

Office of Interdisciplinary Studies
<http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/ois/>

2011 - 2012 *WRS 101: A3 (Fall Term)*
Exploring Writing

Instructor: Jon Gordon
Office: HC 4-104
Office Hours: Tues./Thurs. 3:30-5:00 p.m. *or by appointment*
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Time: 12:30-1:50 p.m.
Place: HC 4-42

Course Prerequisite: none

Course-based Ethics Approval in place regarding all research projects that involve human testing, questionnaires, etc.?

Yes No, not needed, no such projects involved

Community Service Learning component

Required Optional None

Past or Representative Evaluative Course Material available

Not Applicable

Course Description:

231.273 Writing Studies, WRS--Office of Interdisciplinary Studies, Faculty of Arts

WRS 101 Exploring Writing

OE3 (*fi 6*) (either term, 0-3s-0). This workshop course focuses on both the theory and practice of the writing process to help students experience firsthand how university writers enter into rich ongoing conversations by engaging with the words and ideas of others.

Exploring Writing: as the course title implies, WRS 101 will focus explicitly on writing and language use as the content of the course. Students will actively engage with both the theory and practice of writing. The course will combine both low-stakes discovery writing and high-stakes, polished, formal writing.

The Discovery Writing Premise: Writing is a powerful and unique mode of learning that encourages students to explore course material actively, to understand and remember difficult concepts, to organize their thinking, and to evaluate what and how they have learned. Discovery writing complements other forms of learning, enriching the learning process by providing students with a physical record of their inquiry and discovery throughout a course.

Course Objectives (condensed version):

1. to help you produce richer written material more quickly and easily and to use your writing to make connections and discoveries;

2. to help you become self-editing, able to ruthlessly scrutinize and reshape what you have written when necessary;
3. to help you make a clear distinction between the processes involved in #1 and #2 and to become more conscious of your own writing processes, trying out and thus becoming familiar with a range of strategies for producing coherent and effective prose in a wide variety of rhetorical situations (especially situations requiring academic writing of the sort you're expected to produce at a university).

Course Objectives (expanded version)—

- 1) Students will get repeated practice in writing as a mode of learning and thinking that not only expresses what they *already* know, but also helps them discover what they still *don't* know and *need* to know; such practice should also emphasize the role of responsible, engaged, substantive knowing not just as a motive for writing, but as a pre-condition for writing that can make a difference in the world.
- 2) Students will develop a bank of strategies to tackle problems at any stage of the writing process, from invention to composing to revision to proofreading.
- 3) Students will become more alert to the ways in which writing shapes and is shaped by culture, as well as to the implications of seeing writing as a process, developing the cognitive flexibility and tolerance of ambiguity that successful writing usually entails.
- 4) Students will have opportunities to produce writing they care about on subjects related to writing that matter to them, carrying certain projects to completion through a series of drafts and making a final product public.
- 5) Students will be introduced to key readings and debates in the field of Writing Studies, focusing in particular on writing process and language issues.
- 6) Students will learn to approach each new writing context confidently and effectively through frequent practice in analyzing and writing in a range of rhetorical situations, becoming alert to principles of discourse and genre variation across disciplines. In particular, they will experience how university writers enter into rich ongoing conversations by engaging with the words and ideas of others.
- 7) Students will be mentored in the following practices: giving and receiving productive feedback on drafts, working collaboratively with others, and producing final copy to deadline that meets or exceeds university standards for vocabulary, sentence fluency, organization, citation conventions, coherence, complexity, facility with the conventions of Standard Written English (SWE), and skillful handling of rhetorical grammar and punctuation choices.
- 8) Students will become self-aware as university writers by reflecting on their own (and others') writing processes, by assessing what works for them and what does not, and by making changes accordingly.

Required Texts:

Conversations about Writing: Eavesdropping, Inksbedding, and Joining In, by M. Elizabeth Sargent and Cornelia C. Paraskevas. Toronto: Thomson Nelson, 2005.

Spellcheckpluspro. You will be required to use this program on every final draft submitted in WRS 101. Purchase your license to use it at www.spellcheckpluspro.com. The cost is usually \$15 per year, but U of A students can get a special rate to cover all 4 years of their undergraduate programs (available at <http://spellcheckplus.com/promo/?pcode=uofa4>).

Your own writing will also be a key text in this course! You will occasionally be asked to make enough copies of a draft to give identical copies to every member of your editing group—and to me—for workshopping. Set aside now the necessary funds for photocopying. Double-sided copies are OK; but make sure any paper drafts are **double-spaced**, are in normal 12-point font, and **have**

margins allowing room for comments. You will need always to have at least one spare ink cartridge on hand if you use your own printer, so that your original print-outs can produce clear, dark, readable copies on time. Work to be handed in to me or to your editing group in class **cannot be faxed or e-mailed: YOU must do the printing and photocopying of your own work outside of class.** Also, no collating or stapling is to be done during class; manuscripts must be ready to be circulated and/or turned in at the **beginning** of the appropriate class. Plan accordingly.

Course Requirements:

This course functions as a workshop. Thus, you will be doing a lot of group work and collaborative work, and your absences will affect not just you but other students in the class. Other students will be counting on you for thoughtful, timely feedback on their drafts and for editing help; writing workshops and conferences will only work to the extent that you are responsible to each other as colleagues. Further, since this course teaches strategies and processes, classes will be considered labs that cannot adequately be made up by copying the notes of someone who did attend. A process or strategy can be learned only through practice, by being experienced, and each assignment and each class you miss will be an experience of the process or strategy that you did not have. **Note: WRS 101 has no final exam.**

Course contract: Students are **guaranteed at least a B-** for their term mark if they:

1. are active learners and make genuine efforts to help others learn and to help the class go better (possible ways to do this include helping to bring out the thinking of others, especially people who are not being heard; remembering that an effective method of learning something is teaching it to someone else; listening well to others; setting an example of being open, honest, patient, and tactful in class; sharing your thoughts and your writing freely, but without hogging the floor; helping group members work better together);
2. complete all assigned readings on time, revealing in inksheds and in class discussion a detailed awareness of and engagement with the argument, purpose, and complexities of each (in the absence of exams, the instructor can assess each student's understanding of the course readings only from discussions, inksheds, inkshed reports, and Paper #2)
3. meet due dates for all assignments, including paper drafts, inksheds, process writing, and an annotated bibliography for Paper #2;
4. complete and submit on time 2 inkshed reports, when it's their turn to do so (collecting, reading and responding to the inksheds written by their group members and synthesizing this information in a brief inkshed report and/or presentation to the class);
5. participate in **all** in-class exercises and activities, including completion of the Writing Strategies Inventory at the beginning and end of the course;
6. give thoughtful peer feedback during class workshops and work faithfully with their group on other collaborative tasks (e.g., sharing papers, commenting on drafts, proofreading);
7. do the best work possible at each stage of the writing process, including sustaining effort and investment on each draft, making substantive revisions when the assignment is to revise (i.e., extending or changing the thinking or organization, not just editing or touching up);
8. copyedit final drafts of formal papers as well as the metacognitive cover letter for the portfolio until these are virtually free of surface problems—that is, until they conform to the conventions of standard written English (SWE); final drafts must be run through **SpellcheckplusPro** and/or *Editor* and proofread by a partner **in class**;

9. attend 2 scheduled conferences with your proofreading partner and the instructor to discuss drafts, posting a detailed reflection on and summary of the conference within 24 hours to the class Moodle site (a template will be provided for this assignment);
10. submit a **complete** final portfolio on time;
11. miss no more than 1/10th of course sessions (given the number of scheduled class meetings, this means no more than 2.5 classes; being late or leaving early can add up over time to one full class missed, with 30 minutes counting as .4).

Grades higher than B- :

Earning **above** a B- for term work depends, of course, on the **quality** of work done during the term. Excellent work exceeding what is required to satisfy the basic contract will start moving the term grade above B- as long as all the terms of the course contract above have been met.

Grades lower than B- :

I hope no one will aim for these grades. The quickest way to slide to a C, D, or F is to miss in-class writing or collaborative work or to show up without assignments (**remember, when drafts are due, they don't have to be wonderful drafts—they just have to exist so your group can read them and work with them in class**). Completing work **on time** is crucial (in other words, you can't scramble at the last minute and turn in late work at the end of term; doing so would place unfair expectations on the teacher and on your colleagues in class, and in most cases late work can no longer serve its original purpose, as—for instance—feedback on a group member's paper given only AFTER the final revision of the paper has been submitted). Note the terms of the contract carefully; once you are no longer covered by the safety net of the contract, you're on your own. If you have missed classes and are behind in your work, please stay in touch with me about your chances of passing the course. If you miss more than 1/5 of the course meetings, given the workshop nature of this course, you simply have not taken the course and should not expect to receive credit for it.

The course contract system is meant to allow a margin of safety for those who are uneasy about writing—especially since no one's writing ever improves much if they're constantly worried about failing. That is, **the course contract system rewards certain disciplined behaviours that can be learned and practiced no matter what your level of writing skill might be**. Whether or not a student yet feels confident and expert as an academic writer, that student can still be recognized for things that he or she *can* control: reading the assigned texts, writing regularly about them in an attempt to understand them better, exploring the subject matter of the course with energy and concentration, showing up to participate actively in workshop sessions, meeting deadlines, trying out new ways of writing, putting papers through an extensive drafting and revision process, responding to the drafts of others, and reflecting in a convincing, detailed way on his or her own writing processes.

Happily, as it turns out, these are also behaviours that stand all of us in good stead over a lifetime of writing, not just in university but also in our personal lives and in the workplace. In other words, you may not produce in this course the best paper ever written, but you will learn a range of practices and strategies that can help you get writing done and help you improve your writing over the years ahead. And you might even feel able to take some risks with your writing and have fun doing so. As one student put it, in an excellent essay on contract grading (written by Peter Elbow and Jane Danielewicz, an essay to which this syllabus is indebted), "I saw it [the contract] as the netting beneath the high wire as I walked across the tightrope, striving to make an A. I knew that if I fell, the netting would catch me."

Elbow and Danielewicz say this to their students: "This contract will make you work hard, but still we invite you to relax. Give yourself a break and let this be a course where you put aside your worries about your grade or about what kind of writing we like. Don't panic or be anxious; just do the work. Learn to please yourself.

Decide that a B- is fine. If you get an A, let it arrive as a bonus because your pleasure at working towards *your* goals made your writing take off.”

If for any reason the instructor believes that your writing difficulties would actually prevent you from meeting the terms of the contract, no matter how hard you worked at fulfilling all the other terms of the contract, the instructor will, by the end of the first month of classes, suggest that you might need to drop the course and take another preparatory course instead.

Please note that under a course contract system it is quite possible to fail, even with high quality individual pieces of writing and an excellent portfolio, **if other terms of the contract are not met**. In general, students who earn A's make it impossible—by their level of engagement with the course, the quality of their writing, their mastery of the material, and their more than meeting the terms of the contract—for the instructor to consider any other grade.



Inksheds and inkshed reports:

These are ungraded but required. Inksheds are meant to give everyone a safe space to work on their writing fluency, to use writing-to-learn, and to voice questions, puzzlements, and insights about assigned readings. However, the substance and quality of inksheds overall during the term can affect the course grade significantly (occasionally inksheds receive a $\sqrt{+}$ if they're particularly strong, a $\sqrt{-}$ if they're weak or skimpy—and these exceptions are consistently recorded). If an inkshed is simply unacceptable, however (say, because it doesn't represent **at least 15 minutes of nonstop writing** or it doesn't in fact focus on the assigned reading or question), it will be counted as incomplete and will need to be rewritten for the student to stay on contract. Pay particular attention to feedback on your first few inksheds: your instructor will let you know if they are lacking and how they will need to improve if you're to meet the course contract. Note that all of your inksheds should be kept throughout the course, organized chronologically. You will be asked to include your three best inksheds in your final portfolio. Your inksheds should serve as a resource for writing your formal papers, for creating an annotated bibliography, and for your learning.

Inkshed reports will be discussed in detail on September 20th. They are intended to give students the opportunity to see the type of writing other students produce in their inksheds, to practice responding to each other's writing, and to build a supportive writing community in the class.

Major Papers:

Individual papers, although they will go through an extensive drafting process and will certainly receive lots of commentary and feedback as well as suggestions for further revision, **will not be graded**. They will usually, like inksheds, be entered in the course record book simply as satisfactorily completed (checked off), although occasionally they'll receive a $\sqrt{+}$ if they're particularly strong, a $\sqrt{-}$ if they're weak or skimpy, and a zero if they don't meet the assigned criteria at all (there will be no mystery about these criteria: they will vary slightly for each paper and will be distributed and discussed in class with each paper assignment).

Overall evaluation of this component of the course will also be affected by evidence that you have actively explored a range of strategies for writing and revision (such as drafts submitted on time with feedback from group members and with evidence of substantive revision). Conferences will be held to discuss Papers #1 and #2 (proofreading partners will attend each conference together); within 24-hours after your conference, you'll need to upload to Moodle an inkshed summarizing the feedback you received, detailing the quick edits you plan to make before posting the paper to the class website and describing the substantive revisions you *would* make if you were to choose that paper for the major revision in your portfolio.

1) **Paper #1—Interview.** See course schedule for multiple due dates

Description: You'll conduct an interview with someone you know, either professionally or personally, about his/her writing experiences and processes (see p. 105, #1, in the text). You will then shape the information you've collected into whatever prose form best conveys what you've discovered, as well as the voice of your interviewee.

2) **Paper #2: Entering the conversation about writing.** See course schedule for multiple due dates.

Description: This assignment asks you to build on some element of your conversation about writing from your interview essay by connecting it to the texts we read in WRS 101. That conversation includes all the readings from the course anthology as well as all the writing done by all of us this term. Your voice needs to enter into conversation with 3-5 other voices plus that of your interviewee: your voice cannot drown out or misrepresent theirs, and—equally important—their voices cannot drown out your own. This paper asks you to figure out a way to add something significant, no matter how small, to the ongoing conversation about writing. This paper requires an annotated bibliography and evidence of your ability to work effectively with sources (other voices), using the MLA (Modern Language Association) citation format.

Course Portfolio:

There are no midterms or final exams in WRS 101. On December 6th, you will be asked to submit a portfolio that will include copies of Paper #1 and #2, one of which (your choice) you will have revised substantially. You'll also be asked to include all exploratory writing, early drafts, and feedback from WRS 101 colleagues for both essays.

The portfolio will also contain copies of the responses written after your conferences, as well as your three best inksheds. A 2-page metacognitive cover letter explaining your selection and ordering of materials, reflecting on your development as a writer, and analyzing in detail the process you went through to create and revise Paper X, will open the portfolio.

Starting on November 29th class time will be devoted to preparing the portfolio, especially to drafting the cover letter. More information, as well as a detailed checklist, will be distributed in November. Your entire portfolio will receive one overall grade (A-F) from another professor (Dr. X). This score will give you information about how your writing would be evaluated by a writing expert who does not know you personally; however, since you are covered by the course contract, it will not unduly influence your final term mark. I will do my very best as your writing coach to help you produce the strongest portfolio you possibly can to help you meet or even exceed the expectations of this demanding outside reader.

NOTE: *Don't discard any writing you do or feedback you receive during the term until you have your final term mark. Also, keep copies of all drafts (electronic and hard copy).*

Required Notes:

“Policy about course outlines can be found in Section 23.4(2) of the University calendar.” (GFC 29 SEP 2003) “The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at www.ualberta.ca/secretariat/appeals.htm) and avoid any behaviour which could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University.” (GFC 29 SEP 2003)

☛ ***Plagiarism and Cheating:***

All students should consult the “Truth-In-Education” handbook or Website (<http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/TIE/>) regarding the definitions of **plagiarism** and its consequences when detected.

☛ ***Attendance, Absences, and Missed Grade Components:***

Significant changes have been made to regulations regarding the requirement of medical documentation to support absence from missed work and exams. Students are no longer required to present medical documentation to support absence due to illness. Students may present a Medical Declaration Form for Students

(http://www.foa.ualberta.ca/Undergraduate_Programs/Student_Services/Forms%20Cabinet.aspx) in lieu.

Regular daily attendance is essential for optimal performance in any course. In cases of potentially excusable absences due to illness or domestic affliction, notify your instructor by e-mail within two days. Regarding absences that may be excusable and procedures for addressing course components missed as a result, consult sections 23.4.2 and 23.4.3 of the University Calendar. Be aware that unexcused absences will result in partial or total loss of the grade for the “attendance and participation” component(s) of a course, as well as for any assignments that are not handed-in or completed as a result.

As explained above, in WRS 101 active participation is a required element of the course contract. Absenteeism will make it impossible to satisfy the terms of the contract and result in a grade lower than B- regardless of the quality of written work.

☛ ***Deferred Final Examinations:***

Not Applicable

☛ ***Policy for Late Assignments:***

Completion of assignments on-time is a contract requirement. Late submission of assignments will prevent satisfaction of the terms of the contract and result in an overall grade of less than B-. Because the final portfolios are marked on a tight schedule by someone other than the instructor late portfolios cannot be accepted.

Useful Links

- An important webpage for all students that links to everything related to Writing@Uof A—
<http://www.writing.ualberta.ca/>
- A brochure about WRS 101 go to the following site and follow the link—
<http://www.ois.ualberta.ca/nav01.cfm?nav01=89519>

Schedule of Events (Subject to Change)

September 8 Introductions
 Syllabus and Course Contract
 Writing Strategies Inventory

- September 13 “A Letter to Students Using this Book”; Conversation 3: Exploratory Writing and Invention, “Introduction”; Duncan Carter “Five Myths About Writing”; Nancy Sommers “The Novice as Expert: Writing the Freshman Year” (link on Moodle)
- September 15 Cheryl Glenn “Understanding the Rhetorical Situation” from *Entering the Conversation* (Moodle) and Maxine Hairston, from “The Winds of Change”
Inkshed Due
Essay #1 Interview/Research Subject and Schedule Due
- September 20 Perl Guidelines Exercise
Inkshed Due
Inkshed Response/Report Model
- September 22 Conversation 2: Reflecting on the Writing Process, “Introduction”; Gail Godwin, “The Watcher at the Gates”; Kim Stafford, “My Father’s Place”; Sondra Perl, “Guidelines for Composing”;
Inkshed Report
Creative Non-fiction Paragraph Due
- September 27 Conversation 1: Life Without Language “Introduction”; Malcolm X, “Saved”; June Callwood, “Why Canada has to Beat Its Literacy Problem”;
Response to Perl Guidelines (“Process Inkshed”) Due
Interview Notes Due
- September 29 Conversation 7: Audience, Evaluation, and Response, “Introduction”; M. Elizabeth Sargent, “Feedback Sheets”;
Inkshed Report on Perl Guidelines Responses
Essay #1 Interview Drafts Due
- October 4 Peter Elbow, “Ranking, Evaluating, and Liking”; Margaret Atwood, from “Communion—Nobody to Nobody”;
Inkshed Due
- October 6 Conversation 6: Organization and Genre, “Introduction”;
Inkshed Report
- October 11 Rick McConnell, “Beginning to Understand the Beginning”; Robert Root, “This is What the Spaces Say”; Mary Paumier Jones, “Meander”;
Inkshed Due
- October 13 **Essay #1 Drafts Due**
Proofreading
Sign up for conferences
Inkshed Report
- October 18 Conferences
- October 20 Conferences
- October 25 Conversation 5: The Grammar-as-Style Debate, “Introduction”; Stephen Pinker, from “The Language Mavens”; Lewis Thomas, “Notes on Punctuation”;
Essay #1 Draft Posted to Moodle Due

- October 27 Essay #2 Exploratory Loop Writing
Inkshed Due
- November 1 Conversation 4: The Academic Writing Debate, “Introduction”; Carolyn Matalene,
“Experience as Evidence”;
Inkshed Report
Annotated Bibliography Entries Posted to Moodle Due
- November 3 Peter Elbow and David Bartholomae, “Two Voice in a Crucial Debate”
Loop Writing Inkshed Responses Due
- November 8 Conversation 8: Separating Revision from Proofreading, “Introduction”;
Peer Review
Essay #2 Drafts Due
Inkshed Report
- November 10 Fall Term Break
- November 15 Nancy Sommers, “Revision Strategies”; Donald Murray, “Internal Revision”;
Inkshed Report
- November 17 M. Elizabeth Sargent, “Preparing Final Copy”;
Inkshed Due
Proofreading
Sign up for conferences
Essay #2 Drafts Due
- November 22 Conferences
- November 24 Writing Strategies Inventory
- November 29 Drafting Cover Letter
Inkshed Due
Essay #2 Draft Posted to Moodle Due
- December 1 Inkshed Report
Proofing Final Cover Letter
- December 6 **Final Portolio Due**
Final Revision and Cover Letter posted to Moodle
- December 13 Return Final Portfolios (HC 4-42 between 9 a.m and 6:30 p.m.)