

Writing As Consolation

**Dr. Nadeen
Kharputly**

nkharputly@wlu.edu

Washington Hall 110

Office Hours:

Wed 2:30-4:30

Fri 11:15-12:15

and by appointment

Required texts

Everything you need for this class is available on **Canvas** (<http://canvas.wlu.edu>), with the exception of Sufjan Stevens' album, *Carrie and Lowell*. You may access the album through Spotify or YouTube or your preferred music streaming service.

Please bring the readings to class; hardcopies, tablets and laptops are all permissible (no cell phones)

Course description

This course focuses on the theme of writing as consolation, with a close look at meditations on grief, healing, loss, complicated relationships with the body and with nature, ranging from work by Roxane Gay, Joan Didion, Rachel Carson, Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, and more. The central question we consider together here is how and why writers turn to their craft to move through tremendous shifts in their life. What does it mean to write about difficult issues publicly, to put oneself — as a writer, as a person, as someone who grieves — out there? What is achieved in this relationship between reader and writer? Students should be prepared to discuss and write about sensitive issues like trauma, grief, loss, assault, illness, and death

Due to the difficult nature of the topics we will discuss, I strongly urge you to consult with mental health resources on campus should you need them. Therapy is a necessary tool for everyone to make sense of the world around them. Please explore the various resources available to you on campus:

Mental Health & Wellness at W&L: <https://www.wlu.edu/student-life/student-services-and-support/mental-health-and-wellness>

Syllabus change policy

This syllabus is only a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice.

Assignments

A) **75%** -- 4 papers, 6000 words total:

- 1) close reading (1000 words) = **15%**
- 2) compare/contrast (1500 words) = **15%**
- 3) mixed genre (1500 words) = **20%**
- 4) list & rationale (rationale = 2000 words) = **25%**

B) **10%** -- Attendance and participation

C) **5%** -- In-class work (workshops, peer critique)

D) **5%** -- Self-evaluations (1000 words total)

You must complete all components of the class in order to receive a passing grade

Formatting

All essays should be turned in with Times New Roman 12pt font, 2.0 spacing, and 1-inch margins all around. Please include your name, essay title, the pledge, and your word count. Please adhere to **MLA style**.

Objectives and Learning Outcomes

1. Write persuasive essays that contain a clear and debatable thesis, appropriately developed claims, and logical organization of argument.
2. Analyze supporting evidence fully and convincingly, integrating the writer's ideas with those from appropriate primary or secondary sources.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of audience appropriate documentation conventions and mastery of sentence-level skills, including precision in grammar, mechanics, and style.
4. Reflect on and apply the stages of the writing process including pre-writing, drafting, reviewing, conferencing, editing, and revising to develop polished final products.

Class policies

Absences and late submissions

Attendance in this class is crucial for your success. You may have two unexcused absences during the semester, no questions asked. Further absences require permission or documentation or they will impact your grade. Perpetual tardiness and/or leaving class early will also affect your grade. Please e-mail me when you expect to miss class and/or if issues come up.

Late submissions will lose a third of a grade per late day (e.g. A to A-). Papers more than 3 days late will not be accepted.

Accommodations

Students requesting accommodation will need to provide appropriate documentation of: (1) a disability, which is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; and (2) a need for accommodation, by virtue of the specific functional limitations of the disability, to have equal access to educational opportunities. It is the responsibility of a student with a physical or mental disability who may require any type of accommodation to make the accommodation request in a timely manner. In order to ensure sufficient time for the eligibility and accommodation decision process and to make arrangements for appropriate accommodations, a student should contact the Title IX Coordinator and Director of Disability Resources, Elrod Commons 212, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia 24450, (540) 458-4055 and submit the documents required for consideration of disability accommodations during the first month of the fall or winter academic terms. Requests submitted after the first month of either of those academic terms, or requests submitted with incomplete documentation (including insufficient testing data), could result in a delay of consideration and action on the request until the the following academic term. The student will need to complete a “Request for Accommodation of Disability” form, obtain a copy of the most recent medical or cognitive testing documentation, and schedule an interview with the designated administrator.

General Guidelines

Please devote the 60 minutes of class to listening attentively to everyone in this space. We are covering difficult and sensitive topics so your full attention is required. Do be mindful of your participation – make sure you respond to the questions posed during our discussions directly and efficiently, and do not forget that your classmates need to be able to participate as well.

Bring the readings with you to each class. You may bring your tablet or laptop, although hardcopies of the readings are definitely preferred. Phones must be kept out of sight. Any distracting behavior – attempting to text discreetly, browsing through social media, etc. - will be cited, and you will be marked as absent for the class. Fiddling with technology during class is rude and distracting, both to me and your peers, and a colossal waste of your time and tuition money. If you are dealing with an emergency that requires you to be on your phone, please do not come to class.

I encourage you to attend office hours whenever you need to talk through ideas and issues, even early on in the semester. Please check your W&L e-mail at least once a day to keep up to date with any possible changes to our schedule. Expect responses to your e-mails within 24 hours during the week and 48 hours over the weekend.

Honor System & plagiarism

Students will be held to the standards of the W&L **Honor System**. The inclusion of your name on all assignments indicates that you have understood and abided by the pledge, whether you write the pledge or not.

Plagiarism is a serious offense. It is imperative that you review the university's statement on plagiarism before turning in any assignments: <https://libguides.wlu.edu/plagiarism> and <https://www.wlu.edu/writing-program/citation-documentation-and-plagiarism>

Plagiarism consists of but is not limited to the following: presenting another person's ideas or language as if they were your own, copying (words AND ideas) from the Internet, and failure to acknowledge and properly cite the sources of the language and/or ideas presented. Re-using language from a paper you have previously written for another class is unacceptable. If you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, please check in with me ahead of time. It is your responsibility to be aware. You may find this plagiarism test useful: <https://www.indiana.edu/~istd/test.html>

Class Resources

Writing Center & Writing Program resources

The **Writing Center on campus (Leyburn M11)** is not a tool for remedial purposes, but a crucial resource for writers of every skill and background. Good writing relies on feedback from other perspectives; I encourage you to visit the Center frequently in order to solicit feedback and improve your writing. <https://www.wlu.edu/writing-program/writing-center>

The **Writing Program website** (<http://www.wlu.edu/writing-program>) offers a good list of resources for your essays. Use right hand side menu/tabs for:

- **Resources:** <https://www.wlu.edu/writing-program/resources>
- **Specific Types of Writing:** <https://www.wlu.edu/writing-program/specific-types-of-writing>
- **Writing in Different Disciplines:** <https://www.wlu.edu/writing-program/writing-in-different-disciplines>
- **International Students:** <https://www.wlu.edu/writing-program/international-students>

Course Schedule

Friday, September 6

Introductions

On writing

Monday, September 9

Anne Lamott, excerpts from *Bird by Bird* (1995)

Amy Tan, "Pixel by Pixel," in *Light the Dark: Writers on Creativity, Inspiration, and the Artistic Process* (2017)

Wednesday, September 11

"On Motivation," from *The Writers Chapbook: a compendium of fact, opinion, wit, and advice from the 20th century's preeminent writers* (1989)

Skim through the quotes in this piece and write a 200-300 word explanation of your choices. Bring your writing to class on Friday.

Friday, September 13

Workshop short essay [diagnostic exercise; essay will not be graded]

On grief

Monday, September 16

Sign up for conferences with prof

Joan Didion, chapters 4 and 17 from *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005)

Wednesday, September 18

Library workshop: Managing Citations

Joan Didion continued

Friday, September 20

Paper #1 draft due. Conferences next week

Matthew Salesses, "To Grieve Is to Carry Another Time" in *Longform* (2019)

Conferences in my office, Washington Hall 110

Monday, September 23

No class – conferences

Wednesday, September 25

No class – conferences

Friday, September 27

Revised paper #1 due by 11:59pm

Workshop: debrief and discuss writing process for paper #1

On language and sense of self

Monday, September 30

James Baldwin, “Autobiographical Notes,” from *Collected Essays* (1998)

Wednesday, October 2

Toni Morrison, “Eulogy for James Baldwin,” from *The Source of Self-Regard* (2019)

Friday, October 4

Nicole Chung, excerpt from *All You Can Ever Know* (2018)

On our bodies

Monday, October 7

Roxane Gay, chapters 1-4 from *Hunger: a memoir of (my) body* (2017)

Wednesday, October 9

Tressie McMillan Cottom, “Thick” from *Thick* (2018)

Friday, October 11 – NO CLASS (Reading day)

On nature

Monday, October 14

Rachel Carson, “Of Man and the Stream of Time” (1962)

Wednesday, October 16

Wendell Berry, “Faustian Economics” (2006)

Friday, October 18

Paper #2 draft due. Bring 3 hard copies to class

In-class peer workshop

On nature and animals

Monday, October 21

Return peer edits by 11:59pm

Walt Whitman, excerpt from “Song of Myself” from the *Leaves of Grass* (1855)

Ross Gay, “Becoming A Horse” (2012)

Wednesday, October 23

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance” (1841)

Friday, October 25

Revised paper #2 due by 11:59pm

Library workshop: Frankenreferences

On poetry

Monday, October 28

Rainer Maria Rilke, selections from *Letters To A Young Poet* (1929)

Wednesday, October 30

Mary Oliver, selected poems

Friday, November 1

Frank O'Hara, selections from *Meditations in an Emergency* (1957)

On poetry

Monday, November 4

Midterm self-eval due

Selections from Wallace Stevens and W. S. Merwin

Wednesday, November 6

Selections from Jane Hirshfield and Ed Bok Lee

Friday, November 8

In-class library workshop: Search Strategies 101

On poetry

Monday, November 11 – Meet at Library: Leyburn 301

Hands On Session in the library

*Wednesday, November 13*Krista Tippett, “Gregory Orr: Shaping Grief with Language,” *On Being Podcast* (2019)

Gregory Orr, selected poems

*Friday, November 15****Paper #3 first draft due***

In-class peer review workshop

Contemporary elegies

*Monday, November 18*Sufjan Stevens, *Carrie and Lowell* (2015)*Wednesday, November 20*Sufjan Stevens, *Carrie and Lowell* (2015)*Friday, November 22****Revised paper #3 due***Sufjan Stevens, *Carrie and Lowell* (2015)

Thanksgiving holiday

*Monday, November 25 – NO CLASS**Wednesday, November 27 – NO CLASS**Friday, November 29 – NO CLASS*

Course conclusion

Monday, December 2

In class workshop for paper #4 draft

*Wednesday, December 4****Paper #4 first draft due***

Peer critique workshop

Friday, December 6

Conclusion

FINAL PAPER: Paper #4 final draft and final self-eval due on Wed Dec 11
