Reading as a Writer

Class code | ENGL-UA 9201 – 001

Instructor Details | Anna Westbrook  
| aw93@nyu.edu  
| Consultations by appointment  
| Please allow at least 24 hours for your instructor to respond to your emails.

Class Details | Fall 2017

Reading as a Writer

Monday 3:30 – 6:30pm  
4 September to 11 December  
Room 202  
NYU Sydney Academic Centre  

Prerequisites | None

Class Description

Consider a hypothetical Venn diagram of reading and writing; ‘Reading as a Writer’ situates itself in the intersectional middle. In this class we will interrogate reading as an activity that is seldom passive or complacent. We consider modes of reading and the various critical postures we assume whilst reading, whilst limning the relationship between reader/writer for all its fecundity.

Writing, as a way to “make sense” of reading, and what moves us to respond in kind, is integral to this course. We put ourselves into experimental dyads and constellations with other writer/readers, tracing these palimpsest telegraphs across centuries and hemispheres. ‘Reading as a Writer’ explores the diaristic impulse, love letters, language, ecologies and the non-human, queer readings, affect, visual and textual collisions, autofiction, paratexts, marginalia, intertexts, subjectivity and the lyric essay, and necromances and erotic potentials with dead authors.

Here is the space to launch your wildest speculative brainchildren from a strong theoretical foundation where creative and critical practice are enmeshed.

Desired

By the end of the course, students will be able to:
Outcomes

- Articulate a clear understanding of modes of reading and their literary, critical, and historical contexts.
- Strengthen creative and critical writing via regular assignments with substantial opportunity for feedback and critique.
- Deepen knowledge of the landscape and culture of Australian writing situated within a global reading list.
- Participate in poiesis “making” exercises that interleave critical theory with creative practice.
- Demonstrate an engagement with complex cultural and literary theory through deep analysis of the contemporary and historic roles of reader and writer.

Assessment Components

Class Participation, including Weekly Directed Experiments: 30% (Ongoing Assessment)

Weekly Directed Experiments: (250-500 words per week).
These will often (but not always) be initiated from an In-Class Exercise Prompt. You are expected to then polish and refine at home and post these by Sunday 3:30pm, the day prior to class. Whilst they are recognised as experimental drafts, please make sure to edit for grammar, spelling, and general coherency. We will often begin the class by sharing these aloud to recap the theme of the last week.

Class Prep: Everyone comes to class with all texts/materials in hand, read, and annotated. For each class, have at least 2 specific passages identified that you wish to share, discuss, comment upon, or question. In any given class, you will be asked to specify, share, and present your passage[s].

Mid-Term Analytic Essay: (1500 words): 30% (Due by 3:30pm, Week 8)
A focused, intense engagement with critical terms, writerly gambits, and reading methods. Essay prompts will be provided in class in Week 4.

FINAL PROJECT: Three Tracks: 40% (Due by 3:30pm, Week 15)
A. Long Analytic Essay (4000 words): in which students mobilize syllabus materials to respond to key analytic/conceptual/formal/historical questions raised by the course & conversation. Your essay question must be submitted in Week 11 for approval. Your essay may well emerge out of one (or more) of your postings or experiments.

B. Research Paper (4000 words): designed in concert with instructor and class, arising from the syllabus and pre-existing or emerging questions and areas of interest. Your subject of research must be submitted in Week 11 for approval.

C. Made Thing/Hybrid Composition: you propose it, and we’ll see if we can help you dispose it. Required: intellectual and artistic ambition, equivalent to tracks A and B. Otherwise format and form open. A one paragraph pitch must be submitted in Week 11 for approval.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component will result in failure of the class.
For this course your total numerical score, calculated from the components listed above, is converted to a letter grade without rounding.

Extra Credit: Site policy does not allow grading of work outside of the assignments included in the syllabus. The final grade will only be calculated from the assessment components listed here and no other work, whether additional or substituted, is permitted.

**Assessment Expectations**

**Grade A:** Excellent performance showing a thorough knowledge and understanding of the topics of the course; all work includes clear, logical explanations, insight, and original thought and reasoning. Creative work is of a highly sophisticated standard.

**Grade B:** Good performance with general knowledge and understanding of the topics; all work includes general analysis and coherent explanations showing some independent reasoning, reading and research. Creative work is of a superior standard.

**Grade C:** Satisfactory performance with some broad explanation and reasoning; the work will typically demonstrate an understanding of the course on a basic level. Creative work is of an acceptable standard.

**Grade D:** Passable performance showing a general and superficial understanding of the course’s topics; work lacks satisfactory insight, analysis or reasoned explanations. Creative work is of a basic standard.

**Grade F:** Unsatisfactory performance in all assessed criteria. Creative work is weak, unfinished or unsubmitted.

**Grade Conversions**

The complete range of grade conversions is as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94 to 100</td>
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<td>67 to &lt; 70</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>65 to &lt; 67</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>0 to &lt; 65</td>
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Submission of Work

Assignments (excluding in-class presentations and exams) must be submitted electronically via NYU Classes. It is the student’s responsibility to confirm that the work has been successfully been uploaded. In the unlikely event that a submission to Classes fails, students must immediately submit the work to the Academic Programs Coordinator via email before the original submission deadline accompanied by an explanation of the issue. All in-class presentations and exams must be completed during the scheduled class time. An assessment component is considered completed when the student has met all the terms for that assessment component as outlined by the instructor.

An assessment component completed after the deadline without an agreed extension receives a penalty of 2 points on the 100-point scale (for the assignment) for each day the work is late. Work completed beyond five weekdays after the due date without an agreed extension receives a mark of zero, and the student is not entitled to feedback for that piece of work. Because failure to submit or fulfil any required assessment component will result in failure of the course, it is crucial for students to complete every assignment even when it will receive a mark of zero.

Plagiarism Policy

The academic standards of New York University apply to all coursework at NYU Sydney. NYU Sydney policies are in accordance with New York University’s plagiarism policy. The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

It is a serious academic offense to use the work of others (written, printed or in any other form) without acknowledgement. Cases of plagiarism are not dealt with by your instructor. They are referred to the Director, who will determine the appropriate penalty (up to and including failure in the course as a whole) taking into account the codes of conduct and academic standards for NYU’s various schools and colleges.

Attendance Policy

Study abroad at Global Academic Centres is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centres is mandatory, and unexcused absences will affect students’ semester grades. The class roster will be marked at the beginning of class and anyone who arrives after this time will be considered absent. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence.

For courses that meet once a week, one unexcused absence will be penalised by a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade. For courses that meet two or more times a week, the same penalty will apply to two unexcused absences. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure.
Faculty cannot excuse an absence. Requests for absences to be excused must be directed to the Academic Programs Coordinator. Students must provide appropriate documentation for their absence. In the case of illness, students must contact the Academic Programs Coordinator on the day of absence. They must provide medical documentation to Academic Programs Coordinator within three days of the absence in order to be medically excused. The note must include a medical judgement indicating that the student was unfit to attend class/work on the specific day or dates of the absence. Faculty will be informed of excused absences by the Academic Programs staff.

Classroom Expectations

This is a seminar subject and requires the active participation of all students. It also requires engaged discussion, including listening to and respecting other points of view. Your behaviour in class should respect your classmates’ desire to learn. It is important for you to focus your full attention on the class, for the entire class period.

- Arrive to class on time.
- Once you are in class, you are expected to stay until class ends. Leaving to make or take phone calls, to meet with classmates, or to go to an interview, is not acceptable behaviour.
- Phones, digital music players, and any other communications or sound devices are not to be used during class. That means no phone calls, no texting, no social media, no email, and no internet browsing at any time during class.
- Laptop computers and tablets are not to be used during class except in rare instances for specific class-related activity expressly approved by your instructor.
- The only material you should be reading in class is material assigned for that class. Reading anything else, such as newspapers or magazines, or doing work from another class, is not acceptable.
- Class may not be recorded in any fashion – audio, video, or otherwise – without permission in writing from the instructor.

Diversity, Inclusion and Equity

NYU is committed to building a culture that respects and embraces diversity, inclusion, and equity, believing that these values – in all their facets – are, as President Andrew Hamilton has said, “…not only important to cherish for their own sake, but because they are also vital for advancing knowledge, sparking innovation, and creating sustainable communities.” At NYU Sydney we are committed to creating a learning environment that:

- fosters intellectual inquiry, research, and artistic practices that respectfully and rigorously take account of a wide range of opinions, perspectives, and experiences; and
- promotes an inclusive community in which diversity is valued and every member feels they have a rightful place, is welcome and respected, and is supported in their endeavours.

Religious

Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to
**Observance**

miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. Students must notify their professor and the Academic Programs Coordinator in writing via email one week in advance before being absent for this purpose.

**Provisions to students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in a class are encouraged to contact the Moses Centre for Students with Disabilities at (212) 998-4980 as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. For more information, see Study Away and Disability.

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### Required Texts

All required materials will be uploaded to CLASSES in the RESOURCES folder. It is a course expectation that you have done the required reading and have prepared sufficiently to discuss them in class.

#### Week 1  Introduction: Orientations in Reading & Writing

**Monday 4 September**

To be read before first class meeting:

**Required Reading:**

- ‘The Library as Home’ – Alberto Manguel (in *A Reader on Reading*, Yale University Press, 2010)
- Excerpt from *The Arcades Project* – Walter Benjamin (Harvard University Press, 1999)

#### Week 2  The Diaristic Impulse, or, Whose Record?

**Monday 11 September**

**Required Reading:**

- Excerpt from *Note Book* – Jeff Nunokawa (Princeton University Press, 2015)
- Excerpt from *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* – Gertrude Stein (Harcourt, 1933)
- ‘Goodbye to All That’ – Joan Didion (in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1968)
- Excerpt from *M Train* – Patti Smith (Bloomsbury, 2015)

#### Week 3  Writing as Ludic Experiment

**Monday 18 September**

**Required Reading:**

- Excerpt from *Eunoia* - Christian Bök (Canongate, 2009)
- ‘To Scratch, Claw, or Grope Clumsily or Frantically’ – Roxanne Gay (*in Bad Feminist*, Corsair, 2014)
• Excerpt from *Codex Seraphinianus* – Luigi Serafini (Franco Maria Ricci, 1981)

**Week 4  The Reading Imperative**

**Monday 25 September**

**Required Reading:**
- ‘To the Reader at Parting’ – Edward Hirsch (in *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry*, Mariner, 1999)

**Essay Prompts Distributed In-Class for Assessment Due in Week 8**

**Week 5  Numinous Epistles, or, ‘Every Letter is a Love Letter’**

**Friday 6 October (Make-up day for Monday Public Holiday)**

**Required Reading:**
- Excerpt from *Why I Love Barthes* – Alain Robbe-Grillet (Polity Press, 2011)
- Excerpt from *My Emily Dickinson* – Susan Howe (New Directions, 2007)
- Excerpt from *I Love Dick* – Chris Kraus (Semiotext(e), 2006)

**Week 6  Reading as an Annotator: Paratexts, Marginalia, Intertexts**

**Monday 9 October**

**Required Reading:**
- Excerpt from *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* - from H. J. Jackson, (Yale University Press, 2002)
- Excerpt from *Working Hot* – Mary Fallon (Sybylla, 1989)
- ‘Octet’ – David Foster Wallace (in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, Little, Brown, 1999)

**FALL BREAK: 16 – 20 October (Week 7)**

**Week 8 Language and Ecologies**

**Monday 23 October**

**Guest Lecture: Dr Prudence Gibson**

**Required Reading:**
- ‘In the Beginning was the Word: The Genesis of Biological Theory’ – Donna Haraway (in Simians, Cyborgs and Women, Routledge, 1991)
- Excerpt from Janet Laurence: The Pharmacy of Plants – Prudence Gibson (University of New South Wales Press, 2015)
- Excerpt from The Island Will Sink – Briohny Doyle (The Lifted Brow, 2016)

**Assignment: Mid-Term Analytic Essay Due (30%)**

**Week 9  Touching Feelings**
Monday 30 October

**Required Reading:**
- Excerpt from Depression: A Public Feeling – Ann Cvetkovich (Duke University Press, 2012)
- Excerpt from H is for Hawk – Helen Macdonald (Vintage, 2014)

**Week 10  Visual/Textual Intersections**
Monday 6 November

**Required Reading:**
- Excerpt from Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic - Alison Bechdel (Mariner Books, 2007)
- Excerpt from Phosphene – Tamryn Bennett (Rabbit, 2016)
- Excerpt from Rawshock – Toby Fitch (Puncher and Wattmann, 2012)
- Excerpt from Spit Temple – Cecilia Vicuña (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2012)

**Week 11  Autofictions / Authorship and Late Capitalism**
Monday 13 November

**Required Reading:**
- Excerpt from Between the World and Me – Ta-Nehisi Coates (Spiegel & Grau, 2015)
- Excerpt from The Hate Race – Maxine Beneba Clarke (Hachette, 2016)
- Excerpt from Between a Wolf and a Dog – Georgia Blain (Scribe, 2016)
- Excerpt from How to Grow Up – Michelle Tea (Plume, 2015)

**Week 12  Lyric/Essay? Subjectivity, Collectivity, Composition**
Monday 20 November

**Required Reading:**
• ‘Looking Past White Australia and White Feminism’ – Celeste Liddle (New Matilda, 2016)
• ‘Poetry is Not a Luxury’ – Audre Lorde (in Sister Outsider, Crossing Press, 1984)

Week 13     Reading Queerly
Monday 27 November

Required Reading:
• ‘Critically Queer’ – Judith Butler (in The Routledge Queer Studies Reader, 2013)
• Excerpt from The Argonauts – Maggie Nelson (Graywolf, 2015)
• Excerpt from The Pleasure of the Text – Roland Barthes (Hill and Wang, 1975)

Week 14     Troubleshooting & Editing
Monday 4 December

Work on final projects & read/prepare for final class!

Week 15     Course Reflections & A Spot of Necromancy
Monday 11 December

Required Reading:
• ‘Descent: Negotiating with the Dead’ – Margaret Atwood (in AfterWord: Conjuring the Literary Dead, ed. Dale Salwak, University of Iowa Press, 2011)
• Excerpts from Daily Rituals: How Great Minds Make Time, Find Inspiration, and Get to Work – Mason Currey (Picador, 2013)

Assignment: Final Projects due (40%)

Your Instructor

Dr Anna Westbrook (Ph.D., University of New South Wales) published her debut novel Dark Fires Shall Burn in 2016. She has presented at many conferences and writer’s festivals around Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. In 2015 she taught a sold out masterclass workshop for the Sydney Writers’ Festival. She was the recipient of the Sydney University prize for Best Honours thesis in Gender & Cultural Studies, a Marrickville Council Arts Development Grant, the Australian Society of Authors Mentorship award, and has been shortlisted for the Australian Vogel. Anna has been anthologized in Herding Kites (Affirm Press) and online in The Disappearing, and published in harlequin creature (USA), The Bastille (France), Voiceworks, Slit, Scum, Cuttings, Pony, and WQ (Australia). She has lectured at NYU Sydney since 2012.