

Advice Letter

Dear friends...

This class is hard. You really need to realize that. When Mr. Tomecko got up on the first day and told us that I kind of just shrugged it off. The whole first day is just a bunch of teachers telling you how difficult their course is going to be and handing you syllabuses (syllabi?) and what not with all the work you're going to have to do, so when Mr. Tomecko did the same, I figured it was nothing special. I figure it was just protocol. However, what I wish I would've known in those first few weeks, is that this class will actually challenge you. Most of you probably aren't used to that, most stuff probably just comes easy to you, it's why you're in here, but it's made you weak, soft. This class will whip you into shape and prepare you for the road ahead. I don't mean scare you, okay maybe a little bit, maybe I get some kind of perverse joy from imagining your cherubic faces turn to panic as you read the above sentences, but that's beside the point. Anyway, as I was saying, this class is one of those things you don't enjoy very much at the time, but when you look back you realize that you really did have something somewhat akin to fun. Not bouncy house fun or anything like that, but about as much fun as you can have cramped in a chilly (yet somehow humid) room for nigh on an hour and a half right before lunch. That kind of fun.

Well this is an advice letter according to the heading so we should probably dive into that. You'll definitely need to read whenever you're assigned to, those ID quizzes can be a real female dog when you're not ready for them. Also please try and read the night, and not the period, before, I'm begging you. I had 2D art right before this class and, as someone already handicapped by having the drawing skill of your average hoofed animal, having to memorize the various reforms of the New Deal did not make it any easier drawing pastel landscapes. You should probably take notes on the reading. I hear they're great. Personally, I can't put pen to paper without getting distracted drawing stick people doing backflips and stuff so that approach never really cut it for me, but I'd be remiss if I didn't mention them because everyone's always talking about their notebook and stuff. If you just read the section and make sure you understand it you'll be fine. Or you could just stare at the page and blink really fast in the hopes that your subconscious will absorb the information. Your call. Tests are another matter. You definitely need to study for those bad boys. The multiple choice is hard enough on it's own, since it seems like 3 out 4 are the right answer, but the essay is the real kicker. You can take this letter and light it on fire over your toilet, I don't care, just take away that you need to be thinking about your test essay every waking moment at least a day in advance.

Mr. Tomecko is a pretty cool guy and a great teacher. He'll help you out. Just don't tick him off by falling asleep, zoning out, drawing **in** class, and/or standing on a desk to recreate the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. **That's about all my humble self can offer you.** I'm sure you'll do **fine**. 3 years ago I was sure I'd have a girlfriend by now, though, so maybe you'll **crash and burn**. I'm not the best judge of these things.

Toodles
Signed: Me

Dear Future Student of Honors American History,

To start off with the basics, if you aren't a fan of the Cleveland Browns, I'd dropout now. And don't make presidential history easy, you're wasting your breath. Now that I've established that, here comes what you need to know about the course itself. One: it's not AP, its honors. Don't expect it to do miraculous things to your overall grade and GPA. You still earned what you worked for. The amount of work you may find hard to handle at first, and it is. From first grade all the way up to 8th, history was a breeze for me. I've been in honors classes my whole life, and this class is not a breeze, so don't treat it that way. When Mr. Tomecko assigns reading, just do it. Even if the probability is low that you will have an ID quiz the next day. If you don't read and there's no quiz, you'll still be lost in the notes. Also in middle school, it was acceptable being "sick" and then catching up. I wouldn't pull any of that in this class if I were you. Another key thing I would've liked to know before taking this course, is PARTICIPATE! Don't take the participation standards lightly. Pay attention and take good notes. I assure you, you will thank yourself later. Most notes up until this point are spoon fed to you, that is not the case with this class. Study more than just the night before a test. Another thing don't get lazy with the class. If you think or even know that you have the material down that you're being tested on, at least still review because you probably don't as well as you think. Study well and be organized. Don't make ½ good essay intros either, even if you think the body paragraphs will make up for it, you're wrong. Don't have or use your cell phones in this class. He pretty much hates everything about the idea of kids on their phones while he's trying to teach a class. I wouldn't even bring it if I were you, with the chances of it going off. Also, it's too late to dropout. So hahaha if you were thinking about it. I remember, the first week of school I went to see my counselor. I was debating if I wanted to quit or not and he told me to challenge myself. Then he told me he was always right. So I stayed in it, and fortunately, my counselor was right. I am so happy I stayed in the class. Sure, I am not the top of the class when it comes to history and social studies, but I've learned more from this course and about my country than I've ever learned in my life. By about the middle of this course it came to my realization that I didn't care if I was recommended or not. I didn't care if I had a steady B. All I know is that whenever I was in that class, I was always learning something new. That is all that matters to me. When Mr. Tomecko wants to teach something, he does, very well and thoroughly. So stick with it and study hard.

From a freshman who took this class before you.

Dear new students,

Are you prepared for this? A lot of you will say no, and if you're like me you will be like "I totally got this! Nothing can stop me!" Well slow down there slick because you need to think a minute. You can't just go at this blind and come out on top. First of all you need to learn that when you have a reading assignment, you might want to read it. I get that you may have a lot to do one night or you forgot, but get it read by class time. You will need that reading. Even if he doesn't quiz you, which he might, you need it to be able to participate; which brings us to class participation. It is the easiest grade you can get. Even if you say something wrong, Mr. Tomecko will talk about it and make it sound almost right. But if you do the reading, which you should, you'll be right most of the time. The next order of business is tests. The actual test part isn't really the hard part. He will throw out questions if most of you miss it and it was too hard. The essay is where you need to take your time. Try planning a little bit and figuring out how you will organize it and where you will put your vast amount of information. Figure out what topics you will use for body paragraphs and what information you will put in those. If you need help on any of this, he is there for you in a couple ways. He is great with email, and will respond quickly answering any question you may have. Also, in his room there is a signup sheet to get a meeting with him for a face to face chat. It's not that scary so don't be shy. Most of the time though he explains things well in class and will give you all the information you need for any assignment or project. Projects in Mr. Tomecko's class are just like any other class. He gives you requirements and tells you what you need to do and what he expects. Our projects were out of class assignments but it was manageable. This class is seriously not that hard if you are prepared and know what you are getting into. So just relax, take a deep breath, and get ready because this will show what you are made of.

Good luck,

A kid who thought they had it all figured out.

P.S. beware of social experiments, jokes, or pranks if you miss a day :)

Advice Letter

To the lucky new student in Mr. Tomecko's class: Hello! To start off, I'd like to say that you shouldn't expect this course to be very easy. In no alternate universe could this be described as an easy class that you can slide through without really paying attention. That's not, of course, to say that it isn't completely possible to survive the semester and pull a solid A. It is. And there are a few things that can make it considerably easier.

First, it's highly advisable to keep organized. Organizing your binder by unit would be the best idea. If you can put in subsections for bold terms from the reading, class notes, and handouts, even better. But whatever you do, keep things organized *by unit*. When you're preparing for the finals, it will be very helpful to have everything in chronological order so that you can prepare for the essays that span several units, and trust me, rifling through your notes trying to find out what happened when is a supreme pain.

Next, some advice about the homework reading and how to take notes on it. As a general rule, you'll have to read a section or two in the books, and Mr. Tomecko will have several terms in bold on the unit syllabus (aka the blue sheet – and yes, it's called that for a reason). You'll have to identify the bold terms using Mr. Tomecko's CaDRES format. CaDRES stands for Causes, Description, Results and Effects, and Significance. All but the significance are fairly straightforward. The significance, however, is not; along with being difficult to describe, it's occasionally similar to the results and effects. A good way to tell the two apart is that the results and effects are what happens *directly* after the bold term. The significance is either a description of how the bold term had a lasting effect on society or an effect of the bold term that had lasting significance. Anything lasting is good, or just anything really major. Also, it will be tempting to read only the sections around the bold term, just to get your homework done. *Don't*. You'll need the perspective and extra information offered by the rest of the reading, even though the book sucks. (Even Mr. Tomecko thinks it's terrible!)

Note-taking is, of course, very important. Mr. Tomecko has PowerPoint slides that give an overview of what he will discuss. I cannot stress how important it is to *write down MORE than what is written on the PowerPoint*. What's written on the slides should be your headings; the words coming out of Mr. Tomecko's mouth are what you need to focus on. That being said, listen very carefully in class. It's important to be able to pick out the main points and differentiate between the most important facts and those that are just extra details. You won't usually be tested over small details. That's not to say you shouldn't write down the main points and a fairly detailed description of them. You definitely should do that. Also, as a general rule, Mr. Tomecko isn't too picky about dates and times; however, they are helpful to put the events in perspective. Write them down, and try to remember the decade and order in which things occurred.

Mr. Tomecko's tests usually consist of about twenty multiple choice questions and an essay. The essay is by far the most important part. If you review your notes before the test, you should be able to get the multiple choice. The essay, on the other hand, will require a good deal of preparation beforehand. There will be at least three or four essays that might be on the test, and you'll have to prepare them all. Mr. Tomecko will provide you with a specific template for essay-writing. *Do not fight the template*. It is your friend. It will help you and make the entire process easier. It might seem impossible at first, but you'll get used to it quickly. If, by any chance, you *do* struggle a lot with the essays, then ask Mr. Tomecko for help.

Moving on the subject of *help*, email is very useful for an isolated question. Also, Mr. Tomecko has a sign-up sheet for meeting times, so you can have a one-on-one discussion with him if you need more interactive help. These are very helpful tools and you should put them to good use. I found the email to be particularly useful, especially for questions about essays and makeup work when I missed a few days.

Finally, Mr. Tomecko does grade you on participation. This freaks some people out, but it's really nothing to worry about. If you contribute to the conversation at least once a day, you should be perfectly fine. It could be asking a question, answering a question, commenting – anything. He'll even give you participation credit for a wrong answer, just as long as you pay attention and contribute.

Overall, the course is difficult, but if you work hard, study, and pay attention, you'll do just fine.

-- A Survivor