

RHET 115–01 Entering Discourse Communities: Writing for College & Beyond–Fall, 2006

Professor: Mr. Podis King 139–Office Hrs: T-Th. 2:00-3:00 or by appointment

Writing Associate: Jared Glenn Conferences by appointment

How do I know what I think until I see what I say? —E.M. Forster

The word in language is half someone else's. —M. Bakhtin

Writing is rewriting. —Donald Murray

This course focuses on writing for college and for the world beyond. You will write a variety of nonfiction pieces, including personal essays and academic papers. You will be encouraged to try other modes, such as journalistic reviews, editorial pieces, lab reports, letters, or stories. We will emphasize the writing *process* (how to function as a writer) as well as the *product* (the qualities of a good paper). We will dispel harmful myths and will approach writing as a rewarding activity that benefits the writer, who *learns* by composing, and the reader, who is informed, enlightened, or entertained. We will be both writers and readers: that is, we will be writing for others and reading what others write for us.

When you enter the world of higher education, you get intensive exposure to various disciplines or fields. Each discipline or field can also be called a “discourse community.” Discourse communities are groups of people with their own ways of communicating to one another about topics in which they share an interest. They employ specialized terms and formats, writing in conventionalized genres that members of the group have come to expect. For example, biologists, literary theorists, and cognitive psychologists have all developed ways of writing that fall under the more general heading of academic discourse. Within academic discourse there is a lot of variation: Biologists may write lab reports, literary theorists may write speculative essays, and cognitive psychologists may write experimental studies or reviews of prior research. Beyond the boundaries of academia, we all participate in other discourse communities in which we may use forms such as letters, emails, personal essays, or journals. This course will help us to form a writer’s community to explore and to pursue the various discourses in which we participate.

I would like us to think of our writing, as much as possible, as real communication aimed at each other. We will treat writing as a vehicle for discovering and refining ideas, not merely a device for recording pre-existing knowledge. The course will include readings on the process of writing and essays on various topics, including discourse communities. There will be frequent writing assignments and conferences with the instructor to review written work. Most classes will be peer response workshops. There are several major themes that will inform the course:

1. The value of writing as a vehicle for *discovery and learning*. (Writing is often generative, not just expressive.)
2. The need for *revision* to clarify the writer's ongoing discoveries. (Revision lets us re-envision our work.)
3. The recognition that writing is *social and interactive*, not just individual. (Our creations are influenced by others.)
4. The importance of *context and situation* in forming a piece of writing. (Adapting to circumstances is essential.)
5. The crucial role of *reading* in the shaping of a text. (Our writing becomes other people’s reading.)
6. The link between *personal* and *academic* writing. (Often they are separate, but they can reinforce each other.)
7. The effects of a *diverse society* on writing and discourse. (Varied backgrounds yield diverse discourses.)

Writing Proficiency (WP) Credit. Students whose writing meets Oberlin’s proficiency standards by the end of the course can earn WP credit. However, WP credit is *not* automatically awarded for passing the course. If you wish to earn WP credit, let me know so we can discuss your progress. *At the end of the course, students interested in WP credit should submit a portfolio including their final research paper and three of their best revised essays.*

Classes and Conferences. Classes meet Tuesdays and Thursdays. In lieu of a third class session, I will hold a half-hour conference with you every other week to review your written work in a one-on-one format. (Conferences will begin in Week 2.) Classes will allow you to write for—and get advice from—your peers, and conferences will provide an opportunity for you to work individually with me. **(OVER)**

Important: If you have more than three unexcused absences during the semester, you will be penalized at least one letter grade in the final course evaluation. I am enforcing a strict attendance policy—not to be authoritarian or punitive, but to emphasize that *your presence in class is crucial to our work*. This will be a hands-on, participatory course in which you are expected to take an active role. If you are absent when it is your turn to present a draft, it will be impossible to conduct the session. If you are absent when you are expected to be part of the audience for a presentation, it will strain our efforts to hold an effective workshop. **So please make every effort to attend class.** If you must be absent, let me know. Also please be on time. Late arrivals are distracting and discourteous to your classmates, especially when they are leading workshops. Of course everyone has days when they are unavoidably delayed, but please take seriously your responsibility to be on time. All that said, I would prefer that you come late rather than not at all.

Writing Assignments. There will be one assignment in writing or rewriting weekly: either the draft of a new paper or a major revision of a previous one. Most papers should be 4–5 pages in length, except for the longer research paper (10–15pp) at the end of the course. I will hand out a new assignment sheet each week, but you should also do some revisions of previous papers. Major revisions may be done in place of new assignments. (You and I can discuss in our bi-weekly conference whether a particular revision is substantial enough to be counted as a new paper.)

Topics. Each week I will provide many topic options from which you can choose. You may also develop your own topics. If you want to work on a paper that is actually due in another course, I am happy for you to do so, and I will usually accept such assignments in place of the ones I give. However, please be sure to get permission from the instructor of the other course. **Note:** If you believe that you are a person who responds poorly to freedom of topic choice, let me know, and I will then dictate a topic that you **must** write on. Also, if you believe you need practice with writing academic discourse, please pick one of the academic options. As a last resort, I can “force” you to write on an academic topic, but I’d rather you took the plunge of your own free will.

Submitting Work. Papers must be submitted on time. All drafts and revisions should be word-processed. Please use double or 1.5 spacing for your papers. Also please attach a Cover Sheet to each paper, whether for peer response sessions, presentation workshops, or submission to me. I will hand out blank Cover Sheets with each new assignment.

Grading. This is a graded course, but, as much as possible, I would like you to put aside the pressures that come with grading to adopt a trial-and-error mentality and take risks that may help you improve your writing. Rather than dwell on grading, I hope we can concentrate on the tasks before us and draw inspiration from the challenges and rewards of writing: discovering, expressing and communicating ideas, solving problems, and informing, enlightening, and entertaining each other. To facilitate this approach, I use a form of what is usually called contract grading. If you (1) attend regularly, (2) participate in course activities with commitment, and (3) do all the required assignments at an acceptable level, you will earn a B. (I will be sure to tell you if a piece you have done is not acceptable, and we can talk in class about what is acceptable work.) If you do all the above and pursue your work with exceptional intensity and write very effective papers, you may earn a grade in the A range. If you don’t meet the contract, you will get a C, D, or F, depending on how much you depart from the contract (e.g., more than three unexcused absences costs you one letter grade). Rather than put grades on papers, I will discuss with you in conference where I think you stand regarding your grade and how you might maintain or improve your standing. Also, I will invite you to submit a final self-evaluation that I will consider as I determine course grades.

Textbooks: *Rethinking Writing* by Podis/Podis— Available on **ERes** (Password is RHET115)
The Norton Reader, 11th Ed., by Peterson/Brereton— Available at the Bookstore
Working with Student Writers by Podis/Podis— Available at the Bookstore
Online Resources for Writers: <http://www.oberlin.edu/rhetoric/students/online.html>

RHET 115-01 Schedule for First Module—Spring, 2006

WEEK 1

Tues., Sep. 5.....First Class Meeting: Check class registration and do introductions. Review of syllabus. Assign. #1 will be handed out. For next class read *Rethinking Writing*, pp. 1–17 (ERes—Password is RHET115) and do Assign. #1 (This assignment may be handwritten.)

Thurs., Sep. 7.....Bring your completed Assign. #1 for class discussion. I will ask you to sign up for a bi-weekly conference, and I will also hand out Assign. #2. For next class (Tues., 9/12), compose a draft of Assign. #2 and read *Rethinking Writing (RW)*, pp. 17–39 & 394–402. In *Working with Student Writers (WSW)*, read Chapter 3 (pp. 33–37).

WEEK 2

Tues., Sep. 12.....Bring a draft of Assign #2 to class. Today I will hand out the **Draft Presentation Schedule** for the first module (listing when people will present their papers to the whole class in a workshop format). In the first part of class today, we will go over the Guidelines for Response in *Rethinking Writing*, pp. 25–28. During the second part of class, please exchange your draft of #2 with a partner. After you get advice on your draft, revise it to submit at our next class (9/14).

Note: Individual conferences w/Mr. Podis begin this week for students in Sequence 1.

Thurs., Sep. 14.....Revised #2 due today. I will hand out Assign. #3. A draft of #3 is due for peer response Tue. 9/19. Main activity for today: Scheduled Draft Presentation to the class. For next week: *RW*, Ch. 2 & 200–208; *WSW*, Ch. 7 (73–83); *NR*: 1–9, 9–11 & 18–22.

WEEK 3

Tues., Sep. 19.....Bring a rough draft of Assign. #3 to class and exchange with a partner to read and respond to each other's work. Based on advice you receive, plan to revise #3 for submission at our next class.

Note: Individual conferences w/Mr. Podis begin this week for students in Sequence 2.

Thurs., Sep. 21.....Revised Assign. #3 due. Assign. #4 handed out. Bring a draft of Assign. #4 to class on Tues., Sep. 26 for peer response. Main activity for today: Scheduled Draft Presentation. For next week: *RW*: 74–95 & 406–408; *WSW*: Ch. 10 (107–116); *NR*: 32–41 & 442–448.

WEEK 4

Tues., Sep. 26.....**Peer Response Sessions** for Assign. #4. Read and respond to each other's drafts. Then plan to revise Assign. #4 based on the advice you receive and submit it in class Thurs., Sep. 28.

Note: Individual conferences w/Mr. Podis this week for students in Sequence 1.

Thurs., Sep. 28.....Submit revised Assign. #4. Assign. #5 handed out—draft of #5 due in class next Tues. (Oct. 3) for peer response. Main activity for today: Scheduled Draft Presentation. For next week: *RW*: 95–112 (**optional**: 493–506); *WSW*: Ch. 9 (95–100); *NR*: 74–79 & 82–87.

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WEEK 5

Tues., Oct. 3.....**Peer Response Sessions.** Bring a draft of Assign. #5 to class for peer response. Plan to revise the paper after you get feedback from your partner, and submit the paper in class Thurs., Oct. 5.

Note: Individual conferences w/Mr. Podis this week for students in Sequence 2.

Thurs., Oct. 5.....Revision of Assign. #5 due. Assign. #6 handed out. A draft of Assign. #6 is due in class on Tues, Mar. 14 for peer response.
Main activity for today: Scheduled Draft Presentation. For next week: *RW*, Ch. 4 and (optional) pp. 506–515; *WSW*, Ch. 16 (185–192); *NR*, 210–217 & 223–232.

WEEK 6

Tues., Oct. 10.....**Peer Response Sessions.** Bring your draft of Assign. #6 and plan to exchange with a partner. Then plan to revise to hand in at our next class, Thurs., Oct. 12.

Note: Individual conferences w/Mr. Podis this week for students in Sequence 1.

Thurs., Oct. 12.....Revision of Assign. #6 due. Assign. #7 handed out. A draft of Assign. #7 is due in class on Tues., Oct. 24 for peer response.
Main activity for today: Scheduled Draft Presentation.

WEEK 7

Week of Tues., Oct. 17 & Thurs., Oct. 19:

Fall Break—Our next class meeting will be Tuesday, Oct. 24. During break, in addition to working on your writing assignments, please reflect on your work for the first half of the course and on the strengths and weaknesses of our writing course. We can discuss your thoughts at the start of class on Tues., Oct. 24.