

Rhodes College
Spring, 2013

FYWS, 151-10. Latin America Through Writing
Instructors: Prof. Michael J. LaRosa and Ms. Maggie McGowan

Office: 215 Buckman | Phone: 843-3656 | Hours: T,R 9-11; W 10-12

Writing matters in Latin America; in societies where democracy is in constant turmoil, and a basic “bill of rights” is not always guaranteed, writers become important political figures, journalists, social commentators, critics and intellectuals. This course is a first year writing seminar designed to help students become better writers through reading, writing and editing. We will focus on writing from and dealing with Latin America, and students will learn about various genres and how writing has changed over time. The course emphasis, though, will focus on student writing.

There is one text assigned and a packet that will be available on my public folder.

Required text:

Trimble, John R. *Writing with Style: Conversations on the art of Writing*, (third edition).

Requirements: All students enrolled in this course will submit four essays; they will run 1000 words, 1300, then 1500 and a longer, 2500 word essay. Each essay should include a word count. We will speak in terms of words in this course, not pages. By my understanding 250 words d/s at 12 point font constitutes a “page. Seventy percent of your final grade will be determined by the papers You will keep a writing journal and it will be collected every two weeks; in it, you will record your thoughts, ideas, progress, set-backs and anything that pertains to this course, and/or your development as a writer. I want you to write every day—in a meaningful, tweet-free-way: 20 percent.

Ten percent of this course grade will be determined by an intangible factor called “writing collaboration”—I want you to fully participate in this course in an un-ironic, un-postmodern fashion—let’s focus on modernity. Let’s speak clearly, honestly and directly with one another in a manner that is community building, graceful and helpful. We’re all growing together as writers and we all need one another in this course. Everyone, every day, will participate in this course—there are no exceptions to this.

Adopt a writer: Each student, and the instructors, will adopt a writer at week three; this writer--a non literary writer from Latin America--will follow you during the semester and you will refer to this writer, primarily, during the course of the semester. It can be a historic figure who wrote in a significant fashion (Simón Bolívar for example) or an essayist such as José Martí or a religious figure such as Fr. Bartolomé de las Casas.

Attendance: Attendance will be taken and students must come to class prepared; this course is community based, it is workshop in nature, it is collaborative—it has to be this

way. Students can miss two classes without penalty; after that, the course grade will decline by one “tier” ie, .33 points. Students who participate in college activities that require absence from class will make up the classes missed but will not be subject to R-33. All work must be submitted on time and on paper—I do not accept late papers under any circumstances. I do not accept electronic submissions of work. All of my policies are subject to modification if deemed necessary by the instructors.

Visiting writers: We will have visitors during the semester. Bruce VanWyngarden editor at *Memphis Flyer* will visit together with Emily Yellin (a Memphis-based journalist and writer) and Curtis Wilkie, chair, Journalism department at the University of Mississippi at Oxford. We might have some visitors from on-campus.

I will miss two classes during the semester due to previously scheduled travel. Lo siento mucho, I’m sorry about this.

Email and office hours: I prefer to visit with students in my office. Please stop by during my hours, or at other times when I’m there. I don’t answer all emails, but I will take as much time as you need when you come to see me during my hours.

Weekly schedule of readings and assignments:

Weeks One

January 10: Introduction to the course. Building familiarity and trust as a community of writers.

Week Two

T: Jan 15: Good writing: Bring in a very short example of good writing and be prepared to discuss why it’s good.

R: Jan 17: Bad writing: We’ll do the same with bad writing.
Reading: Front matter plus chapter one from “WWS”

Week Three

T: Jan 22: Genres of writing, creative versus expository. Bring in one short creative piece versus a piece that’s “expository” and explain the difference. 250 word essay assignment due in class this day. To be read to peers.

R: Jan 24: Why writing matters in Latin America with examples. Be prepared to bring in your experiences with Latin American writers—who have you read; research and write up a brief 100 word essay on a Latin American, non-fiction writer that you plan to adopt during the semester.

Week Four

T: Jan 29: Chapter three from text plus “Chronicle” from packet [doc 1]; what is a chronicle? Write a short (250 word) critique of style and substance of this document.

R: Jan 31: A conversation with editor Bruce VanWyngarden

Week Five

T: Feb. 5: Read chapter four from text, plus las Casas argument [doc 2]. Workshop first paper (peer review). First draft of 1000 word essay is due today in class.

R: Feb 7: Discuss Las Casas’s writing. Final paper due on Thursday.

Week Six

T: Feb 12 Read 5,6 in text + Sor Juana piece [3]. Discussion of the rhetorical style of Sor Juana, a seventeenth-century-sister [nun]

R: Feb 14: Happy Valentine’s Day—no class.

Week Seven

T: Feb 19. Read chapters 7,8. Discuss chapters in class

R: Feb 21. Read Simón Bolívar’s “Letter from Jamaica” [4]; write a 500 word criticism of this piece; some reviews read in class.

Week Eight

T: Feb 26: Read chapters 9, 10 from text. Bring second paper in draft form to class (the 1,300 word piece) and we will workshop by reading and editing a common draft (peer review).

R: Feb 28: Emily Yellin: A conversation with a working writer. Paper due in class.

Week Nine

T: March 5: Read chapters 11, 12

R: March 7: José Martí’s “Nuestra América” [5] – discussion.

Week Ten No class: Spring break.

Week Eleven

T: March 19: Read chapters 13, 14 plus R. Darío and José Vasconcellos [6,7]; discussion of poetry as rhetoric.

R: March 21: No class.

Week Twelve:

T: March 26: A conversation with writer and journalist Curtis Wilkie [each student will find and read one of Mr Wilkie's stories from *The Boston Globe*].

R: March 28: Easter Break, No class

Week Thirteen

T: April 2: Herbert Mathews and Ernesto "Che" Guevara. [8,9]. Writing the revolution in Latin America. Third paper (1500 words) due in draft form. Peer review.

R: April 4: Third paper due. Read and discuss chapters one and two from Stanley Fish *How to Write a Sentence, and how to read one*. [10]

Week Fourteen

T: April 9: Read Joan Didion's report from Bogotá [11]. Write a 500 word criticism of this piece.

R: April 11: Peer review Didion pieces and discussion of "The New Journalism."

Week Fifteen

T: April 16: Oscar Romero: Writing as sermon. [12]. Discuss.

R: April 18: Draft of 2500 word paper due. Begin peer review.

Week Sixteen

T: April 23: Continue peer review. Read Nobel speeches of Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa. Discuss.

R: April 25: Paper due.

Addendum to the syllabus: Presentations by Maggie McGowan, Writing Fellow and Co-instructor of our course.

1. Thursday, Week Two

"A Brief Guide to *The Elements of Style*" a classic writing text by Strunk and White.

2. Tuesday, Week Three

"'Grammar death-march': Rules, rules, rules--Why we hate them, why they matter."

3. Thursday, Week Three

"Starting a Paper/Generating a Topic"; Free-writing exercise in class plus hand out, "Shitty First Drafts" from Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird*.

4. Tuesday, Week Four

"Thesis Workshop"; students should prepare a thesis idea prior to class

5. Tuesday, Week Seven

"Structure and Organization"; hand out, John McPhee's recent piece on structure from *The New Yorker*.

6. Tuesday, Week Eight

"Revision"; workshop on Reverse Outlining.

7. Thursday, Week Thirteen

"How to Write a Sentence"; a workshop intersecting with the reading by S. Fish.

8. Tuesday, Week Fourteen

"Research Techniques."

9. Thursday, Week Fifteen

"Summary vs. Analysis/Paraphrasing."

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