ENGLISH 3680: ADVANCED ESSAY WRITING: STYLE AND STYLES IN PROSE
Baruch College, January 2016
Classroom: VC 4-212
Professor Cheryl C. Smith
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Email: cheryl.smith@baruch.cuny.edu (the best way to reach me)
Office Hours: By appointment

Readings and Tech Policy

Most course readings will be available via the Class Schedule page on our class blog. Where indicated, you must print out and bring the day’s readings to class. We will be working on close reading and you need the text in front of you whenever possible. I won't allow phones during class, so plan accordingly. Texting and surfing the Internet during our limited class time will drive me crazy, so please don’t do it. Most of the required readings are short and can easily be printed out.

Course Description

This course focuses on the craft of prose writing and the art of style. Through assigned readings and class discussions; lessons on style; workshopping of student writing; and intensive drafting and revision you’ll experiment with an array of stylistic options. In the process, you'll discover methods for using language more consciously for different purposes, effects, and audiences. You’ll learn how to avoid wordiness and write with greater impact; develop a sense of your writer’s voice in the many registers in which it operates; employ a variety of sentence types and patterns, as well as creative paragraphing and sectioning, to achieve specific ends; use grammatical and mechanical devices (like semicolons and m-dashes, sentence fragments and one-sentence paragraphs, and specific sentence structures) to evolve and control a sense of rhythm; study how the sounds of words and their associations can enhance vividness; and gain appreciation for the process of revision and its opportunities. As you become skilled at using the writing methods we discuss, you’ll develop both a sense of your own style and a repertoire of writer’s tools to draw from in a variety of writing occasions.

This is a HYBRID class, which means we meet together 50% of the time and the other 50% of class time is realized remotely in digital platforms, including on our class blog and a CommentPress site where you will post your writing-in-progress and get and give feedback. You will need regular and reliable Internet access to participate in this class, familiarity with Blogs@Baruch, and the ability to work independently and meet deadlines. Since this is a compressed January, writing, and hybrid course, you will not be able to pass the class if you fall behind on the assignments.

Course Requirements

Writing is the central requirement for this course. You’ll write short assignments in and out of class (mostly as 1-2 paragraph blog posts) and three drafts as you develop one polished essay. You will also provide detailed feedback on classmates’ work according to prompts provided by the professor.

Peer Feedback and Workshops: You’ll be put into writing groups with classmates and you will post essay drafts to exchange feedback with writing group members. You may also meet with your writing group or with the professor (individually or in your groups) to discuss ongoing revisions of your work. Please note that up to two meetings may take place outside of class time; students are asked to be flexible in order to make themselves available for 1-2 meetings outside of class.
Attendance and Participation: In hybrid courses as well as intensive writing seminars, attendance and active, informed participation are critical to your success. I want to hear from you in class; in order for that to happen, you (obviously) have to be in class and complete the assignments. Please refer to the Grading Overview for information about how missing class impacts your course grade. I do not excuse absences. I understand there may be valid reasons for missing class, but if you know you will have to miss more than 1 of our 9 Face-to-face class meetings, you should seriously consider dropping the class. You are responsible for handing in, on time, any work assigned or due during your absence.

Class will begin and end at the scheduled time. Since late arrivals and early departures are very disruptive, every two late arrivals or early departures will count as one absence. Again, see the Grading Overview for more information.

Grading: I want you to take risks and experiment with your writing, with the understanding that some risks and experiments will yield less-than-perfect results; for this reason, your writing will not be graded. Rather, your grade will be calculated on a point system. As long as you turn in assignments on time (including blog posts, complete essay drafts with cover letters, and review of your writing group members’ drafts), you’ll earn the full points possible for the assignment. Though I won’t grade your writing, I’ll provide feedback pointing out what is and is not working and offering suggestions for revision. If your writing “flops,” I’ll help you figure out why so you can improve, but you’ll still get full credit. (Everyone’s writing flops sometimes, especially when you’re willing to take risks and try something new, which is the best way to improve.) See the Grading Overview, which outlines the point system on which your course grade will be based.

Plagiarism: I expect you to be familiar with and follow the academic principles regarding plagiarism. If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to:

1. Submitting essays or portions of essays written by other people, including well-intentioned friends and family.
2. Failing to document paraphrases, ideas, or verbatim phrases taken from outside sources.
3. Collaborating on an assignment without the explicit permission of the professor.
4. Submitting an essay written for one course to another course without the explicit permission of both professors. You should write new and original essays for this course. I will not accept work that you have previously written for another course.
5. Submitting work as your own that has been purchased or copied from a paper preparation service or web site.

Any work submitted to me that has been plagiarized will receive a failing grade and be reported to the dean. As this is a writing class and author integrity is crucial to the mission of the course, any event of plagiarism will most likely result in a failing course grade.

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CLASS SCHEDULE

Unless otherwise noted, readings are available on the blog. Please print out readings where indicated.

Week 1: Voice and Vivid Writing

Mon Jan 4  Voice and Tone: What’s the Difference?
- Watch Ta-Nehisi Coates video on Writing
- Discuss Strunk and White, The Elements of Style, Chapter V (pp 64-79) *(print this reading out)* and Damon Young, “President Obama’s ‘Folks Wanna Pop Off’ Is the Blackest Thing That Ever Happened This Week”

Tue Jan 5  Voice, Time, and Memory
- Discuss Beth Kephart, “And There’s Your Mother, Calling Out to You” and Langston Hughes, “Salvation” *(print this reading out)*
- Intro to our Class Writing Forum in CommentPress

Wed Jan 6  Attitude, Anecdote, and Reflection
- Discuss Sherman Alexie, “Somebody Else’s Genocide” and Ira Glass on Storytelling, Part 1
- Set up Essay 1 review groups

Thu Jan 7
- Blog Post 1 due by 12 pm on our course blog main page (see my post with instructions on posting to the blog)
- Work on your essay draft

Fri Jan 8
- Draft 1 with cover letter due by 9pm to the English 3680 Student Writing Forum AND emailed as an attachment to Cheryl.smith@baruch.cuny.edu with the subject line ENG 3680 Draft 1

Sun Jan 10
- Comments on your writing group members’ drafts due on the Forum by 12pm. Find their drafts by clicking on their names on the Table of Contents to the left of the Forum, then click on their post, "Draft 1."
- Read your feedback on Draft 1 and begin revising!

Week 2: Vivid Writing and Rhythm

Mon Jan 11  Word Choice, Sentence Boundaries, and Revising for Rhythm and Vividness
- Workshop Draft 1; everyone bring two hard copies of your latest draft to class
- Discuss Elements of Style, chapters 1 and 2 (pp 13-40) *(print this reading out)*
- Keep revising

Tue Jan 12  Show, don’t Tell; Metaphor; Sectioning
- Discuss James Baldwin, “Notes of a Native Son” *(print this reading out)* and Lisa Ohlen Harris, “Writing the Sharp Edges of Grief”
- Blog Post 2 due by 7pm on our course blog main page
Wed Jan 13  
**Pacing; Line and Paragraph Breaks**
- Discuss Gay Talese, “Frank Sinatra Has a Cold.” Read up to the end of the scene with Harlan Ellison, which ends “The assistant manager nodded, and walked back to his office.”
- Read Gessner, ”Don’t Write Scenes”

Thu Jan 14
- **Blog Post 3 due by 12pm on our course blog main page**
- Watch Ira Glass on Storytelling, Part 2
- Read Annie Lamot, “Shitty First Drafts”
- Keep working on your Draft 2

Fri Jan 15
- **Draft 2 with cover letter due by 9pm to the Student Writing Forum AND emailed as an attachment to Cheryl.smith@baruch.cuny.edu with the subject line ENG 3680 Draft 2**

Sun Jan 17
- Comments on your writing group members’ drafts due on the Forum by 9pm

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**Week 3: Rhythm and Revision**

Mon Jan 18  
**No Class; MLK Day**

Tue Jan 19  
**Rhythm and Revision**
- Workshop Draft 2; everyone bring one hard copy of your latest draft to class
- Discuss Kate Carroll de Gutes, “Can You Hear Me Now?”

Wed Jan 20
- Draft Workshop continued
- Discuss Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Letter to My Son”

Thu Jan 21
- **Draft 3 due by 12pm to the Student Writing Forum**

Fri Jan 22
- Comments on your writing group members’ drafts due on the Forum by 12pm

Mon Jan 25 (Final Exam)
- Final Class Reading
- **Revised Essay with Final Cover Letter and additional materials TBA: due in hardcopy in class**