
READING AND WRITING THE MODERN ESSAY

Yale University, Spring 2017

Instructor: K.Q. Andrews

ENGL 120

Section 1: T Th 1-2:15pm / Section 2: TTh 9-10:15am

Office Hours: T 2:30-4:30; Th 10:30-12:30; also by appt

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Excellent communicators move the world. Many people will try and convince you that the ability to communicate, through either writing or speaking, is a natural talent—some have it, some do not. This is a lie. While some people do have natural aptitude for writing or speaking, anyone, once equipped with sound understanding of persuasive and compositional principles, can communicate effectively. The goal of this course is thus to help you to become an even stronger, more confident, and more flexible writer and reader.

This course, in particular, will train you to read as a writer of creative nonfiction, and to use the strategies of professional nonfiction writers in your own work. We will practice “close reading for craft,” attending to persona, point of view, and voice; problems and questions; coherence, connection, and concision; defamiliarization; and public significance in the essays we read. Our collective analysis of exemplary writing is the heart of the course. Together we will notice aspects of the essays that we might miss on our own, and we’ll each bring our own unique readerly sensibilities to the task of figuring out what works, and how and why it works. Good writing is born out of attentive reading and lively conversation, so come to every class prepared to share your critical perspective.

Books and Course Materials

We will use two textbooks available at the Yale Bookstore:

- Goldthwaite, Melissa A., et al. *The Norton Reader*. 14th edition. (Full Edition)
- Clark, Roy Peter. *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer*.
- Other readings will be posted as PDFs to the course’s Canvas page, to be **printed and annotated**

Note: Almost all of the Norton readings are available in the 13th edition as well. Buy either one.

You should also buy a **notebook** to carry around with you and bring to class, as well as a **two-pocket folder** for the purposes of turning in the second draft of your assignments along with your first. (First drafts will be turned in electronically on Canvas; I will offer copious digital commentary on these.)

Responding to Readings

Always annotate the readings. Use these detailed notes to help you write your brief reading responses, which you’ll be posting on Canvas at least one hour before each class starting Week 3. There will be a thread for each group of readings, and you’ll choose one reading to respond to. Your response can be anywhere between a few sentences and a few paragraphs long.

Use your responses as a place to experiment and play with close reading for craft. You can:

- Start with your own emotional reaction to the text, and then figure out how the author uses language to create this response.
- Explain one of the technical “takeaways” from the text: which tool or technique does the author use well, why is it effective, and how might we use it in our own work?

- Explain how the essay uses or adapts one of the tools from *Writing Tools*.
- Explain the costs and benefits of a particular writing choice the author made.
- Write a paragraph using one of the techniques the author used, or write a paragraph in imitation of the author's style (e.g. pastiche or parody – these are really just exaggerations of a particular technique!)
- Make a revision suggestion for the essay: explain an aspect you would change, and why.
- Rewrite a sentence or paragraph, altering diction, tense, or person, etc., and comment on the effects of these changes.

We'll discuss other approaches to reading responses during the semester, and I will make suggestions. You are also, of course, free to invent your own and mix things up each week. If you come up with a prompt of your own, write it out—this will help us see your thinking process.

Writing Assignments

You will be turning in a draft or revision almost every week. For first drafts, you'll be turning your work in digitally on Canvas by the class time on which it is due; for second drafts, you'll be bringing them on paper to class (along with your graded first drafts). Plan your semester accordingly, and allow the rhythm of writing to structure your week. This will likely be a challenge at first, but by the end of the semester you will really feel like a writer. Deadlines are a writer's lifeline—without them nothing would ever get written.

All in all, you will write ten full-length versions of essays this semester: five drafts and five revisions. You are welcome and indeed encouraged to write "rough drafts" (or pre-drafts) for your own benefit, but the drafts that you turn in to me and your peers should be as good as you can make them. Your drafts should all be polished, your revisions burnished to a high sheen.

There are a few three-week units which stretch out this process a bit: the profile unit, which will require a topic and methods proposal and which will stretch over spring break, and the unit on cultural analysis and op-eds, which is really two topics rolled into one. For this latter unit, you will choose to write *either* an analysis of some cultural phenomenon or a policy argument. You may also write a shorter version of either one of these (as a review or an op-ed), provided that it is then submitted for publication. We will discuss this in more detail as the unit approaches.

Always title your essays. Always use 12-point font, 1-inch margins, and double-spacing. Always include page numbers and your name.

Nonfiction and Sourcing

Everything you write must be true. Every source you use must be cited. When in doubt about truth or citation, err on the safe side. As you gather information, keep track of its sources (as professional writers of nonfiction must). When you submit drafts and revisions, use endnotes to identify where factual information came from: interviews, books, articles, conversations, photographs, and perhaps more.

Revising and Workshopping

In addition to the imagined audience that you will write into being with each essay, you will sometimes have a real and in-the-flesh audience: your classmates. And, in a spirit of mutual endeavor, you will be a responsive and supportive audience for them as well. You will workshop your colleagues' drafts in class, give them spoken and written feedback, and learn to be a good editor of others' work as well as of your own. **Note:** We will not be formally workshopping the humor piece. Instead, you will read your draft aloud during the final class, and will revise it based on your experience of performing it and on the immediate response you receive from your classmates during class. You will have the opportunity to discuss both the essay and the reading with me during office hours.

Sign-ups for workshop dates will be finalized during the third week of class. Regardless of whether you are being workshopped that week or not, you will prepare for workshops by reading all the essays being workshopped, and writing at least a paragraph's worth response to each essay in which you:

- praise an admirable aspect of the essay, and cite a specific example to illustrate your praise;
- explain one aspect of the essay that requires revision, and give a specific example of how this revision might work.

Attendance, Grading, and Participation Policies

As much of this class is based on discussion, your attendance and punctuality are essential. If you miss more than three classes, your participation grade will be lowered by one full letter. If you are late by more than five minutes to three classes, it will count as one full absence. If you have an emergency of any kind that requires you to miss class, please provide me with a Dean's excuse.

When figuring your overall semester grade, I will use the following formula:

Personal Essay	10 %
Place Essay	20 %
Profile	20 %
Cultural Analysis / Op-Ed	20%
Humor	10 %
Class Participation	20 %
(includes: attendance, in-class participation which demonstrates active preparedness, responses, workshop)	

	100% total

Extensions & Lateness Policy

If you discuss your essay with a residential college Writing Tutor or a Writing Partner at the Writing Center, you will receive a 24-hour extension on your next deadline. You must meet with the tutor before the deadline—the extension does not work retroactively. Simply email me before the deadline to let me know the name of tutor you saw, the time that you saw them, and (in a sentence or two) what you talked about. You may use this extension option as often as you like for both drafts and revisions; the only exception is that you can't get an extension on a draft that is being workshopped, since your peers will need plenty of time to respond to it.

You may also request extensions in case of emergency, as long as you do so 24 hours in advance of the deadline. Without an approved extension, late papers will lose one-third of a grade (B+ to B, B to B-, and so on) per day late.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE
(subject to slight change, always with notice)

UNIT ONE: INTERPRETING PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Week 1	Class Content	Readings DUE	Writing DUE
Tues 1.17	Welcome! Introduction: Writing the Personal (Roach, "I, Guppy")		
Thurs 1.19	The Event	Hughes, "Salvation" (NR); Staples, "Black Men and Public Space" (NR)	

Week 2	Class Content	Readings DUE	Writing DUE
Tues 1.24	Narrative	Collins, "Love in Translation"; Didion, "On Keeping a Notebook" (NR 487)	Literacy Narrative
Thurs 1.26	Identities; Odd-Form	Siasoco, "Pinays"; Smith, "Joy"	Reading Response

Week 3	Class Content	Readings DUE	Writing DUE
Tues 1.31	How to Read as Writers, i.e. How to Workshop	Jamison, "Mark My Words"; King, "On Writing," Bolina, "Writing Like a White Guy" (all NR)	Personal Essay Draft Reading Response
Thurs 2.2	Workshop #1	Peer Essays	Workshop Commentary

UNIT TWO: WRITING ABOUT PLACE

Week 4	Class Content	Readings DUE	Writing DUE
Tues 2.7	Introduction: Places	Kriss, "Nagakin Capsule Tower"; Baldwin, "Stranger in the Village" (NR)	Personal Essay Revised Reading Response
Thurs 2.9	Homes	Didion, "Coming Home" (NR); White, "Once More to the Lake" (NR)	Reading Response

Week 5	Class Content	Readings DUE	Writing DUE
Tues 2.14	Travel & Destinations	Frazier, "Take the F" (NR); Harris, "Our Fancy Foods"	Place Essay Draft Reading Response
Thurs 2.16	Workshop #2	Peer Essays	Workshop Commentary

UNIT THREE: PAINTING A PORTRAIT

Week 6	Class Content	Readings DUE	Writing DUE
Tues 2.21	Intro: People	Phillips, “Deus Ex Machina” (online)	Place Essay Revised Reading Response
Thurs 2.23	Home and Away	Dillard, from <i>An American Childhood</i> (NR); Thurman, “The Misfit”	Reading Response

Week 7	Class Content	Readings DUE	Writing DUE
Tues 2.28	Trauma	Sanders, “Under the Influence” (NR); Patchett, “The Face of Pain”	Interview Topic and Method Reading Response
Thurs 3.2	Not Trauma	Klosterman, “Appetite for Replication”	Reading Response

Week 8	Class Content	Readings DUE	Writing DUE
Tues 3.7	Labor	Aviv, “The Philosopher of Feelings”; Parker, “Pete Wells Has His Knives Out”	Profile Draft Reading Response
Thurs 3.9	Workshop #3	Peer Essays	Workshop Commentary

Weeks 9-10	Spring Break!
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UNIT FOUR (CULTURAL ARGUMENT) and FIVE (POLICY ARGUMENT) (choose one to write)

Week 8	Class Content	Readings DUE	Writing DUE
Tues 3.28	Introduction: Writing Readings and/vs. The Opinion Pages	Gay, “Peculiar Benefits”; Gladwell, “Offensive Play”	Profile Revised Reading Response
Thurs 3.30	Topic Ranges	Wallace, “Consider the Lobster” (NR); Beachy-Quick, “Poetic Geometries”	Reading Response

Week 11	Class Content	Readings DUE	Writing DUE
Tues 4.4	High vs. Low	Klosterman, “Billy Sim”; Coates, “The Case for Reparations”	Reading Response
Thurs 4.6	The Personal as Political	Rich, “Taking Women Students Seriously” (NR)	Cultural/Policy Argument Draft Reading Response

Week 12	Class Content	Readings DUE	Writing DUE
Tues 4.11	Workshop #4	Peer Essays	Workshop Commentary
Thurs 4.13	Workshop #5	Peer Essays	Workshop Commentary

UNIT SIX: HOW TO BE FUNNY

Week 14	Class Content	Readings DUE	Writing DUE
Tues 4.18	Intro: Funniness	Kaling, “Flick Chicks”	Cultural/Policy Argument Revised Reading Response
Thurs 4.20	Argumentative Complaining	Burneko, “Things Take Too Long Now” (online); Osler, “What Harvard Is”	Reading Response

Week 15	Class Content	Readings DUE	Writing DUE
Tues 4.25	Odd-Form Humor	Burns, “The Snake Fight Portion of Your Thesis Defense”; Ortberg, “Texts from the Lorax” and “Texts from Emily Dickinson” (all online)	Reading Response
Thurs 4.27	Reading!		Humor Piece

Humor revision due Tuesday, 5.2, by 4pm in LC 107.

NOTES ON THE SYLLABUS