Writ 201: The Art of the Essay
Tuesday & Thursday, 2:00-3:20pm in LA 243

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COURSE OVERVIEW
Michel de Montaigne pioneered the literary genre of the essay. Published in 1580, his Essais examine various topics utilizing subjective knowledge: knowledge marked by personal observation, exploration, and reflection. Derived from the French root assay, to try or attempt, Montaigne’s essays are marked by the visibility of the writer’s mind, grappling with ideas on the page. Sustaining this legacy, the contemporary essay is enlivened by the writer’s reflectivity. The attempts or trials of the essayist necessitate a willingness to engage thought, emotion, and curiosity in a restless examination of the world.

Essayists like to examine — or, to use an essayist’s favorite term, consider — topics from various perspectives. To consider is not necessarily to conclude; the essayist delights in a suspension of judgment…. The essayist, by and large, agrees with Robert Frost that thinking and voting are two different acts.

– Robert Atwan

Essayists begin with an objective truth and attempt to find a greater, grander truth by testing subjective interpretations of experiences and ideas, memories and theories. They try to make meaning of actual life…. The essay’s engine is curiosity; its territory is the open road.

– Cheryl Strayed.

In this course we will study the essay as both a literary form and a craft. We will explore various sub-genres of the contemporary essay to examine how the essayist illuminates everyday objects, practices, and experiences. How is the material of ordinary life transformed into an intriguing contemplation or cultural critique? We will inquire into what makes these pieces meaningful, enduring, and provocative. We will also study anatomical and technical aspects of the essay, and you will acquire skills to analyze texts; you will then apply these lessons to your own writing process. Expect to do a lot of writing in the course. Through developing a regular writing practice, you will learn to mine your daily encounters with the world for material, and to turn your insights into powerful prose that challenge and enlighten your readers. In addition to engaging informal writing assignments and a reflective piece, you will write and revise two major essays. In-class writing exercises, peer response workshops, and individual conferences will complement our class discussions.
Learning Outcomes

- Compose written documents that are appropriate for a given audience or purpose
- Formulate and express opinions and ideas in writing
- Use writing to learn and synthesize new concepts
- Revise written work based on constructive feedback
- Find, evaluate, and use information effectively
- Begin to use discipline-specific writing conventions (largely style conventions like APA or MLA)
- Demonstrate appropriate English language usage

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Essays posted on the course website: 201theartoftheessay.wordpress.com
  These must be printed and in-hand for class discussions.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Major inquiry projects

- **Anthropologies of the Everyday: Encounter Essay, 4-6 pages**
  Workshop Draft due Thursday 2.16
  ‘Final’ Draft due Thursday 2.23
- **Peeling the Onion: Subjective Essay, 12-15 pages**
  Workshop Draft due Thursday, April 6th
  ‘Final’ Draft due Thursday 4.13
- **Final Portfolio**
  **Reflective Essay, 2-3 pages**
  Due Thursday 5.4

Peer Response Workshops
You will provide and receive feedback for our major assignments in small group workshops. In preparation you should read each of the essays from your workshop group and write thoughtful critiques. I will provide an outline for these responses. Be sure to seriously engage the critique process; analyzing the work of your peers will give you valuable tools to improve your own writing. These will be a major component of your participation grade.

Individual Conferences
I will meet with each of you individually at least two times during the semester to discuss your work. We may use these meetings to talk about your ideas for an essay you are working on, questions you have about your writing, or revision strategies.

Informal Assignments
These may include writing exercises and short responses to reading assignments. I will regularly provide prompts that are designed both for you to generate material and to develop in your writing rhetorical and stylistic techniques. Unless otherwise noted, these should be printed for our next class meeting.
Academic Integrity
Plagiarism is defined in the UM Student Conduct Code as representing another person's words, ideas, data, or materials as one's own. Consequences include failing an assignment, failing the course, or even expulsion.

Attendance: Regular attendance is critical for your success in any writing course. You are permitted three absences for the semester; each subsequent absence will lower your final grade by a full letter grade. Plan accordingly.

Participation: Come to class with questions and insights, and be prepared to contribute your perspective to our discussion. Your participation grade will also include attentiveness to other students, commitment to the revision process, and engagement with course concepts, as well as completion of peer critiques and informal writing assignments.

GRADING
Because you will revise your essays over the course of the semester, these will not be graded until the final portfolio. However, I am happy to speak with you about your grade. If at any time you would like to know where you stand, you are welcome to schedule an appointment.

Participation: 40%
Final Portfolio: 60%

UNIVERSITY-WIDE PROGRAM-LEVEL WRITING ASSESSMENT
This course requires an electronic submission (via Moodle) of an assignment stripped of your personal information to be used for educational research and assessment of the university’s writing program. Your paper will be stored in a database. A random selection of papers will be assessed by a group of faculty and staff using a rubric developed from the Intermediate Writing Learning Outcomes. This assessment in no way affects either your course grade or your progression at the university.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodation. Please speak with me privately after class or in my office. Be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator. If you think you might qualify for Disability Services and you have not yet registered, please contact Disability Services in Lommasson Center 154 or 406.243.2243.

*This syllabus is subject to change.*