

Writing About Travel

ENWR 1510, Section 35
Bryan Hall 330
TR 8:00-9:15

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Office hours: Tues 9:30-11:30
at Alderman Café or by appointment

Course Description

ENWR 1510 is a course on academic writing. It is intended to develop students' abilities to write in the academic contexts they are likely to encounter in college. While different departments and disciplines obviously require students to write in different ways, writers in all fields must make critical inquiries into what they study. They research, observe, argue, revise and present – and writing is crucial to every step of this process. Persuasive, articulate, and vivid writing is a technical skill for life. In this course we will learn to better articulate and justify arguments in our own writing, as well as how gainfully revise these arguments after drafting them. We will also learn to examine and respond to the writing of others. By the end of this course, each student will have produced around 20 pages of thoroughly revised pages.

Topic: Writing (and Reading) about Travel

This section of ENWR 1510 will focus on writing concerned with travel in a broad sense. By this I mean not only traveling across the borders between states or countries, but borders, boundaries, and meaningful distances of all kinds. We will read great examples of traditional travel writing as well as writing about less conventional kinds of travel. These writings will come in a variety of genres, from short stories and stand-up routines to critical theory, anthropological studies, and Hollywood blockbusters. They will include examples of travel writing as well critiques of travel writing. These readings are not “experts” you will be asked to emulate, but rather resources to help us write. If you feel like being critical of something I have assigned, I encourage you to do so.

I have divided this class into three units. Each has its own sets of questions and a specific genre in which the student will be asked to write their end-of-unit assignment. They are as follows:

- **Descriptive writing:** How can we write critically – writing that is informed and perceptive – about descriptions of traveling across various kinds of borders?
- **Comparative writing:** How can a critical examination of the many genres and personalities in which people write about traveling across borders help us to write more thoughtfully about the writing of others (as well as our own experiences)?
- **Analytical writing:** How might research into the contexts that informs a piece of travel writing – cultures, intended audiences, who is doing the traveling/writing, who is being written about –enhance our ability to write about it?

Course Requirements

Essays: You will be required to write three essays over the course of the term. The first two essays should be 4-6 pages in length. The final research essay should be 5-7 pages. All papers

must have 1-inch margins, be 12-point Times New Roman, and double-spaced. All citations should conform to MLA format.

Revisions: Revision is an integral step in the writing process, and that is reflected in the assignments as well as grade breakdown of this course. Every essay you write will be revised and re-submitted. Revision does not mean turning a draft into a final product. It means re-writing and re-structuring significant portions of what is already a complete first version of a piece of writing: fixing a comma splice and getting rid of some passive voice is not enough. Those are corrections to be made before turning any assignments in. These revisions should incorporate in-class workshops as well as my own comments.

Workshops: At the end of each unit we will workshop each other's writing in class. In these workshops you will be expected to give ample feedback to the work of your classmates. More information will be given as to the kind of feedback expected as the first workshop approaches.

Final Portfolio: At the end of your semester, all the essays you have submitted will constitute a final portfolio. I will also require a self-assessment letter to be submitted with every essay detailing the areas in which your writing has developed and where it needs to develop further with regards to the practices we will work on in class. See the "Evaluations" section to understand how your final portfolio will bear on your final grade.

Participating in a Seminar: This class will be a relatively small seminar. Unlike a lecture, it allows me to give close attention to your work and that of your classmates. However, unlike a lecture, it also means you are required to be not only present in class, but also prepared with readings and assignments. You are required to participate. I am not a lecturer. I will be guiding discussion. This means that what we gain from class every day will be greatly informed by the ideas that you and your classmates bring to discussion.

Assignments:

Readings: The readings in this class will almost entirely be available in .pdf format on Collab. This is a class on writing, not reading, so readings have been kept thin but protein-rich. There will be no more than ~50 pages of reading per week in this class. However, these readings will form the basis for all writing assignments and in-class discussions. Please print them out beforehand so that they can be brought to class.

Written Assignments: Before every class you are required to submit a written response to the assigned reading for the day. These responses must be posted to Collab by 8pm the night before class, as I will use them to structure our workshops. These responses will count towards your participation grade. They are designed to get us thinking about formal writing skills as well as topics about which you will write your papers.

Film Viewings: We will watch three films throughout the term, one for every unit. The films will be on reserve at Clemons Library. You are required to watch them in their entirety, and there will be a short quiz at the beginning of the class in which we discuss the film (see schedule). There is no scheduled class viewing, so you will be required to view these films on your own

time outside of class. If you want to watch them with other students in our class, I encourage you to schedule a time and do so.

Course Policies

Attendance: All students are allowed two unexcused absences for this class. If a student misses a third class without a documented excuse, their final letter grade (NOT their participation grade) will be reduced by one third (from “A” to “A-“ for example). If a student misses a fourth class without documented excuse (that is two weeks’ worth of class), I will request that they drop the course or will give them a failing grade for the semester.

Late Work: All essays are due by midnight of the assigned day. For every 24 hours that a paper is late, it is docked a third of a letter grade. Under exceptional circumstances extensions can be given, but they must be requested 24 hours in advance. All written responses to readings are due on Collab at 8pm the night before class. Late written responses will not be accepted.

Tardiness: If you are more than 10 minutes late to class it will count as one half of an absence. This means that if you are late twice, and have already used both unexcused absences, your final letter grade (NOT your participation grade) will be reduced by one third of a letter.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: This is a class about your writing, and all writing you submit should be yours. If you quote or paraphrase someone else’s writing he or she must be cited accordingly. Plagiarism is a serious offence – it will result in a failing grade for the assignment, potentially for the course, and perhaps even dismissal from the university. If you are unsure of how to cite sources, or have any questions regarding what is meant by academic integrity, please ask me – I’m here to help. If you are unsure what counts as plagiarism, or would like a link to the University’s policies on it, I direct you to these pages:

<http://www.virginia.edu/honor/what-is-academic-fraud-2/> and

<http://www.virginia.edu/honor/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/PlagiarismSupplement2011.pdf>

Laptops: I find laptops to be uncondusive to a seminar setting, so I ask that you do not use them in class. This means that you should print out the assigned readings everyday so that you can refer to them during class. Note-taking is always a good idea and a skill that requires practice, but I ask that you do so with pen and paper in this class. If you have your laptop out I will ask you to put it away.

Phones, tablets, snacks: If you are using your phone or tablet in class, I will not ask that you put it away but will reduce your participation grade. Food is fine, but please be mindful of distracting noises while you snack.

Evaluation

I will give comments and feedback on assignments, but will not give them individual grades. This includes the three essays and their respective revisions. A student’s final grade will be determined by the content of the final portfolio they will have assembled by the end of the semester. This portfolio will consist of each essay as well as the second version (revision) of each essay. NOTE: The first version of each essay you turn is expected to be a complete college-level composition of your best writing: *it is not a draft*. If you turn in a draft, your final

portfolio will have a draft where it should have a complete essay in its own right, and your grade will reflect accordingly. The second version of each essay *does not replace* the first version.

To receive an A in this course, a student will need to have done three things: produced college-level writing consistently, demonstrably improved their writing, and participated in making our class a collegial learning space. At the end of the course, I will review your full portfolio of work, including all writing assignments and notes on your classroom participation to determine your grade according to the above three criteria. During individual midterm meetings, I can provide a provisional grade to give you a sense of where you stand based on your work so far.

Writing Center

The Writing Center is a great resource and I strongly suggest you use it. Located at 314 Bryan Hall, it offers assistance in essay writing by trained graduate students, free of cost. Check their website out to learn more and sign up for an appointment:

<http://www.engl.virginia.edu/undergraduate/writing/center>.

Texts

Required:

Men in the Sun & Other Palestinian Stories, by Ghassan Kanafani

Love in a Blue Time, by Hanif Kureishi

A Small Place, by Jamaica Kincaid

Recommended:

The Elements of Style, by William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White

They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing, by Gerald Graff

SCHEDULE

Unit One: Descriptions

How can we write critically about the descriptions given by others of their experiences traveling across various kinds of borders? What is important to us in descriptions of travel and why?

Tues, Aug 26 –Introduction to the course

In-class: Emerson activity & write about being outside the country thing

Thur, Aug 28 - Read Pico Iyer, “Why We Travel”

<http://www.salon.com/2000/03/18/why/>

Exercise 1: Practice free writing so as to generate ideas for a thesis. What is this text saying, and do you agree or disagree (or both)? What would other people say about this text? What would you say in response to what other people would say? What is this text’s relationship to Emerson’s piece? How are they similar, and how are they different? Explore for topics of discussion. Complexity is good.

Tues, Sept 2 – Read Louise Erdrich, excerpts from *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country*
Forum response 1 on Erdrich

Thurs, Sept 4– Read Thomas Kohnstamm, excerpts from *Do Travel Writers Go to Hell?*
Exercise 2: As we did with Erdrich’s text, make a claim regarding Kohnstamm’s text, then a scratch outline. Ones you have the main sections of our paper, make main sections of each section

Tues, Sept 9 – Read Jack Kerouac, excerpt from *On the Road*
Forum Response 2 on Kerouac

Thur, Sept 11– Film: *An Idiot Abroad*, episode 1 and 2
Quiz on the film
Send me: a few potential topics for your upcoming writing project
Read: Review of *An Idiot Abroad*
<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/tv-review-ricky-gervais-idiot-74530>

DUE September 16th: **Writing Project 1** (Submit to me before midnight; bring four copies to class)

Write an essay in which you analyze the descriptions from one of our readings as successes or failures as pieces of travel writing (or both). In this analysis you should draw from Iyer and/or Emerson’s piece on what makes travel (and by extension travel writing) good or bad (you do not have to agree with them, but you should refer to them in formulating your own opinions on what makes these descriptions successful or not). Lastly, how might your experience as someone who has had, at some point, to travel somewhere help develop our understanding of the issue?

Tues, Sept 16 – Discussion of samples of Writing Project 1

Thur, Sept 18– Discussion of samples of Writing Project 1

Unit Two: Genres and Personalities

How can a critical examination of the many genres in which people write about traveling across borders, and the personas they adopt in doing so, help us to write more thoughtfully about the writing of others (as well as our own experiences)?

Tues, Sept 23 – Read Hunter S. Thompson, “The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved”
Forum Response 3 on Thompson – use specific quotations from the text.

Thur, Sept 25 – Read Horace Miner, “Body Ritual among the Nacirema”
Exercise 3: Who is the article for? How do you know? Write a list of evidence from the article that indicates its audience.

DUE September 29th: revision of Writing Project 1.

Tues, Sept 30– Read Gloria Anzaldua, “Borderlands”

Forum Response 4 on Anzaldua and the genre of “theory” – remember to use specific quotations from the text.

Thur, Oct 2 – Watch Conan O’Brian, “1864 Baseball”

Watch Gordan Ramsay on sushi,
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llG0NTJ7rcU>)

Watch Garrison Keillor, excerpt from *News from Lake Wobegon*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CzF2Jw2jZd8>

Exercise 4: Write a paragraph of at least 250 words about how one of the personalities in the above videos relates to its genre. Think about its style and intended audience and decide on a genre. What viewpoints does the personality adopt? Do you like or dislike this personality in this kind of genre and why?

Tues, Oct 7 – Read Ghassan Kanafani, “Men in the Sun”

Forum response 5 on Kanafani

Thur, Oct 9 – Film: Watch *Lost in Translation*

Quiz on the film

Send me: a few potential topics for your upcoming writing project

Read: Roger Ebert’s review

<http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/lost-in-translation-2003>

DUE October 14th: **Writing Project 2** (Bring four copies to class)

Write an essay in which you analyze two of the genres or personalities used in the preceding readings. What have you learned from their approaches and the suitability of their genre to travel writing, either by positive or negative example? Does this particular genre help or hinder the “point” of the description? How so?

Tues, Oct 14 – No class – Fall Break

Thur, Oct 16 – Discuss samples of Writing Project 2

Tues Oct 21 & Thur Oct 23 – **Individual conferences** to discuss progress

Unit Three: Contexts

How might research into the contexts that informs a piece of travel writing – cultures, intended audiences, who is doing the traveling/writing, who is being written about – enhance our ability to write about it?

DUE October 27th: Revision of Writing Project 2

Tues, Oct 28 – Read Hanif Kureishi, “With Your Tongue Down My Throat”

Forum Response 6 on Krueishi

Thur, Oct 30 – Read Levi Strauss, excerpts from *Tristes Tropiques*

Exercise 5: TBA

Tues, Nov 4 – Read Joseph Conrad, excerpts from *Heart of Darkness*

Read Chinua Achebe, “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s ‘Heart of Darkness’”

Forum Response 7 on Conrad and Achebe

Thur, Nov 6 – Read Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*

Exercise 6: TBA

Tues, Nov 11 – Read Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*

Forum response 8 on Kincaid

Thur, Nov 13 – Film: watch *Avatar*

Quiz on the film

Send me: a few potential topics for your upcoming writing project

Read: Louis Owens, excerpt from *Mixedblood Messages*

Tues, Nov 18 – TBA: Library class on research

Thur, Nov 21 – Student discussions of Writing Project 3

Tues, Nov 25 – Student discussions of Writing Project 3

Thur, Nov 27 – No Class (Thanksgiving)

DUE December 2th: Writing Project #3 and Presentation

Research the cultural context for a particular piece of travel writing that we have read in class – who wrote it, where they were from, where they traveled, what was going on there or back home, etc. Then write an essay analyzing the piece of writing in light of your research, and how your opinion of it has changed or failed to change. Be specific in your argument with reference to the actual writing, or argument made by the writer.

Tues, Dec 2 – Student discussions of Writing Project 3

Thurs, Dec 4 – Student discussions of Writing Project 3 and Course Evaluation

DUE December 12th: Revision of Writing Project 3