

## Shakespeare (English 230) – Spring 2015

Rhodes College, Department of English

Professor Newstok, [newstoks@rhodes.edu](mailto:newstoks@rhodes.edu)

Office hours (Palmer 306): MTu 10:30am-noon, or by appointment (please email)

*“Education should have a ‘depth-charge’ effect, the consequences of which might only reveal themselves years down the line. . . . Two invaluable lessons can be taught through Shakespeare. A) He’s difficult and there’s something to be said for sitting and working through something difficult, and B) Shakespeare demands that we deal with ambiguity and ask questions of the world around us.”—Jonathan Gil Harris*

### Course description

A close-learning seminar on Shakespeare’s works, with special attention to the problem of **genre**. We begin by closely reading and memorizing selected sonnets. We then examine representative Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies from across his career, concluding with the generically mixed *Winter’s Tale*. While we concentrate our efforts primarily on the **texts** of the plays, along the way we explore the greater **context** of Shakespeare, from the historical meanings of individual words to the continued influence of his works today, including contemporary performance practices. The course gives you extensive **practice** in critically exploring Shakespearean **craft**, and preparation for enjoying Shakespeare throughout your life. Students must attend the **lecture by John Guillory April 23 (7pm, Blount)** and at least one local production (e.g. *Dido & Aeneas*, April 17 or 18).

### Schedule—subject to revision, per class interest and instructor’s discretion

Have the texts read **before** our discussions each week. Ideally, you will read them once over the weekend, and then **re-read** them during the week—good reading always entails **re-reading**. Read aloud, read slowly, and take notes. You should plan on **at least four hours** of preparation for every class session, and **even more at the beginning of the semester**. Bring your **Norton Shakespeare** to each seminar.

<i>Week of</i>	<i>Readings</i>	<i>Assignments</i>
Jan. 14	<b>Sonnets 1-18</b>	‘Craft’
Jan. 19	NO CLASS—MLK	
Jan. 21	<b>Sonnets 19-81</b>	Sonnet terms & memorization
Jan. 26	<b>Sonnets 82-154</b>	Norton Introduction reading and quiz
Feb. 2	<b>Titus Andronicus</b>	Close reading of one word
Feb. 9	<b>Comedy of Errors</b>	Close reading of one line
Feb. 16	<b>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</b>	Rhetorical tropes
Feb. 23	<b>Othello</b>	Source study
Mar. 2	<b>As You Like It</b>	Close reading of one speech
Mar. 9	SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS	
Mar. 16	<b>Richard II</b>	Function of the garden scene
Mar. 23	<b>Henry IV, part I</b>	Generic blending
Mar. 30	<b>Henry V</b>	Five-act progression
Apr. 3	NO CLASS—EASTER RECESS	
Apr. 6	<b>King Lear</b>	Quarto vs. Folio editorial quandaries
Apr. 13	<b>Dido, Queen of Carthage</b>	Shakespeare vs. Marlowe
Apr. 17–18	DIDO, PLAYHOUSE ON THE SQUARE	
Apr. 20	<b>Winter’s Tale</b>	Shakespearean recycling
Apr. 23	GUILLORY LECTURE—7pm, BLOUNT	
Apr. 27	<b>In-class exam</b>	Chronology, Terms, Essay

## **Requirements**

**Engagement (30%)** is mandatory, broadly conceived to include active **participation** (*listening* and *responding* to your peers as well as the professor), consistent **preparation** of course readings, **enthusiasm** for assignments, **collaboration** with your peers, and **respect** for the course. Successful students are those who re-read thoroughly in advance of discussion, arrive on time to class, and participate thoughtfully every day of the semester. You are expected to attend every class session. To paraphrase Gertrude Stein: *absence is an absence is an absence is an absence*; I don't distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. If *for whatever reason* (including medical and personal emergencies, extracurricular events) you miss **more than six classes** (that is, **two full weeks of the semester!**), **you will fail the course.**

**Short essays (50%)** are arguments (one **full** page, single-spaced—**around 600 words**) designed to familiarize you with a number of different *kinds* of approaches to reading Shakespeare—from examining very minute details to considering larger issues across multiple texts. Essays are due **every Sunday by noon via email. No late work**—the responses prepare your thoughts in advance of Monday's discussion. A rough score (out of 10) will be assigned to give you a sense of your progress. See attached guidelines.

**Final Exam (20%)** requires that you be familiar with the **chronology** of Shakespeare's publications and historical events; literary and critical **terminology** pertinent to our readings; and a **retrospective essay**, synthesizing everything you have learned about 'craft' over the course of the semester.

**Grading:** 'C' (70–79%) represents *satisfactory* work; a 'B' (80–86%) represents *good* work; a 'B+' (87–89%) represents *very good* work; an 'A-' (90–93%) represents *excellent* work; and the infrequent 'A' (94% and above) represents *extraordinary* achievement. This holds true for your overall engagement, your short essays, and your final exam.

**Policies:** You must complete **all written work** to pass this course. As always, please observe Rhodes guidelines regarding the **Honor Code**; academic dishonesty will not be tolerated, and students caught plagiarizing **will fail the course**, in addition to being reported to the Honor Council. See attached departmental policies for further details. Respect the integrity of the seminar: please turn off **cell phones** and **remove hats** before entering the classroom; please **do not eat during class**; please **use the bathroom before our session commences**. Treat email exchanges with one another and with the professor as **formally composed correspondence**.

### **Typical Week**

Weekend	<i>Read play <b>twice in full</b></i>
Sunday noon	<b>Email</b> your weekly essay
Monday	Brief <b>quiz</b> ; overview of the play
Wednesday	<i>More detailed immersion in play per student interest</i>
Thursday	<i>Begin reading the <b>next play</b></i>
Friday	<i>Further thoughts; preview of <b>next play</b></i>

## Department of English Expectations and Policies

A college course is more than simply a set of assignments; it is an intellectual process, one which requires active engagement from beginning to end in order to achieve its intended results. With this in mind, the Department of English has formulated a number of expectations and the policies that support them. If you have questions about how these policies relate to the syllabus for a particular course, you should address them to the instructor.

**Attendance:** The success of a course depends to a significant extent upon the presence of students alert and prepared to address the subject under discussion. Unavoidable absences should be discussed with the instructor, ideally before they occur. Excessive absences will result in a lowering of grade, in some cases to an F.

**Deadlines:** Writing assignments, tests, etc., are carefully scheduled as stages toward the fulfillment of the course's goals and cannot be indefinitely deferred without frustrating those goals. Brief extensions for good reasons may be permissible with the instructor's prior approval; otherwise, late assignments will be penalized and may result in their not being accepted for credit.

**Submission of all work:** All major assignments are integral to the goals of the course. Failure to complete any major assignment will result in a grade of F for the course.

**Intellectual honesty:** All work is assumed to be the student's own and produced exclusively for the course in which it is submitted. Papers written for one course, even if revised, are not to be submitted in another without the instructor's prior approval. Borrowing of ideas or language from other sources (including published material, other student papers, the internet or other electronic resources, etc.) must be carefully documented. Students are advised against posting their work on the internet since doing so may lead to suspicion of plagiarism. Students are advised to maintain drafts of their work to verify its originality. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council, and the student if convicted will receive a grade of F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Clear evidence of plagiarism (failure to use quotation marks around verbatim or copied language, failure to adequately paraphrase, and failure to cite the source of quoted, paraphrased, or borrowed text and ideas), regardless of the Council hearing outcome, may likewise result in failure of the course. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not technically plagiarism, will be penalized as the instructor deems appropriate. If you are uncertain about how or whether to document sources, consult your teacher.

## How to write a short essay

*Short essays* are arguments (one **full** page, single-spaced—**around 600 words**) designed to familiarize you with a number of different *kinds* of approaches to Shakespeare—from examining very minute details to considering larger issues across multiple texts. Essays are due **every Sunday by noon via email**.

**No late work**—the responses prepare your thoughts in advance of Monday’s discussion. A rough score (out of 10) will be assigned to give you a sense of your progress. As the semester progresses, you will be able to incorporate the ‘tools’ from earlier essays into your increasingly nuanced compositions. They are also intended to give you some expertise on a particular topic for discussion that week, and serve as preparation for our meetings; *it is often through writing that we come to recognize what we have to say*.

Weekly essays entail a considerable amount of writing, in short but regular assignments (there is no longer mid-term essay). The habit will prove useful for you – you’ll have a record of your thoughts from throughout the term; you’ll become accustomed to engaging with Shakespeare on a very particular level; you’ll always be prepared for discussion; you’ll hone your prose and your critical attention.

### Suggestions from a former student:

How to Write Short Essays For Professor Newstok –  
I mean,

“How to Write Thoroughly Yet Specifically About Shakespeare in a Very Small Space”

\* \* \* \* \*

1. “What does he mean by ‘focus on the text’??”

He means Use the Text – standard quotation style. You don’t have to quote entire passages – just a few pertinent lines. Words are always open to interpretation, so if you are going to have a fabulous interpretation of the text you just read, you need to show whomever is going to read your paper what it was that inspired your thinking. (Citations, yes!)

2. “Why can’t I have a stinking intro paragraph?”

You don’t have much space. So instead of writing about what you are *going* to write about – just write it.

3. “What does he mean ‘focus on specific words’???”

Here’s a special hint: lift an author’s word (from the lines you are already using), and use it in your own text, perhaps in a slightly different way. Know what it means and how it is used in the lines you are discussing. It seems very trivial and difficult, but it’s really not that hard. All you have to do is pay attention and respect and enjoy the language you are using.

4. “I can’t think of a good topic!”

Don’t stress too much about this. You’re not going to have some complex “thesis” that you are going to “prove.” You do, however, want to say something interesting about the passages you are talking about. While you are reading, write notes in the margins about what interests you or catches your attention or just doesn’t make any sense. The best topics are the ones that interest you already, but sometimes you forget what you were thinking after you finish reading and wipe the sweat off your brow. This way, if you have passages underlined and notes in the margins, you’ve got your work cut out for you – you have your own personal interest designated AND the appropriate lines to talk about – what could be better? Then you write about what you were already thinking – in an intelligent and informed way – and you’re all set!

## How to read a sonnet

This involves an ongoing process of moving *closer to* and *further away from* the lyric. Leo Spitzer called this the “philological circle,” following the 19th century “hermeneutic circle”: **“the to-and-fro voyage from certain outward details to the inner center and back again to other series of details . . .”** (*Linguistics and Literary History: Essays in Stylistics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948)

On the most basic level, this means picking up the poem, reading it, and then putting it down for some time before returning once more. Every good reader of poetry engages in this process of reading and rereading, sometimes for an entire lifetime. *You have not read a poem if you have read it only once.*

This also means becoming quite closely involved in the most minute aspects of the poem (looking up words in the dictionary, referring to commentator’s notes) and then stepping back to a more removed appreciation of the whole.

*Memorize the poem.* While many techniques will help this process (breaking down the poem into smaller units, reading the poem backwards), understanding *how the poem works* will ultimately prove most useful. A good poet carefully constructs her poem to build upon itself with quite powerful internal logic. Once you discern the progression of the poem, you will more easily be able to recollect it. This isn’t quite the same as narrative *plot*, but it’s somewhat similar: What happens, and in what order?

*Copy the poem out in your handwriting.* It can even be rewarding to pretend that you are composing it as you go along, pausing after words and lines to reflect upon what you have “written,” and what you will next write. This is yet another manner of learning how the poem was *crafted*.

*Type out the poem, and rearrange it:* as one paragraph; with a break after every complete phrase; with the verbs in one font, and the nouns in another – these are ways of discerning poetic patterns.

*Read the poem aloud.* The lyric (as its name suggests) developed from sung poetry, and Shakespeare’s sonnets were certainly intended for oral recitation. Read the poem to someone else; have someone else read the poem to you. Try reading the poem in different voices and manners – quietly, loudly, seriously, humorously, quickly, slowly. These extremes should help discover the nuances of the readings.

*Survey the Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* – look up all unfamiliar words: <http://www.oed.com/>.

*Compare the notes in different editions of the poem:* The library owns multiple editions of Shakespeare’s sonnets; editors gloss words and syntax in suggestively different ways.

*Ask yourself a wide variety of questions about the poem.* (adapted from Helen Vendler’s *Poems, Poets, and Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology*, pp. 128–29):

- What *kind* of poem is it? Who is speaking to whom? Where and why?
- What is the *temporal structure* of the poem—that is, at what point does it *begin* (sometimes in the midst of a previous, implied event), and when does it *end*? Can you imagine what happened before and after the ‘moment’ of this poem?
- What other *paths* could the poem have taken—what *choices* were made to make the poem in this way? how does this differ from an expected *trajectory*? (is there a ‘ghost’ behind this version?)
- How many *patterns* can you discern, from the *repetition* of a *sound* to emphasized parts of speech to more conceptual patterns? Where is the *syntax* awkward?
- Into how many *parts* can you divide the poem? Where do the ‘breaks’ fall?
- Can you draw an “emotional *curve*” of the poem?
- How does it compare to other sonnets you’ve previously read? Does it follow or break *convention*?

## **How to read a play**

Always keep in mind is that a *play is not a novel*. What does this distinction entail?

- English Renaissance dramatists were not as preoccupied with the modern idea of **character** as we might expect. Characters can fall away from the plot with relatively little notice – or appear with just as little preparation. Their ‘motivation’ is based much less on psychological or biographical consistency than on cultural expectations for the roles in which they are placed. It helps, in this respect, to think of characters not as fully developed people but rather as ‘types’ – ‘the wise old counsellor,’ or ‘the scorned lover.’ This is not to say that playwrights only make caricatures, but it does mean that your sense of how a ‘character’ acts needs to be flexible, and speculative.

- Shakespeare wrote much of his drama in **verse**; these plays are much more like poetry than like prose. Moreover, this is a highly stylized, rhetorically-inflected verse. The culture in which Elizabethan drama emerged was extremely well trained in producing different kinds of speeches and arguments, and even a boy with only a ‘grammar school education’ would have memorized, translated, and imitated far more elaborate Latin and Greek models than all but the most advanced students do today. On account of this, much of the language appears quite ornate, and presents some difficulty for us. Keep reading, keep consulting the footnotes; after a while, you will recognize more than you might expect. But don’t just read ‘for plot’; let the words trouble you, and try to approach them with the same attention and intensity as you would a poem.

- We tend to take for granted a degree of **realism or naturalism** in many of our prose readings today; even experimental narrative forms presume a familiarity with novelistic conventions. This is not necessarily the case with English Renaissance drama: fantastical events can happen; great lengths of time can be compressed into the short span of a few hours; and distances across the globe can be traversed between scenes. Sometimes even the characters themselves express incredulity at these almost magical developments. Remain open to the plot as it exists; reserve judgment about its ‘believability.’

**Read the play closely.** The unfamiliar style, vocabulary, syntax, and stories require a great deal of attention. If you read the play in the same amount of time required to watch it, you’re going too fast.

- *Good reading is re-reading*; to this end, read the play at least **twice**. You might want to read through the entire play quickly at first, then look back at the Norton introduction, and then re-read more slowly, with an eye for detail (note, for instance, what you have already forgotten since the first reading).

- Read the play **aloud**; or listen to a **recorded audio version**. You’ll find that you won’t be able to gloss over passages you don’t understand, and will have to stop to figure out what they mean. You’ll also get a better sense of the rhythms of the lines by getting them into your mouth—again, like poetry. For these reasons, we’ll also be reading aloud a good deal in class.

- Keep an eye out for **patterns**—where have you heard this kind of speech before? why does this particular image keep re-appearing? Keep track of what happens in each scene—you might even want to add a kind of descriptive subtitle to each one (‘Hamlet contemplates killing Claudius’). Make an outline of the plot; what would happen if certain scenes were rearranged? Read with a pencil in hand, and make note of anything that seems important, or confusing, or surprising. Review these notes before class.

Most importantly, **be curious**. If you don’t understand a word, look it up in the footnotes, or better yet, in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. If something doesn’t make sense to you, make a note, and bring it up during seminar. Check out the Shakespeare books in the library; view videos of the plays in the Media Center. **Begin with questions you can’t immediately answer, and see where you can go from there.**