

ENGLISH 250: ADVANCED COMPOSITION

Winter 2008

Section 002: MW, 8:30-9:50

INSTRUCTOR: Raj Mehta

TELEPHONE: 370-3328

E-MAIL: mehta@camosun.bc.ca

OFFICE: Paul 318

OFFICE HOURS: M, 1:00-2:00pm; W, 10:00-11:30am

A writer is a reader who is moved to emulation.

-Saul Bellow

Every story teaches you how to write that story but not the next story.

-Eudora Welty

Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.

-Anton Chekhov

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to techniques of writing "creative nonfiction": expository writing which combines characteristics of literature and journalism with the personal narrative. The familiar fundamentals of effective persuasive writing - providing a clear context and warranted reasons and evidence in support of a claim - are necessary underpinnings for an exploratory and reflective writing style. As such this course assumes students have a certain maturity in their prose and self-awareness as writers. Focus in this class is on development of the writer's literary voice and style to explore experience (family, culture, community, travel, health, and historical or personal history, for example) with emphasis on the creative use of setting, character, narrative action and arc, motif, symbol, and possible archetypal themes. Film (?) and text readings will be used as prompts, models, or jumping-off points for students to produce writing to be shared in a workshop setting. The course will involve intensive reading and writing. This course offers practice in writing a variety of prose forms. Stress is placed on developing the student's ability to order and structure material into its most effective form. Individual assignments will be written weekly over the semester and range from 500 to 2,000 words (course total of 5,000-5,500 words).

REQUIRED TEXTS

The only required reading is provided online (readings will be announced in class).

<http://mehta.disted.camosun.bc.ca/>

(Click on 250 link on top)

EVALUATION SCHEME

A+ = 90-100%	A = 85-89	A- = 80-84
B+ = 77-79	B = 73-76	B- = 70-72%
C+ = 65-69	C = 60-64	D = 50-59%
F = Below 50%	IN = Incomplete	

All papers will be give a numerical grade to reflect the value in the term's work. The mark will be based on organization, quality of ideas and support, style and grammar, according to the following criteria:

A Range (85 - 100%) Superior level of achievement - worth consulting.

exceptional insight into material or topic
detailed, significant discussion
effective organization for paper's purpose
fluent, error-free expression

B Range (70 - 84%) High level of achievement - worth keeping.

competent treatment of material or topic but less originality or perception than for A
full but not so detailed discussion as for A
organization contributing to sense but remaining workmanlike
expression free of errors

C+ (65 - 69%) More than satisfactory level of achievement - worth doing.

sound content, reasonably well organized
clear but somewhat mechanical organization
expression generally free of errors that confuse sense. May display content at the B or even A level but with more than one or two serious mechanical errors

C (60 - 64%) Sufficient level of achievement to proceed with next level – readable.

acceptable but commonplace content adequately supported
mechanical but generally coherent organization
adequate but sometimes confusing expression

D (50 - 59%) Minimum level of achievement for which credit is granted - worth reworking.

limited or misleading content with inadequate or inappropriate support
incomplete or confusing organization
frequent errors in expression that confuse sense

F (Below 50%) Minimum level not achieved - worth discarding.

inadequate or inaccurate content
incoherent organization
many errors in expression
basically, no apparent effort made in the paper at all

A word about grading standards: Merely fulfilling the terms of an assignment, and doing so in a competent, reasonable manner, is generally only enough for a grade in the B- range. A-grades will only be awarded when work demonstrates notable creativity, insight and excellence.

EVALUATION & ASSIGNMENTS

Your grade this semester will be based primarily on three main writing assignments (personal essay/memoir, critical review, reflective essay) and a group presentation.

1. 25%: Personal Essay/Memoir - This essay should link an experience relevant to a larger audience by connecting it to larger social concerns. Your primary source will be individual experience. (4-5 pages max.)
2. 25%: Criticism/Review - This essay will be an extended review of some (pop) cultural event: live or recorded music, film, theatre performance, book, lecture, a protest rally, food/restaurant, a sporting event, etc. Your goal will be to describe and evaluate the event. Your primary source will be "textual" in the broadest sense. (4-5 pages max.)
3. 25%: Reflective Essay - This essay should be a "philosophical" reflection on a general element or principle of life. Your writing should reflect on social, theoretical or literary issues and link personal, social, historical or theoretical texts. Your primary sources will be individual experience and textual evidence. (1000 words max.) Your essay should take on the guise of a feature article. This essay should be approached as if you were writing to submit to a magazine. Your primary sources will come from research: experiential, textual, and/or oral/interview(s). (4-5 pages words max.)
4. 25%: Presentation - This exercise requires students (in their respective groups) build an essay presentation from a single word. First, each group will choose one word - any word - to which they are particularly drawn, a word that resonates for them. Then the task is to build an essay collaboratively revolving around this single word. The direction of the presentation is open, but groups might wish to present the chronology of the project, work with personal memories triggered by the word, or provide some analytical, intellectual, philosophical study of the word. The goal of this exercise is to weave the word's broader application into a cogent, complex and meaningful presentation. The essay is not handed in – only the oral presentation is graded. Each group member must have equal speaking roles. (15 minutes max.)

Note: I suggest students keep a reading portfolio. Collect articles that are examples of the types of things you will write, keep a reading log/journal of notes on those readings as well as the readings that will be assigned in class. This will help you work through the assignments in the course.

COURSE POLICY

Participation:

-This course requires participation by class members, so it is important that you attend in order to peer edit and contribute to class discussions. Regular and prompt attendance is required. You are responsible for material you miss if you are absent. I do not respond to "what did I miss" queries via email.

Assignments:

-Assignments are mandatory and due according to the dates & times specified. Late work will not be accepted (except under extraordinary circumstances) and will receive a grade of 0 (zero).

-Do not e-mail assignments.

-Please keep a copy of all work - including material you hand in - until final marks have been posted.

Email Policy:

While I make every effort to check email regularly, I would appreciate at least 24 hours to respond to questions/problems.

Student Disabilities:

-I would like to hear from students who have a disability that may require some modification in my teaching so that arrangements may be made to make them feel more at ease in class.

Reading Others' Work:

Regularly in this class you can expect others to read your writing and you to read theirs. Doing so will enrich the course and help us learn from each other. I expect everyone to be respectful of their classmate's writing, to take it seriously, to offer suggestions for revision in a constructive manner.

Academic Honesty:

-I develop a sense for the style and syntax of your writing, and it is relatively clear when a written submission is not representative of your work. I also routinely use www.plagiarism.org to upload essays and check any suspected instances of plagiarism against sources on the Internet. Plagiarism is a serious offence. All offences will be reported and will result in a failing grade for the course. If you have any questions about source materials you are using, talk with me *before* turning in the assignment in question. **Students are assumed to be familiar with the "Academic Policies and Procedures" in the Camosun Calendar.**