

WRT 120: Effective Writing I



Syllabus

Spring 2005

Instructor: Stacy Tartar Esch

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Email stacy@brainstorm-services.com or startar-esch@wcupa.edu

Web Look for our Blackboard course site:
<http://blackboard.wcupa.edu>

Course Texts and Materials

The Call to Write, Brief 3rd ed., by John Trimbur

Quick Access, 4th ed., by Lynn Quitman Troyka

E-Reserves — FHG Library (Access from Blackboard or the Library's home page)

Pocket folder or small binder to use as a Portfolio, containing all completed course work

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to deliver writing instruction. The central assumption is that writing is a skill to be acquired through practice and feedback rather than lecture. The materials we read and the texts that you and your classmates will write are the heart of the course. The textbook, the instructor, as well as supplementary readings and other materials will introduce students to a variety of genres which you will attempt to master through careful drafting, collaboration, revision, workshopping, and peer review. The expectation is that students will come to understand writing as a process of discovery. During workshops, students will be offered both written and verbal feedback to guide the process of revision. The formal texts you write during the semester will not be considered final until you hand in your **Portfolio** at the end of the semester.

The method of this course is listed in the course catalog as "lecture," but that will hardly be the case during the majority of our class sessions, which will be overwhelmingly participatory and collaborative. I may lecture (infrequently) to explain concepts related to effective writing practices, but more typically my role will be to provide you with methods to practice, to coordinate exploratory discussions and to guide editorial relationships among you and your peers. Many of our classes will involve reading and discussing your own work, the work of fellow students, and the work of professional writers who can provide inspiration.

The general education goals which this course is designed to meet include: (*) learning to communicate effectively in writing; (*) learning to think critically and analytically; (*) learning to respond thoughtfully to diversity; and (*) becoming prepared to lead productive and contributing lives.

Course Components: Reading, Discussing, Writing

The reading assignments will involve reading instructional chapters in **The Call to Write** or **Quick Access** as well as supplementary materials provided by the instructor in the form of handouts (digital or paper). Students are responsible for going online to access and print personal copies of digital handouts. Most of these will be available from the Library's E-Reserves. Specific instructions will be provided any time a digital handout is assigned.

Discussion is a term that refers to several different class activities to extend or enhance your thinking on assigned material: class-wide, large group discussions; collaborative, small group discussions; and individual response papers. Students are expected to attend each class prepared to engage in any of these discussion activities when materials are assigned.

The writing assignments for this course reflect our intention to explore three broad types of essay writing: expressive, expository, and persuasive. **The expressive writing** you do will ask you to draw on your personal experience, your personal observations and perspectives on the world that surrounds you, and your personal response to texts we explore. **The expository writing** you do will ask you to acquire and/or develop critical thinking skills such as analysis, interpretation, and synthesis. **The persuasive writing** you do will challenge you to practice an ethical form of persuasion, highly valued in the culture of academia, by learning the how to construct a rational argument.

The reading, discussion, and informal writing you do throughout the semester will combine to form your **PARTICIPATION** grade at the end of the semester. Absence or lack of preparation for any of the assigned classwork will affect your participation grade. The formal writing assignments you do will combine to form your **ESSAY** grade. If you fail hand in one of your formal essays you cannot receive more than a "D" for your final course grade, regardless of your other scores. If you fail to hand in more than one of your formal essays, you will receive an "F." Your final course grade is calculated by compiling your PARTICIPATION, ESSAY, and PORTFOLIO scores.

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|-----|---|
| 65% | FORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENTS WITH ATTACHED RUBRIC |
| 30% | INFORMAL WRITING, PREPARATION, AND PARTICIPATION |
| 5% | PORTFOLIO W/ CHECKLIST AND QUESTIONNAIRE |

Class Policies

Late Work. All essays and other assignments are due on the date assigned. If a serious injury, illness, or other emergency prevents you or seems likely to prevent you from meeting a deadline, make arrangements with me before the assignment is due, or the day it is due. If no specific arrangement has been made, late penalties will ensue. Late papers will be assessed a penalty of one letter grade for every two days late (in our age of email, weekends count). You cannot turn in an assignment for full credit more than one week after its due date. After one week, your work can only earn a "D" (numerically 65) or lower.

Portfolio. Each student is required to hand in a portfolio of all finished formal assignments at the end of the semester. The portfolios will be accompanied by a "Portfolio Checklist" (to be distributed), and a Self-Assessment Questionnaire (to be distributed). You will be given specific instructions in class as to the presentation of your portfolio at the midterm and again at the end of the semester. So, in accordance with the Department of English policy, you must keep all of your completed essays (and other writings) in a folder, which you will turn in at the end of the semester. The department will keep these for reference until the following semester (Fall 2005), at which time (after the 10th week of the semester) you may retrieve your folder from my office or from one of the English department secretaries on the 5th floor in Main Hall. After the 15th week of the semester the department discards unclaimed portfolios.

Class Policies, cont.

Attendance. I take attendance each class period. Students are expected to attend every class having read assigned material or prepared assigned homework. Any student who misses more than four classes may receive a lowered grade. (Absences necessitated by a student's participation in a University-sanctioned event are not penalized if the student follows the "excused absence" policy stated in the University catalog.) After four absences your final grade may be lowered according to the severity of your absenteeism and my own discretion. Students with extended medical problems or personal emergencies should notify the Dean of Students, who will contact me about allowing for necessary adjustments. Athletes, student teachers, band members, etc., should provide me with a note from the appropriate professor or coach documenting your need to be away from class. Chronic or extended absence throughout the semester without consultation or permission from the Dean of Students will be grounds for failure. These penalties may be waived only in the case of extreme extenuating circumstances. It is up to the student to provide official verification from the Dean's office of extenuating circumstances, and preferably to discuss these issues with me directly via office visit, phone, or email.

Conferences are an important part of the course, and you will have the opportunity to meet with me several times during the semester. Some conferences will take place in lieu of class and some will be conducted during class. If you need further conferencing, you can meet with me during scheduled office hours. Each conference is an opportunity for personalized editorial discussion and evaluation of your work's progress.

Writing Center. If you are having trouble with a writing assignment, do not hesitate to bring your problem to my attention or bring your essay to the Writing Center in Main 203. The Writing Center offers free, high-quality tutoring to any student who is writing a paper for any course offered by the college. The staff will assist students at all stages of the writing process: developing ideas, organizing drafts, revising, and editing. Tutors will not serve as your proofreaders, however. Their aim is to help you develop your own skills. You may need to call ahead for an appointment as the center becomes fairly busy once the semester is under way. The number is 436-2121. Writing Center hours are M (10-4), Tu (9-5), W (9:30-7:30), Th (10-7:30), F (10-2).

Office of Services for Students with Disabilities. I will make accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability, please make your needs known to me and contact the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities at 436-3217 for further support or information.

Diversity and Fair Language. You are required by University policy to use nondiscriminatory language and to treat all issues of diversity respectfully (including, but not limited to, race, sex/gender, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation). Read **Quick Access**, pp.101-103.

Academic Honesty. Plagiarism of any type is a serious academic offense that can result in a failing grade on an assignment, failure of the course, or referral to academic judicial affairs, depending upon the instructor's judgment. You are plagiarizing if you lift either ideas or word-for-word passages from a published book, article, or website without giving credit to the author; pass off another student's work as your own; or allow a "helper" to actually write parts of your paper for you. Don't do it!!! If you have any questions about how to use sources properly, approach me or one of the tutors in the Writing Center. You can also read **Quick Access**, pp. 126-134.



Writing Assignment Sequence

Five formal writing assignments and several informal ones will punctuate the course. There are no exams or quizzes. Your writing, your active engagement with the materials we explore, and your participation in class activities are the sole determinants of your course grade. Keep all completed homework and classwork in case of a discrepancy between my records and yours. All formal and informal writing, when returned to you, must be stored in a **Writer's Portfolio**, a sturdy two pocket folder with your name on the front. This portfolio will be checked soon after midterm (to make sure you're maintaining it properly) and handed in to your instructor at the end of the semester. **All graded writing is placed in the Writer's Portfolio** and provides a hard record of your work in the course.

All informal writing is scored according to a point system, with most activities worth 3 points, though sometimes there will be activities worth more. Formal writing is scored by use of a rubric which reflects my belief in a holistic approach to evaluation, and attempts to provide students with a clear, objective understanding of how their grade is derived. Five equal criteria are applied to determine the quality of your essay: focus, development, organization, style, and correctness. For each of these criteria, students can earn a High Pass (95), a Pass (75/85), or an In Progress (65). A perfect score on an essay is 95. All essays can be revised and resubmitted for re-evaluation as long as the revision is accompanied by the original and a note explaining what you attempted to improve in your revision.

Sequence of Assignments

Essay #1: Expressive Writing

- Letter
- Memoir
- Response
- Formal Essay #1**

Essay #2: Expository Writing

- Analysis
- Interpretation (Applied to literature, current or historical events, or pop culture)
- Synthesis
- Formal Essay #2**

Essay #3: Persuasive Writing

- Casebook
- Commentary
- Formal Essay #3**

Essay #4: Independent Writing

- Letter
- Memoir
- Profile
- Review
- Commentary
- Reader Response
- Analysis
- Interpretation
- Synthesis
- Formal Essay #4**

COURSE OUTLINE

Please note that the assignments and/or dates on this schedule are subject to change during the course of the semester. Changes will always be announced in class and on the course website(s).

| Week # | Activities |
|--------------------|---|
| 1 | INTRODUCTIONS. Explore your previous experience with writing: valuable lessons learned; inspirations; turn-ons and turn-offs. Explore preliminary ideas: What is the link between reading thoughtfully and writing thoughtfully? How can writing become a means of discovery? How conscious are you of the “self” projected in your writing voice? <i>Readings:</i> “You Are Exhausted By Risk” (handout/web). <i>Writing:</i> Write a freestyle paper on the topic of “ IDENTITY ” (2-3 pgs.). You choose the form, style, content, and mode of presentation. Looking for thought and/or feeling, and your personal stamp. Identity paper due Jan. 14. |
| 2 | LETTERS, MEMOIRS, AND RESPONSE TO LITERATURE. Letter writing and memoir as a genres for expressive writing. Responding to literature and writing about personal experience. <i>Readings:</i> Trimbur 47-60 (rhetorical situation) and 147-171 (memoir); also Troyka 13-34 (the writing process). <i>Writing:</i> Write a personal response to one of the readings assigned (1 pg.). You can use one of the questions provided or go in your own direction. Write an open letter to the campus community on any topic (1 pg.). |
| 3 | Writing, discussion, and collaborative activities relating to expressive writing TBA. Writing Workshop for the expressive paper. Bring 2 copies of your typed draft to class for peer and instructor review.* |
| 4 | Editing and Revision on the memoir paper continues. Expressive Essay due Feb 3. Reflection paper and exploratory writing in class. |
| 5 | ARGUMENTATION/COMMENTARY. What is argument? <i>Readings:</i> Trimbur 61-90 (analyzing argument); also Troyka 51-58 (logic and reasoning). Class will meet in the library on announced days. |
| 6 | What is commentary? <i>Readings:</i> Trimbur 303-321 (identifying patterns of meaning). Collaborative assignment (5-6 per group): “Assembling a Casebook” (Trimbur 322). Library time will be announced. |
| 7 | Casebooks due February 25. Preview writing Commentary writing assignment in Trimbur 323-324. |
| 8 | Writing Workshop for the Commentary paper: Bring 2 copies of your typed draft to class for peer and instructor review. Revision may begin in class. |
| 9 | SPRING BREAK: WEEK OF MARCH 7 – 11 |
| 10 | Persuasive paper due March 17. Reflection paper and exploratory writing in class. |
| 11 | CRITICAL THINKING: ANALYSIS / SYNTHESIS/INTERPRETATION. What is critical thinking? <i>Readings</i> TBA. |
| 12 | Continued readings, TBA. Writing and collaborative activities relating to critical thinking and writing TBA. Preview assignment in Trimbur 133-134. Writing Workshop for the Letter paper: Bring 2 copies of your typed draft to class for peer and instructor review. |
| 13 | Expository paper due April 14. Preview final writing assignment: Independent Paper. Brainstorming session to generate ideas for possible topics. |
| 14 | Topics due. In class activities and conferences toward the Independent Paper. |
| 15 | Out-of-class Conferences for Independent Paper. |
| 16 | Writing Workshop for Final paper: Bring 2 copies of your typed draft to class for peer and instructor review. Independent Paper due April 28. Reflection paper and journal writing in class. Also, we’ll discuss the Portfolio self-assessment assignment. Last day of class: Portfolio due on April 28! Place all graded papers in your two-pocket Portfolio folder, along with the Portfolio Checklist and the self-assessment questionnaire. |
| Finals Week | Last chance for late papers or late portfolios. Meet in my office, Main 312, during the Final Exam period to hand in late work or drop in my Mailbox, Main 527. |

* At times, during Writing Workshops, I’ll take the opportunity to meet individually with students for in-class conferences. During the course of the semester, out-of-class conferences (in addition to the dates designated in the outline) may be announced in lieu of class.

