

Whenever it's time to post in a given thread on the class blog, you'll need to follow a few basic steps.

First, head to portal.ausd.net and log in via your usual student ID and password. (See me if you have no idea what your password is.)

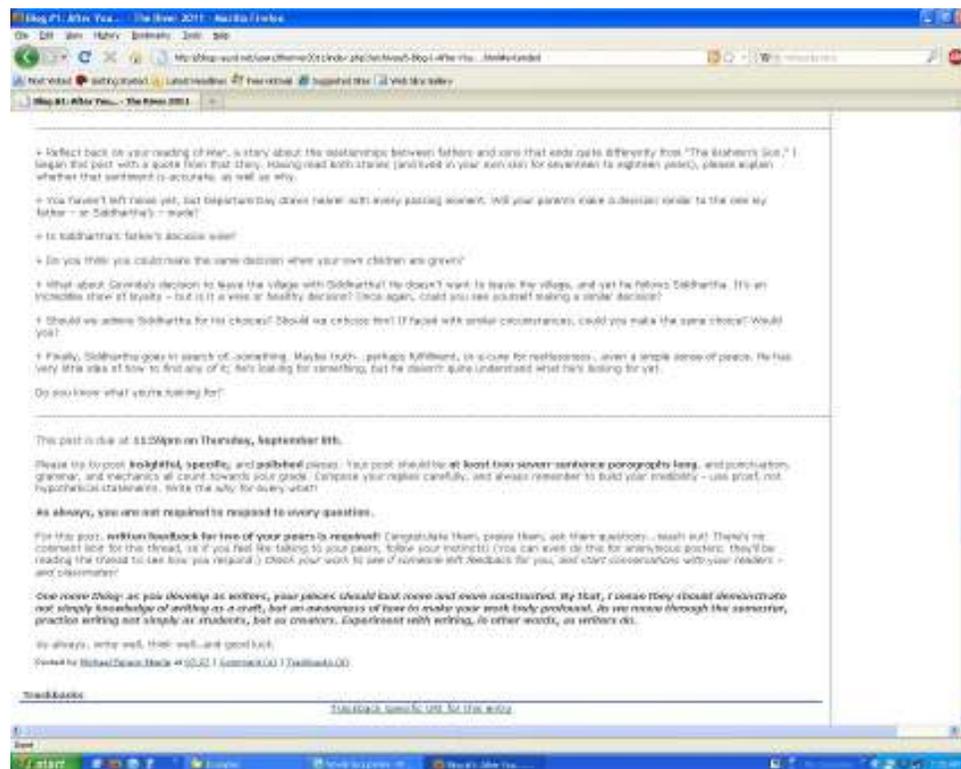
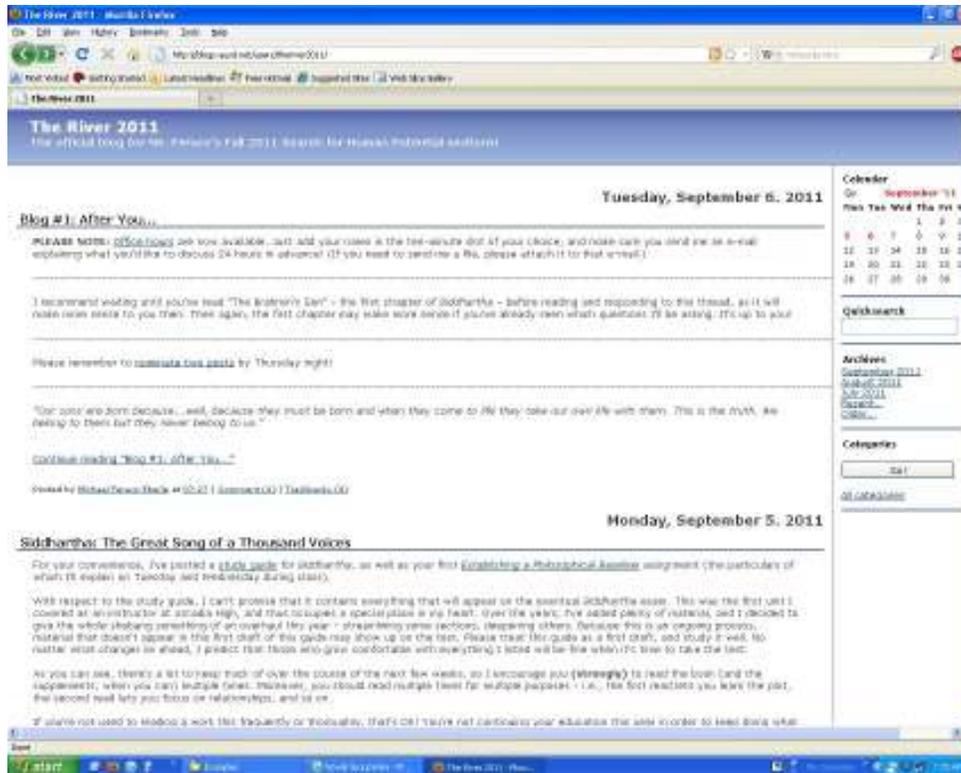


You'll know you're in if you end up with a screen that looks a little less cluttered than the next one. (You won't have nearly as many icons as I do, but your name and ID number should appear in the upper right corner, just as mine does.)



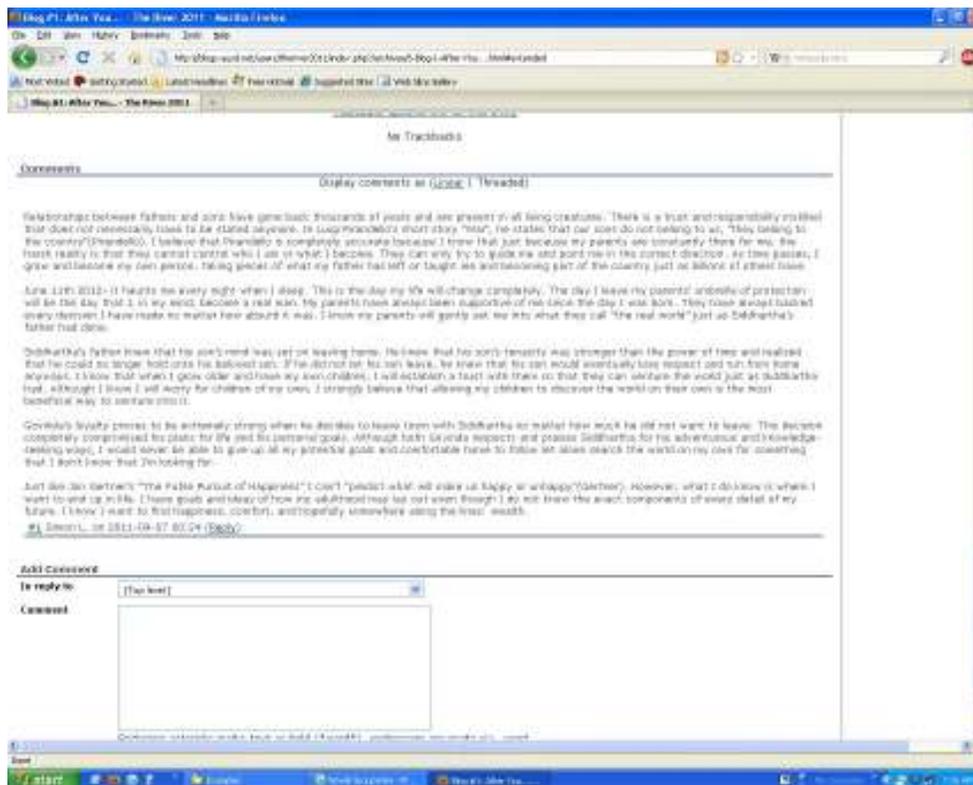
Then, instead of clicking on the “Blogs” icon and searching through the entire list for the page you want, simply type the blog’s URL into your address bar.

Once you’ve done that, read the entire post. If you have to click “Continue Reading ‘(Title of Blog)’ (a la today’s post),” click away, then scroll to the bottom after finishing the entry. You’ll see the commenting field there.



The posts can vary wildly in length, and often contain commentary as well as questions. The questions you're answering appear with "+" to the left. You are **absolutely not** required to answer every question. They're meant to be options. You choose which one(s) you wish to use as a foundation for your response. Think of the prompt questions like they're items on a menu; you can choose the ones that suit you best, provided you write insightfully enough to satisfy requirements.

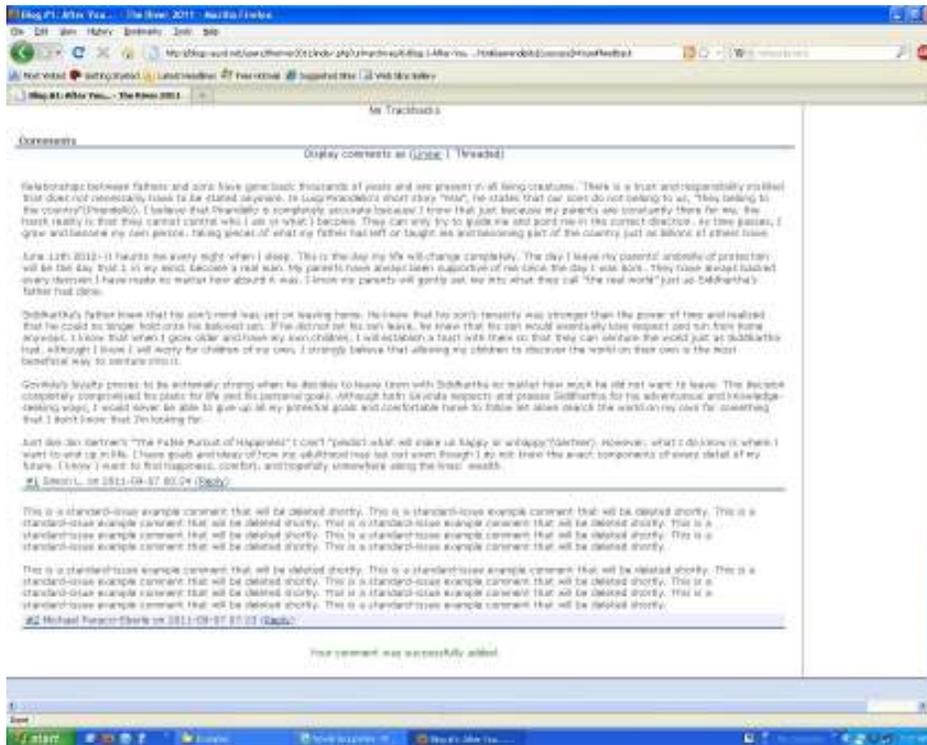
If you don't see the prompt you were hoping I'd write, compose your own and post it at the top of your entry. I don't want you to force yourself to answer a question you don't like.



One odd thing to notice: In a typical thread, you'll have the option to choose between displaying comments in either "Linear" or "Threaded" Mode. You can select this just above where the first comment replying to my original post begins. It's **critical** that you select "Threaded Mode" before making comments. When you're replying to someone else, only Threaded Mode allows you to attach your reply to the original work. Otherwise, we just end up with a jumbled thread of confusingly mismatched entries.

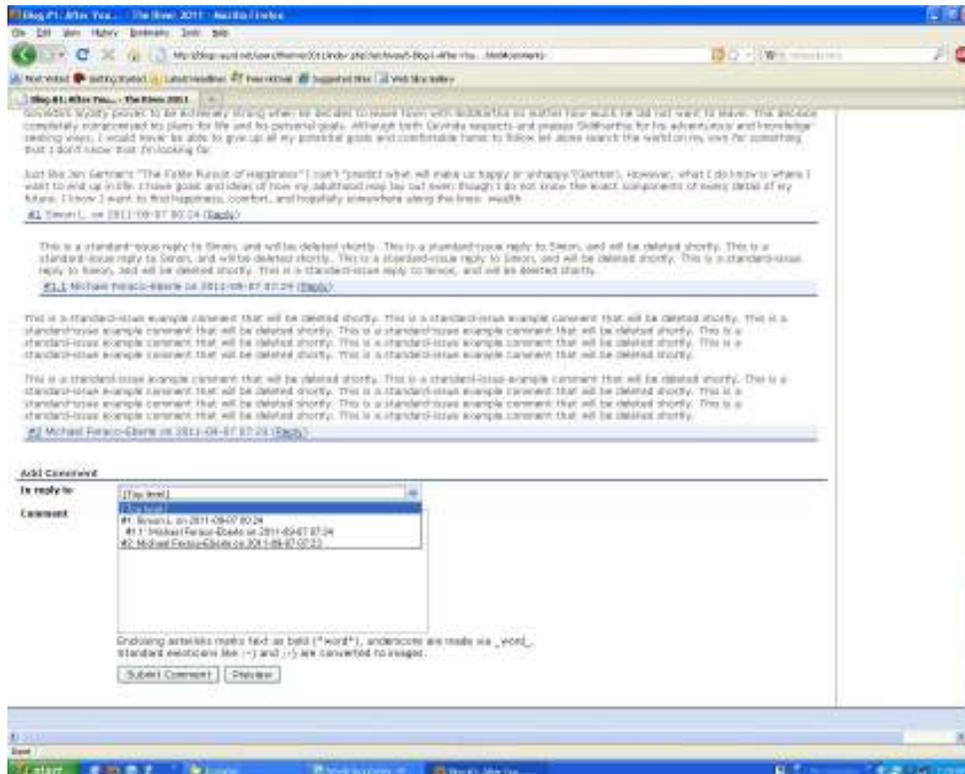
When you reply, you'll see the comment field as it appears in the shot above. Notice the complete lack of editing tools – spell-checkers, formatting buttons, etc. The blog allows you to "boldify" words by placing asterisks on either side of the word, like *this* one. It also allows you to underscore words by placing underscores on either side of the word, like _this_ one. Note, however, that the formatting **does not work** if you put punctuation marks directly beside your formatting. If you try doing *this*, the comma messes everything up.

As for the lack of spell-checking and so forth, protect yourself. Write in Microsoft Word (or some comparable word processor) if you want to avoid mistakes you already know how to avoid, such as misspellings, punctuation errors, homonym switches, and the like. Make sure you re-read your comment before posting, because the blog doesn't have an editing feature once you click "Submit." (I am able to edit your posts, but I only do so by request...or if someone foolishly writes something deeply offensive and indefensible.)



Once you post your reply, you should see a green message at the bottom of the blog stating that your comment was successfully added. **Please note:** you may only leave one comment at a time. (I don't know why; it's just how the blog works.) In order to leave a reply to, say, Simon's post, I'd need to head back to the blog's homepage first, then re-enter the thread.

Once I re-enter, I reply to Simon by clicking his name. The comment field that says "Top level" will switch to his name. When you reply – provided you use Threaded View – it looks like this:



After a while, the posts will look like this:



In any given thread, I'll read more than a hundred original posts plus whatever feedback you leave one another. I grade each entry according to the following criteria:

- Content (i.e., ideas, thoughtfulness, profundity, etc.)
- Mechanics (i.e., grammar, tense, sentence fluency and variety, precision, etc.)
- Focus (i.e., coherence, logical ordering of sentences, narrative structure, transitions, connections, etc.)
- Creativity (i.e., word choice, memorable lines, interesting structure, singularity, voice, etc.)

All categories are important, and writers who write clearly and memorably about interesting topics, incorporate new perspectives, or push themselves to improve from post to post will earn the highest marks.

The minimum length requirement for each post isn't arbitrarily chosen, and it isn't optional. I don't look favorably – at all – at posts that simply shoot for the minimum and call it a day, let alone work that doesn't meet that mark.

That said, I need to make this clear: "Long" does not necessarily equal "excellent." Some people don't need a lot of words to say what needs to be said. As I've said before, one of my favorite short stories consists of three sentences. It sounds too simple to work, but it's deeply moving; when my classes analyze it, they're able to spot dozens of themes. (You see, the things that aren't said – and the manner in which they're silenced – meant everything.)

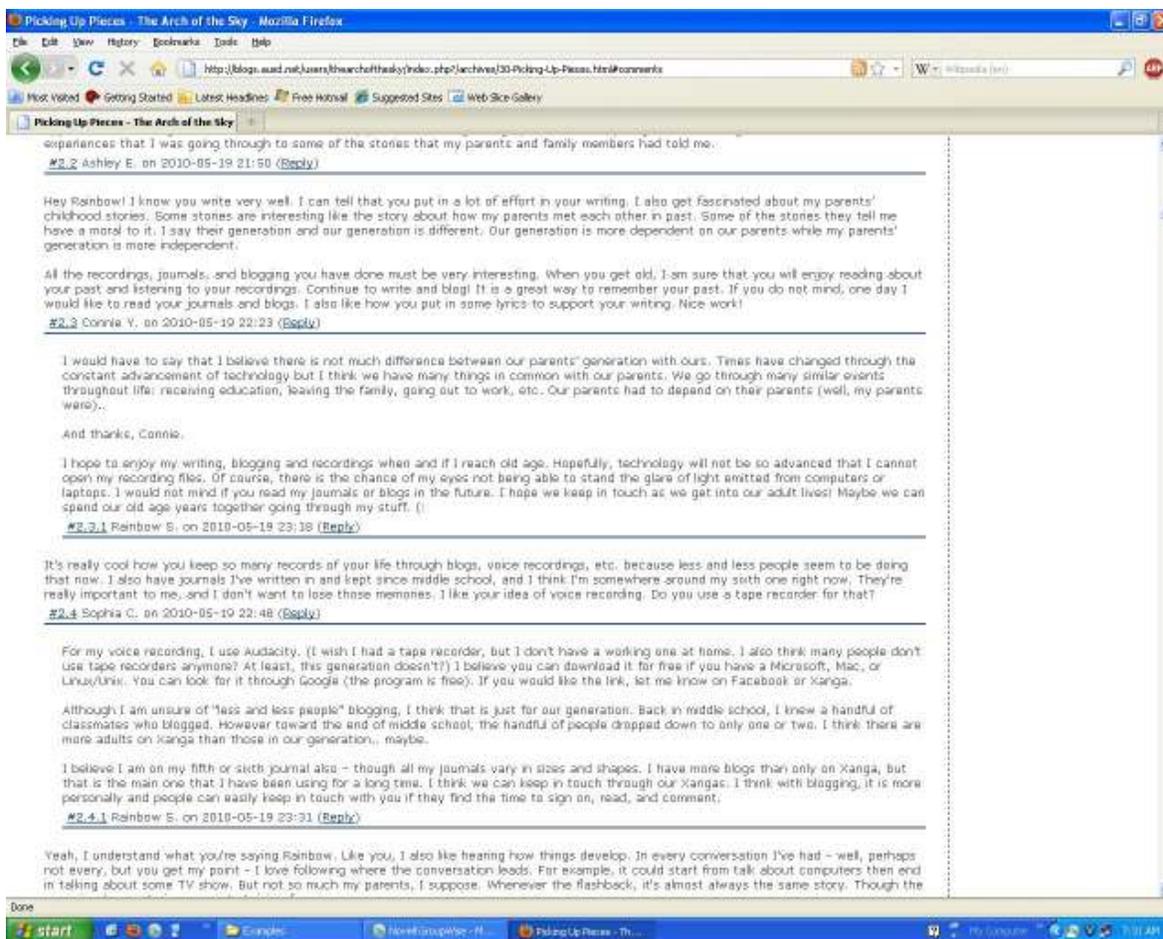
While there's no bonus for writing more than the required "floor," I'm not a fool: I can tell the difference between writing that packs a ton of profundity into a concise package and work that's simply short, bereft of thought and passion. So don't ever waste your time (or, frankly, mine) on words and work you can't take pride in completing! Whether you're going to write a great deal or relatively little, your words are currency in this class. Invest wisely.

Similarly, please remember that polished writers strive for clarity, and that big words aren't necessarily better words. If a short word works as an accurate descriptor, don't arbitrarily substitute a longer word; if you can't figure out what you're writing about, neither will your readers.

Don't rush your comments, or submit "first drafts" of them; you don't get more points for finishing earlier. I will always prefer to read a polished, coherent statement than something you dashed off in ten minutes. We have an embarrassment of computerized editing tools at our disposal; there's no excuse for sloppiness in your work.

It's important for you to feel free to express your thoughts here, as this is one of the major ways I will assess your writing throughout the semester. If you are reluctant to post your thoughts in public – or just want to see how the whole thing works before giving it a shot – take a look at some of the posts that pop up before commenting.

Your comments should be semi-formal (contractions are OK, song lyrics can be quoted, etc.), but err toward formality instead of AIM language when in doubt. Avoid acronyms, smilies, profanity, etc.



If someone is kind enough to reply to you, feel free to strike up a conversation!

You don't need to write stilted (that also goes for your essays!), but you should always be sensitive to your audience and setting. In other words, remember **I'm** reading these posts. I'm trying to get a sense of how well you understand the material, how your reading/writing/critical-thinking skills are developing, and who you are as a person!

One final note: Please write honestly and well at all times, and remember that this is an extension of the classroom. It's an opportunity to come together and share your thoughts openly, as well as to see what your classmates (even ones from other sections) think. If you are worried that your content may be controversial/offensive, please write to me and ask if your writing is appropriate. I'm OK with potentially inflammatory writings, as long as they're informative and enlightening, but I have my limits. If you're just writing something because you want to make someone mad, I'll simply delete your comment. While we have had very few problems with this, I'm asked this question frequently enough that I figured it would be best to address it here.

Finally, please remember to click on the link to the Nomination Form at the beginning of the thread once you've seen two posts you believe truly stand out.

Thanks for reading, and good luck in the semester to come!

