

Professor Leslie Petty
Office Hours: MWF 11-12 and by appointment
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English 151: Thinking, Reading and Writing Critically

In this course, we will read several selections from *The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2008*. We will consider the form as well as the content of these essays; while they provide provocative perspectives on science and nature, they are also exemplars of articulate, persuasive writing. By the end of the course, you will not only have a better sense of the current national discourse about science and nature, but you will also be prepared to comment persuasively on this discourse through argumentative writing.

Our main focus will be on the *process* of good writing, and perhaps the most essential skill for being a good writer is to be a good reader. Therefore, we will talk about the elements of persuasive analysis not only as training for you to be better writers, but also to give you a vocabulary to discuss and analyze essays and books. By the end of the course, you will have:

- 1) Learned to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments and points of view
- 2) Developed skills in expressing yourself both in writing and orally
- 3) Learned how to find, evaluate and use resources for answering research questions

Required Texts

Ramage, John D., et. al. *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing: Brief Edition*. 6th Ed. New York: Pearson Longman Press, 2012.

Roach, Mary ed. *The Best American Science and Nature Writing, 2011*. New York: Columbia UP, 2011.

*You may have assignments in my Public Folder. These will be identified clearly on your syllabus or announced in class and are considered required texts.

Assignments

Essay #1: Rhetorical Analysis (4 pages)	15%
Essay #2: Exploratory Essay (5 pages)	20%
Essay #3: Research Essay and Presentation (10-12 pages)	35%
Written Essay	30%
Presentation	5%
Essay #4: Argumentative Essay	15%
Unit Writing Assignments/In-Class Quizzes	10%
Participation	5%

PLEASE NOTE: You cannot receive a passing grade for this course unless you submit all major assignments.

Attendance Policy

You are expected to be in class every day. Being “present” doesn’t just mean physically being in the room; you are to be alert and prepared. Anyone not alert (i.e. sleeping, reading the paper, working a crossword, etc.) will be counted absent, as will anyone clearly not prepared to participate. If you must miss class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed and what, if anything, you need to make up. **After 3 absences (for any reason), you will lose 1/3 letter grade for each subsequent absence. If you have more than 6 absences, you will fail the course.** Chronic tardiness will count towards absences.

Participation

This course is a seminar and requires the active and engaged participation of every member of the class. Make sure you read each day’s assignment carefully and come to class with questions or comments to bring to the discussion. Often the most productive questions are ones that work to pinpoint what is difficult about a particular reading.

Cell Phones and Laptops

I should never see or hear your cell phone, nor should I be aware of it vibrating. Please turn your phones off before you enter the room. Be warned that I reserve the right to answer any phone that rings in my class and that if I see you texting or checking your phone, you’ll be counted absent for that day. I am happy for you to use laptops for taking notes, etc. However, if I discover that you are on the internet for any reason (other than my asking you to look something up) or you are doing something on your laptop that distracts you from class participation, then you will be counted absent that day, and I’ll ask you not to bring your laptop back.

Assignment Submission Policy

Essays are due at the beginning of class unless otherwise noted. Essays turned in late (for whatever reason) will be penalized a 1/3 letter grade per day, including weekends. If the essay is one week late, it will be given an “F.” Presentations and in-class quizzes / writing assignments cannot be made up. If you believe you have a legitimate reason for missing a due date, talk to me beforehand to make alternative arrangements. **Please note: You will be required to submit the rough draft and the unit’s daily writing assignments along with each essay.**

All essays must (be):

- 1) Typed, double-spaced with 1-inch margins and 12 pt. Times New Roman font
- 2) Include your name, date and which assignment you’re submitting in the upper left-hand corner, also double-spaced

- 3) Follow MLA style documentation
- 4) Proofread carefully for grammatical errors and typos

Unit Reading and Writing Assignments

I will distribute reading assignments in “units” before each essay is due. Doing so gives me the flexibility to respond to the particular interests and needs of the class. Note that you have short writing assignments on most days. These are to be completed on the day assigned and brought to class. At the end of the unit, you will submit them in a packet along with your rough and final drafts of the essay.

Rough Drafts and Peer Review

An integral part of your essay assignment is participation in peer review. Therefore, you must bring a complete rough draft with you to class on peer review day, which I will initial at the beginning of class. Failure to submit the rough draft that I have initialed along with your final essay will result in a 10-point deduction (1 full letter grade) from your final essay grade. We will discuss this policy further as the semester progresses.

Grammar

This course is not designed to teach you grammar. I assume that you already have a solid understanding of grammatical rules, so significant errors in this area will lower your essay grades significantly. Of course, you probably do have some grammar weaknesses, and I am happy to meet with you personally to help you improve them. If I see that there is a problem that the majority of the class is having, I might address it in lecture. Furthermore, it is possible that I will return an essay and ask you to revise it for grammar and/or citation issues before I will accept it for a grade. These cases will be handled individually as the need arises.

Academic Honesty

Every assignment that you submit must be your original work, written specifically for this class, and it must clearly and properly cite any sources you used in writing it. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask. I am bound by the honor code to turn in any work I suspect of being plagiarized to the honor council, and I will not have a conversation with you before doing so. Therefore, it is best to approach me with any concerns before the assignment is submitted. If you plagiarize an essay or other assignment, in part or whole, you will fail the course in addition to any punishment meted out by the Honor Council. Please see the English Department policies attached to this syllabus for a further elaboration of the course plagiarism policy. I will require you to submit an electronic copy of all your papers to Turnitin.com. This program will help you – and me – identify citation problems.

**Unit 1:
The Writer as Critical Reader**

Thursday, 1/11

Introductions

Tuesday, 1/17

Reading: ABG: “Thinking Rhetorically About Good Writing,” Concepts 1-2 (5-15)
PUBLIC FOLDER: Malcolm Gladwell, “Disclosure Statement”

Thursday, 1/19

Reading: ABG: “Thinking Rhetorically About Good Writing,” Concept 3 (15-24)
BASNW: Jacobsen, “The Spill Seekers” 204-21

Writing: ABG Brief Writing Project 2: “A Letter to Your Professor” (24)

Tuesday, 1/24

Reading: ABG: “Thinking Rhetorically About Your Subject Matter,” Concepts 4-7 (25-50)
BASNW: Bhattacharjee, “The Organ Dealer” (1-14)

Writing: ABG: Brief Writing Project: “Playing the Believing and Doubting Game” (49)

Thursday, 1/26

Reading: ABG “Thinking Rhetorically About How Messages Persuade” Concepts 8-9 (51-9)
BASNW: Musser, “Could Time End?” (263-73)

Tuesday, 1/31

Reading: ABG: “Reading Rhetorically: The Writer as Strong Reader” 87-113; 118-23

Thursday, 2/2

Reading: BASNW: Tucker, “The New King of the Sea” (319-28); Dittrich, “The Brain that Changed Everything” (46-68)

Writing: Review the “Criteria for an Effective Summary Incorporated Into Your Own Writing” on pg. 102 of ABG, then write an approximately 200 word summary of one of the essays we have read thus far from BASNW, following this criteria.

Tuesday, 2/7

Reading: ABG: “Skill 16.4: Use peer reviews to help you think like an expert” 445-50

Writing: ROUGH DRAFT OF ESSAY 1 DUE TODAY IN CLASS. If you fail to bring a complete rough draft, you will be counted absent and will lose 10 points on your final essay grade.

Essay #1 Due Outside My Office Door by 11:00 am on Friday, February