ENG 818: Peculiar Genres of Academic Writing

Professor Kathleen Fitzpatrick (she/her/hers)
M 4:10 – 7:00 pm, A304 Wells Hall

Office hours: via Zoom; by appointment
Office: 308A Linton Hall (though I’m almost never there)
Email: kfitz@msu.edu

Course description:
Over the last ten years of my career, without question, the most important form of writing I’ve been called upon to undertake is the grant proposal. It’s a form I was never taught anything about, but instead had to learn for myself through a nasty process of trial and error. The same is true of a lot of kinds of writing we’re required to complete; the work you are assessed upon in grad school largely focuses on the seminar paper (a prototype for the journal article) and the dissertation (a prototype for the scholarly book). Insofar as grad school teaches you to write those forms — a questionable notion in itself — you’re all too frequently left on your own when it comes to the other crucial bits of scholarly and public prose you’ll be called on to produce. This course, which is more writing workshop than seminar, will give you exposure to and practice in several such forms, and will give you some tools to bring to bear on the other peculiar genres you might run into over the years — hopefully with good results for your more standard writing practices, too.

Course objectives:
Over the course of this semester, you will:
- Explore some under-considered forms of academic writing, discussing good examples and thinking through how they work.
- Consider the relationships between more conventional forms like the journal article and these crucial but less-taught forms, and the ways that ideas might develop and move among them.
- Gain facility in writing in a wide range of forms and for a wide range of audiences.
- Develop a practice of sharing work-in-progress for feedback.
- Write. A lot.

Required texts:
- Barbara W. Sarnecka, *The Writing Workshop* (digital edition available for free download at https://osf.io/n8pc3/; available in print from Amazon and other booksellers)
• Sönke Ahrens, *How to Take Smart Notes* (available from Amazon, etc., or via [https://takesmartnotes.com](https://takesmartnotes.com))

• William Germano, *On Revision*

• Other texts as linked below or otherwise shared.

**Recommended texts:**

• Paul Silvia, *How to Write a Lot* (2 ed.)

**Course requirements:**

• **Professionalism:** This goes beyond attendance and participation, though those are required, too. What I want to see from each of you this semester is a determination to both teach and learn and a willingness to support one another in that teaching and learning. Generosity of spirit, in other words.

• **Blogging:** Across the semester, you’ll produce weekly blog posts. These can focus on the ideas we’re encountering and discussing in class, but they should also be used to help you develop and process the research you’re doing toward your degree overall. So feel free to post about the reading you’re doing for other classes, or the questions that surface in your teaching, or the other ideas that surface throughout your work.

• **Op/ed or manifesto:** In February, we’ll spend a couple of weeks exploring public academic writing, including opinion essays and manifestos. During those weeks I’ll ask you to use your blog to experiment with each form, and then to choose one to revise and expand upon.

• **Statement:** Numerous kinds of applications (for advancement from the MA to PhD program, for fellowships, for jobs, and more) will ask you to provide a personal statement, a research statement, a statement of teaching philosophy, or other kinds. Each of you will choose a type of statement to work on this semester.

• **Peer review and response:** These pieces of writing often have conflicting audiences: a peer review, for instance, may address both an editor and an author, who may have very different needs. Moreover, these pieces can often be complicated by power dynamics. So practice is key!

• **Proposal:** The proposal, written for the grant or fellowship program of your choice, will constitute your final piece of writing for this semester. We’ll talk more about it right around midterm.

**Schedule (subject to revision):**

**January 10:** Introduction, or the Peculiar Nature of Academic Writing
In preparation for this class session, please read chapter 1, “The Workshop,” from Sarnecka, *The Writing Workshop*, as well as the excerpted chapters from Silvia, *How to Write a Lot*.

We’ll spend this session talking about the weirdness of academic writing, as well as the overflow of writing advice out there.

We’ll also use this session to get set up for the writing you’ll do over the semester. If you have a laptop, bring it with you to class.

January 17: NO CLASS

January 24: Notes

- Sönke Ahrens, *How to Take Smart Notes*.
- Experiment with your notetaking in completing your reading for another class. You can use note cards, a bullet journal, or notetaking software such as *Obsidian* (my personal favorite). Bring the results of that experiment with you to class.

January 31: Blogs and newsletters

- Blog posts:
  - Andrea Kaston Tange, “What If We Could Measure Value in Units Besides Dollars?,” *Thinking about the Humanities*.
  - Cathy Davidson, “The Single Most Essential Requirement in Designing a Fall Online Course,” HASTAC.
  - Maha Bali, “From Twitter Thread to Model to Keynote #OpenEd20 & #MandL20,” *Reflecting Allowed*.
- Other blogs and newsletters to explore:
  - Jade Davis, *Performing the Digital*.
  - Janneke Adema, *Open Reflections*.
  - Dan Lockton, *Architectures*.
  - Virginia Yonkers, *Connecting 2 the World*.
  - Shawn Graham, *Electric Archaeology*.
  - Maha Bali, *Reflecting Allowed*.
  - Amanda Visconti, *Literature Geek*.
  - Jill Walker Rettberg, *jill/txt*.
  - Lisa Duggan, *Commie Pinko Queer*.

- During the week before this class, write a blog post that links to and thinks through several blogs that you find influential or important.
February 7: Public writing
- Columns/essays to read:
  - Corey Robin, “How Intellectuals Create a Public”
  - Mark Greif, “What’s Wrong with Public Intellectuals?”
  - Tressie McMillan Cottom, “The Dolly Moment”
- Other public-facing publications to explore:
  - Public Books.
  - The Feminist Wire.
  - The Conversation.
- During the week before this class, write a blog post that begins the work of translating your current research (where “current” can mean a paper you’ve written during a previous semester, or something you’re working on now) into an argument for a public audience.

February 14: Manifestos and screeds
- The Combahee River Collective, “The Combahee River Collective Statement”
- Audre Lorde, “Poetry Is Not a Luxury”
- V21 Collective, “Manifesto of the V21 Collective”
- Eric Zimmerman, “Manifesto for a Ludic Century”

February 21: Personal statements and other application materials

February 28: Proposals 1: Grants
- Model grant proposals

March 7: NO CLASS

March 14: Proposals 2: Comps, Dissertation, Book
- Chapter 4, “Literature Reviews,” from Sarnecka, The Writing Workshop
- Sample book/dissertation proposals

March 21: Letters of recommendation
- NYT Magazine columns
- Sample (redacted) letters of recommendation
March 28: Peer reviews and reader’s reports
  • Sample peer reviews

April 4: Responses to reports
  • “Revise and Resubmit,” in “Scientific Articles,” from Sarnecka, The Writing Workshop
  • Sample responses to peer reviews, reader’s reports, and other assessments

April 11: Revising
  • William Germano, On Revision
  • Select one piece of writing from this semester – a blog post, a personal statement, whatever – and really revise it.

April 18: Working/workshop day

April 25: Conclusion(s)
  • How to wrap up a project…
Course policies:

Academic Honesty

Article 2.3.3 of the Academic Freedom Report states that "The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards." In addition, the (insert name of unit offering course) adheres to the policies on academic honesty as specified in General Student Regulations 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades; the all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades; and Ordinance 17.00, Examinations. (See Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide and/or the MSU Web site: www.msu.edu.) Therefore, unless authorized by your instructor, you are expected to complete all course assignments, including homework, lab work, quizzes, tests and exams, without assistance from any source. You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, you may not submit course work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course. Also, you are not authorized to use the www.allmsu.com Web site to complete any course work in this course. Students who violate MSU academic integrity rules may receive a penalty grade, including a failing grade on the assignment or in the course. Contact your instructor if you are unsure about the appropriateness of your course work. (See also the Academic Integrity webpage.)

Limits to confidentiality

Essays, journals, and other materials submitted for this class are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University’s student record policies. However, students should be aware that University employees, including instructors, may not be able to maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues to protect the health and safety of MSU community members and others. As your instructor, I must report the following information to other University offices (including the Department of Police and Public Safety) if you share it with me:

- Suspected child abuse/neglect, even if this maltreatment happened when you were a child,
- Allegations of sexual assault or sexual harassment when they involve MSU students, faculty, or staff, and
- Credible threats of harm to oneself or to others.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In almost all cases, it will be your decision whether you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting you are encouraged to make an appointment with the MSU Counseling Center.

Accommodations

Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at rcpd.msu.edu. Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you
will be issued a verified individual services accommodation (“VISA”) form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (test, project, etc). Requests received after this date will be honored whenever possible.

Weather emergencies
As you know, MSU almost never closes in response to weather issues. I urge all of you, however, to exercise your best judgment in navigating dangerous weather conditions. Should it become prudent to do so, I’ll make a Zoom link available so that we can hold class online. Barring significant power outages, you will still be responsible for attending that day’s class.

Class agreements
During our first class sessions together, we will collectively develop a set of agreements that will guide the ways that we engage with one another around our work this semester. We’ll return to these agreements frequently over the course of the semester to be sure that we’re upholding them and that they’re still serving our needs.