

English 203: Writing in Context

Instructor: Prof. Ning Yu
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Classroom: BH 114
Class Time: TR 12:00-1:50

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The Arranged Hour: W 3:00-3:50
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Description: The key to making meaning is contextualizing. The key to good writing is re-writing. Re-writing, if you look at it more closely, is re-contextualizing the existing words, sentences and paragraphs by re-arranging them into a new order and thus lending them a new, better defined meaning with a sharper focus. The objective of this class is to help students improve their textual power by honing their skills of contextualization. What is the larger cultural context of college writing? What is the context of student life? What is the larger context of our identity that is taking shape in a specific socio-economic environment? In response to these questions, students work towards becoming self-conscious writers who know why, what, how and for whom they write. We will also devote a considerable amount of time to sentence skills so that students can write with clarity and some grace. This course hopes to lay the foundation for the students' academic success and for their success in the larger world beyond college.

Text: *The Arlington Reader: Canons and Contexts*

Requirements: 1. Regular attendance. The student will lose 3% of his/her total grade for each unexcused absence. No student with more than three unexcused absences will get a grade higher than B no matter how well s/he does in the class otherwise. 2. Active participation. Students are required to read **all** the assigned texts in advance and prepare well for in-depth discussion. They are expected to read and comment on each other's works in class. 3. Each student is responsible for writing four (4) thought-provoking and well-written questions with a full page of written response to each question. Students must submit their questions and responses via e-mail or my mail box in HU329 **the evening (by 8:00 pm) before the meeting during which their questions will be used.** I need time to read and think about your questions and response. If you submit yours later than the deadline, I won't have time to read and think about your questions and thus unable to use them in class and therefore you lose the 2% for each set of your question and response. 4. Four (4) short essays of approximately four pages and a longer essay of about eight pages. 5. An oral presentation based on the longer essay. In sum, in this class we will write various drafts that will result in twenty-four (24) pages of finished prose (4 pages of responses, 12 pages of short essays, and 8 pages of a longer essay).

Evaluation: 1. Attendance and participation=20% of total grade; questions and response=8% of total grade (2% for each set of question and response); short essays=40% of total grade (10% for each essay); the longer essay=20% of total grade; the oral presentation=12% of total grade.

Schedule:

Jan.

- 6 T Course introduction; diagnostic writing; lecture: "Towards Clear Prose"
Assignment: Joan Didion's "On Keeping a Notebook" (each member of group 1 write two (2) questions/responses and submit them by 8 pm, Wednesday); everybody prepares to talk about why he or she writes at home or school
- 8 R In-class re-writing; peer commenting; group discussion: "Why I Write"
Class discussion: "On Keeping a Notebook"
Assignment: read the "Contexts" for Didion's essay (group 2 write two questions and responses, submitting them by 8 pm, Monday)
- 13 T Discussion continued: "Why I Write"; In-class outlining; Lecture: "Grammar and Clarity"; In-class draft: the intro. paragraph to your longer essay "Why I Write"
Assignment: read Tan's "Mother Tongue" and King's "Write or Die" (group 3 write two (2) questions and submit in time); continue your intro. para and outline
- 15 R **Outline and intro. para due.** Discussion: Tan and King; In-class writing: "Who Am I?"; peer discussion: "Who Am I?"
Assignment: read Momaday's "The Way to Rainy Mountain" (group 4 write two Questions and responses)

- 20 T Discussion: “The Way to...”; In-class outlining: the first short essay “Who Am I?”; lecture: “Avoiding Wordiness”
Assignment: read “Contexts” for Momaday’s essay (group 5 questions)
- 22 R Discussion of Momaday’s contexts; group discussion: “the context(s) of “Who Am I?””; in-class writing: the final draft of “Who Am I?”
Assignment: read Liu’s “Notes of a Native Speaker” (group 6 questions)
- 27 T **The first short essay “Who Am I?” due.** Lecture: “Sentence Control”; Free writing; group sharing; discussion: Liu’s essay
Assignment: Said’s “Keeping Time” (group 7 questions)
- 29 R Controlled free writing on keeping time. Discussion: “Keeping Time”; in-class outlining “Where I Am From;” group discussion: how time and place inter-connect in the shaping of my identity
Assignment: read White’s “Once More to the Lake” (group 8 questions)

Feb.

- 3 T Discussion: “Once More to the Lake”; lecture: “How to Make Long Sentences Work”; in-class writing: “Where I’m From”; instructor’s comment on essay 1
Assignment: read “Contexts for White” (group 9 questions); finish the first draft of “Where I’m From”
- 5 R Discussion: “Contexts for White”; group discussion of the first draft; in-class writing: second draft; group comparison and contrast between the two drafts: what have we changed and why
Assignment: read “Street People and Air People” (group 10 questions)
- 10 T **The second essay “Where I’m From” due.** Lecture: “Sentences in Context”; Discussion: “Street People”; Focused free writing: Am I in the Air or on the Street or Else Where? Group sharing
Assignment: read “Troubled Waters” (group 1 questions)
- 12 R **The first draft of the longer essay “Why I Write” due.** Discussion: “Troubled Water”; free writing; presentations 1 2 3
Assignment: read “The Heat Is On” (group 2 questions)
- 17 T Brief comments on the first draft of the long essay: has it deviated from the outline? How? Discussion: “The Heat Is On”; focused free writing: what do I think when I am reminded that 70% of myself is water? Presentations: 4 5
Assignment: read Rodriguez’s “Aria” (group 3 questions)
- 19 R Discussion: “Aria”; lecture “Style and Usage”; in-class writing: “My High School”; presentations 6 7
Assignment: read “Contexts for Aria” (group 4 questions); draft the third short essay with a sharper focus: “One Thing about/ Person in My High School”
- 24 T Discussion: “Contexts for Aria”; group discussion of draft; presentations 8

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Assignment: read Rose’s “I Just Wanna Be Average” (group 5 questions); finish the final draft

- 26 R **The third short essay due.** Discussion: “I Just Wanna Be Average”; focused in -class writing: am I lucky or privileged to be “above average”? presentations 11 12 13
Assignment: read “Disappearing Ink” and “Behind the SAT” (group 6 questions)

March

- 2 T Discussion: “Ink” and “SAT”; presentation 14 ; class sharing of notes; presentation 15 ; class sharing of notes
Assignment: read “Shooting an Elephant” (group 7 questions); start the final touches on your longer essay

- 4 R Discussion: “Shooting an Elephant”; group discussion of the longer essay; presentation 16 17
Assignment: read “Contexts for Shooting...” (group 8 questions); finish the final draft of the longer essay

- 9 T **The longer essay due.** Discussion: “Contexts for Shooting...”; in-class writing: “My Writing History”; presentations 18 19 20
Assignment: read “History Overcomes Stories” (group 9 questions); “2011” (group 10 questions)

- 11 R Discussion: “History Overcomes Stories” and “2011”; presentations 21 22

- 16 T **Final Exam Day:** presentations 22 23 24