



The Denim Beret Policies and Procedures: Correspondence Courses and Mentoring

The Denim Beret
writing and literature
for teens

Last updated: 2/19

Welcome to *The Denim Beret!* In this handbook is important information that you and your student will need throughout your study. Please read it carefully, and contact me if you have any questions.

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GENERAL INFORMATION

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Teacher: Cheri Blomquist

Office hours: Monday-Friday; closed Saturdays, Sundays, and major holidays

Email: cblomquist@denimberet.com

Phone: (720) 999-1658

MOUNTAIN TIME ZONE

NOTE: All stated times in my communications will be in Mountain time to prevent me from making calculation mistakes. Please know your time difference, and account for it in your calendar when we set up video chats or phone calls.

TEACHER-STUDENT CONTACT POLICY:

Transparency is important at The Denim Beret. If a student communicates with me through his or her own email address, I will always copy the parent in my reply, unless it is very brief and minor (such as for a quick technical question). All video chats must be conducted only in the presence of a parent or adult guardian. This does not mean the parent must be sitting next to the student throughout the chat, but the parent does need to be present in a room nearby. If this is not possible at the time of the appointment, I will need to reschedule.

LATE PAYMENT POLICY:

Because The Denim Beret is a micro-business, I am unable to pursue late or non-payments beyond emails. For the sake of simplicity, I require payment before I begin working with your student; however, sometimes I'll give a grace period. When a payment is late after the grace period is past, I will send the parent/guardian a follow-up email, continuing to work with the student in the meantime. If the payment isn't received in a timely manner after this follow-up email, I will stop evaluating assignments and sending the student lessons. Although I will never discuss finances with your student, this will quickly become awkward. Please prevent an unpleasant situation by paying promptly.

PRIVACY POLICY:

When I receive positive feedback, I often like to quote it on my website. I also like to use student work as models on occasion. If at some point I want to use any quotes or models from you or your student, I will ask you for permission to do this. I also do not sell or give student or parent information to third parties.

WHAT TO DO IF I DON'T RESPOND TO YOUR EMAILS:

When you enroll in *The Denim Beret*, you are supporting a home microbusiness with all the limitations that may entail. It is important, therefore, that you know that I will never ignore your emails, phone calls, or assignments. If I don't respond to you in a timely manner, please assume that something went wrong in cyberspace (or my memory!) and try again.

In addition, because I do not employ a staff and realize that something may suddenly happen to me or my technical capabilities, I am providing you with a secondary email address: etblomquist@gmail.com. This address should be used only if I do not respond to you after you have tried to email and call me several times. Your subject line should be "Urgent Re: The Denim Beret."

CORE COURSE VS. SUPPLEMENT?

The Denim Beret mentoring option works well as a supplemental study. However, The Denim Beret correspondence courses are intensive, requiring significant study time each week; thus, they need to be considered an essential part of your student's language arts program. They do not work well as a supplemental or enrichment study. Those who need a supplemental grammar or writing study might want to choose a few *a la carte* lessons to address specific needs.

CORRESPONDENCE COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS:

Correspondence courses:

- computer
- printer
- PDF reader
- webcam
- scanner – *Note: Using a phone scanner is okay, but I do not accept .jpg submissions for the occasional hand-written assignments, because they are so difficult to grade. All scanned assignments must be saved as PDF documents.*
- Google account and Gmail address – *Note: Students will use Google apps for all lessons. These include Gmail (email), Drive (word processing and document exchange), and Hangout (video chat and instant messaging). I may be adding Classroom soon, as well.*

The link for opening a Google account and Gmail address is:

<https://accounts.google.com/signup?hl=en>

Please note: Instruction cannot begin until this account is ready and test emails have been exchanged.

BILLING POLICY:

Tuition for *a la carte* lessons may be made per lesson. Payment must be made in full before the lesson is sent.

Tuition for full courses may be made in either one or two installments. If parents choose to pay in a single installment, the full tuition is due within eight days of the invoice date. If parents choose to pay in two installments, payment #1 is due within eight days of the invoice date. Payment #2 is due within 60 days of the invoice date. I will give a grace period of five business days for checks that are in the mail by the course start date.

I accept personal checks, cashier's checks, cash (if you are local), and credit cards through Square. Your invoice will provide payment instructions and due dates.

DROP POLICY:

If you need to withdraw your student from the course, the following procedures will apply:

- The request needs to be made in writing.
- The registration fee is non-refundable.

- Refunds will be pro-rated if the student has already begun the course.
- For full courses, refunds will only be given through unit 1 or within 60 days, whichever comes first. I will give 90 days for students under 13.
- For *a la carte* lessons, refunds will not be given once the lesson is sent.
- Refunds will be given within 7 days of the request.

NON-CORRESPONDENCE POLICY:

The Denim Beret primarily uses email to correspond with families. Any required video chats are occasional and always scheduled ahead of time. I will place a telephone call only by prior arrangement in special circumstances. If a family drops the course without notifying me, I will adhere to the following procedure:

- 1) I will first follow my late-work policy.
- 2) If I do not receive a response from the parent in a timely manner, I will send a second email.
- 3) If I do not receive a response to this second attempt within a week or so, I will consider this to be an unofficial withdrawal from the program. I will then place the student on "inactive" status until I hear otherwise from the parent.

ASSIGNMENT AND COURSE DEADLINES:

All students have one calendar year to complete their course work with access to teacher services (grading, emails, video chats). Any lessons remaining after the year is over will be sent to the student for the parents to direct. To help students finish their course work within a year, I will provide a schedule of assignment deadlines that accounts for any planned vacations the parent may have mentioned. If a student misses an assignment deadline for any reason, a new one will be given, but the final date of teacher services does not change. Exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis for serious reasons, such as illness.

VIDEO CHAT REQUIREMENT:

Regular video chats (Hangouts) are an integral part of The Denim Beret courses. These Hangouts provide an opportunity for me to check in with you in a more personal way than emails allow. During them we will discuss any questions or concerns you or your parent may have, and I will check on your progress with warm-ups and assignment deadlines. I will also help you with any concepts you may be struggling to master. Except for the orientation Hangout, which is required for all students before beginning their courses, you will initiate each one.

LATE WORK POLICY:

I will send a reminder email to the student a day or two after a missed deadline. If the student does not respond in a timely manner, I will contact the student again before contacting the parent directly. If I do not receive a timely response from the parent, I will begin following my "Non-correspondence Policy" (see "General Information" section).

RESPONSE TIME:

Please allow two full business days for the return of evaluated assignments. If I don't respond within the expected time frame, feel free to send me an email reminder, in case your assignment was accidentally overlooked or deleted. Business days are Monday-Friday, major holidays excepted.

THE PARENT'S ROLE IN THE LEARNING PROCESS:

Although I may be your student's writing instructor, your support is important. As your student works with me, one of the best ways you can assist is to look over completed assignments to make sure your student has followed all instructions. Incomplete assignments or assignments that do not follow instructions may be sent back for corrections, which will impact your student's ability to complete the course within a year.

Another important way you can help is to drop me notes on occasion to let me know how your student is doing. I have learned that many students will not ask for help or express feelings of stress or confusion, even if I ask them pointed questions. With that in mind, although I do my best with students, I trust parents to alert me if anything is wrong.

HOW MUCH TO HELP:

Most parents understandably want their students to turn in nothing less than excellent work. However, it is important that you refrain from helping your student so much on an assignment that I cannot get a clear idea of the student's true abilities. Because you have the final say in your student's education, it is not a matter of cheating but of possible confusion on my part. If I think that your student is more advanced than he (or she) really is, I may inadvertently challenge him more than he is able to handle and may also neglect to help him when he really needs it.

LITERATURE AND THE DENIM BERET:

The Denim Beret courses are secular, designed to serve all students. My world view, however, is Christian. I also take a somewhat liberal approach to literature. This means that I draw from various types of literature for my models in the writing courses, including classic and contemporary, children's and adult, fiction and non-fiction, Judeo-Christian and non-religious. When I choose religious models, I attempt to choose texts that are not inflammatory, controversial, or evangelistic, and the excerpts are chosen with a clear purpose in mind.

TRANSCRIPT CREDITS:

High school students may need to know how their courses will translate on a transcript. I can help parents determine this at the end of the course. No course will worth more than one credit.

GRADING POLICY--WRITING

I don't use traditional letter grades, unless they are requested by the parent. Because I prefer to keep parents in control of final grades and because I approach writing as an art, I focus on mastery and growth. My grading key (below) reflects this philosophy. Please don't try to translate this key into letter grades, because they don't necessarily compute that way. In other words, an "AM" is not just another way of saying "B." If you need a letter grade for reporting purposes, please let me know.

GM = goal mastery
AM = almost-there mastery
MM = mid-level mastery
LM = low-level mastery
NP = skill expected but not shown
N/A = not applicable

Students who receive a grade they don't like will always have the option of revision. Sometimes students will need to revise more than once to achieve a satisfactory grade. Revision is a common and necessary part of The Denim Beret approach and should be viewed as an opportunity, not as a setback.

GRADING POLICY—GRAMMAR:

For *Grammar Matters* I use traditional letter grades and percentages, as outlined below:

A+ = 100% and above
A = 93-99
A- = 90-92

B+ = 87-89
B = 83-86
B- = 80-82

C+ = 77-79
C = 73-76
C- = 70-72

D+ = 67-69
D = 63-61
D- = 60-62

F = 1-59

MENTORING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

HOW MENTORING WORKS:

Once you have registered for The Denim Beret, your student will soon receive a welcome email and may begin submitting papers and essays to be evaluated. It is also helpful if I receive an email that describes the project and the kind of guidance desired. I will then evaluate the draft and email it back to the student with my comments and scored rubric. My comments and rubric will be tailored to meet the student's skill level as closely as possible.

If I recommend a revision, you may choose to have your student revise the draft and send it to me for a second evaluation, or you may choose to use my evaluation to complete the revision with your student. Please note that I consider revision an extremely important part of the writing process and may recommend several revised drafts. Whether or not you complete them with me, however, is always up to you. Each draft is charged separately.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS:

- computer
- email address (Gmail preferred)
- Google Drive is recommended for document creation and exchange but is not required.
- If Drive not used, Word or Rich Text Format capability. No PDFs accepted, except for handwritten exercises.

BILLING POLICY:

Unless other arrangements have been made, payments for mentoring must be made before I can return your student's evaluated work. I accept personal checks, cashier's checks, cash (if you are local), and credit cards through Square. Your invoice will provide payment instructions and due dates.

REFUND POLICY:

Refunds are only available for drafts that have been paid for but not yet submitted. Once I have begun reading a draft, a refund for that draft is unavailable.

STUDENT DEADLINES:

Students in the mentoring program are self-paced and will therefore not be given deadlines. I do, however, appreciate regular communication so that I know what to expect. For example, if I evaluate a rough draft and recommend a revision, I like to know whether the student intends to work on that revision with me or with a parent. If I don't receive this information, I will follow up with you.

RESPONSE TIME:

Please allow three full business days for the return of evaluated projects. If I don't respond within the expected time frame, please send me an email reminder, in case your email was accidentally overlooked or deleted. Projects of three pages or more may require a longer response time. In such cases I will let your student know when to expect the evaluation.

NON-CORRESPONDENCE POLICY:

If a family drops the mentoring program without notifying me, I will follow this procedure:

- 1) If a student does not respond within a few days to an email to which I am expecting a reply, I will send one or two follow-up emails. Parents will always be copied on these emails.
- 2) If I do not receive a response my follow-up emails, I will place the student on "inactive status" and cease to follow up. The student may return to mentoring when he or she is ready, as long as I have an opening and the previous invoice has been paid.

TIME-SENSITIVE PROJECTS:

Sometimes mentoring students come to me for help on projects that are due elsewhere by a certain date. If you are under a tighter deadline than my response window (see "Response Time" above), let me know. In such cases I will try to give your student's project a high priority and return it faster. Because I can't guarantee an earlier response, however, it is important that you plan ahead as much as possible.

GRADING POLICY:

I don't use traditional letter grades for mentoring. Because I prefer to keep parents in control of final grades and because I approach writing as an art, not an academic exercise, I focus on mastery and growth. My grading key (below) reflects this philosophy. Please don't try to translate this key into letter grades, because they don't necessarily compute that way. For example, an "GM" grade is not just another way of saying "A." I approach your student's work with a different mindset from when I use letter grades.

GM = goal mastery
AM = almost-there mastery
MM = mid-level mastery
LM = low-level mastery
NP = skill not shown
N/A = not applicable

THE PARENT'S ROLE IN THE LEARNING PROCESS:

Although I may be your student's writing mentor, your support is important. As your student works with me, one of the best ways you can assist is to help your student understand and apply my evaluations to their revisions. Another important way you can help is to drop me notes on

occasion to let me know how your student is doing. I have learned that many students will not ask for help or express feelings of stress or confusion, even if I ask them directly for their thoughts. With that in mind, although I do my best to ensure student success, I trust the parent/guardian to alert me if anything is wrong.