An honest bookstore would post the following sign above its ‘self-help’ section: “For true self-help, please visit our philosophy, literature, history, and science sections, find yourself a good book, read it, and think about it.”

-Roger Ebert

Course Overview:
Written and oral communication is a part of our daily and professional lives regardless of what major we are studying or what jobs we have. In addition to life in general, written and oral communication will be a huge part of your college career, the basis of which rests on strong composition skills. That’s why you’re here. This class is designed to meet all these challenges by giving you the tools and strategies you need to navigate your way through the many papers, conversations and discourses you will participate in during your time as a student and as an adult. This class will engage you as a writer, a critical thinker, and as a human being as you discuss, think about, and practice all the ways that writing can help you engage with and have an effect on the worlds around you.

Required Texts:
-Other readings/viewings will be provided either by E-mail or online E-Reserves.
-A Pocket Style Manual by Diana Hacker

Course Overview, With Grade Percentages:
Personal Narrative Paper (15%)
Persuasive Paper (20%)
Research Paper (30%)
Journal Entries/Weekly Short Essays (15%)
Every week (with a few exceptions), I will be giving out a prompt to write about as your journal entry. Don’t hold back: your grade here will be based on your thoughts and engaging with the readings or prompts, not with mechanics or grammar. Sometimes, replacing the journal entry, I will give you a short essay assignment. The essay will be short, 2-3 pages, and the prompt will be given at the beginning of the week, due the following week.

Freewrites/Quizzes and Homework (10%)
At the beginning of each class, we will spend 5-10 minutes freewriting. I will be giving out the prompt at the beginning of class; sometimes it will be about the readings, other times I will be asking you to write on a specific topic. Sometimes (and more rarely) we will be having quizzes on the readings or something we have done in class. Sometimes freewrites and/or class discussion will be the basis of a homework assignment that might not be on the syllabus, but I will try to give you ample time to do the homework before it is due in class. If you miss a class when this homework is assigned it is your responsibility to find out what it is and to do it before it is due.
**Participation, including Peer Review (10%)**

I expect you to be in class and on time every class period. The freewrites and quizzes at the beginning of each class cannot be made up if you are not there or are late. In addition, if you are not in class, you will not be able to participate in active class discussion. If you miss class, please come talk to me about said absences(s) and we can work something out.

Participation is kind of an abstract notion, but this is the basics of what I expect from you: you should be a participant in this class, an active listener, a constructive critic, and you should be willing to share your ideas with the rest of the class. Listening, accepting, and discussing divergent views are the foundation of critical thinking skills, so please realize that the contribution of your thoughts and ideas will directly influence what you get out of this class, as well as how you develop as a writer and as a citizen.

**Grading Policy:**

A "C" level grade (70-79%) denotes average college-level writing and achievement. The essay is a competent response to the assignment: it meets, to some degree, all the assignment requirements, and demonstrates that the author has put significant time and effort into communicating his/her ideas to his/her targeted audience. It has a thesis, presents some support, and moves from point to point in an orderly fashion; sentence-level errors do not significantly prevent comprehension. Essays that do not meet these criteria will not earn a "C."

A "B" level grade (80-90%) highlights a strong example of college writing and thinking. In addition to meeting the "C" level requirements, such an essay goes further in some way(s): it demonstrates some insight into the "gray areas" of the topic, provides original or very thorough support that is tightly woven into the overall argument, reads smoothly at both the sentence and paragraph levels, and/or exhibits a personal "voice" or style. It has few sentence-level errors.

An "A" level grade (90-100%) marks an essay that is a delight for the reader. Even more than in a "B" essay, its author anticipates and responds to possible reader questions, uses a wide range of supporting evidence, engages the reader in a provocative conversation, provides unexpected insights, and/or uses language with care and facility.

"D" and "F" level essays do not meet the basic expectations of the assignment.

All three essays must be completed in order for you to pass this class.

**Students with Disabilities**

The George Mason University catalog states, “students with documented disabilities are legally entitled to certain accommodations in the classroom.” If you qualify for these accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible so that I can better meet your needs. You will need to visit the Disability Resource Center (703-993-2474) and bring me a faculty contact sheet.
The University Writing Center
Since you will be writing several papers in this course, you may want to visit the University Writing Center (http://writingcenter.gmu.edu), located in Robinson A114, for assistance. The Writing Center is one of the best resources you will find on campus. They have an outstanding website that offers a wealth of online resources for student writers. You can schedule a 45-minute appointment with a trained tutor to help with any phase of the writing process. You can even obtain assistance with papers by visiting the online writing center at http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/owl/index.html, but please plan ahead and allow yourself at least 23 days to receive a response. Make an appointment on their website, or by calling 703-993-1200, or stop by and schedule a session.

Midterm Grades
In English 101, students receive a midterm letter grade based on the work of the first seven weeks of the course. The purpose of this grade is to help students find out how well they are doing in the first half of the course in order to make any adjustments necessary for success in the course as a whole. Instructors calculate letter grades based on the completed course assignments as weighted on the syllabus through the seventh week. The work in the second half of the semester may be weighted more heavily, and so the midterm grade is not meant to predict the final course grade. Students may view their grade online as soon as it is recorded.

NC Grades
Students who earn a final grade lower than a “C” will receive an “NC” (no credit) grade for the course. This grade will not appear on transcripts, but students who receive an NC must repeat English 101.

Open-Revisions:
For the first two essays, there will be an open-revision policy, meaning, if you want to revise those essays after you have turned in the final and have received a grade on it, you will be able to do just that. This is an optional revision; if you feel comfortable with your original grade, you do not have to do this. If you want to do this, you need to come into my office and discuss your essay with me. We will also discuss how long you will have to do the revision during our meeting. This revision policy is designed to alleviate the anxiety of having a perfect second draft, but also to introduce you to an essential part of the writing process: the revision. The revised essay grade will take the place of your previously turned in final draft.

Policy on Late Work:
I will not accept late work unless I have approved it before the due date. Do not drop anything into my mailbox or e-mail me unless we have discussed it before hand. I will also not accept anything by e-mail. After we have approved the late work, there will still be a penalty for each day it is late; this is day as in a standard 24-hour period, not each class meeting. For each day the assignment is late, there will be a third of a letter grade deducted from the assignment (i.e. a B+ will become a B). If your work is late due to a severe, documentable emergency, see me as soon as possible to discuss arrangements.
Format Policy

• All essays in this class, and in most college-level courses, must adhere to the following specifications:
  • Typed and double-spaced
  • 1" margins - top, bottom, left, right
  • Name, date, word count and course section number in upper left corner
  • All essays must include numbered pages
  • All essays must contain a title
  • Font size: Times New Roman, size 12

Please adhere to these rules: it's not hard to see when they are even a little off. You will have points taken off, and if they are blatant (triple spaced paragraphs, two and a half inch margins) I’m not only going to take points off, but I will also be personally insulted and saddened by the fact that you thought I wouldn’t be able to notice.

Attendance & Participation

I expect you to be in class and on time every class period. The freewrites and quizzes at the beginning of each class cannot be made up if you are not there or are late. In addition, if you are not in class, you will not be able to participate in active class discussion. If you miss class, please please please please come talk to me about said absences(s) and we can work something out.

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Plagiarism

While we will discuss plagiarism in detail during the course, for now let's say this: Don’t do it. I will be able to tell if you plagiarize, it’s much easier to catch than you might think. If you do plagiarize, you will be in violation of the GMU Honor Code, which earns you a hearing in front of the Honor Code committee, who will determine whether you will be expelled, fail the class, or other heinous acts of punishment. In addition, I will be very sad and depressed, especially when I have to fill out numerous copies of paperwork. Don’t plagiarize.

English Department Statement on Plagiarism

Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another source without giving that source credit. Writers give credit through the use of accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or end notes; a simple listing of books, articles, and websites is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in an academic setting.

Student writers are often confused as to what should be cited. Some think that only direct quotations need to be credited. While direct quotations do need citations, so do paraphrases and summaries of opinions or factual information formerly unknown to the writers or which the writers did not discover themselves. Exceptions to this include factual information which can be obtained from a variety of
sources, the writers’ own insights or findings from their own field research—what has been called common knowledge. What constitutes common knowledge can sometimes be precarious; what is common knowledge for one audience may be so for another. In such situations, it is helpful to keep the reader in mind and to think of citations as being “reader friendly.”

In other words, writers provide a citation for any piece of information that they think their readers might want to investigate further. Not only is this attitude considerate of readers, it will almost certainly ensure that writers will not be guilty of plagiarism. Consult the George Mason Honor Code for more information.

Peer Review
For every draft due in this class, we will have a peer review session. Drafts will be due Thursday and you are expected to bring 4 copies to class: one copy for me and 3 copies for your classmates. For each peer review session I will split you up into groups of 4 and you will give a copy of your work to each of your 3 other groupmates. You will then, for homework, use the tools we have talked about in class, a rubric I will provide to you, and your personal knowledge to mark up and comment on your classmates’ papers. Then on that following Thursday, you will get into your groups again and talk about what each person did well and what they might be able to improve upon. Towards the end of class, we will get together as a class and talk about the concerns of our classmates as a whole.

Tentative Course Schedule:

Week 1; 9/3: Introductions; Hi Syllabus; What is “good” writing?

Week 2; 9/10:

-Telling Stories - Parts of a Narrative; Showing and Not Telling; Avoiding Cliches; How to be Specific; Why are Stories Important?

Due: Aria: A Memoir of a Bilingual Childhood - Richard Rodriguez; A Widow’s Story - Joyce Carol Oates; Words - Radiolab; Journal #1

Week 3; 9/17:

-Art - Rhetorical Strategies; Getting Personal; Grammar Issues

Due: I Could Do That - The Art Assignment; Why We Should Draw More (and Photograph Less)
- The School Of Life; My First Four Night Cafes - Patton Oswalt; What Is Art For? - The School Of Life; What Is History For? - The School Of Life; What is Philosophy For? - The School Of Life; What is Literature For? - The School Of Life

Personal Narrative Draft Due (Bring Four Copies to Class!)
Week 4; 9/24:
-Comedy - Peer Review Discussion; Revision Strategies; What is a thesis?; What Makes Something “Arguable”?
Due: The Comic’s Quandary - Lary Wallace; Everything’s Amazing and Nobody’s Happy - Louis CK; Lessons From Late Night - Tina Fey; Confessions Of A Juggler - Tina Fey; Movie Hecklers - Key & Peele; School Bully - Key & Peele; A Very Realistic Video Game - Inside Amy Schumer; Journal #2

Week 5; 10/1:
-Right and Wrong - Considering your Audience; How we can convince; Parts of an Essay; Bringing The Thesis Home
Due: Man Up - Brian Phillips; Morality - Radiolab; Bad Show - Radiolab; Good Show - Radiolab; Letter from Birmingham Jail - Martin Luther King, Jr; Are You Authentic? – 8-Bit Philosophy; Get Away With Anything? – 8-Bit Philosophy; Are Your Actions GOOD? – 8-Bit Philosophy; The Orangutan Trap - Colleen Kimmett; How Could They? - Tage Rai
Personal Narrative Paper Final Due

Week 6; 10/8:
-Pain, Suffering, and Boredom - How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Analysis; Introductions and Conclusions
Due: The Quiet Alarm - Andreas Elpidorou; Is Boredom Worse Than Death? - 8-Bit Philosophy; Consolations for Difficulties - Alain de Botton; Worried Well - Charlie Kurth; On Feeling Melancholy - The School Of Life; Status Anxiety - The School Of Life; What is Success? - The School Of Life; First World Problems - The School Of Life; Why We’re All So Anxious - The School Of Life; Philosophy-The Stoics - The School Of Life; Journal #3

Week 7; 10/15:
-Faith - Counter-Argument; Considering the Essay Structure; Concerns So Far; Grammatical issues
Due: In Silence - Radiolab; Ecclesiastes; Job; I Contradict Myself - Nat Case

Week 8; 10/22:
-Science - Making Your Thesis Matter; Revising an Academic Essay
Due: Numbers - Radiolab; Creation Myths of Cooperstown - Stephen Jay Gould; False Idyll – J.B. MacKinnon; The Skull - Radiolab; (In)completely Loopy” Radiolab Podcast; The Era Of Echinacea - Michael Spector; Does SCIENCE = TRUTH? - 8-Bit Philosophy
Persuasive Paper Draft Due (Bring Four Copies to class!)
Week 9; 10/29:
- **Education** - Peer Review Discussion; Formulating Research Questions; Making Your Thesis Matter; Researching; Coming Up With Ideas and Topics

**Due:** Valedictorian Speech – Erica Goldson (handout); Address upon Receiving the National Book Award for Fiction – William Faulkner; Kenyon College Commencement Address – David Foster Wallace; What Good Is Information? – Dougald Hine; Secrets of Success – Radiolab; Journal #4

Week 10; 11/5:
- **Work** - Researching Continued; Researching Continued; Evaluating Sources; Do I Know Enough about What I am Talking About?

**Due:** You can do it, baby! - Leslie Garrett; Does Money Own You? - 8-bit Philosophy; Is Capitalism Bad For You? – 8-Bit Philosophy; Is The American Dream B.S.? – 8-Bit Philosophy; Brilliant impersonators - Kat McGowan; History of Ideas - Capitalism - The School of Life; History of Ideas - Work - The School of Life

**Persuasive Paper Final Due**

Week 11; 11/12:
- **Other People** - Proving What you are Arguing; Citations, especially MLA; Making Research Matter; Consider the Annotated Bibliography

**Due:** Can We Trust the Media? - 8-Bit Philosophy; Beyond the churn - Sarah Smarsh; Consolation for Unpopularity - Alain de Botton; Poor Teeth - Sarah Smarsh; Know Thy Selfie - Simon Blackburn; A Theory of Jerks - Eric Schwitzgebel; Suicide - The School Of Life; I’m Offended - The School of Life; Fear Of Missing Out - The School Of Life; Journal #5

Week 12; 11/19:
- **Technology** - Giving Research the Storyteller's Edge; The Language of Scholarly and Academic Writing

**Due:** Is Facebook Making Us Lonely? – Stephen Marche; Talking to Machines - Radiolab Podcast; Do Humans Operate Like Computers? - 8-Bit Philosophy; Is Technology Killing Your Creativity? – 8-Bit Philosophy; Artificial Intelligence - The School of Life; Digital Sabbath - The School of Life;

**Annotated Bibliography of at least 5 sources**

Week 13:
11/26: No Class! Thanksgiving Break!
Week 14; 12/3:

-Life - Peer Review Discussion; Using Personal Experience; Group Student Paper Discussion

Due: Beyond - Veronique Greenwood; What is Real? - 8-Bit Philosophy; Why Shouldn't We Commit Suicide? – 8-Bit Philosophy; Time is a Flat Circle? – 8-Bit Philosophy; Do We Enjoy Being Free? - 8-Bit Philosophy; Are You Authentic? – 8-Bit Philosophy; Indifference is a power - Lary Wallace; Letting go - Amy Westervelt; Philosophy-Epicurus - The School of Life; The Meaning Of Life - The School Of Life

Research Paper Draft Due (Bring Four Copies to class!)

Week 15; 12/10:

-Death - Concerns So Far; Group Student Paper Discussion; MLA and Plagiarism Discussion; Course Evaluations

Due: My Own Life - Oliver Sacks; The Good Death - Mary Talbot; Not Nothing - Stephen Cave; The Death Cafe - Clare Davies; The Death of My Father - Julian Baggini; Journal #6

Exam Week:

12/17: One Last Freewrite; Goodbye!

Due: Research Paper Final Draft

YOU'RE DONE! WE DID IT! YAY!