English S120E:  
Reading and Writing the Modern Essay  
Summer 2019  
MWF, 10-11:30 (EST)

ENGL S120 is an intensive course designed for students who are confident readers and writers of English—students who already write fluently and correctly and want to hone techniques in a range of nonfiction genres. It is recommended that students who have not completed an introductory college-level writing course take ENGL S114 instead.

In this course, students will examine modern prose with two goals--to become shrewd readers who can identify successful writing styles, strategies and structures, and then build with those elements in their own writing. This we will call “close reading for craft,” a method by which students hone their own writing and workshop the writing of their classmates by emulating the triumphs of professional writers. Students will write essays each week which are clear, compelling and purposeful.

A note on how to read for the class: Reading for craft means we’re interested in the “how” more than the “what.” Breaking down elements of style and narrative requires us to stay focused on authorial intent rather than content. We may admire the forest but we’re crawling down into the root system this summer to see what makes the trees rustle and shine as they do. In published works and in your not-yet-published work.

The logistics of this seminar will be somewhat unusual, and more than a bit experimental. English 120 is a classic Yale course that depends upon the repeated rhythm of writing and rewriting, as well as the give-and-take of seminar discussion. To recreate that experience in the compressed schedule of the summer session can be challenging; to recreate that experience online requires even more care. Our online writing workshop will operate not as a MOOC, but as a virtual version of that classic collegiate seminar, with its own sense of close-knit community, individualized attention, and personal challenge.

To make this happen, all of us need to do our parts. You must join the class for each meeting actively ready to discuss the reading, prepared to share your writing and to
comment on others’ pieces with enthusiasm. You absolutely must use the course packet or print out all the pieces (first is expedient); because our computer screens will be our virtual classroom, they cannot also be our reading machines. Besides, you will need to mark up your readings extensively as you study them.

**Required readings:**

- Course packet (available at Tyco Copy Center, 262 Elm St, by Davenport College). Ask for the “Hill English S120” course packet.


**Overview of Essays:**
You will write four essays, each of which will be written in two stages: a first draft and a final copy. Drafts will not receive grades, though we will comment on them in detail. Each essay’s focus will correspond to the reading unit—personal experience, place, cultural criticism and humor. Every Sunday by noon you will turn in your drafts to me and Prof. McGowan by email.

**Instructions for workshops:**
Mondays are workshop days. We will hear from each writer about the experience of writing the essay and a reading aloud of a favorite passage and one which feels problematic (where peer edits could be particularly helpful). We’ll be asking these questions:

- Which elements work best? Where is the writing most active, crisp, evocative, and how? Focus on structure, diction and audience.

- What are suggestions on improving the work in progress. Where should the writer focus the revision?

Please print out the ones designated for that week’s workshop and read them carefully with marked edits. You’ll write a cover letter of a page in which you do three things: 1. Note the positives, what is working well in the essay, 2. Note what could be improved, and 3. Make specific suggestions.

Everyone’s final drafts will be due on **Thursdays by noon.**

**Grading:**

**Participation 20%**

**Essays 20% each.** While essays 1-4 will count equally, there is (hopefully!) a cumulative effect to the quality of your work over the term. That is, our readings, discussions and workshops should provide lift as we go. All of your submissions should be polished; your fourth essay will likely be better than your first. Toward this end, your presence and participation are critical. Absence, lateness and distraction can significantly affect your overall grade in English S120.

**This course will adhere to two general policies of the English Department:**
1. an A grade will be reserved for work that is prize-worthy
2. any section should, normally, produce no more than 50% A/A- grades
There will likely be A grades in this course, but a grade of B is one of which you can be proud.

Note on Academic Honesty:
Yale’s Writing Center defines plagiarism as “the use of another’s work, words, or ideas without attribution. The word ‘plagiarism’ comes from the Latin word for ‘kidnapper’ and is considered a form of theft, a breach of honesty in the academic community. Plagiarizers suffer serious consequences in Yale College—including suspension or expulsion from school.”

Writing Assignments:

UNIT ONE: Interpreting Personal Experience
Write a 1,200-1,500 word essay that uses a moment, episode, or experience in your life to make a public point. That is to say, your essay should use personal reflection to address a larger social issue or problem, and even influence the way your reader thinks or acts. Remember that all essays should be written as if for a wide audience and should be non-fiction and verifiable.

UNIT TWO: Writing about Places
Write an essay of 1,250 to 1,500 words portraying a place of importance to you. The essay should be vivid, precise, engaging, and capable of leaving the reader with a unified impression of the place and its significance. You should guide the reader to an understanding of this place through your selection of details and tone. You’re probably better off thinking small or specific – stretch of beach or woods, a store or café, maybe even a place you can revisit (an entire state or country would be tough).

UNIT THREE: Cultural Criticism
Write an essay of 1,200 to 1,500 words that analyzes and comments on some aspect of contemporary culture. Both “aspect” and “culture” may be broadly defined. It could be a cultural phenomenon or a moral issue. Make your artifact vivid and interesting to a reader who may know nothing about it and make an argument about what it reveals about some portion of contemporary culture.

UNIT FOUR: Humor
Write a humorous essay of 1000 words that makes a public point – explicitly or implicitly, sharply or softly. Your essay should employ one of the modes of comedy we have studied in this unit (i.e. satire, parody, travesty). You could satirize a public figure or a cultural object. As you select your subject ask yourself what broader point you wish to make. Don’t be trivial or silly – we all know Bachelorette is an easy target of derision – your aim is to be edgy and surprising. We’re going for LOL.
Readings:

Monday, May 27: Introduction
“Nonfiction as Literature” On Writing Well 95-100
George Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant”
Langston Hughes, “Salvation”
Joan Didion “On Keeping a Notebook”

Parts of all of these essays will be discussed on the first day. Please read them in their entirety before class has met, marking them up in hardcopy.

Wed, May 29: Personal Experience
Joan Didion, “On Going Home”
Chang-Rae Lee, “Coming Home Again”
Zora Neale Hurston, “How it Feels to Be Colored Me”

Thurs, May 30: Personal Experience Nugget Due by Noon
This is a 1-2 p. kernel of your personal experience essay-in-progress. You should seek to include a short description of the event or experience you will focus on describing, as well as an explanation of the public point you wish to use it to make. Be thoughtful and deliberate about the choices you make about style and tone, as well.

Fri, May 31: Personal Experience
“Writing about Yourself: The Memoir,” OWW 132-46
Yiyun Lee, “To Speak is to Blunder”
Alice Walker, “Beauty: When the Other Dancer is the Self”
Anne Lamott “Shitty First Drafts”

Mon, June 3: WORKSHOP
WORKSHOP ASSIGNMENT: Read your classmates’ essays, with written edits. See Workshop instructions.

Wednesday, June 5: Place
Jhumpa Lahiri, “Rhode Island”
Ian Frazier, “Take the F”
Joey Franklin, “Working at Wendy’s”

Friday, June 7: Place
E.B. White, “Once More to the Lake”
James Baldwin, “Stranger in the Village”
David Foster Wallace, “Shipping Out”
Monday, June 10: WORKSHOP

Wed, June 12: Cultural Criticism
Wesley Morris: “The Cost of Being Savage in a Supposedly Civilized World”
Henry Louis Gates Jr.: “In the Kitchen”
Jamaica Kincaid, “The Ugly Tourist”
Roland Barthes, “The Writer on Holiday,” “Toys”

Fri, June 14: Cultural Criticism
Eula Biss, “Sentimental Medicine: Why we Still Fear Vaccines”
Atul Gawande, “When Doctors Make Mistakes”
Malcolm Gladwell: “The Ketchup Conundrum”
David Foster Wallace, “Consider the Lobster”

Mon, June 17: WORKSHOP

Wed, June 19: Humor
“Humor,” OW/W 207-30
David Sedaris, “Me Talk Pretty One Day,” and “In the Waiting Room”
John Kenney, “We Are the One Percent,” “Pitchfork” and “Frito Lay”

Fri, June 21: Humor
Ethan Kuperberg, “Even More Uber Options,” “What Conversations about Bitcoin Sound Like to Me,” “Missed Connections for A-Holes,”
Tina Fey, “The Juggler”

Mon, June 24: WORKSHOP

Wed, June 26: CLASS READING
ASSIGNMENT: Prepare a portfolio of your four revised essays written for this course. Feel free to polish and revise them even beyond your “final” drafts. Select your two favorite passages, each of about a page in length, to prepare for reading aloud. Make sure that they make sense out of context, and can stand alone; you may need to think about how to introduce or conclude them differently. Practice reading them aloud. Do you want to make changes? Feel free to do so. Practice reading them aloud again, and keep practicing until you feel comfortable. We look forward to hearing everyone’s pieces performed!
# English 120 - Schedule Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mon May 27: Intro class</th>
<th>Tues</th>
<th>Wed May 29: Personal experience readings</th>
<th>Thurs May 30: 1-2-p. personal experience nugget due by noon</th>
<th>Fri May 31: Personal experience readings</th>
<th>Sat</th>
<th>Sun June 2: personal experience essay due by noon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mon Jun 3: WORKSHOP (personal experience) + place start</td>
<td>Wed June 5: Place readings</td>
<td>Thurs June 6: Final draft essay #1 due by noon</td>
<td>Fri June 7: Place readings</td>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>Sun June 9: place essay due by noon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon June 10: WORKSHOP (Place) + cultural criticism start</td>
<td>Wed June 12: Cultural criticism readings</td>
<td>Thurs June 13: Final draft essay #2 due by noon</td>
<td>Fri June 14: Cultural criticism readings</td>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>Sun June 16: cultural criticism essay due by noon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon June 17: WORKSHOP (Cultural Crit) + humor start</td>
<td>Wed June 19: Humor Readings</td>
<td>Thurs June 20: Final draft essay #3 due by noon</td>
<td>Fri June 21: Humor readings</td>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>Sun June 23: Humor essay due by noon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon June 24: WORKSHOP (Humor)</td>
<td>Wed June 26: CLASS READINGS</td>
<td>Thurs June 27: Final draft essay #4 due by noon</td>
<td>Fri June 28: NO CLASS</td>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>Sun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>