

Writing Seminar for PhD students (1 credit)

I&L 3016 (web-based; see Canvas course)

Wednesday 12:00 – 12:55

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*That I could just understand
The meaning of the word
Your see,
'Cause I've been scrawling it forever,
But it never makes sense to me at all.
Words...
Called a language...*

From *All This And Heaven Too*
Florence and the Machine

Course Description

This course is intended to provide support for academic writing for students in the process of completing milestones in their respective PhD programs. Since the majority of students in this course are in the 4th year in the PhD program, it is assumed that writing projects for milestones are already in process and that these projects will form the basis of our discussions. Because our work will depend on the types of writing concerns that are raised each week as we analyze written texts, we will have a 'living syllabus' that will take shape based on what you need and when you need it. The contents of this course are derived, therefore, from the TEXTS that YOU create and your specific needs for the improvement of your writing. By collectively examining our texts, we may establish by the end of the course a set of operating principles to keep in mind when writing to convey concepts, explain procedures, document observations, and raise critical issues of interpretation.

Course Goals

In this course, we will focus on a number of issues concerning academic writing from word choice to coherence, clarity, and critique in longer stretches of written text. We will learn what is meant by:

- Revising through a *close reading* of your own writing,
- Writing from the reader's perspective by questioning your own,
- Developing your voice as an author,
- Writing as acts of communication,
- Writing without bias or prejudice,
- Inviting and responding to feedback by turning control of our writing over to others,
- Providing productive feedback to writers.

When appropriate, I will share with you my writing and what I have learned that has helped me improve my ability to express concepts, ideas, arguments, etc., in written language.

Class procedures

Each week we will focus on a short piece of writing by one or two students in the class for a writing conference. We will set up a weekly calendar when we meet. Specific procedures are:

- 1) **By Sunday night at the latest**, your text should be send (in canvas) to the entire class for preparation for discussion during our class meeting.
- 2) For now, **send short texts** of 2-3 pages that you have written.
- 3) In the message, **explain briefly** to the class in a few sentences the context of the writing.
- 4) **Ask any direct questions** about what you have sent that you would like the class to focus on. For example, is the concept made clear and understandable? Are my word choices accurate for the topic? Is there anything confusing in the text? Etc.

A Word about content and concepts

You cannot write about what you do not know. It is often the case that struggles with writing can be traced to insufficient content knowledge about the topic of the text or a lack of serious and critical deliberation about the topic, your opinions, reactions, etc. In this class, we cannot be content specialists for all the diverse areas that are represented in each one of us. However, our conferencing around texts will most certainly entail questions about content knowledge, foundational concepts, and current thinking about your topic. Even though you may not be a specialist in the content of the writer, as an intelligent reader who knows how to engage in close reading, you will be able to offer valuable comments and feedback to the writer.

Text

There are no texts for this course. One book that is often recommended is:

They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing with Readings (Fourth Edition)

There are several of these books on Amazon at varying prices (cheapest about 10.00 USD).

In addition to this book, there are many on-line resources about academic writing if you simply write in the search box "Academic Writing." Some of these sites might be worthwhile to consult. The *Purdue On-Line Writing Lab* is very good and comprehensive (and it's free). When appropriate I may share with you a few sites that I found helpful.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

All students are expected to adhere to the standards of academic honesty. Any student engaged in cheating, plagiarism, or other acts of academic dishonesty would be subject to disciplinary action. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating the University Policy.

DISABILITY SERVICES:

Disability Statement – If you require special accommodations or classroom modifications, please notify both the instructor and Disability Resources and Services by the end of the first week of the term. The office of Disability Resources and Services is located in 140 William Pitt Union (412-648-7890 [voice or TDD]), and their website is at: [<http://www.drs.pitt.edu>]. If you have a physical, learning, or emotional disability, please let me know as early as you can so that I can accommodate you.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STATEMENT:

I consider this classroom to be a place where you will be treated with respect, and I welcome individuals of all ages, backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, genders, gender identities, gender expressions, national origins, religious affiliations, sexual orientations, ability – and other visible and nonvisible differences. All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming and inclusive environment for every other member of the class.