

**New York University**  
**Expository Writing Program**  
**Writing the Essay**  
**Fall 2014**  
**EXPOS-UA 1 134 (17621)**  
**M, W 4:30pm–5:45pm**  
**Rogers Hall Room 203**

Instructor:  
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*"Most people know you as a novelist, but you spend a lot of your time writing nonfiction. What led you to start writing essays?"*

To change my own mind. I try to create a new vocabulary or terrain for myself, so that I open out—I always think of the Dutch claiming land from the sea—or open up something that would have been closed to me before. That's the point and the pleasure of it. I continuously scrutinize my own thinking. I write something and think, how do I know that that's true? If I wrote what I thought I knew from the outset, then I wouldn't be learning anything new. In this culture, essays are often written for the sake of writing the essay. Someone finds a quibble of potential interest and quibbles about it. This doesn't mean the writer isn't capable of doing something of greater interest, but we generate a lot of prose that's not vital. The best essays come from the moment in which people really need to work something out.

Marilynne Robinson

**Required Texts and Materials**

*The Brooklyn Reader*. Ed. Jono Mischkot, Elisa Linsky, Pat C. Hoy II.

*Mercer Street* (2014–2015). Ed. Steven Donatelli, Hanna Novak, Megan Steiner.

*The Little, Brown Essential Handbook for Writers*. 6th ed. Jane E. Aaron

*Oxford English Dictionary*. Online through Bern Dibner

Library Link.

You will need a notebook dedicated to our course. You will use this journal to hold your in-class writing assignments, notes, observations from your reading, and the thinking it generates. It is important to create a "common place" where useful ideas or arguments can be gathered. Dedicated to our work this semester your notebook will serve as a repository of ideas that you can draw on as you approach your writing assignments. It will prove useful to have all your informal writing (that is, writing you are not handing in to me) in one place.

### **Course Description**

Writing the Essay asks you to write three exploratory essays to help you work on critical thinking and writing skills as you examine specific, textual evidence, and ideas.

This semester, we will do close, annotated readings and write a series of exercises that will lead to your writing several drafts of three exploratory essays, that include a revealing title, well-represented textual and other evidence, and an idea that evolves and turns over the course of the essay.

It is necessary that you complete all the exercises in order 1) to pass the course and 2) to construct the best possible essay at the end of each progression. Through conversation, in-class writing prompts, and incremental homework exercises, we will practice the careful reading and critical interpretation of several texts, with an emphasis on the craft and art of writing good, specific, clear prose and provocative exploratory essays ourselves.

### **Course Goals**

1. To learn that writing is pleasurable, hard work.
2. To learn to write a number of different kinds of essays.
3. To develop an interesting and arresting writing style.

### **A Note on Form**

Exploratory Essays are not five-paragraph essays in shape or form. Exploratory essays weave together reflective and analytical writing *inductively* to *interpret and create*

rather than just *report and summarize*.

Our goal is to write inductively (reasoning from particular facts to general principles—OED), and imaginatively, while remaining logical and credible in our thinking, and coherent in our writing. The essays that we will read together often exemplify this inductive and imaginative thinking/writing process. As you read these essays, try to notice how each essay grows and develops as it represents fresh evidence and makes surprising connections between pieces of evidence. Pay attention to how each one explores an idea from many angles and through many lenses, while guiding the reader through discoveries (which are not necessarily declarations).

### **Procedures**

You will read and (almost always) write about a number of essays over the course of the term, either formally or informally. Make sure you bring your annotated texts and other materials to class with you. Be prepared to discuss what you've read. Our discussions will require a close reading of the texts I assign as well as the careful completion of your exercises.

Print each exercise before class and be ready to work with it when class begins. You will hand it in to me when class is over. Printed exercises are due at each class meeting. I cannot accept emailed homework. Plan ahead. *See me in advance about problems.*

Save all the writing you generate for this class, especially the work I return to you with my comments and suggestions. This material will make drafting your essay an easier task and is required to be submitted at the end of each progression in a portfolio with your finished essay.

At the end of each progression, your completed essay will be included in a portfolio that contains your exercises and two proofread drafts of your essay. It is absolutely essential that you keep the assignments with my written feedback; you have to include them in the portfolio.

### **Communication**

You will need to check your NYU email regularly between class meetings. This is how I will communicate with you should the need arise (e.g. announcements, changes in the assignment, additional notes or ideas)

If you need to email me, be aware that I might not respond promptly in the evenings or over the weekend. Often, it is best to make an appointment if you have questions or concerns that we need to address together.

### **Attendance and Participation**

Our class is a reading and writing community. Your timely, alert presence in class and active participation are essential. If for some reason you need to be late or absent, make every attempt to notify me *in advance*, and be prepared to present documentation and an explanation when you return to class. Medical conditions and the observance of religious holidays are legitimate excuses for an absence.

Our class will be shaped according to a shared conversation. Come to class ready to talk about the work you're doing, but also be ready to approach the work in unexpected ways.

### **Peer workshops**

Since you will occasionally share writing your peers, be sure to you bring work that you feel comfortable sharing with the group.

### **Writing Requirements**

All final essays must

1. Explore and develop an idea in a coherent, interesting way;
2. Have a thoughtful beginning, middle, and end;
3. Be grammatically correct; and
4. Have a tone appropriate for the intended audience.

### **Grades**

A work gives the reader a positive impression of excellence in all listed standards.

B work gives the reader a positive impression of general superiority in all listed standards.

C work is average in each standard.

D or F work is seriously deficient in one or more of the listed standards.

### **Conferences**

You may email me for an appointment if you would like to see me. I may also ask you to meet with me or to visit the Writing Center if I think you need additional help. You and I will schedule two required 20-minute conferences during the term.

### **Writing Center**

To make an appointment in the Writing Center, go here:

<https://nyu.mywconline.com/>

The Writing Center is a valuable resource dedicated to our course and curriculum and staffed by EWP instructors. It is a place where any NYU student can get one-on-one help with his or her writing. A 40-45 minute appointment is useful at every stage of the writing process. As you might imagine, appointments are harder to come by as essay due dates approach. I encourage you to take advantage of the Writing Center not only to complete your drafts, but also to brainstorm ideas, engage in a close reading of an assigned text, or work on your exercises.

### **Miscellaneous items of importance**

All your work (exercises, drafts, essays) must be typewritten (near letter quality)--**double-spaced** with 1 1/2 inch margins on the left, 1-inch margins elsewhere, stapled or paper-clipped. Folding down the upper left hand corner of your work to secure the pages doesn't work.

Use standard pica or elite type (11 or 12).

Avoid fancy fonts; they usually draw attention away from your good ideas.

You will often need to provide copies (sometimes two) of your work for your classmates. I will let you know when this is required.

Always keep extra printed copies of your work.