Advanced Placement English Language and Composition with Mr. Bah

2018/2019

[abah@tamdistrict.org](mailto:abah@tamdistrict.org)

My website: MrBah.com

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| **A Letter to Students Regarding This Class and My Expectations**  **Welcome Students,**  When taken correctly, this course can be one of the most rewarding, and also one of the most challenging of courses. You will get from this course an amount of experience, insight and reward commensurate to the amount of effort and thought you put into it. This is an “honors” level course. Earning the honor of being in this course means that you honorably will make your best effort to read and learn. You will need to contribute and behave in a manner that enhances the class community.  I see my number one job as making sure you read thoughtfully, and a lot. This will be the foundation of the writing we do as well. I will not want to hear about how a sport, a drama or music production, a family trip, a college trip, or any such thing kept you from doing your reading. I am reasonable about family emergencies and tragedies, but I may make an effort to confirm that an emergency or tragedy occurred when you say one has. Don’t be offended by this.  I encourage you NOT to rely upon a parent to call you in sick to take time off, or to avoid a deadline, test, or to cover for you when you need to do work for another class, etc. It is usually better for you to be in class. Manage your time, ahead of time.  **Reading for this Class:**  This year we will read a variety of short and long works, mostly non-fiction, mostly essays. The focus of the reading is rhetorical analysis.  The literature we read will at times be difficult and will demand rereading and concentration. You will be asked to read the texts carefully, and often more quickly than you might have been asked to read in the past. You will need to manage your schedule to complete the reading with time for reflection and note making. But the works should prove interesting and rewarding.  **Writing in this Class:**  Most writing for class will be expository, analytical or persuasive, maybe with some descriptive and narrative writing done early in the year.  We will do most of our writing in class. Why? Because I want to know what you think and know, not what can be found on the internet. Also, the AP exam is still a hand-written, timed, in-class, on-demand test.  In this course, you will also prepare for the AP English Language and Composition examination by performing on-demand, timed, in-class writing; taking practice AP tests; and having the occasional discussion about the AP exam.  **Policies and Rules:**  My class policies and rules are consistent with the Tamalpais Union High School District’s policies which are in line with the state education code. The district’s policies regarding student behavior can be found in the Student-Parent Handbook.  Let me address three big issues right away, Cell Phones, Academic Honesty and Attendance:  **Cell Phones and Electronics:**  I am aware that electronic devices are sometimes useful tools. I will sometimes ask you to look something up on your device, and you might look something up after asking me, if the timing is appropriate. Ask first. Otherwise, I don’t want to see phones, ipod, mp3 players, ear buds, gocams, etc.  The default requirement in my class is that you will place your phone/device in a numbered pocket in a holder provided in the classroom. Do not attempt to circumvent this system. If you do not place a phone in the caddy, you will forgo bathroom passes, and other reasons to be out of the classroom.  My experience is that electronic devices can be, and often are, especially for some students, too much of a distraction. Most of us need to disconnect, unplug, slow down, contemplate for a moment the human experience, especially when you are given an opportunity to consider art or literature. I see my class as time to do just that.  **So here is what I say to students:**   * “Unplug.” Be here, now. Give this literature the respect it deserves, your classmates, your teachers the respect they deserve. Use me as an excuse to not have to be tethered to that device for a bit. * Don’t make using your device a game. I’ve seen all the places a phone might be hidden, all the ways to sneak a peek, and I don’t want to have to make it difficult to go to the bathroom because some students turn a bathroom break into a text and meet break. * Don’t be late to class because of something you are doing on your device. * If you have a legitimate need for the device to be available to you (you have a child in the care of another, you have a seriously sick relative, you are expecting a call from your boss and it’s the only time she will call, you are waiting to find out if the Marine Corps will take you, etc.) let me know in advance and we will work out a way for you to get your call or message. (I have in the past even answered calls for students, or had students direct their calls to the main office. Someone will be glad to let you know if you are needed on the phone.)   **Academic Honesty, A Concern and Caution:**  District Academic Honesty policy applies to this class (as it does to all others). All work students present must be their own. Copying or paraphrasing another’s work without citation will be considered plagiarism and a violation of academic honesty. While writing papers for class, and during tests and quizzes, a student should avoid even creating a doubt about integrity.  If research, discussions, or “outside” sources, have shaped your thinking, you should simply give proper credit to the sources of the ideas. Cite appropriately and include a bibliography if necessary.  Also, while I encourage and require group discussions, study groups, and research, keep in mind that the purpose of these activities is to help you develop your own analytical and interpretive skills, and to give you models for the tone and voice used in literary interpretation. Copying, dividing a large assignment into parts when not directed to do so, using work from another class, or doing anything that violates the spirit of the assignment, is a violation of academic honesty. After working in a study group, you should spend some time alone to imbue your academic work, especially your writing, notes or essays, with your own thoughts, insights and voice.  You should see me if you need help with interpreting an assignment or if you need help with citing sources. (Any form of citation is better than none.)  Most of the writing you do out of class, you will turn in electronically to Turnitin.com. Mr. Bah will explain how.  A cheating event is any effort to circumvent an assignment, an assessment, or class activity. For instance, if you ace a test, but then give information about the test to a student in a different period, I consider that cheating. The penalty for cheating is getting a zero on the test you took, the associated assignment. Be careful when friends, even days later, press you for information or copies of tests or quiz material since they may not have taken the test yet. Keep your materials. Don’t let others copy or scrutinize material unless it is during a legitimate study session. When in doubt, ask me.  Attendance, Tardiness and Alertness:  I have noted a strong correlation between attendance and punctuality, and student grades and performance on the AP exam. I will enforce a stern class participation and attendance policy. It is difficult to make up missed class discussion time, even when your absence is excused. In a college English class, and in some AP classes, the instructor determines a student’s grade to a great extent by that student’s participation.  If you miss class, even for excused absences and illness, you may be required to arrange your own discussion group and to document that discussion. Having said that, it might even be fun to have the discussion group (I recommend study groups for discussing literature), but for the class-work, it will be easier to be in class where I can verify your participation. If you are absent, assume you should form a study group, do missed work, read ahead, and take the initiative to do so. Otherwise, don’t miss class!  Be awake and alert in class. Get enough sleep. Manage your time. As they used to say when I was in the military, “Being tired is okay. Being asleep is not okay.” In military instructional programs, if we felt we were going to nod off, we stood at the back of the class and did our work standing. It helped a bit.  And I am sorry I have to say this, be sober and uninfluenced in class.  **Make-up Work:**  Make up work is for essays and large tests only.  Quizzes, daily assignments and homework—I will drop two grades per grading period. This is how I will drop grades: I will start by dropping the SMALLEST assignments first. If you “use” your dropped grades on small credit homework, you will not have any available credit for when you need to drop a larger quiz or assignment. If all your homework and classwork is turned in and done well, then you can miss or bomb two quizzes and still come out okay. This accounting will be done for each grading period. You cannot “bank” dropped grades from one grading period to the next, or for the end of the semester.  I no longer deal with make-up quizzes or late homework. Try to not miss more than two per grading period.  Homework can be turned in electronically, as can essays. If you plan to be absent, turn in assignments and essays on time electronically or early. Late essays may be docked points.  Essays will not be dropped. Turn in all essays, even if late.  **SPECIAL NOTE:**  Make a copy of ALL assignments. Save electronic copies of essays, and even photograph homework. If there is any question about whether or not you turned something in, having a copy MIGHT help resolve the problem.  Each grading period, I make sure that missing assignments become zeros in the grading program, and I will not revisit these grades. (The exception being some life shaking event: a serious illness requiring hospitalization, death in the family, etc. Breaking up with a romantic partner, computer problem, leaving something at the airport, sport or music events, drama production rehearsals or late night performances, other class demands, etc.—no).  Grading:  The AP scale for scoring essays is a nine-point scale. 9 or 8 ≈ A, 7≈B, 6≈C, 5≈D. I will use this scale.   * Reading quizzes are typically worth 6—10 points, depending on length. Essays (on the AP scale) are worth 8 points, with some longer ones, or more processed essays being worth double. * I occasionally give a large, end of the unit test—these may be worth 2 or 3 times more than a regular, “homework” reading quiz, and usually take the place of some of the homework quizzes. * In general, you can expect to perform at least one task per week, sometimes two, for points—typically, two quizzes, or one in-class essay and a quiz.   I tend to be a generous grader/scorer. In the past, students who did not receive the “good grade” they thought they deserved were students who missed a lot of class, failed to turn in work, or who did not do the reading.  Grades are based upon the percentage of points earned divided by the total number of points made available. I offer extra points on most quizzes, and on excellent essays.  You need to read and write more than any teacher can grade. To encourage that you write a lot, and to make it possible for me to still provide responses to you, I may use, in addition to close reading of your work, a variety of “quick scoring” strategies, quizzes, and peer review. Some student writing is simply practice and may only be “checked off,” or given “FC” for “full credit.” An analogy I use compares an AP English teacher to a track coach. Not every practice lap gets timed and critiqued by the coach. I will focus my close reading on those assignments that are most analogous to the big races, yet I will assign much practice that will be looked at for different things in a variety of ways.  Late work:  The due dates of major work assigned in advance are firm. This late work policy applies even if you are absent for excused reasons (appointments for which you can plan). Again, catastrophic events will be dealt with in an appropriate and sensitive manner. (Computer problems are not catastrophic events. If necessary, you can handwrite an assignment, or better yet, leave plenty of time to solve computer problems, or accept the late penalty.)  **The Three Ps**  **I ask students to:**  Be **Prompt** (bathroom break done, eating done, in your seat, dressed appropriately, ready to work when the bell rings)  Be **Prepared** (reading completed, notes out, ready to work, and assignments ready—printed and stapled at home—before the bell rings. Bring your book and other school tools)  Be **Polite** (as a colleague used to say, “Don’t spit in the soup we all have to eat.”)  **Materials:**  You are in a college level, honors, AP course. Bring your stuff:   * Your book, or handouts, etc. * Lined, loose leaf paper (in a—) * Binder * Pens (I recommend erasable ink and don’t want essays written in pencil) * Pencils (for notes, Scantron tests, other things) * Highlighters, two colors * Post-its   I know I am leaving something off this list, so let’s start with these. There may be more on this later.  If you show up to class unprepared or unequipped, I will respond in surprisingly formal ways. Your parent may be called, emailed, or requested for a conference, or you may be referred for counseling or to an administrator. You are in a college level, honors course. You should be able to prepare and equip yourself before class. Please don’t disrupt the class or rely upon others to equip you.  Students who need assistance obtaining materials for school may visit their counselor, or any school administrator. I too may help if you email me or see me privately. | **Student Acknowledgement of Mr. Bah’s Expectations, a Contract**  **This course will be challenging, yet rewarding. I will get from this course an amount of experience, insight and reward commensurate to the effort and thought I put into it. This is an “honors” level course for which I receive an extra grade point. I will behave honorably in that I will make my best effort to read and learn, and to earn that extra point. I will contribute for the good of all, and I will behave honestly and with integrity.**  **Despite what I believe are my best efforts, it is possible that I might not earn an A. In this case, I will seek help and guidance from my teacher during tutorial. The focus of my interactions with my teacher will be upon learning (and learning to learn), not upon grade points.**  **Since reading is the all-important foundation to academic learning, I will manage my time to complete my reading thoughtfully, and I will not make excuses for not doing so.**  **Initials \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  **Reading for this Class:**  **Some of the literature I read this year will be difficult and will demand my rereading and concentration. I will read the texts carefully, and often more quickly than I might have read in the past. But I WILL READ the texts. I won’t take shortcuts, rely on online sources, or a hasty summary given to me by a classmate. Mr. Bah will tell me several times that I MUST do the reading, and I WILL.**  **I will read, reflect, annotate, and discuss to prepare for writing assignments. I understand that most of the writing I do for his class will be analytical or persuasive.**  **Initials \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  **Writing in this Class:**  **I look forward to having my reading and understanding of the texts we read challenged when I write my best analyses on paper. I also believe that writing my ideas, is the best way to learn, to hone my ideas, to know what I actually know, to know what I think. Writing clearly, explaining clearly with detail and evidence, helps me to think clearly. Also, when I try to solve writing problems, just as when I read, I gain insight into the techniques and strategies other writers use.**  **I understand that I may not skip a writing assignment, that take-home writing assignments will be turned in electronically, so not being here will not be an excuse for missing a deadline.**  **Initials \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  **Phones and electronic devices:**  **I get it. I don’t need to be a slave to my electronic device or all the people and entities that try to use it for their own needs and profit. My real friends understand that I need to focus in class and won’t try to contact me during class. We have made our lunch and afternoon plans already, or I can check my texts after class. My friends shouldn’t be texting me during my class anyway, even if they are lucky enough to have a teacher who lets them out early. I am not so lucky. (Mr. Bah tends to go until the end of class, even a minute after sometimes. The class is over when I am dismissed.)**  **Initials \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  **Academic Honesty:**  **My integrity is valuable. Colleges ask about it. Prospective employers wonder about it. I am the person I am, even when no one else is looking. I will not cheat, cut corners or ask another student to cheat for me. The first penalty for an event of cheating, even if I have finished my work and am only helping another student, is a zero on the associated assignment. Cheating will be reported to the school administration and will become part of my record.**  **I will do my best to understand the “spirit” or purpose of an assignment, or will ask for clarification to help me judge my own behavior. Sharing or copying homework is not a study session.**  **Mr. Bah will do his best to make it difficult for me to rely upon cheating sources like Sparknotes and the help of my friends. I understand that a program like Turnitin.com is designed to catch plagiarism, but it is also designed to help me see how many quotations I am using, and to remind me what needs to be quoted and cited, or what needs to be reconsidered in my own thinking and voice. Even another’s ideas should be cited, even if I write it differently.**  **Initials \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  **Attendance, Punctuality and Alertness:**  **I will be in class. When possible, I will avoid making appointments that conflict with class times. Being up late for another event, or to study for another class, is not a reason to miss my AP English class. As far as Mr. Bah is concerned, other classes, and activities are not more important than his class.**  **I know that if I am absent, I still need to make deadlines and make time to study and discuss the literature. If I am chronically absent or late, I will not complain about my grades or expect Mr. Bah to be responsible for catching me up. To that end, I will find reliable classmates I can study with or who can inform me about assignments, but the ultimate responsibility is mine.**  **I will be on time. I should not interrupt a class already in session. If I am late, I may need to wait out of class for the least disruptive and best time to enter class. Mr. Bah will explain to the class the procedure for coming to class late.**  **Initials \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  **Make-up Work:**  **To reduce the temptation to put off taking quizzes, and to reduce the problems of managing make-up work, Mr. Bah will drop two grades per grading period. Mr. Bah will start by dropping the lowest value assignments first, so it behooves me to get all homework assignments done, and to be in class for in-class homework checks, in-class assignments, and quizzes.**  **I can turn in homework and essays electronically.**  **Initials \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  **Gradings:**  **I must turn in all essays.**  **I understand that I should make copies of all assignments. If I have a camera on my phone, I can certainly take the time to document my own work.**  **I understand that computer or romantic problems, or any other reasons such as, and except those, mentioned in Mr. Bah’s policies, are not an excuse for missing or late work.**  **This is an honors level, college level course. I understand that I may not necessarily get an A in this class, that an honest effort is more important that the letter grade I receive. According to Mr. Bah, I understand that students do well in this class if they attend consistently and turn in all their work. Doing the reading and preparing for class, making an effort on my writing is essential to my achieving my highest potential in this class.**  **Initials \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  **I will be—**  **Prompt. This means, I will be in my seat and ready to work when the bell rings.**  **Prepared. I will have done my best to complete preparatory reading and work, or I will accept the consequences. Being in class is better than missing class. Being prepared for class and prompt, is the best.**  **Polite. If necessary, I will ask Mr. Bah what appropriate class behavior is. I will remember that it is an honor to be in an honors level course.**  **Initials \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  **Materials:**  **I won’t make excused for late or missing assignments. I will find solutions to computer, scheduling, romantic, class conflict, and such problems. I will bring my reading and writing to class every day.**  **I understand that Mr. Bah has little patience for students showing up without appropriate class materials and supplies. I will bring my supplies**  **Neatness counts. That is why I need neat loose leaf paper in a binder and a pen to write with.**  **I will not ask classmates to give me materials in class. It is not right to expect them to, or to disrupt the class.**  **Initials \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  **I have read Mr. Bah’s entire letter to students, and the document in this column. I have paid attention to Mr. Bah’s discussion of class expectations, and when necessary, I have asked for clarification. I believe I understand the spirit of this document. I will follow directions to the best of my ability, and will ask for help and clarification when necessary.**  **Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  **Print Your Full Name**  **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**  **Sign Below**  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |