

The Gallatin School  
 New York University  
 Fall 2009  
 MW, 3:30-4:45

Prof. June Foley  
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 Office hrs: TR, 3-5

### **K10:0343—FIRST YEAR WRITING SEMINAR: Writers on Writing**

**Description:** George Orwell named four reasons for writing: "egoism," "aesthetic enthusiasm," "historical impulse" and "political purpose." Franz Kafka stressed the emotional power of words in describing writing as "an ax for the frozen sea within us." Mario Vargas Llosa claimed the secret reason for the literary vocation is the questioning of real life. Gustave Flaubert stressed the limitations of language, as "a cracked kettle on which we beat out tunes for bears to dance to, when all the while we long to move the stars to pity." In this course, students write critical essays that are inspired by writing *about* writing. Our texts, exemplary works in various genres, include essays by Orwell and Joan Didion; selections from the diaries of Virginia Woolf; Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* and Vargas Llosa's *Letters to a Young Novelist*; Lillian Ross's *New Yorker* "profile" of Ernest Hemingway; short stories about the writing life by E.L. Doctorow, Alice Munro and Lorrie Moore; and James Joyce's novel *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Student writing will culminate in a literary-critical essay.

**Texts:** Required texts are available at the NYU Bookstore: Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*, Vargas Llosa's *Letters to a Young Novelist*, Ross's *Portrait of Hemingway*, and Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Strongly recommended: Strunk & White's *The Elements of Style*.

**Requirements:** Students write and revise three short (3-5-page) essays and one 7-9-page literary-critical essay. Students also write brief (1-2-page) responses to every reading, handing them in at the end of the class. All work must be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins and numbered pages. For workshops, students e-mail me the work by 1 PM, or make copies for students and me.

**Grades:** Thoughtful, informed participation—analyzing the texts and constructively critiquing classmates' writing—is crucial, and determines 20% of the grade (missing more than two classes without a serious reason lowers the final grade; three late arrivals = one absence). The collective responses determine 15% of the grade. The first essay is ungraded; each of the other two short essays determines 20% of the grade, and the literary-critical essay determines 25%. (Only revisions are graded). Late work is progressively downgraded.

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## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

### **Week 1: Wed., 9/9**

In class: Intro to class; intro to one another through in-class writing, "Why I Write"; intro to Orwell

Reading assignment: George Orwell's "Why I Write"

Writing assignment: Response to Orwell's essay (What surprised, excited, puzzled, disturbed you most? What did you learn? Consider everything—ideas, organization, voice, language, syntax, even punctuation.)

### **Week 2: Mon., 9/14**

In class: Discuss Orwell's essay as an example of the genre

Reading assignment: Read Joan Didion's "Why I Write"

Writing assignment: Reponse to Didion

### **Wed., 9/16**

In class: Discuss Didion; freewrite for Essay 1: "What I Learned from Orwell &/or Didion, and What I Want/Need to Learn" (3-5 pages—ungraded)

Reading assignment: Your responses to Orwell and Didion, your freewriting

Writing assignment: Draft, Essay 1

### **Week 3: Mon., 9/21**

**DUE: DRAFT, ESSAY 1**

In class: Workshop Essay 1

Reading assignment: Essay 1

Writing assignment: Revise Essay 1

### **Wed., 9/23**

**DUE: ESSAY 1**

In class: Intro to Woolf, including essay "Modern Fiction"

Reading assignment: Woolf's diary, selections

Writing assignment: Response to Woolf

**FYS: Writers on Writing/Gallatin School, NYU/Fall 2009/Prof. Foley/Page 3****Week 4: Mon., 9/28**

In class: Discuss Woolf's diary; intro to Rilke  
 Reading assignment: Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*  
 Writing assignment: Response to Rilke

**Wed., 9/30**

In class: Discuss Rilke  
 Reading assignment: Mario Vargas Llosa's *Letters to a Young Novelist*  
 Writing assignment: Response to Vargas Llosa

**Week 5: Mon., 10/5**

In class: Discuss Vargas Llosa; intro to Ross  
 Reading assignment: Lillian Ross's *Portrait of Hemingway*  
 Writing assignment: Response to Ross

**Wed., 10/7**

In class: Discuss Ross  
 Reading assignment: Your responses  
 Writing assignment: Ideas for Essay 2 (compare and contrast any two works we've read, including advantages and constraints of each genre, 3-5 pages)

**Week 6: Mon., 10/12: GUEST SPEAKER—ATTENDANCE MANDATORY****Wed., 10/14**

In class: Discuss your ideas for Essay 2  
 Reading assignment: Your ideas  
 Writing assignment: Draft, Essay 2

**Week 7: Mon., 10/19****DUE: DRAFT, ESSAY 2**

In class: Workshop Essay 2  
 Reading assignment: Your draft  
 Writing assignment: Work on draft, Essay 2

**Wed., 10/21****DUE: DRAFT, ESSAY 2**

In class: Workshop Essay 2  
 Reading assignment: Essay 2  
 Writing assignment: Revise Essay 2

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**Week 8: Mon., 10/26**

**DUE: ESSAY 2**

**VISIT TO LIBRARY: ATTENDANCE MANDATORY**

Reading assignment: First 25 pages of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist* . .

Writing assignment: Response--a close reading

**Wed., 10/28**

In class: Intro to James Joyce and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

Discuss first 25 pages

Reading assignment: Joyce, rest of Part I and Part II

Writing assignment: Response

**Week 9: Mon., 11/2**

In class: Discuss Joyce, Parts I and II

Reading assignment: Joyce, Parts III and IV

Writing assignment: Response

**Wed., 11/4**

In class: Discuss Joyce, Parts III and IV

Reading assignment: Joyce, Part V

Writing assignment: Response

**Week 10: Mon., 11/9**

In class: Discuss Joyce, Part V; (anonymous, informal) mid-term evaluation

Reading assignment: Your writing

Writing assignment: Your ideas for Essay 3 on any aspect of "Portrait" (7-9 pages)

**Wed., 11/11**

In class: Discuss ideas for Essay 3; sign up for one-on-one meetings with prof.

Reading assignment: Your ideas

Writing assignment: Draft, Essay 3

**Week 11: Mon, 11/16**

**DUE: DRAFT, ESSAY 3**

In class: Workshop Essay 3; meet with prof

Reading assignment: Your own writing re Essay 3

Writing assignment: Work on revising Essay 3

**FYS: Writers on Writing/Gallatin School, NYU/Fall 2009/Prof. Foley/Page 5****Wed., 11/18****DUE: DRAFT, ESSAY 3**

In class: Workshop Essay 3; meet with prof.

Reading assignment: Essay 3

Writing assignment: Revise Essay 3

**Week 12: Mon, 11/23****DUE: ESSAY 3**

In class: Intro to Moore; read aloud "How to Become a Writer"

Reading assignment: None

Writing assignment: None

**Wed., 11/25: HOLIDAY—THANKSGIVING****Week 13: Mon., 11/30**

In class: Discuss Moore; intro to Doctorow

Reading assignment: Doctorow's "The Writer in The Family"

Writing assignment: Response to Doctorow

**Wed., 12/2**

In class: Discuss Doctorow; intro to Munro

Reading assignment: Munro's "Family Furnishings"

Writing assignment: Response to Munro

**Week 14: Mon., 12/7**

In class: Discuss Munro

Reading assignment: Your writing

Writing assignment: Your ideas for Essay 4, on short story (3-5 pages)

**Wed., 12/9**

In class: Discuss your ideas for Essay 4

Reading assignment: Your ideas

Writing assignment: Draft, Essay 4

**Week 15: Mon., 12/14—LAST CLASS; ATTENDANCE MANDATORY****DUE: DRAFT, ESSAY 4**

In class: Workshop Essay 4; Course Evaluation; Celebration!

Reading assignment: Essay 4

Writing assignment: Revise Draft, Essay 4

**\*\*\*\*\*FRI., 12/18: ESSAY 4 DUE VIA EMAIL BY NOON\*\*\*\*\***