

ENGLISH 250 DISTANCE EDUCATION: ADVANCED COMPOSITION

INSTRUCTOR: Raj Mehta

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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. 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

Readings are posted online (usually as external links). No formal textbook is required for purchase as such.

EVALUATION & ASSIGNMENTS

Your grade this semester will be based primarily on three main writing assignments (personal essay/memoir, critical review, reflective essay) and five journal postings (and responses) over the term. Let's look at each of these in a little more detail.

Journal Postings

Journal postings are made to the discussion board throughout the term.

Readings and Essays

There are required readings - all the external links in the weekly schedule. This is where your own discipline comes in. The whole course is self-directed - if you don't work well on your own, you don't belong in an online course! The readings are also meant to provide prose models for the required three essays (and one of the required readings of your choosing is meant to be a springboard for your final reflective essay) so please be forewarned, the more engaged and focused you are with the readings, the more likely you will be successful in this class.

1. 15%: Personal Essay/Memoir - This essay should link an experience relevant to a larger observational point about life. Your primary source will be individual experience (2-3 pages).
2. 20%: 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 just the item under review - no formal research is required (2-3 pages).
3. 25%: Reflective Essay - This essay should be a "philosophical" reflection of sorts – something argumentative. This paper should include some formal research, at least three sources, and formal in tone and focus(4-5 pages).
4. 30%: Journal Postings – You are required to post to the discussion board five responses to specific questions over the term. The posting give you a chance to both reflect on the required reading and either your writing practice or explorations in the course material each week. The journals are not formal – I do not grade these for language or

grammar. However, I presume much effort here so please do devote considerable time and effort to responding to the journal questions. Your journals give me a sense for how well you are keeping pace with the course material.

5. 10%: Participation - Active participation in discussions of the readings and course content is a requirement of this course. Work must be completed by the deadlines in courtesy to other students and to the instructor. You are expected to respond to at least 5 journal postings of another student over the term. Your responses are not to be curt or too cursory. Each response should be about a short paragraph in length.

EVALUATION

A+ = 95-100%	B- = 70-74%
A = 90-94	C+ = 65-69
A- = 85-89	C = 60-64
B+ = 80-84	D = 50-59%
B = 75-79	F = Below 50%
	IN = Incomplete, must be negotiated

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. As this is an online course, there are issues with inserting comments on uploaded documents. This is in part because of compatibility issues between platforms and versions of software, but also because there is no set standard for formatting comments online. As such, please note that my comments are usually itemized at the bottom of submitted assignments. If you require more specific feedback, please make an appointment to see me.

COURSE POLICY

Participation:

This course requires participation by class members with weekly postings and peer review work, so it is important that you follow the weekly requirements. Postings are required. Please avoid 'binge' postings – you are required to post according to the weekly schedule. Binge postings will not be credited for class participation marks. You are responsible for completing all of the course material.

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). Assignments are uploaded into the drop box online. Please note that you are expected to anticipate online and computer glitches. Please anticipate deadlines and note that exceptions will not be made for technical problems. Do not e-mail assignments. All assignments must be uploaded in the drop box. 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 up to two days to respond to questions/problems and often do not respond on weekends. PLEASE NOTE: I commit to the course as any in-class one. Hence I usually schedule two blocks of time each week to tend to student concerns and issues. Each block is usually the same as an in-class one.

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. 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.