

WRITING SEMINAR

General Purpose of the Course

The purpose of this course is to encourage students to think of writing as a practical endeavor and not merely an academic subject. Whether their creative work is an expository essay or a surrealist play, students must follow certain cardinal rules that apply to all writing: 1) to make their writing interesting, even entertaining 2) to make their writing clear and cogent 3) and to make their writing “beautiful” by using figures of speech or other more creative means of expression. Although the course is primarily a writing course, students will be reading professional examples of particular genres, both classic and contemporary, as models for their own writing. The writing genres discussed will include social commentary and analyses, short stories, plays, poetry, and personal and expository essays. One of the students’ plays will be chosen to perform at the end of the year at Speech Night.

Topics Covered in the Course

- The purpose of all writing; discussion of George Orwell’s essay, “Why I Write”
- Cardinal rules of all types of writing
- Writing is thinking
- The necessary skills and knowledge that a student needs to develop, such as vocabulary for word choice, and ways to develop that knowledge and those skills, such as studying literature, experimentation, practice and daring to be original
- The editing process, such as reducing verbiage, going through the “extra step,” starting with foundational issues and seeing the forest before the trees, and ”interior decorating”
- Rhetorical devices, such as rhetorical questions, scesis onomaton, apostrophe, anadiplosis, and climax
- Figures of speech, such as metaphors and similes, verbal irony, metonymy, synecdoche, oxymoron, and understatement
- Methods of writing based on Edgar Allan Poe’s “Philosophy of Composition,” including the importance of not just having an idea, but achieving an *effect* in one’s writing, the proper length of a literary work, an author’s tone, a work’s structure, and *sound* producing an effect.
- Keeping inspired and fighting writer’s block
- Creating interest in short fiction
- Characters in fiction: developing characters, using character interaction, and creating dialog
- Creating humor through situations, character sketches, dialog, and character interplay
- The technical aspects of writing plays, such as creating the set and props
- Understanding poetry and the different types, such as ballads and dramatic monologs

- Writing a personal narrative: introspection, conversational tone; and use of detail, description and dialog
- Writing expository narratives
- Understanding the foundational purpose of description
- Imitating writers
- Drawing from classic writers: establishing a tone, writing satire, sentence length and structure, mood, description, paragraph development, voice, method of engaging the audience, humor and use of dialog
- Novel writing: beginning with an idea that is inspired by a character, history, or personal experience; point of view; writing a basic outline; drawing from experience not just imitating other literature; putting a question mark in the heads of readers; establishing a personal rapport; the importance and techniques of creating interest in the reader through creating interesting characters, “chemical reactions between characters,” using dramatic irony, and creating suspense and mystery in character and situation
- Taking an objective, critical view of one’s own work
- Directions on how to define the genre of one’s work and on how to find a publisher

Reading

The following is a sample of works that will be read as either models for writing or illustrations of the various aspects of composition.

- Benchley, Robert. “Lesson Number One.”
- Browning, Robert. “My Last Duchess.”
- Buckley, William F. “Oh, for the Simple Transaction” and “Religion Scorned.”
- Eliot, T. S. “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.”
- Kimball, Roger. “Shall We Defend Our Common History?”
- Orwell, George. “Revenge is Sour” and “How the Poor Die.”
- Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Raven” and “The Philosophy of Composition.”
- Thoreau, Henry David. “Economy” from *Walden*.
- Thurber, James. “The Car We Had to Push.”
- Traditional Ballads, including “Barabra Allen,” “Sir Patrick Spens” and others.
- Walter, William. *Babysitting the Wilsons*.
- White, E. B. “The Death of a Pig.”
- Wilde, Oscar. *The Importance of Being Earnest*.
- Wordsworth, William. “We Are Seven,” “Simon Lee, the Old Huntsman,” “Anecdote for Fathers”

- Various excerpts from works, such as William Hazlitt's "On the Fear of Death"; Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*; Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*; Oscar Wilde's *Importance of Being Earnest*; Charles Haddon Spurgeon's essay regarding the importance of illustrations; Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Wakefield" and "The Minister's Black Veil"; Katherine Mansfield's "Her First Ball"; Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener" and *Moby Dick*; Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations*; Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome*; Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*; Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Speckled Band"; Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.