

Expo E-39: Advanced Essay Writing
Harvard University Division of Continuing Education
Spring 2016: Tuesdays 7:40-9:40 (Course #24533)
Sever Hall room 204

Instructor: Chris Walsh

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Overview: This course is aimed to help students who are ambitious about cultivating their voices and their authority as writers. We will do so by reading essays both historical and contemporary, by meeting essayists and editors, and, most importantly, by writing essays of our own.

Reading Assignments: I have selected several essays for us to read the first few weeks. After that, we will also be reading the work of the writers who will be visiting us. Most of the rest of the reading will be determined by the class. On the schedule at the end of this syllabus there are blank spots beginning the fourth week. These will soon be filled in on the left with your names and on the right with the titles of essays you will choose from the course anthologies. On the days your name appears, you and I will lead discussion of the essays you have chosen for the class to read, paying particular attention to what the essay has to teach us in our own work. We will, in other words, read as writers.

Writing Assignments: You will be well prepared to help lead discussion of the essays you chose, for the first paper assignment requires you to write about them. The second assignment requires you to write an emulation in which you follow (more or less) the structure of some model essay but give it an entirely new content. The final essay will be an independent project to be undertaken in consultation with me. It will be the longest of the papers you write, though some may wish to fulfill the assignment by writing an assemblage of shorter pieces. The essay is a famously commodious form; personal, academic, humorous, and editorial essays are just a few of its incarnations, and of course these subgenres often mix with each other; new media forms such as the blog also can be essayistic. After the first assignment, I have not specified the exact kinds of essays you will write, but I will of course set standards of quantity and quality. The assignment descriptions to be provided will specify length requirements, and your work will be graded on its substance and style. I will comment on drafts of each paper before you turn the final version in, and you will also benefit from the feedback of your classmates.

Participation—that is, regular attendance as well as thorough preparation for and full engagement in class discussions—is crucial not only to your success in this seminar, but to the success of the seminar as a whole. Your classmates and I will depend on you to come to class on time and well prepared. Please complete each assigned reading in its entirety by the class for which it is assigned. You are also expected to revise drafts thoroughly and to be committed to the peer review process, showing respect for your classmates and the academic setting. Except at certain expressed times or by special arrangement, the use of laptops and other electronic communication devices is prohibited; so is eating in class. Official program policy states that, “because courses proceed by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. If you are absent without medical excuse more than twice, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and failed.” Please email me if you’re going to miss class or be late.

Three essays (preceded by drafts and conferences) will account for your final grade: Essay #1 is worth twenty percent (20%); Essay #2 thirty-five percent (35%); and Essay #3 forty-five percent (45%). Papers are due at the beginning of class on the dates noted on the schedule. Half a grade will be deducted if a student brings a paper late to class on the due date; a full-grade penalty will be assessed for each day a paper is late; papers not turned in within three days of the due date are assigned a grade of zero. Late final papers cannot be accepted. Here is the official program policy on the completion of assignments:

Because your writing course is a planned sequence of writing, you must write all of the assignments to pass the course and you must write them within the schedule of the course—not in the last few days of the summer term after you have fallen behind. If you fail to submit work when it is due, you will receive [in addition to the grading penalty noted above] a letter from [me] reminding you of these requirements. The letter will specify the new due date by which you must submit the late work. If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the piece of writing by this new due date, you are eligible to be excluded from the course and failed.

Grading standards will be distributed in class. They reflect my expectation that students have already mastered the fundamentals of grammar (though we will review grammatical matters as they come up in your writing). The grading standards will remain the same over the course of the semester, but assignments will become more challenging in both complexity and length.

Formatting: Unless otherwise noted, all assignments must be submitted in 12-point typeface, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. The first page should include your name, the date, the course number, and the instructors' names. The last page should specify the works cited. Always number your pages and staple them together. Please keep a copy of drafts of all work that you submit. No electronic submission without permission.

Required Reading

Please purchase the following texts, available at the Harvard Coop, textbook department:

Leah Hager Cohen, *I Don't Know: In Praise of Admitting Ignorance Except When You Shouldn't* (Riverhead, 2013).

Ariel Levy, ed., *The Best American Essays 2015* (Houghton Mifflin, 2015).

Philip Lopate, ed., *The Art of the Personal Essay* (Anchor Books, 1997).

David Foster Wallace, *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays* (Back Bay Books, 2007).

Joseph M. Williams, *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace*, 4th ed. (Longman)

Other documents will be distributed in class and in some cases posted on the class canvas site: <https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/8124>

You should also have a good grammar reference and a good dictionary.

Harvard has a helpful website on Writing with Sources:

<http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k70847&pageid=icb.page357682>

The following two websites may also be useful for matters of grammar and citation:

http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/write/writesite/writing_home.aspx

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

Outside of Class Communications and Assistance

We will meet for individual conferences and I am also happy to communicate via e-mail. I will usually respond within 48 hours. Please note that other than drafts we discuss in workshop, I will not read documents you email me; I will however be glad to talk about them in person. You should also know that the Extension School Writing Center, located in the Grossman Library, has tutors available to help you with your essays for this and every other Extension School Course. I encourage you to pay a visit. For information and to make an appointment call (617)495-4163 or visit the website:
<http://www.extension.harvard.edu/resources/writing-center>

Statement on Plagiarism

All students are expected to observe Harvard University rules regarding all forms of academic honesty, including, of course, rules prohibiting plagiarism, which the Summer School Student Handbook defines as follows:

Plagiarism is the theft of someone else's ideas and work. It is the incorporation of facts, ideas, or specific language that are not common knowledge, are taken from another source, and are not properly cited. Whether a student copies verbatim or simply rephrases the ideas of another without properly acknowledging the source, the theft is the same.... In the preparation of work submitted to meet course, program, or school requirements, whether a draft or a final version of a paper, project, take-home exam, computer program, application essay, oral presentation, or other work, students must take great care to distinguish their own ideas and language from information derived from sources. Sources include published and unpublished primary and secondary materials, the Internet, and information and opinions of other people.

SCHEDULE

The following is subject to change. Writing and reading assignments should be completed by the beginning of class on the day noted. The blank spots on the schedule below will be filled in with your names and the titles of the essays you choose from the course anthologies.

Unit I _____

January 26

In-class writing diagnostic; Hazlitt, "On the Periodical Essayists"; Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"; Emerson, "Self-Reliance" (excerpt); Saro-Wiwa, "Final Statement" (all handouts)

February 2

Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"; Woolf, "The Death of the Moth"; *Style*, Preface and Lesson 1; Wallace, "Authority and American Usage"

Introductory Assignments W1, W2, W3 due

February 9

Borges, "Blindness"; Waller, "On Borges' Blindness and My Own Failing Eyes"; White, "The Ring of Time,"; Sear, "An Annotated 'Ring of Time'"; Baldwin, "Notes of a Native Son"; *Style*, Lessons 2 and 9

Draft of Essay #1 due

February 16

Style, Lesson 3

Final Version of Essay #1 due

Lopate, Introduction to *The Art of the Personal Essay*

February 23

_____ (as noted, these blanks to be filled in with your names and titles of essays you choose for the class to read)

Essay #2 first stage due

March 1

Style, Lesson 4

March 8

Complete draft of essay #2 due

SPRING BREAK: no class on March 15

March 22

Leah Hager Cohen, *I Don't Know*

March 29

Style, Lesson 6

Final version of Essay #2 due

April 5

Final Project Plan due

April 12

Style, Lesson 7

April 19

Style, Lesson 8

April 26

Style, Lesson 9 (revisited)

Essay #3 complete draft due

May 3

Style, Lesson 10

Final Class meeting

Essay #3 complete revised draft due

**May 10: No class: Final Version of Essay #3 emailed to me at
crobertwalsh@gmail.com**
