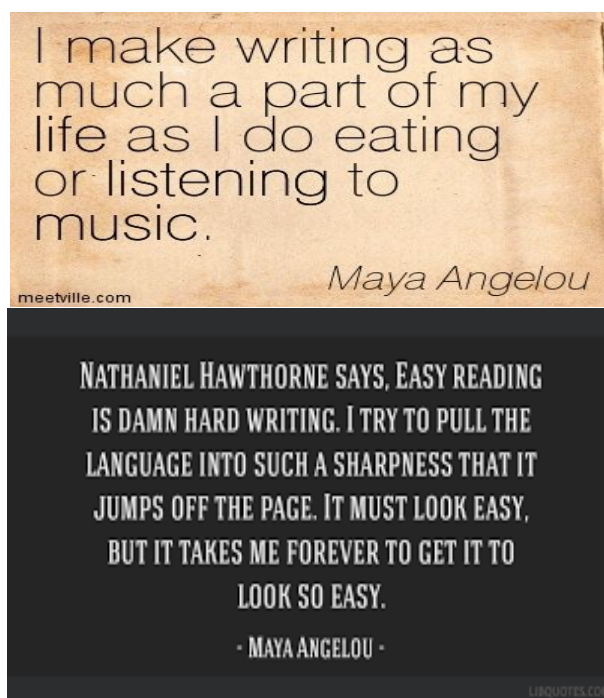


I&L 3016: Writing Seminar for PhD students (1 credit)
Spring 2022
5602 Posvar Hall
Wednesday 11:00 – 11:55
donato@pitt.edu

These two quotes on writing by the late Maya Angelou should guide you throughout this course. As she says, “Easy reading is damn hard writing.”



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 have already completed a portion of your PhD program, it is assumed that writing projects for milestones are already in process. These writing 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 will establish a set of principles to keep in mind when writing to convey concepts, explain procedures, document observations, or raise critical issues of interpretation. In other words, this course is NOT intended to make you into a specific kind

of ‘academic writer,’ but rather the course is intended to allow you to improve your writing so that it is strong, compelling, and clear.

Course Goals

In this course, we will focus on a number of issues concerning academic writing from

- a) word choice, transitions, and clause construction in selected segments of your texts to
- b) coherence, clarity, and critique in longer stretches of written text.

c) A special feature of the course this semester (Spring 2022) is a focus on the differences in writing a FINDINGS chapter and a DISCUSSION chapter. We will discuss how to organize and write FINDINGS based on the analysis of your data.

We will we experience:

- Revising through a *close reading* of your own writing.
- Writing from the reader’s perspective by questioning what a reader might ask.
- Developing your voice as an author.
- Writing as an act of communication.
- Writing without bias, prejudice, or random editorializing.
- Inviting and responding to feedback by listening and responding to readers’ reactions.
- 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

It is said that writing is a **purposeful social** and **cultural practice**. We will experience what this statement means in this class. Each of you will do three things over a two week period:

- 1) Have a ‘**pre-text sharing**’ discussion with the class about the text that you will share.
- 2) At home, edit the text you will send to the class based on questions or suggestions raised in the discussion. Highlight these areas in your text in bold or with a different color.
- 3) The following week, have a ‘**post-text sharing**’ discussion about the text submitted to the class indicating areas that were edited based on the pre-text sharing discussion.

After the pre-text discussion and your personal editing, upload the text to the class **by 10:00 PM Sunday night**. Upload your text to the **DISCUSSION SECTION** of the class CANVAS site.

My Role

During the course, I will provide **mini-lessons** on various aspects of writing that I hope will help you improve the concepts and content you want to communicate in your writing. During the course, we will look are what is called ‘**discourse grammar**,’ that is the grammar of texts and not the parts of grammar you learned in school (e.g., noun, verb, adjective). We will examine

the grammar of text from the smallest component, word choice and clauses, to longer stretches of text for coherence within and across paragraphs, organization, and flow of ideas.

The Importance of Content Knowledge

“If you want to be
a writer, you must
do two things above
all others: read a lot
and write a lot.”

– Stephen King

You cannot write about what you do not know. When you are the writer, it is often the case that struggles with writing can be traced to insufficient content knowledge about the topic of the piece of writing or a lack of serious and critical deliberation about your opinions, reactions, understandings about the topic of you writing. Writing can be and should be a cite of struggle. This is normal and to be expected. This struggle is often resolved, however, by learning about topic through (more) reading, discussing, viewing, listening, etc.

When you are the discussant, you cannot be a content specialist for all the diverse areas that are represented in the class. However, our class conferencing around texts will most certainly entail your questions about the content, foundational concepts, and understandings about the topic. Please ask these questions. Even though you may not be a specialist in the content area of the writer, as an intelligent reader who knows how to engage in close analytical reading, you will be able to ask important questions, offer valuable comments, and provide feedback to the writer.

NO textbook for this course

There are several books on Amazon at varying prices (cheapest about 10.00 USD), however, about writing. There are also 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.

The Use of CANVAS

All course materials will be posted in weekly modules on the CANVAS site. You may download these documents if you like hard copy or use your devices to read them. **Bring to class each week** your devices (tablets, phones, laptops) so we can have access to documents, if we should need them. I will also communicate with you using the ANNOUNCEMENT function, **so please set your CANVAS notifications to ‘immediately’.** If operating correctly, you will see the

messages in both the announcement section of CANVAS where it will be saved and in an e-mail message sent to your PITT account.

Please note:

If you have a **disability** for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union (412) 648-7890, drsrecep@pitt.edu, (412) 228-5347 for P3 ALS users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

If you are **having problems** with anxiety, depression, stress, trauma, or other mental wellness issues, you can visit or call the [University Counseling Center](#) for a free and confidential appointment. They also offer group therapy and support groups for students dealing with grief, social anxiety, trauma, and a variety of other issues. Call them at 412-648-7930 for an appointment or stop by their office in Nordenberg Hall. Other ways to deal with stress and anxiety on campus include the [Stress Free Zone](#), located on the 3rd floor of the William Pitt Union. They offer a variety of classes, one-on-one appointments, and space where you can meditate, practice yoga, etc. They, too, can provide you with strategies to better cope with the stresses of college life.

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.

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.

Statement on Classroom Recording: To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students should not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the written permission of the instructor. Any recording properly approved in advance can only be used for the student's own private use and may not be distributed to anyone or posted on social media. In cases where I must record a class for a student not being able to be in class for a legitimate and excused reason, I will make sure you know that the class is being recorded and why.
