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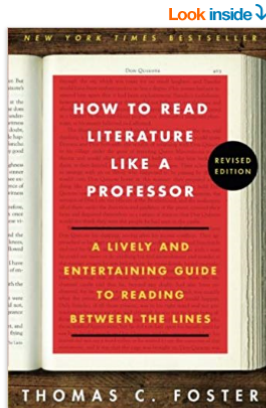
### 1) How to Read Literature Like a Professor, by Thomas Foster

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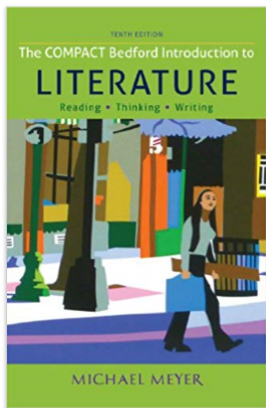
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### 2) The Compact Bedford Introduction to Literature, Tenth Edition, by Michael Meyer

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MAKE SURE YOU GET THE TENTH EDITION. MAKE SURE IT IS THE COMPACT EDITION, not condensed. As you can see, it is about \$17 used now, or you can rent for \$12.50. This will also get more expensive as we get into January. There's a newer edition that costs \$57 used, which we avoided. You're welcome.

## **Second, an apologia<sup>1</sup> on grades and grading:**

I've tried to be as open with you as possible about how the course works and what you need to do to succeed. Most of you listened. And some of you took it to heart. But many of you heard without really believing. As a result, I've been approached a dozen times since Monday with requests to change your college grade – days after final grades were already submitted. It would be untrue to say this cannot be done, but it is very difficult and only ever done under extreme circumstances. (For example, Leavens is doing it for one student who was hospitalized for the final two weeks of the semester.) I will not do it for you, even if it means you have to pay for the course - even if it means you cannot pay for the course and will have to drop it.

Here's why: our primary goal in this course is not just to help you earn college credit, but to prepare you in every possible way for college. I think in many ways we do you a disservice by being too lenient with too many things, giving you too many chances, not sticking to our rules closely enough. I used to take great exception to this, but I've mellowed in the past couple years. Now I see our class more as a halfway home – an in-between place that is simultaneously of both worlds and neither. To put it simply, a lot of you were not ready for college, and some of you still aren't. 30% of fall semester writing students fail their English course; we only had 10%. We would like to believe this is because you're better than average college students, and there is a slight statistical selection bias: after three years and 200 dual students, I figure this to be about 5-10%. Which means 10-15% of you who would normally have failed this course did not.

What am I getting at? As challenging as I dare to make it, and as much as I try to get you to push yourselves, *this class is already easier to succeed in than its university analog*. In part I chalk this up to extra time in class – about 50% more time I have with you over my former university students (they had 165 minutes a week for 13.5 weeks; you have 235 minutes a week for 18.5 weeks); and in part I chalk it up to the pressures on the instructor – administrative, logistical, and emotional – of being in a high school setting. There is a lot of oversight, and it's a lot of work to fail someone; it's even a lot of extra work for me if you lose your grant. And, yes, there is an emotional toll. As much as many of you like to complain about my being mean or my not caring (which, to be fair, is an air I cultivate), I am more invested in you and your lives than any of your future college professors are ever likely to be. I can think of three professors I had in 8 years of university study who cared as much as my high school teachers did. Three. Across four degrees and two universities.

What's my point? It's time to grow up. Some of you worked really hard this semester, and I'm honestly very proud of most of you. But too many of you expect to be given grades, or to have your grades adjusted just because you want it to happen. I don't want you to get used to disappointment; but I do need you to accept that you have to work hard, consistently, to get what you want – not just at the last minute. Once you leave Smyrna High nobody is going to care that you're nice, or that you've had a hard month, or that you really want something. What you want will matter very little to your professors and your employers – what they care about is what you actually do. And that's what we will be focusing on in the spring semester.

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<sup>1</sup> Look it up here if you're confused <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apologia>

## **Finally, Spring Expectations:**

Our goal for fall semester was for as many of you as possible to earn a B, and, while some of you are disappointed, overall I'm very pleased. We had more Bs than Cs, more As than Ds. Our bell curve is shifted to the right, which means we performed as a whole above average. Holistically, it was a successful semester from a grading standpoint.

Our goal for spring semester is a little different: earn your college credit. I don't feel the same impetus to make sure you're getting a B because, frankly, it doesn't matter as much any more. For some of you it will affect your GPA and personal ambition, but from an instructional standpoint I no longer run the risk of losing you if you get a C. So I'm not as worried about it.

Which means, if you *are* worried about it, then you need to get serious from day one to make sure you're doing what you need to do to get the B or A that you want. Because I'm not going to repeat fall semester where I spend every weekday night and one full weekend day away from my family working to give you the extra guidance to help you be your best. I'm still here for you, but I will not hold your hand anymore; as a result, I'll be stepping back a little bit and you'll need to step forward to pick up the difference.

What does this mean in practical terms?

First of all, you will have your schedule with readings, and you will need to keep up with your readings. Every day. As you'll see in our spring syllabus when we return, quizzes make up twice as much of your spring grade as your fall grade. I will not tell you when you are being quizzed. And I will quiz different periods at different times so that you won't know when to expect one. This is intended as both positive and negative reinforcement: positive in that if you are doing your reading you're locking down an easy 20% of your grade; negative in that I am taking away the previous certainty you felt over when you had to read and when you could let it slide.

Second, I won't be providing as much feedback on your essays and you won't have as much opportunity to revise. There are only two, and you'll only have time to revise the first one – which will necessarily receive more feedback than the second, but less than essays 1-3 did this semester. It's time to take ownership of your own writing process.

Third, the class is shifting from a workshop model to a discussion model. Participation is just as important as before, only now you'll be expected to participate in different ways. We will very frequently have class discussions; somewhat frequently we will have smaller group discussions. We are expected to learn from each other, not just from me, and so I will take note of your participation level and it will be a deciding factor in your final grade.

Fourth, and related, you will be teaching the class more often. Obviously I still have to guide the way, and whenever we approach new concepts or genres I will get us started. But after that you will be expected to assume responsibility for your and your peers' learning. Get used to sharing your understanding of literature; get used to being right sometimes and being wrong sometimes. Be ready to accept that other people have different ideas, and sometimes those ideas are better than yours. It happens to me all the time, and frankly the humility this engenders has been good for me. It will be good for all of you, too.

### **A Postscript:**

Now that we've dispensed with all the tough talk, I want you to know that I am truly happy you're going to be with us next semester. As much as I love teaching rhetoric, and as important as I think it is for your critical thinking and your future, nobody gets into teaching English because they like persuasive essays. It's the literature, every time.

This is a survey course, which means we have the unenviable task of covering A LOT of material from the last 500 years. Even so, we will be skipping much that is considered important and worthy of study. My goal is not to familiarize you with the broad sweep of literature in English, but to give you the necessary tools and some practice at using them so that you'll be able to work with any piece of literature that comes your way in the future.

In other words, our class will be more skills based than knowledge based. I care less that you know who wrote "The Flea" (John Donne, 1633) or "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (Flannery O'Connor, 1953) than I do that you can analyze the symbolism of blood in Donne's poem or the ironic inversion of family in O'Connor's short story.

And for those of you considering dropping down to English IV: please don't. I don't say this for myself, because it's less work for me if I have fewer students. I mean this for you: English IV is not for you. Not only will it be repetitive (all of Q3 is basically doing this semester's paper 4), but it will also be very slow and it won't help you very much in the end. Remember why you're taking this course: so you don't have to take it later when you will have less time with a professor who cares less about you or your success. Stick with us. I promise it will be worth it.

See you in January,

- Moser