

Critical Writing and Thinking

6:00-8:00 p.m.

Horizonte Instruction and Training Center Library
1234 Main St., Salt Lake City

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Purpose of Course: Critical Writing and Thinking develops your ability to write interesting, clear, focused, and well supported essays. During the first semester, these essays will be based on assigned readings, as well as your own experience. They will be primarily “narrative” in nature, in that they will focus on your story and how you see your life. We will discuss and practice the writing process--how to get a piece of writing started, how to develop it, and then how to shape and revise it so that it has greater power.

In the second semester, the focus shifts away from writing narrative to writing critical analysis of persuasive writing. We will also read a longer work of literature (Sophocles’ *Antigone*) for the arguments made there. You will study how writers (and characters) persuade using *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*. Throughout the course, we will focus on how to ask a variety of questions about texts in order to understand more about its underlying assumptions, logic, and method of development.

Books:

Best American Essays of the Twentieth Century, ed. Joyce Carol Oates and Robert Atwan (primarily first semester)

The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing, Michael Harvey (both semesters)

Antigone, Sophocles (second semester)

Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (both semesters)

Important Tips: **Always** bring the book in which you have an assignment to class that night. Because we review or reread passages from the book during class, it will be difficult for you to follow without a copy of the book in front of you.

The reading or writing assignment for a given date is **due that day**.

If you have a question about an assignment or find you are getting behind, please call or email me.

Unlike the other sections of Venture, Critical Writing and Thinking meets during both semesters but less frequently than the other sections. For this reason, there may be 2 or 3 weeks between our class meetings. To feel “in sync” with the class, your attendance at each class is extremely important.

Class Assignments

First Semester

(I will add assignments in *Nuts and Bolts* as we go. If you have to miss class, make sure you call someone to find out what the added assignment is.)

September 11 Focus: What is this thing called thought?

Reading: Mark Twain, “Corn Pone Opinions,” 1-5 (*Best American Essays*)
Walter Lippmann, “The Indispensable Opposition” (hand-out)

Discussion of Essay #1 Assignment

September 27 Focus: How does my past affect me as a thinker? (Part one)
Reading: James Baldwin "Notes of a Native Son," 220-238 (*Best American Essays*)
Writing: Draft of Essay # 1 Due

October 16 Focus: How does my past affect me as a thinker? (Part two)
Readings: Richard Rodriguez, "Aria: A Memoir of a Bilingual Childhood," 447-466 (*Best American Essays*)
Adrienne Rich, "Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying" 412-420 (*Best American Essays*)
Writing: Essay # 1 Due

Discussion of Essay #2 Assignment

November 13 Focus: Environments of thought: thinking with desert, thinking with trees
Reading: Gretel Ehrlich, "The Solace of Open Spaces" 467-476 (*Best American Essays*)
Edward Abbey, (hand-out)
Writing: Draft of Essay #2

December 4
Writing: Essay # 2 Due

Second Semester

January 15

Reading: "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Martin Luther King (*Best American Essays*), 263-279.
Writing: In this long letter, King argues his point in many ways. Identify (with page numbers and a brief comment) passages in which he
a) appeals to his reader's emotions b) appeals to his reader's logic
c) appeals because he presents himself as a trustworthy person of integrity and merit.

January 31

Reading: *Nuts and Bolts*, Concision and Clarity (1-21)
Writing: Write an analysis of an op ed piece or letter to the editor in which you explain how the writer is using ethos, pathos, and/or logos to persuade. Argue why you think the argument is or is not effective.

(Two to three double-spaced, type-written pages or three to four hand-written pages.)

Bring *Antigone* to class. We'll talk about the background of the story and the basic elements of Greek theatre.

February 19

Reading: *Antigone*, 1-29

Nuts and Bolts: Using Sources, 56-68

Writing: Choosing either Creon or Antigone, write a 1-2 page essay in which you discuss how they tend to argue. Do they appeal primarily to their listener's emotion? Logic? Or do they try to argue from the respect the listener has for them, from their "ethos"? In your essay, decide how effective this approach is. What evidence is there in the play that they succeed in persuading their listener? Do they persuade you, in the audience?

February 28

Reading: *Antigone*, 31-57

Writing: Antigone and Creon are both fixed in their positions and become more entrenched in their opinions as the play goes on. How is this consistency a strength? What is its cost? Should either (or both) characters yield? Answer these questions in an opening paragraph, then use the rest of the two page paper to support your conclusion.

March 20

Reading: Finish *Antigone*
Nuts and Bolts: Gracefulness, 46-55

Writing: Who is a modern Antigone? Benazir Bhutto? Rachel Carson? Princess Diana? You might think of anyone who "speaks truth to power." In a two-three page paper discuss how the person you've selected resembles the Greek heroine. Compare and contrast (note the similarities but also the differences) between the two and how the "fate" they experience was in part determined by their character.

April 17

Venture Reads
Choose a paper or part of a paper you wrote during the semester (in any of the sections) to share with friends and family.

