

Practices of Academic Writing - Philosophical Literary Wonder

WRT 105 Autumn 2013 with Prof Gregory Owcarz - Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:45 to 2:15

Why do writers write? Because it isn't there. - John Berger
How do I know what I think until I see what I say? - E.M. Forster

Required Readings

The Elements of Style

- William Strunk, E.B. White

How to Write a Sentence (and how to read one)

- Stanley Fish

Selected Literary Texts

- Gregory Owcarz (ed.)

Writing Analytically (6th ed.)

- David Rosenwasser, Jill Stephen

Supplemental Readings

What Does It All Mean?

- Thomas Nagel

Real Philosophy, The Heart of Philosophy

- Jacob Needleman

The Norton Anthology of English

- The Free Web Companion

Critical Encounters with Texts

- Margaret Himley, Anne Fitzsimmons

Key Internet Resources

The Writers' Cafe (www.writerscafe.org)

Newsletter on Philosophy and Literature (www.ljhammond.com/phlit/newsletter.htm)

Arts and Letters Daily (www.aldaily.com)

Additional Assistance

Office Hours: Tu-Th by appointment, Tel: 09.54.36.10.40, Email: BeingGregory@gmail.com

Course Description

This is a course in written composition. The focus is on the cultivated experiences, penetrating analysis, and persuasive reasoning that constitutes skilled academic writing. Students explore and describe experience, present and evaluate investigation, and offer clear concise reasoning for their considered opinions. Through workshops of constructive criticism, through writings and rewritings, through (one hopes) inspired course themes, we learn to construct expository and argumentative writing by working the tools of the writer's trade. In short, a course to improve appreciation, analysis, argument and of course expression.

As source material we look to common philosophical themes through significant works of literary art drawn from both European and American traditions. With stories, plays, essays and poems ranging from the classic and canonical (Plato, Twain, Kafka) to the contemporary (Merwin, Waits, DeLillo), we uncover some curiously profound aspects of daily life for careful consideration. Our focus is on the nature of human existence, on the world in which we live, and on our relations with one another. No prior background in philosophical literature is required nor expected.

Course Objectives

Applying critical reading skills in response to widely varied literary forms and genres
Exploring various ways that literary arts may incorporate and convey philosophical ideas
Developing the appreciation skills required to respond fully to significant works of literature
Building written invention strategies, such as observing, brainstorming, associating, drafting
Grasping the prior role primary research and acute reflection play in exposition and argument
Assessing research source reliability, explaining and integrating research into writing
Writing essays that draw upon ideas and reasoning and styles of writers and fellow students
Learning basic rhetorical principles to strengthen the effectiveness of written work
Employing academic composition standards such as MLA style and APA citation conventions
Practicing a variety of revision and editing techniques for written content, structure and style
Participating in constructive teacher consultations and fellow student workshops

Course Requirements

Readings Writing well depends upon reading well, so the course incorporates theme-based readings. The texts are short, popular, eloquent, offering themes and narrative, ideas and arguments. They prompt thought, interpretation, qualification, critical response; they enlarge the context for class discussion by illustrating composition choices good writers make, and inspiring students to do likewise. They also constitute an array of comparative works to deepen our understanding of the time spent and experiences undergone while living abroad.

Assignments Students must complete three essays, and all preliminary drafts for those essays, related to the assigned readings and class discussion. Suggested topics must be approved and submission deadlines must be followed, since cooperative class activities rely on them. Working in designated pairs, students must present another student's work for each of the essays, as an introduction for further discussion. Course enrollment constitutes permission for the instructor to use student compositions as learning tools in open classmate exchange. Essay submissions and class presentations will be scheduled the first week of the course. No late work will be accepted and no make-up work will be offered. Crucial (yet tentative) due dates: Opening Essay 8 October, Analysis Essay 14 November, Argument Essay 5 December

Participation Student engagement constitutes a major portion of this course, consisting of active classroom presence, presentation effort, and quality of written work. Through class discussion we elucidate the readings and clarify key concepts. The emphasis is on student engagement and reaction, crucial to examining philosophical ideas, crucial to appreciating their expression in significant literature, and most crucial to achieving refined written response. Through group activities we cultivate a workshop environment for budding writer abilities. We devote time and effort to formal and informal reading and writing practice that includes recorded observations, annotated readings, discussion notes, experiments with styles and structural choices, and a variety of drafting and revision strategies.

Grading Participation 20%, Opening Essay 15%, Analysis Essay 25%, Argument Essay 30% Advertising Project 10% Note that participation constitutes a significant part of the final course grade, reflecting the workshop nature of the course. Participation is evaluated through in-class exercises and peer critiques, outline and draft preparations, and active class attendance.

Syracuse University Administrative Notes

The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort.

For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>. You are required to attend class on a regular basis. Students are allowed only one unexcused absence without penalty for the entire semester. After that, every unexcused absence will lower your final grade by 2.5 points. Thus, for example, an 85 (B) will become an 82.5 (B-) after one absence, an 80 after a second absence, and so on. There are only two kinds of excused absences: (1) medical absences and (2) academic absences that have been authorized by the director. If you are ill and cannot attend class, you must call the SU Center to alert the staff. Any further medical absences must be justified by a note or bill (“la fiche de la sécurité sociale”) from a doctor.

Course Themes, Readings, Schedule

Wondering About Identity - Writing Within Ourselves

Week One: Writing, A User's Manual

Reading: Excerpts from *The Art of Travel* - Alain deBotton and *Ways of Seeing* - John Berger

Writing: Seeing Better and More, Word Painting, Perceptual Sea Changing

Week Two: Consciousness

Reading: "Zeus the Lutheran" - Garrison Keillor, "Where Am I?" - Daniel Dennett

Writing: The How-To of Sentences, Fear of Grammar, Annotative Reading

Week Three: Love

Reading: Aristophanes' Speech from *The Symposium* - Plato

Writing: Viewpoints and Projects of Writers, Coming to Terms in Reading

Week Four: The Will

Reading: "Hunger Artist" - Franz Kafka, "Throw Yourself Like Seed" - Miguel de Unamuno

Writing: Analyzing Analysis, Distinguishing Analysis from Summary, Argument, Expression

Week Five: The Other

Reading: "Midnight in Dostoevsky" - Don DeLillo, "What's He Building?" - Tom Waits

Writing: Reading Heuristics, Thesis Refinement, Peer Review Strategies

Wondering About Reality - Writing Beyond Ourselves

Week Six: Science and Humanity

Reading: Excerpts from *The Lives of a Cell* - Lewis Thomas, "Army Ants" - Tom Waits

Writing: The What and How of Evidence, The Structures of Essays

Week Seven: Art and Nature

Reading: "Some Questions You Might Ask" - Mary Oliver, "Juniper" - Robert Francis

Writing: Substantiating Claims, Making Inferences, Rhetorical Analysis

Week Eight: Idealism and Realism

Reading: "Circular Ruins" and "The Library of Babel" - Jorge Luis Borges

Writing: Comprehensive Research and Scholarly Databases, Source Acknowledgment

Week Nine: Order and Chaos

Reading: "Tergvinder's Stone" - W.S. Merwin, "Anecdote of a Jar" - Wallace Stevens

Writing: Concision and Economy, Citation Standards, Style Guides

Wondering About Morality - Writing Within and Beyond

Week Ten: Evil Within

Reading: "Man's Place" - Mark Twain, "A Story About the Body" - Robert Haas

Writing: Argumentation and Fallacy, Irony and Sarcasm

Week Eleven: Mass Minds

Reading: "The Lottery" - Shirley Jackson, "The Man to Send Rain Clouds" - Leslie Silko

Writing: Images and Examples and Symbols, Evidence and Further Support

Week Twelve: Social Ethics

Reading: "A and P" - John Updike, "Traveling Through the Dark" - William Stafford

Writing: Elements of Syntax, Elements of Style

Week Thirteen: Political Conscience

Reading: "Step Right Up" - Tom Waits, "The Story of Stuff" - Annie Leonard

Writing: Introductions and Conclusions, Composition Across Extended Media