

COMMUNICATIONS WRITING CMMN A101-003
Spring 2006

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CM 311
Class: MWF
Office hours: M-Th 3:15-5:15pm

"Tell the truth as you understand it. If you're a writer, you have a moral obligation to do this. And it is a revolutionary act--truth is always subversive."

Anne Lamott, author of "Bird by Bird."

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES:

Writing is about life. The more you live, the richer your writing will be. Like a succulent and fragrant meal, good writing requires a recipe, the right ingredients, fresh herbs and spices, and some patient stirring and tasting.

In this course you will learn how to follow a recipe for good writing. The post-Katrina landscape of our city is an ideal learning laboratory for young writers and thinkers. We will explore our city this semester with new eyes, ears and hearts. Our goal is to write about what we see and hear in a clear and interesting manner. We will write weekly, both inside and outside class, and under deadline.

The skills you acquire in this course will help you to become a better communicator, researcher and student. You will also learn how to evaluate critically your own work and that of your classmates for accuracy, fairness, unanswered questions, clarity, style and grammatical correctness. You will learn how to give constructive criticism and accept it.

Ultimately, our goal is to do what Ernest Hemingway tried to do as a writer: "...to put down what really happened in action; what the actual things were which produced the emotions you experienced...the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion and which would be as valid in a year or ten years..."

PROFESSOR BIO: Ten years journalism experience in Central America for various US and Latin media outlets (print and broadcast). Foreign news stringer for TIME magazine and the *San Francisco Chronicle* in Guatemala from 1992-95. Author of "Guatemala: The People, Politics and Culture," freelance writer since 1988 and currently a columnist for *The Anniston Star*. Recipient of the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund for Writers in New York for second book in progress, "Into the Mangrove." Writing instructor in a women's prison and at two universities: the University of Southern California in Los Angeles and Auburn University in Alabama.

REQUIREMENTS:

Attendance: Arrive on time. Tardiness will cost you half an absence. Five absences earns a grade of “C,” six, a “D,” and seven, an “F.” Please check your Loyola email account daily for readings.

Deadlines: Deadlines are sacrosanct in our profession. **I do not accept late papers.** Turn in all papers at the beginning of class on due date. If you cannot attend a class and a paper is due, place in my mailbox before the class period or give to another student to turn in.

Required Tools of the Trade:

- Strunk, William and E.B. White. *The Elements of Style* (4th ed.)
- New Orleans Times-Picayune*. Please subscribe and read the paper daily. Knowledge of local and world news is paramount in this course.
- The New York Times*. Register at nytimes.com. I will assign occasional readings from this website.
- Kingsolver, Barbara. *Small Wonder: Essays* (1st ed). HarperCollins Publishers.
- A journal/notebook to carry at all times.

Types of Assignments and Course Structure

Our focus is on writing and you will write during almost every class period (creative exercises), and have approximately one paper due per week. Descriptive writing and good note-taking will be the mainstay of the class. Rewriting will also be emphasized. Students will receive grade points for reworking drafts. Some writing assignments will require interviews on campus as well as trips to farmer’s markets and businesses. Be prepared to spend considerable time working outside of class.

Reading is paramount. Please do all assigned readings and be prepared to discuss in class. Several quizzes will be given.

There will be a take-home midterm and a final project in lieu of a final exam.

GRADES:

Writing assignments (in-class and homework)	70%
Midterm and Quizzes	20%
Final Project	10%

Note: Students can earn a maximum of five grade points per story for rewrites. Students will also receive five grade points for any classroom work published in a major U.S. newspaper (maximum of two publications—college publications do not qualify). Two grade points will be awarded for an excellent column published in *The Maroon* (maximum of one column).

POLICIES:

- A. Absences:** Students are responsible for all work missed. Please get the phone number or email of a student in the class and call them for missed work and lectures (use the buddy system).
- B. Style:** All papers must be typed, double-spaced, in 12 point Times and on white paper. Turn in two copies of every homework assignment. The instructor will grade one and return it to you; she will keep the other. Each paper should have name, date of assignment and “slug” in the right-hand corner. Spelling, grammar and neatness are crucial to your grade. Computer spellcheck programs are not enough. Proofread papers and have your copy editor read before turning in.
- C. Ethics and Plagiarism:** University policies apply to all work: see *Undergraduate Bulletin 2003-2005*. This is a communications course and communication is about the pursuit of truth. Any student who steals work or invents any part of a story will automatically fail the course.
- D. Courtesy:** Be professional. no cellphones, food or Internet surfing.
- E. Extenuating circumstances:** Life happens. See me privately in case of extreme difficulties.
- F. Disabilities:** A student with a disability who needs accommodations should contact Sarah Mead Smith, Director of Disability Services at 865-2990 (Academic Resource Center, Room 405, Monroe Hall). A student wishing to receive test accommodations (e.g. extended test time) should provide the instructor with an official Accommodation Form from Disability Services before the scheduled test date.
- G. Hurricane Katrina and stress:** This is a difficult time for us all as we rebuild our city and our lives. If you need to talk with someone about your experience, Loyola's Counseling and Career Services Center is offering confidential counseling to all students at no charge. Call (504) 865-3835 or go to the Danna Center, room 208, Second floor. I will hold extra office hours, Mondays thru Thursdays from 3:30pm to 5:30pm, to help you with your writing and listen to your stories. If these times do not work, please email me or see me after class and I will set up another time. Silence is not always golden.

The Department of Communications at Loyola University New Orleans complies with national accrediting standards designed to help prepare students to understand and relate to issues of interest to women and minorities in a multicultural, multi-ethnic and otherwise diverse society.

***LECTURE AND ASSIGNMENT SEQUENCE:**

Week 1, Jan. 9	Introduction: The Creative Spark.
Week 2, Jan. 16	Martin Luther King assignment.
Week 3, Jan. 23	Random Kindness assignment: Observation.
Week 4, Jan. 30	Nature and Our Place: Kingsolver Chap 3. Description assignment.
Week 5, Feb. 6	Nature cont.: Essay assignment.
Week 6, Feb. 13	Start Final Project/Midterm preparation: Srunking.
Week 7, Feb. 20	Midterm and self-evaluations.
Week 8, Feb. 27	Mardi Gras: Painting a Picture.
Week 9, Mar. 6	Small Wonders: Kingsolver Chap. 1, Essay.
Week 10, Mar. 13	Guardian Angels: Kingsolver Chap 5, Essay.
Week 11, Mar. 20	One-Eyed Monsters: Kingsolver Chap 11, Journaling and Essay.
Week 12, Mar. 27	The Citizen: Kingsolver 22, Essay.
Week 13, April 3	The Citizen cont.: Letter to Editor.
Week 14, April 10	Humor: The Lazlo Toth Assignment.
Week 15, April 17	Class presentations on Final Project: bring in draft.
Week 16, April 24	Final Projects Due.

*Schedule subject to change depending on surprise guest speakers and rewrites.