ENGL 584, Spring 2021

SYLLABUS

TTh 9:30 - 11:30 (over Zoom)

Office Hours: Th 1:00 - 3:00 pm and by appointment (over Zoom)

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This graduate prose workshop is a place to generate new work, take risks, and question yourself and others about your writing.  As you do so, you should be developing a good sense of your own passions, obsessions, and fears as writers.

In addition to doing three rounds of workshopping, you have the option to participate in a study of prose style or to complete extra writing or revision and meet with me individually to discuss it. You may also try out the prose style study and drop it part way through the quarter to complete additional writing. However, it will be very difficult to pick up the prose style study in the middle, since lessons in it build on each other.

**Prose Style**

In our workshops, we often want to talk about a story’s or essay’s or writer’s style but are stymied because we don’t have a shared vocabulary. This study of style attempts to provide you with a vocabulary, as well as give you additional writerly tools.

The term *style* derives from the Latin *stilus*, a pointed instrument for writing. *Style* conjures up the little black dress, a world of haute couture and Audrey Hepburn, but it also invokes William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White’s *Elements of Style* and the grammatical prescriptions of the style sheet; though grammar may seem less glamorous than fashion, *glamour* is etymologically speaking a corruption of *grammar*, by way of a set of related terms (*gramarye*, *grimoire*) that refer to a body of occult knowledge.  The *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that *style* may refer to the manner in which something is written, including a writer’s characteristic mode of expression, but a pattern of tension soon emerges from its series of definitions. Is style merely something superficial, referring to features “which belong to form and expression rather than to the substance of the thought or the matter expressed”? Or do we instead adopt the wisdom embodied in the old adage “The style is the man,” which implies that every aspect of character is written into each sentence a person writes?    --Jenny Davidson, *Reading Style: A Life in Sentences*

**Requirements**

* **3 submissions of new fiction or literary nonfiction**.  This should add up to at least 40 pages. If you are working on a novel or book length work of nonfiction, I will also expect you to produce a detailed outline for me and your classmates.
* **Contribution to our summer reading list:** a 250 word plea for why the rest of us should spend part of our summer reading a particular book of your choosing.
* **Thoughtful consideration of each other’s writing**, as evidenced in class discussion and written comments.  As this is a small group, I will expect all of you to participate in all aspects of class discussion.  See below for a description of written comments.
* **Prose style exercises:** grammar, syntax, rhetoric, music, figurative language, and others.  Prepare to learn and think a lot.  Your brain may hurt.
* **OR**
* **Extra writing or revision** (15-20 extra pages of material that I have not read before)

**Required Texts**

Required readings will be in the course reader or through links in Canvas; optional readings will be through links in Canvas.

Course reader, available at Professional Copy'n'Print, 4200 University Way NE, Seattle, WA 98105, (206)634-2689

A good dictionary

A thesaurus

**Grading**

I will be grading on completion this term. If you turn in the required work and participate fully in class, you receive credit. I will not grade your writing, your written peer reviews, or your prose style exercises based on "quality," although I will certainly provide some suggestions for improvement in my comments!

Points below add up to 400, for a grade of 4.0

3 submissions of fiction or nonfiction: 80 pts each

5 prose style exercises: 16 pts each

Written peer reviews: 30 pts

Summer Reading List: 10 pts

Participation: 40 pts

If you are not participating in the study of prose style, you will submit extra writing or revision: 80 pts

**Format for Written Assignments**

**Fiction/Nonfiction**: will be submitted into Google Drive folders. The first page of each assignment **must** include **your name** and **the date the piece is to be discussed** in class.  Please remember to include **page numbers**.  Unless specific formatting is intended to add meaning to your work, use Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, double spaced, and 1 inch margins. **Make sure to include your name in the title of your doc.**

**Written Responses to Each Other’s Work**: Summary or end comments will be typed right at the bottom of your classmates' submissions. To make comments in the margins, choose “Suggesting” mode, highlight the part of the text you’re commenting on, and add your comment. You may also respond to each other’s comments. See below for more detail.

**Prose Style Exercises**: will be submitted into Google Drive folders.

**Workshop Etiquette**

This quarter we will use the Critical Response Process developed by choreographer Liz Lerman.  I imagine that you may find these workshops different from those you have experienced in the past—more formal and more geared towards the writer’s needs.  In past workshops, you have probably sat silently while others discussed your work, a fly on the wall until the end when you were suddenly expected to ask intelligent questions.  Or perhaps you’ve participated in workshops where the writer was allowed to speak and had to sit through endless defenses of the work at hand.  While the Critical Response Process allows for readers’ responses and opinions, it focuses on questions rather than statements, questions from both the readers and the writer.  I have used this method for over 20 years. Too many times in the past, I encountered unhelpful workshop sessions—as a student, as a writer, as a teacher.  I’d wager that the helpfulness or not of the session had little to do with the ratio of negative to positive feedback, but rather with the relationship between the response and the writer’s concerns about own their work.  This method allows us to include those up-front.  It also calls for greater responsibility on the writer’s part.  You may no longer feel that wash of relief after you turn in your writing; instead you’ll need to prepare for workshop too.  And your work itself will need to be at the right point in its development—ready for questioning, ripe for development.

**Written Comments**

These are due before the work is discussed. I do not accept these late.

You will make comments directly on your peers’ Google doc, so, yes, you will all be able to see each other’s comments. You are also free to respond to comments—in agreement or in **polite** disagreement. Before you comment, make sure that you are in **Suggesting** mode (rather than Editing mode) so that you do not delete anyone else’s words.

Your end comments should be typed at the end of the Google doc and should first list 3 statements of meaning or affirmations, including at least one statement about the piece’s main concern (focus, heart, “aboutness”) as you see it.  This should not be a summary but a consideration of what you think the piece is trying to get you to experience, focus on, feel, or think about.  Possibilities for affirmations would be anything that got you excited about the work, things it made you think about, things you loved.  Then, please choose only one or two of the following topics to discuss so that you can go into depth and detail; characterization, movement, tone or voice, sentence construction, imagery, structure, or form (particularly noting any connections or disconnections between form and content). Relate your statements to your general sense of the piece’s main concern and refer to specifics in your peer’s text.

**Recommended Texts:**

Bacon, Wendy. *The Well-Crafted Sentence: A Writer’s Guide to Style*. Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2009.

Calvino, Italo. *Six Memos for the New Millennium*. Vintage Contemporary, 1993.

Clark, Roy Peter. *The Glamour of Grammar*. Little, Brown and Company, 2010.

Danticat, Edwidge. *Create Dangerously*. Vintage Book.s, 2011

Davidson, Jenny, *Reading Style: A Life in Sentences*. Columbia University Press, 2014.

Florey, Kitty Burns. *Sister Bernadette’s Barking Dog: the Quirky History and Lost Art of Diagramming Sentences*. Melville House, 2006.

Forsyth, Mark. *The Elements of Eloquence: Secrets of the Perfect Turn of Phrase*. Berkley Books, 2013

Landon, Brooks. *Building Great Sentences: How to Write the Kinds of Sentences You Love to Read*. Plume Books, 2013

Lanham, Richard. *Analyzing Prose*. Continuum, 2003.

Lanham, Richard. *Style: An Anti-Textbook*. Paul Dry Books, 2007.

Lee, Sherry Quan (ed.). *How Dare We! Write: a Multicultural Creative Writing Discourse*. Modern History Press, 2017.

Le Guin, Ursula. *The Wave in the Mind*. Shambhala, 2004.

Livesey, Margot. *The Hidden Machinery*. Tin House Books, 2017.

Martone, Michael, and Susan Neville. *Rules of Thumb: 73 Authors Reveal Their Fiction Writing Fixations*. Writer’s Digest Books, 2006.

Morrison, Toni (ed.). *Burn This Book: Notes on Literature and Engagement*. Harper, 2009.

Oliver, Stephanie Stokes (ed.). *Black Ink: Literary Legends on the Peril, Power, and Pleasure of Reading and Writing*. 37 INK/Atria, 2018

Pinker, Stephen. *The Sense of Style: The Thinking Person's Guide to Writing in the 21st Century*. Penguin Books, 2014

Prose, Francine. *Reading Like a Writer*. HarperCollins, 2006.

Tufte, Virginia. *Artful Sentences: Syntax as Style*. Graphics Press, 2006.

Vitto, Cindy L. *Grammar by Diagram: Understanding English Grammar through Traditional Sentence Diagramming*. Broadview Press, 2006.

Watson, Cecelia. *Semicolon: the Past, Present, and Future of a Misunderstood Mark*. Ecco, 2019.

Woods, Geraldine. *25 Great Sentences and How They Got That Way*. Norton, 2020.

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

I am committed to making this class a welcoming place for all, and a place where all can engage in lively, respectful conversation--and even respectfully disagree. I aim to present you with a wide range of writers, from a wide variety of backgrounds, writing in a wide variety of styles and genres. Some may choose to explore the most heated topics of our day, while others delve deeply into topics we might consider more personal. I hope that each of you will discover a writer or a piece of writing that speaks to you and that inspires to read and write more.

**Land Acknowledgement**

We acknowledge the people – past, present, and future – of the Dkhw’Duw’Absh, the Duwamish Tribe, the Muckleshoot Tribe, and other tribes on whose traditional lands we study and work.

**English Department Statement**

The UW English Department aims to help students become more incisive thinkers, effective communicators, and imaginative writers by acknowledging that language and its use are powerful and hold the potential to empower individuals and communities; to provide the means to engage in meaningful conversation and collaboration across differences and with those with whom we disagree; and to offer methods for exploring, understanding, problem solving, and responding to the many pressing collective issues we face in our world--skills that align with and support the University of Washington’s mission to educate “a diverse student body to become responsible global citizens and future leaders through a challenging learning environment informed by cutting-edge scholarship.”

As a department, we begin with the conviction that language and texts play crucial roles in the constitution of cultures and communities, past, present, and future.  Our disciplinary commitments to the study of language, literature, and culture require of us a willingness to engage openly and critically with questions of power and difference. As such, in our teaching, service, and scholarship we frequently initiate and encourage conversations about topics such as race, immigration, gender, sexuality, class, indigeneity, and colonialisms. These topics are fundamental to the inquiry we pursue.  We are proud of this fact, and we are committed to creating an environment in which our faculty and students can do so confidently and securely, knowing that they have the backing of the department.

Towards that aim, we value the inherent dignity and uniqueness of individuals and communities. We acknowledge that our university is located on the shared lands and waters of the Coast Salish peoples. We aspire to be a place where human rights are respected and where any of us can seek support. This includes people of all ethnicities, faiths, gender identities, national and indigenous origins, political views, and citizenship status; nontheists; LGBQTIA+; those with disabilities; veterans; and anyone who has been targeted, abused, or disenfranchised.