

Writing, Performance and Self-Making
Stanford Pre-Collegiate Studies Summer Institute Singapore
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Course Description

In this course, we will examine different forms of writing through the lens of performance, broadly conceived. What is the relationship between writing, performance, and the self? We will study different forms of writing that grapple with notions of self and identity, including autobiography, fiction and fantasy, the personal essay, social media, blogs, graphic narrative and more. While some of these genres may seem to be a more “authentic” way of depicting the self and identity, through this course we will consider how writing is a process through which the self is performed and made. Close analysis of various texts, as well as your own writing, will reveal the planning, writing, revision, editing and rewriting that go into constructing a textual identity. By studying these texts, we will learn to recognize and critically analyze the rhetorical situation. Through them, we’ll begin to assess the ways in which writers can present personal or autobiographical information as rhetorically effective nonfiction. At the same time, we will use these various forms of writing as resources for connecting with our larger social worlds, and finally to comment on and critique them. Through performing your own selves in writing, you will find strategic ways to build arguments about the world you inhabit.

We are concerned primarily with your development as a scholarly writer. Writing is a process as much as it is as finished product. To this end, this course pays as much attention to the process and preparation for writing as it does to the completion of daily writing assignments. The process of writing begins by immersing yourself in how other writers, often with national, ethnic and personal backgrounds different from your own, attempt to persuade, entertain, challenge and enlighten us. Classes will thus consist of reading assignments, discussion, in-class writing exercises and peer-review exercises.

Writing assignments will help students master the primary components of effective expository writing. This course will cover thesis development, argumentation, textual support, audience, clarity, organization and sentence construction, among other topics. Peer review assignments will give you the opportunity to provide and receive constructive feedback on your writing. Peer reviews demonstrate that writing is never done in a vacuum. In this class we will come to learn that all writing is social and part of a dialogue.

Requirements:

You are asked to come to class fully prepared to participate. Fully prepared means that you have done all the reading and at-home writing assignments for the day and have thought of questions and topics for discussion ahead of time.

You will also keep a “writing journal” in which you can keep track of your ideas, getting them out of your head and onto paper. This writing journal is a workspace where you will collect your own stories, take notes on the readings, formulate questions for class discussion and generate ideas that will lead to your written assignments.

Course Texts:

Andrea Lunsford, *Easy Writer, Fourth Edition*

Gene Luen Yang, *American-Born Chinese*

Course Reader *(CR) next to readings on syllabus indicate they are in the Course Reader

Day 1: Course Introduction and Introduction to “Rhetoric”

- Introductory Exercise: Interviews and Introductions
- Course overview
- Lecture: What is Rhetoric? Evaluating the Rhetorical Situation and Close Reading as the Basis for effective writing and research
- Reading and Class Activity: Sample Close Reading analysis and discussion
- Class Activity and Discussion: Self, Writing and Authorship
- Lecture: What is Performance? What does this have to do with your Writing and your Self?
- In-class writing activity: Notebooks and Free-writing
- Introduction to Joan Didion and “On Keeping a Notebook”

Assignments:

- Read: Joan Didion’s “On Keeping a Notebook” (CR), *Easy Writer* “Critical Thinking and Argument” (p. 25-38) and Joseph Kelly’s “How to Read Essays” (CR)
- Write: Close Reading (1 page/~250 words) on a paragraph from “On Keeping a Notebook”

Day 2: Conveying the Self

- Discussion of “On Keeping a Notebook” and Close Readings
- In-class Reading and Discussion: Mark Twain’s “Two Ways of Seeing a River” (CR) and Amy Tan’s “Mother Tongue” (CR)
- Mini-Lecture and Discussion: Language, Style, Grammar
- Class activity: In groups, compare Didion, Twain and Tan. Consider language, style, audience and purpose
- In-class writing exercise: Rewrite the paragraph you chose but for a different audience
- Introduction to the Personal Essay (sample essays, rhetorical appeals, audience)
- In-class Writing Assignment: Choose a significant moment in your life and write a Personal Essay (2 pages/~500 words). You may use the free-writing exercise from yesterday as a starting point
- The Writing Process: Pre-writing, Drafting, Peer Review, Revisions

Assignments:

- Read: Haruki Murakami’s “The Mirror” (CR) and James Thurber’s “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty” (CR). In your Writing Journal, take notes on ways in which these texts are similar and ways in which they are different.
- Write: Rewrite/Revise 2 page Personal Essay from in-class writing assignment. Complete first draft due tomorrow. Consider audience, language, style and purpose.
- Post your question on the reading to tomorrow’s assigned discussion leader

Day 3: Performance and the Self

- In-class writing: Fantasy and Writing the Self
- In-class discussion: Murakami’s “The Mirror,” Thurber’s “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty” and *Adaptation* (dir. Spike Jonze, written by Charlie Kaufman)
- Class activity: In groups, compare Thurber, Murakami & *Adaptation*. How do these different texts envision the relationship between Writing and Self? How do they view personal experience as a resource for Writing? How do they differ from the nonfictional forms of writing we’ve read?
- In-class Peer Review of Personal Essay
- Mini-lecture on Performance and Identity, Coco Layne’s *Warpaint*
- In-class reading, small group discussion and debate of “The Power of the Rouge Pot” (CR)

Assignments:

- Read Michael Chabon's "Secret Skin" (CR) and *Easy Writer* "Language" (pp. 142-157)
- Write: Finish revisions on your Personal Essay and turn in the final draft tomorrow by 9am

Day 4: From Personal to Public

- Group Activity: Reading questions, small group presentations and class discussion of "The Secret Skin"
- In-class reading: George Orwell's "On Shooting an Elephant" (CR)
- Class discussion and activity: How do Chabon, Orwell and other authors reflect and/or critique social issues of their time and place?
- Class Activity: Rhetorical Analysis of a live performance
- In-class writing exercise: "Embodied Writing" and Writing about Performance
- Paper assignment: Argumentative Essay. Discussion of prompts
- Argumentative Paper writing: Choosing a topic for your paper and developing your argument. Research, planning, constructing a thesis, building support and outlining
 - o In-class reading: *Easy Writer* "Kinds of Sources – Taking Notes" (pp. 178-197)
 - o Choose one of the texts that we have read so far and begin planning a paper on it.

Assignments:

- Read: Hari Kunzru's "Raj, Bohemian" (CR). In your writing journal, reflect on what this story has to do with the world of social media.
- Write: 3 page paper (~750 words) addressing one of the paper topics we discussed in class. You can use your class activity as the basis for this or start a new paper if you so desire.
- Find: 3 tweets, 2 blog posts, and 2 instagram posts that you find effectively use the medium to make an argument. Consider audience, language, style and purpose.

Day 5: Branding the Self and Social Media

- Class Discussion on "Raj, Bohemian"
- In-class Reading and Discussion on Zadie Smith's "Generation Why" (CR)
- Lecture: Social Media and Evolving Rhetoric
- Class Activity: Performance and Self-Making in Social Media
- Mini-lecture & Activity: What's in a genre? From social media to traditional forms.
- In-class writing: Choose a topic, and write a tweet, a Facebook status update, an Instagram post and a persuasive blog entry about it.
- Lecture: It's in the Details – Grammar, Style, Punctuation/Mechanics
- Revision Workshop: Sentences and Structure
- In-class Conferences with me on your papers

Assignments:

- Read: Susan Sontag's "On Photography" (CR), Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* (until p. 130), *Easy Writer* "Integrating Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism" and "In-Text Citations" (pp. 197-202 and 207-213)
- Write: Revise your paper and submit the final draft to me **by Sunday 5pm**. Include a memo on your final draft explaining how you feel about the final product and your writing process.

Day 6: Rhetoric and the Visual Arts

- Lecture: Visual Rhetoric (Photography vs. Graphic Narrative) and Rhetorical Analysis
- Discussion of Sontag's "On Photography" and selections from Matt Madden's *99 Ways to Tell a Story* (CR)
- Class Activity: Your Life in Frames (Creating 3 panel comics of a moment from your weekend)
- Lecture: Introduction to Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* and Comics Medium
- In-class Reading: Selection from *American Born Chinese*
- Class Discussion: Compare and contrast with the other texts about self and identity we have read. What are the benefits of visual rhetoric in illustrating particular ideas about self, identity and performance?
- Class activity: Small group visual rhetorical analysis
- Review your Writing Journal: Brainstorm and plan for your final project assignment.

Assignments:

- Read: Finish *American Born Chinese*, selections from Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (CR)
- Write: Choose an image and write a 1 page rhetorical analysis of it. You may choose a photograph, a comic/cartoon (4 panels max), an advertisement, or something else.

Day 7: American-Born Chinese and Final Project Development

- *American-Born Chinese*, continued.
- Small group discussion of visual rhetorical analyses
- In-class reading and discussion of *Understanding Comics*
- Final project assignment

Assignments:

- Read: Arthur Plotnik's "Edge: Writing at the Nervy Limits" (CR)
- Decide on your final project
- Write: (See assignment sheet) Consider a topic you would like to explore in greater detail and write a half-page prospectus outlining your topic as well as a prospective argument about that topic. Also, compile a list of at least 3 sources you would need to fully address your topic and make your argument. Remember to evaluate your sources for their appropriateness.

Day 8: Review and Final Project Writing

- Class Activity: In-class review game of topics and readings covered
- Class Activity: Speed Dating with Sources
- In-Class Final Project Research and Drafting Workshop
- In-class conferences with me

Assignments:

- Write: Pre-writing and rough draft of final project (see assignment sheet). Prepare a draft of your final project and bring 2 copies to workshop in class tomorrow
- Read: Susan Sontag's "Directions: Read, Write, Rewrite. Repeat Steps Two and Three as Needed." (CR)

Day 9: Peer Review and Final Projects

- Mini-Lecture
- Writing workshop on final projects
- Peer Review
- In-class revision and writing workshop

Assignments:

- Revise and complete your final project (4-6 pages/1000-1500 words)
- Prepare a 10 minute presentation of your writing, research and analysis
- Compile a portfolio of all your course writing and bring to class

Day 10: Wrap Up and Student Presentations

- Student Presentations of Research and Writing
- In-class conferences & Portfolio Submission