

### Guidelines for Class Presentations and Discussion Leadership

For this assignment, each student will prepare an original presentation for the class containing information that supplements our readings and discussions.

#### **Content:**

- should enhance rather than simply recapitulate what we are learning from assigned readings, lectures, and class discussions;
- should show evidence of consultation with **scholarly** resources (books and articles). Simply googling your topic or consulting Wikipedia will not be considered appropriate engagement with your topic and sources;
- should be clearly and overtly relevant to the course curriculum and topics;
- may focus on a topic you are working on for your term paper. It's also OK if it works the other way around: your presentation topic ends up as your paper idea.
- should not consist of source material being read to the class. I expect to see substantial engagement with the material you gather and will grade accordingly.

**Presentation style** is up to you (capitalize on your strengths), with a few suggestions:

- In addition to presenting new information, presenters are encouraged to engage the class in discussion or activities.
- I will expect students to be well prepared and to have practiced their delivery. Reading and rambling are discouraged. **Prepare** and **practice** are the operative words.

#### **Structural guidelines:**

- **Length:** Aim for a ten-minute presentation, which should include question-and-answer time. Remember that an important goal of this assignment is to engage the class with the material, so be prepared to generate discussion or activities that may run slightly longer. Please note, however, that generating a good discussion that runs over time is not the same thing as running over because of failure to prepare and practice. The difference will be clear to the audience, and will be reflected in your grade, so the latter is not encouraged.
- **Grading criteria:** Your contributions will be evaluated in terms of your **level of preparation** and the **quality and originality of the material** you present, so plan ahead and prepare thoroughly. Try to choose an area of focus that interests you. If you're excited about what you're presenting, it's more likely that the rest of us will be, too. Conversely, presenters who read a printed-out website to the class probably won't generate as much excitement.

## **Suggestion for content:**

You are encouraged to focus on a topic related to what we are covering in class during the week that you are scheduled to present. The topics below include suggestions connected to each given week's class reading and discussion topics. In past semesters, student presentations have been among the highlights of our course. I look forward to your contributions to this tradition, and I welcome the opportunity to talk with you about your ideas. I can also help you find some interesting readings on various topics associated with the development of English. Here a few topic suggestions to get you started, but don't feel that you have to limit yourself to these:

### **Week 4: Indo-European languages and the earliest ancestors of English**

- Possible topic: Find out about Indo-European people, the people who lived during what we term the Indo-European era. Based on how they lived (e.g. what were their food sources, available materials and tools, kinds of agriculture; and were they sedentary or nomadic people?), what kinds of linguistic needs do you think they might have had? How might these linguistic needs have been met?
- Find out more about the history of scholarship on Indo-European and Germanic language families. How do we know as much as we do about pre-historic languages? How certain can scholars be about PIE, Germanic, and their structures and development?

### **Weeks 5 and 6: Old English**

- Research the history of the Germanic tribes that invaded Britain in the fifth century. What factors led to the invasion? What is known about tribes such as the Angles, Jutes, and Saxons, linguistically and otherwise?
- Find a literary text written in Old English and a modern English translation. What are some of the differences between the two texts? Can you identify which features (phonological, lexical, grammatical) have changed?
- Using an Old English literary text and information about Old English phonology, available in our course texts, demonstrate what Old English sounded like, and teach the class how to read the text.
- Explore the influence of the Roman empire in England on the language and culture there.

### **Weeks 8 and 9: Middle English**

- Find out more about the Normans prior to their invasion of England in 1066. Why did they invade? Also, what specific things happened after the invasion that impacted speakers of English?
- Try the text-analysis and reading-lesson suggestion proposed under Old English, above, with a Middle English text.

## Weeks 10 and 11: Early Modern English

- Explore some of the important developments that propelled the English language into modernity. Look at technological advances, attitudes towards literacy, and/or other social, political, economic, and cultural influences.
- Find out more about the rise of prescriptivism, including how and why it became such a major factor for the development of English. Also, consider thinking about what prescriptivism means for standardization, and in turn, what standardization means for people who speak nonstandard varieties of English.
- Analyze an Early Modern English literary text and discuss the phonological, lexical, and grammatical changes that have occurred since OE and ME times.

## Weeks 12 and 13: Present-day and American English

- Explore how American English became a distinct language variety. Find out about the people who worked to establish this national linguistic identity. You might also want to look at the politics involved in this identification.
- Compare American English to British English or any other variety of English. Look at spelling, phonology, or any other features that interest you and think about the factors that influenced those differences.
- Explore English around the world. How and why did it grow to be such a dominant linguistic force worldwide? What does its apparent dominance reflect about the non-linguistic influences of American politics, economics and culture, and how they function around the world?