert
Department of English
alf.seegert@utah.edu

(To make sure I don't miss your emails, please always put "ENGLISH 3600" in the subject header)