

ENGL 120, Sections 2 & 12

Kim Shirkhani

Locations: LC 204 (2) & BRW35 215 (12)
T-Th 9-10:15 a.m. OR 11:35 a.m.-12:50 pm
Fall 2016

Office hours: TTh 10:30-11:30 & by appt.
Office location: LC 003
kim.shirkhani@yale.edu

Reading and Writing the Modern Essay

Course Goals

In this course, you will work to develop the skill of crafting artful, compelling essays the kind that you would want to read for fun—by way of close, careful attention to how some of the best essays are put together. As in other sections of 120, ours will focus on the role of diction, tone, and structure, and more generally of narrative and comedic elements in good essay writing. But here we will pay special attention to the importance of anticipating the reader's expectations and desires, examining how the model essays fulfill the latter in the process of flirting with and sometimes frustrating the former. The process of revision will be paramount. And it will be in some sense collective. Three quarters of class time will be spent discussing assigned readings how they are built and how they achieve their effects—with an eye to how you might apply their strategies to your own writing. One quarter will be devoted to discussing your peers' and your own writing in the form of a workshop—that is, a constructive discussion aimed at helping you achieve your goal of writing clear, fresh, lively, exciting prose. You will write and revise five essays in all, one of which will share the focus at a workshop.

A note on how to read for this class: The readings on your syllabus have been chosen as much for their remarkable formal strategies as for their compelling subject matter. This kind of reading requires a certain critical distance compared to how we typically read. In other words, you need to keep reminding yourself not to look “through” the writing itself as if it were merely a window onto the writer's point. The writing is the point.

Texts

Available at The Yale Bookstore/ Barnes & Noble:

Roy Peter Clark, *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer*, Little, Brown and Co., 2006 (Optional)

Verlyn Klinkenborg, *Several Short Sentences About Writing*, New York: Vintage, 2012.

Melissa Goldthwaithe et al. *The Norton Reader*, 14th Ed., Norton, 2015

Available at Tyco:

ENGL 120-10/11 Course Packet

Schedule

Note 1: The writing assignments for this course are more or less standardized across all the sections.

Note 2: To help you with your planning, especially brief readings are marked with a [b]

and especially long ones, with an [L]. If you see neither code, the reading is of average length. Note 3: NR14 = Reading is in the Norton Reader, 14th Ed. CP/Canvas = Reading is in the course packet and is available on our Canvas course page under the Modules> Week x Readings tab.

UNIT ONE: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Assignment (1,250 to 1,500 words): Write an essay based on personal experience. Focus your piece on a single, true story or event from your past, although you may refer to peripheral incidents. You should use your narration and interpretation of the event (and perhaps a reflection on the role you played in it) to make a point with public relevance.

Th 9/1, Introduction to the course

Please come having already read Mary Roach, "I, Guppy" (~One-page long, available on my Canvas site under Modules> Week 1 Readings tab)

WEEK 1

T 9/6

David Foster Wallace, "Consider the Lobster" [L], NR13, also on v2

Brent Staples, "Black Men and Public Space," NR14, also CP/Canvas

Verlyn Klinkenborg, *Several Short Sentences About Writing*, pp. 1-29, also CP/Canvas

Th 9/8

Anne Fadiman, "The His'er Problem," CP/Canvas

Geeta Kothari, "If You Are What You Eat, Then What Am I?" CP/Canvas

Phillip Lopate, "Introduction xxiv-xlv" [L], CP/Canvas

WEEK 2

T 9/13

James Baldwin, "Stranger In the Village," NR14

Meghan Daum, "Diary of a Coma," CP/Canvas

Wallace Stegner, "The Dump Ground," CP/Canvas

Klinkenborg, pp. 29-63

W 9/14, Non-class day: Essay 1 draft due for A Schedule. For full credit, post complete draft as Word document to designated Canvas Assignment page **by the start of our normal class time** (For B Schedule/ Workshoppers' deadline see boxed entry below.)

Th 9/15

Ariel Levy, "Thanksgiving in Mongolia," CP/Canvas

David Sedaris, "Ashes," CP/Canvas

Marion Coutts, "There Is Going to Be a Destruction... The Obliteration of a Person," CP/Canvas

F 9/16, Non-class day: Essay 1 draft due for B Schedule (workshoppers). For full credit, **by the start of our normal class time**, post complete draft as Word document to designated Canvas Assignment page and also email a draft to the class e-mail list, CCing me.

WEEK 3

T 9/20 Workshop #1

W 9/21, Non-class day: Essay 1 final due for *A* Schedule. For full credit, post essay as a Word document to designated Canvas Assignment page **by the start of our normal class time**. (For *B* Schedule (workshoppers') deadline, see boxed entry below.)

UNIT TWO: CREATING A PLACE

Assignment (*1,250 to 1,500 words*): Write an essay that portrays a specific place and leaves the reader with a single, unified impression. Highlight telling details – not necessarily the conventionally important ones – and let these details do the work of building the perspective that you want your reader to adopt. *Do not write about your or anyone else's dorm room or suite, for reasons we will discuss in class.*

Th 9/22

Joan Didion, "The Getty" & "Marrying Absurd," *CP/Canvas*

Martin Amis, "Palm Beach: Don't You Love It?" *CP/Canvas*

Fred Strebeigh, "Wheels of Freedom" [L], *CP/Canvas*

Roy Clark, *Tools*, Tool numbers 14-17, on *Canvas*

F 9/23, Non-class day: Final Essay 1 due for *B* Schedule (workshoppers). For full credit, post essay as a Word document to designated Canvas Assignment page **by the start of our normal class time**. Also remember to bring on Monday your peer review materials from workshop.

WEEK 4

T 9/27

Joan Didion, "At the Dam," *CP/Canvas*

David Foster Wallace, "Ticket to the Fair," [L], *CP/Canvas*

Susan Orlean, "A Place Called Midland," *CP/Canvas*

W 9/28, Non-class day: Essay 2 draft due for *A* Schedule. For full credit, post complete draft as Word document to designated Canvas Assignment page **by the start of our normal class time** (For *B* Schedule/ Workshoppers' deadline see boxed entry below.)

Th 9/29

David Foster Wallace, "Shipping Out: On the (Nearly Lethal) Comforts..." [L], *CP/Canvas*

Hua Hsu, "Wokking the Suburbs," *CP/Canvas*

Klinkenborg, pp. 64-100

F 9/30, Non-class day: Essay 1 draft due for *B* Schedule (workshoppers). For full credit, **by the start of our normal class time**, post complete draft as Word document to your designated Canvas Assignment page and also email a draft to the class e-mail list, CCing me.

WEEK 5

T 10/4 Workshop #2

W 10/5, non-class day: Essay 2 final due for A Schedule. For full credit, post essay as a Word document to designated Canvas Assignment page **by the start of our normal class time**. (For B Schedule/ Workshoppers' deadline see boxed entry below.)

UNIT THREE: PORTRAYING A PERSON

Assignment (*1,250 to 1,500 words*): Write an essay that portrays a person and creates a unified, lasting impression of that person. You must include some direct quotation, for which you will *conduct one or more interviews* (the more the better) with your subject *and an additional one* with someone acquainted with your subject. Take thorough and accurate notes, including quotations and the time and place of the interview (I might ask to see any of this material). *Do not portray yourself; and do not portray a family member or another student between the ages of 14-24 unless you clear it with me first.*

Th 10/6

Annie Dillard, from *An American Childhood*, NR14

Calvin Trillin, "Covering the Cops," *CP/Canvas*

Roy Clark, *Tools*, numbers 26-28, on *Canvas*

F 10/7, Non-class day: Final Essay 2 due for B Schedule (workshoppers). For full credit, post essay as a Word document to designated Canvas Assignment page **by the start of our normal class time**. Also remember to bring on Monday your peer review materials from workshop.

WEEK 6

T 10/11

Ariel Levy, "Enchanted: The Transformation of Marc Jacobs," *CP/Canvas*;

Ian Parker, "Why Me?: Alec Baldwin's disappointment, undimmed by success," *CP/Canvas*;

Roy Clark, *Tools*, numbers 29-33, on *Canvas*;

Klinkenborg, pp. 100-26

W 10/12, Non-class day: Physical Description Exercise due for A & B Schedules. For full credit, by the start of our normal class time post to designated Canvas Assignment page a one-page description of your profile subject's physical appearance (including voice qualities; age; legible regional background; legible socioeconomic background; mannerisms; names, nicknames and aliases; and clothing style).

Th 10/13

Tish Durkin, "Heavy Metal Mercenary" [L], *CP/Canvas*

Martin Amis, "In Hefnerland," *CP/Canvas*

WEEK 7

T 10/18

Malcolm Gladwell, "Six Degrees of Lois Weisberg" [L], *CP/Canvas*

Gay Talese, "Mr. Bad News," *CP/Canvas*

Version 8/31/16. Subject to minor changes as the semester progresses.

Klinkenborg, pp. 126-60

The same evening (10/18) by 11 p.m.: Essay 3 draft due for both *A* & *B* Schedules, including Workshoppers. For full credit, post complete draft as Word document to designated Canvas Assignment page. (**Workshoppers: do observe this Canvas upload deadline**, though you can wait to email a draft to the class e-mail list, CCing me, until Monday, 10/24, by class time.)

Th 10/20 **NO CLASS, OCTOBER RECESS**

WEEK 8

T 10/25

Workshop #3; Klinkenborg, pp. 160-end

Th 10/27

David Foster Wallace, "Roger Federer as Religious Experience" [L], *CP/Canvas*

M 10/31, Non-class day: Final Essay 3 due for both *A* & *B* Schedules, including Workshoppers. For full credit, post essay as a Word document to designated Canvas Assignment page **by the start of our normal class time**. **Workshoppers:** also remember to bring on Tuesday your peer review materials from workshop.

WEEK 9

UNIT FOUR: CULTURAL CRITIQUE

Assignment (*1,250 to 1,500 words*): Write an essay that illuminates an artifact of contemporary culture. This artifact could be an event, an invention, a product, a trend, a practice. **This is not an op-ed or pro/con position paper** but rather an analysis—a tunneling around one's chosen artifact to discover and turn in the light some of the beliefs and assumptions that underlie it and bring it into being.

T 11/1

David Foster Wallace, "The Weasel, Twelve Monkeys and the Shrub" [L], *CP/Canvas*

Joan Didion, "Good Citizens," *CP/Canvas*

Th 11/3

Adam Gopnik, "The Information," *CP/Canvas*

Eula Biss, "Sentimental Medicine: Why We Still Fear Vaccines" [L] *CP/Canvas*

Eric Schlosser, "Why The Fries Taste Good," [L], *CP/Canvas*

WEEK 10

T 11/8

Roxane Gay, "Peculiar Benefits," *CP/Canvas*

Kelefa Sanneh, "Discriminating Tastes" [b], *CP/Canvas*

Jack Hitt, "A Confederacy of Sauces," *CP/Canvas*

Anne Fadiman, "Night Owl," *NR14 & Canvas*

W 11/9, Non-class day: Essay 4 draft due for *A* Schedule. For full credit, post complete

draft as Word document to designated Canvas Assignment page **by the start of our normal class time** (For B Schedule/ Workshopppers' deadline see boxed entry below.)

Th 11/10

Henry Louis Gates, "In the Kitchen," *NR14*

Louis Menand "Name That Tone" [b] *CP/Canvas*

Eula Biss, "Time and Distance Overcome," *CP/Canvas*

F 11/11, Non-class day: Essay 4 draft due for B Schedule (workshoppers). For full credit, **by the start of our normal class time**, post complete draft as Word document to designated Canvas Assignment page and also email a draft to the class e-mail list, CCing me.

WEEK 11

T 11/15

Workshop #4

W 11/16, Non-class day: Final Essay 4 due for A Schedule. For full credit, post essay as a Word document to designated Canvas Assignment page **by the start of our normal class time**. (For B Schedule/ Workshopppers' deadline see boxed entry below.)

UNIT FIVE: SATIRE/HUMOR

Assignment (750-1,250 words): Write a satiric essay that makes a point about modern culture.

Th 11/17

Jonathan Swift, "A Modest Proposal," *NR14*

Jack Handey, "My First Day in Hell" [b], *CP/Canvas*

Joe Veix, "Goodbye, New York" [b] *CP/Canvas*

"Area Man Passionate Defender of What He Images Constitution," from *Onion* [b] *CP/Canvas*

Stein, "Leaked!: Harvard's Grading Rubric" [b] *CP/Canvas*

F 11/18, Non-class day: Final Essay 4 due for B Schedule (workshoppers). For full credit, post essay as a Word document to designated Canvas Assignment page **by the start of our normal class time**. Also please, by the start of our normal class time, put in my LC 109 mailbox your peer review materials from workshop.

WEEK 12

T 11/22

NOVEMBER BREAK

Th 11/24

NOVEMBER BREAK

UNIT FIVE: SATIRE/HUMOR

Assignment (750-1,250 words): Write a satiric essay that makes a point about modern culture.

WEEK 13

T 11/29

David Sedaris, “Me Talk Pretty One Day” & “In the Waiting Room,” *CP/Canvas*

“Marilyn Manson Now Going Door to Door Trying to Shock People,” *[b] CP/Canvas*

Maria Semple, “Dear Mountain Room Parents” *[b] CP/Canvas*

John Kenney, “We Are the One Percent” *[b], CP/Canvas*

Th 12/1

Gideon Lewis-Kraus, “Christopher Nolan’s ‘Implementation’” *[b], CP/Canvas*

Dan McCoy, “Budget Inception” *[b], CP/Canvas*

Roxane Gay, “To Scratch, Claw, or Grope Clumsily or Frantically” *CP/Canvas*

Patricia Pearson, “History: The Customer Reviews” *[b], CP/Canvas*

Mallory Ortberg, “Everything That’s Wrong of Raccoons” *[b] CP/Canvas*

F 12/2, Non-class day: Essay 5 draft due for *A* Schedule. For full credit, post complete draft as Word document to designated Canvas Assignment page **by the start of our normal class time**. For *B* Schedule (workshoppers’) deadline, see boxed entry below.

WEEK 14

M 12/5, Non-class day: Essay 5 draft due for *B* Schedule (workshoppers). For full credit, **by the start of our normal class time**, post complete draft as Word document to designated Canvas Assignment page and also email a draft to the class e-mail list, CCing me.

T 12/6

Zev Borow, “A Guide to Summer Sun Protection” *[b], CP/Canvas*

“Pitchfork” & “Frito Lay” from the *Onion* *[b], CP/Canvas*

Paul Rudnick, “A Date with Nate” *[b], CP/Canvas*

Th 12/8

Workshop #5

Course Conclusion

F 12/16, Non-class day: Final Essay 5 due for both *A* & *B* Schedules, including Workshoppers. For full credit, post essay as a Word document to designated Canvas Assignment page **by the start of our normal class time**. Workshoppers: please, by the start of our normal class time, also put in my LC 109 mailbox your peer review materials from workshop.

Course Requirements (please read!)



1. Participation, Attendance, and Punctuality: Good participation means fully engaging with the course – reading carefully, digging into the texts at hand, offering constructive feedback on the work of your peers, and contributing to class discussion in a fashion both generous and economical. Attendance at every session is crucial, for which reason unexcused absence will negatively affect your final grade. Note that the short exercises assigned during the semester also fall under this rubric (i.e., they're not graded, but you do get/lose credit for turning/not turning them in.)

2. Essays, Drafts, and Revisions: You will write five essays, each of which will be written in stages, including a *complete* draft version (to receive my comments as well as credit for turning it in, though no grade) and a revised final version (to receive a grade). Essay cycles will correspond with the course's five main units – personal experience, place, profile of a person, cultural critique, and satire.

3. Workshops: At least once during the semester, your writing (along with that of two of your classmates) will be the focus of a workshop period. You will be assigned to a group (1-5) at the beginning of the semester. Non-presenting students will prepare for these sessions by reading their classmates' work in advance and preparing a typed report for each of the workshopped writers. Specifically: Type your comments, at least 150 words, for each workshop draft (you will be reading two to three drafts),

- ~ stating what works best in the draft

- ~ suggesting one improvement

Put the date, your name, and the name of the workshop writer on your comments and put your name on each draft you read, whether or not you have written on it. Bring two copies of each report to the workshop (one for me and one for the writer), and return the drafts to the writers at the end of workshop (but know that I will end up reviewing them).

Deadlines & Extension Policy

Deadlines for all assignments are firm. In cases of unexcused absence, late *final* papers will be docked 1/3 of a grade for each calendar day beyond the deadline. **Extensions on final papers will be granted only in cases of extreme need and should be requested during an office visit or via e-mail.** This policy is not meant to be punitive but rather is a practical tool to help me keep the class running. As for extensions on drafts, getting one does not automatically spell an extension on the final – i.e., you might have fewer days between the draft and final deadlines. Also, complete drafts (**not outlines or notes**) are due on draft deadlines; if a draft is not submitted on deadline without legitimate excuse, the final paper grade will be docked by a full letter grade (A- becomes B-, e.g.). ***Please note that final paper grades are holistic measures of your performance in the given unit, including meeting courtesy deadlines (i.e., on peer copies during workshop), getting your draft in on time, and doing a complete draft (versus outlines, sketches, or notes).***

Submission Procedures

All information is under the deadline notes on syllabus schedule.

Grading

Essays 1-5

18% each

Written Exercises, workshop reviews	5%
In-class participation	5%

Formatting Work

All essays—drafts and revisions—must be in college-level-presentable shape: typed in a 12-point font, double-spaced, **stapled**, and free of typographical errors. Give each essay a title, which should be centered at the top of page one. Using the header/footer function, number each page in the upper right-hand corner, with your last name typed in before the page number. At the end of each draft, include 2-3 questions you have for me and/or note what you most want help with for the revision. **At the end of each paper, both draft and final versions, (1) give the word count, (2) acknowledge any help you received on the paper, and, (3) if you used sources, identify the style you used for documentation.** All sources, including electronic citations, should be properly documented according to a major style guide (MLA, APA, Chicago, e.g.). These specs do not apply to workshop peer reviews, though the same must be typed.

The “Non-Fictionality” Requirement and Academic Honesty

All the writing you do in this course must be non-fiction (true, verifiable). In addition, all of the work you submit should be your own, in conception as well as execution. You are encouraged to discuss your essays with your peers and to receive editorial comments, but you are not to accept final phrasing or significant conceptual help from anyone. Keep track of all your sources (whether books, conversations, websites, or anything else), as you will have to cite each one in the form of endnotes or a Works Cited list. If you are ever unsure of the difference between legitimate reliance on a source and plagiarism, please feel free to run it by me. Plagiarism is grounds for failure, of the assignment and/or possibly of the class. Yale’s statements on academic honesty can be found here:

<http://yalecollege.yale.edu/content/academic-honesty>.

Additional help

Yale College Writing Center is a valuable resource. The Bass Writing Tutors, located in all the residential colleges, are especially useful for students who need or would like long-term, regular, one-on-one help. For shorter term or last-minute help, Writing Partners (Yale College or graduate school students who are exceptionally talented tutors) offer drop-in service five nights a week. You can make an appointment for either kind of tutoring at <http://www.yale.edu/bass/tutoring/partners/>