

HUMANITIES 3300: Reading and Writing Texts

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Course description

This course aims to help students succeed within the interdisciplinary environment of the School of Arts and Humanities, by teaching them how its different disciplines work and how they converge. We will begin by studying the practice of cultural analysis common to humanities work in general. We will then progress through three units that revolve around the consideration of a single text, Frederick Douglass's *Narrative*. Our goals will be to determine how literary scholars, historians, and creative practitioners have variously approached Douglass's text and to engage these approaches in a variety of writing assignments.

Student learning objectives

This course aims to have students:

1. understand the motivating questions of scholars in the humanities.
2. improve skills of analysis through three papers, and one project, each of which differently engages with scholarship in the humanities.
3. learn techniques for evaluating and revising work in progress, through interactions with classmates.

Required texts

Available at Off-Campus Books on Campbell Road and at the on-campus bookstore:

Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Hill and Wang)
Gerald Graff & Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say* 2nd edition (Norton)
Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Norton)
Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Cornell)

Course Requirements

Students must:

1. bring reading assignments to every class session. If you do not have a printed version of a text, you must bring a laptop or e-reader so that you can access it.
2. act respectfully towards the viewpoints of others—those present in class and those whom we will read.
3. use personal technology responsibly. Looking up an unfamiliar word is okay; texting your friends is not. In general, I prefer phones to be off desks.
4. use the edition on e-reserves for texts marked [ER]. The web site for our course is: <http://utdallas.docutek.com/eres/coursepage.aspx?cid=1248>. The password is: romance.

Attendance

Students are expected to be present and prepared in all class sessions. Semester grades will reflect this expectation as follows:

Four absences or unprepared presences will result in the final grade being lowered by seven points. More than four absences may result in failure of the course. Coming late to class twice is the equivalent of being absent once.

A sign-in sheet will be circulated at the start of every class session. It is your responsibility to make sure that the sheets accurately reflect your attendance, as they are my only means of determining absences at the end of the semester. If a sheet is not circulated, please remind me to take attendance at the conclusion of class.

Evaluation

Student performance will be evaluated on an A-F grading scale, with components weighed as follows:

Brief writing assignments	10%
Contribution to class	10%
First paper	20%
Second paper	20%
Third paper	20%
Fourth project	20%

University Policies

For important information about university-wide policies such as academic integrity, grievances, incompletes, disability services, and plagiarism, please see the provost's Web site: <<http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>>.

Assignments

You will be responsible this semester for both reading texts and producing written assignments. You will want to read texts closely, engage with their ideas, and think seriously about what and how they mean before class. You are responsible for providing yourself with materials and an environment that will allow you to do so.

There are three types of written assignments that will be due in class.

1. Brief writing assignments: On six dates throughout the semester, a brief (approximately 300-word) writing assignment answering a specific question about the reading is due in class. These will be an opportunity for you to demonstrate your engagement with the texts as well as your involvement in the class discussions. Grades for these will be a check (grade equivalent of 85%), check plus (grade equivalent of 95%) or zero. Keep in mind that work must be above average to receive credit.

- ◇ *a check* means that the assignment reflects an adequate reading of the text (usually, 1-2 hours of reading). Check papers demonstrate a basic understanding of the terms of the question and/or a deliberate effort to make sense of them. They are polished but may contain (limited!) factual or grammatical mistakes.
- ◇ *a check-plus* means that the assignment reflects a serious engagement with the text (usually, 2-3 hours of reading). Check-plus papers answer the question thoroughly and with good prose. Often, they also ask "So what?". This means that they grapple with the consequences of their answers and attempt to extend them to other aspects of the text or to class discussions.
- ◇ *a zero* means that the assignment presents no information that could not be gleaned from a cursory search about the text on the Web (10 minutes of reading). A paper that reflects more time reading, but does not answer the question asked, will also be a zero. Finally, a paper with seriously sloppy writing will be a zero. In other words, assignments that might be graded C or D in other contexts will be zeroes here—so don't bother turning in such work.

2. First drafts: Each major (3-4 page) paper or project for this class will be developed in drafts. Your drafts must: reflect a genuine, thoughtful engagement with the paper assignment; fulfill the length requirement for the final paper; be organized and written deliberately; and be proofread. In short, you should feel that if you were to turn in your draft for a grade, it would earn a good one. You will then have the opportunity to make it even better, by working in groups and following specific guidelines to discuss, evaluate, and improve your writing.

3. Final drafts: Paper and project grades will reflect your ability to revise, develop, and improve your work. Hence final drafts must take into account the feedback received during peer editing. You will thus turn in your first draft, your peer editing worksheet, and any other relevant drafting or brainstorming activity with your final paper—in that order. Make sure your final paper is separately stapled; other materials may be attached with a binder clip. You'll also want to use MLA guidelines for in-text citations, a Works Cited list and quotation style and present your text in twelve-point, double-spaced font.

Schedule of readings and assignments

Analysis in the humanities: Reading cultural objects

- 1/17 Introduction.
- 1/19 Reading advertisements. (Bring a favorite or available magazine to class.)
- 1/24 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*: Preface to the 1957 edition; "Soap-powders and Detergents"; "Toys"; "The Face of Garbo"; "Wine and Milk"; "Steak and Chips"; "The New Citroen"; "Plastic"
Brief writing assignment #1 due.
- 1/26 *Mythologies*, continued.
First paper assigned.
- 1/31 Draft of first paper due.
Peer revisions. Focus: Clear sentences & organization.
- 2/2 Schnapp, "The Romance of Caffeine and Aluminum." [ER]
Expansion of first paper assigned.
- 2/7 Graff & Birkenstein, "The Art of Quoting."
- 2/9 Expanded first paper draft due.
Peer revisions. Focus: Using quotations.
- 2/14 Final copy of first paper due. Laub, "Testimony and Historical Truth." [ER]

Literary analysis: Thinking about representation

- 2/16 Culler, "What is Literature and Does It Matter?" [ER]
- 2/21 Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*.
Prefaces & chapters 1-8
Brief writing assignment #2 due.
- 2/23 Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*.
chapters 9-11
- 2/28 Andrews, "Frederick Douglass and the American Jeremiad." [in Norton]
Brief writing assignment #3 due.
- 3/1 McBride, "Consider the Audience: Witnessing to the Discursive Reader in Douglass's *Narrative*." [ER]

Literary analysis, continued

- 3/6 Selections from Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*. [ER]
Excerpt from Wald, *Constituting Americans*. [ER]
Graff & Birkenstein, "Her Point Is," "Yes/No/Okay, But"; "And Yet."
Second paper assigned.
- 3/8 Draft of second paper due.
Peer revisions. Focus: Integrating sources with argument.
- 3/13 Spring break.
- 3/15 Spring break.
- 3/20 Second paper due.
Arrested Development Season 1, Episode 2: "Top Banana." [R]

Historical analysis: Thinking about accuracy

- 3/22 Appleby, Hunt, & Jacob, "Scientific History and the Idea of Modernity." [ER]
- 3/27 Ripley, "The Autobiographical Writings of Frederick Douglass." [in Norton]
Brief writing assignment #4 due.
- 3/29 Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, Introduction & pages 1-82
- 4/3 Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, pages 83-144.
Brief writing assignment #5 due.
- 4/5 Graff & Birkenstein, "As a Result," "But Don't Get Me Wrong."
Third paper assigned.
- 4/10 Library research.
- 4/12 Draft of third paper due.
Peer editing. Focus: Argumentation.
- 4/17 Third papers due.
Crowley, "Follow That Cab!" [ER]

Creative work: Thinking about expression

- 4/19 Jones, "Liaison. The Warmth of Family. Stormy Weather." (chapter 1 of *The Known World*) [ER]
- 4/24 art21: "Stories," section on Kara Walker [on-line video]
<http://www.pbs.org/art21/watch-now/episode-stories>
Kara Walker: my complement, my enemy, my oppressor, my love. [ER]
Brief writing assignment #6 due.
- 4/26 Excerpts from Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* [ER]
Fourth project assigned.
- 5/1 Draft of fourth project due.
Peer editing. Focus: Precision.
- 5/3 Fourth projects due.

***This syllabus is subject to change at the instructor's discretion.
Please see me in the event that its terms become difficult to meet.***