

ENGL 109 Sec. 011: Introduction to Academic Writing
Tuesday and Thursday, 4:00 – 5:20: Hagey Hall 119
Instructor: Dr. Frankie Condon
Office Location: Hagey Hall 147
Telephone: 3.7141
Email: fcondon@uwaterloo.ca
Office Hours: Tuesday, Thursday 10:00-11:00 and by appointment.

Territorial Acknowledgement
I would like to acknowledge that we are on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Anishnaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, land promised and given to Six Nations, which includes six miles on each side of the Grand River.

Course Description
English 109 is designed to get you comfortable writing in an academic context. You will learn about differences between forms of academic writing as well as more widely shared ideas about what makes writing good across disciplines. Together, we will study the choices great writers make as they write and the processes they engage in order to create their best work. We will study a variety of texts to learn more about how they were written and how to improve the writing each of you produces.

Across the disciplines as well as in nearly every profession the ability not only to communicate effectively, but also to collaborate is necessary to success. The best writers, we believe, talk with one another extensively about their writing at every stage of the composing process from the development of ideas through the final polishing of prose. The production of knowledge and, indeed, all learning are inherently social activities: writers at all levels of experience and ability learn from one another. For these reasons, much of your work in this course will involve different kinds of collaboration with your peers. You will learn to give useful feedback to your classmates, as well as to receive feedback and put it to use in the revision of your writing. We believe that learning to write and read rhetorically takes place over time with meaningful support. In this course, you will receive feedback at multiple stages of the writing process and will have many opportunities to revise your work.

Course Learning Outcomes
• To help you to think critically and communicate effectively
• To learn and practice a variety of strategies for inventing, drafting, and editing texts
• To learn and practice writing in a variety of academic genres
• To learn to read critically
• To learn to write persuasively by effectively employing elements of formal argumentation
• To help you give and receive useful feedback on writing for the purposes of revision
• To learn and practice communicating to a variety of academic audiences

Accommodations
We will all need some accommodations in this class, because we all learn differently. If you need specific accommodations, let me know. I will work with you to ensure that you have means of accessing class information, ways to take part in class activities, and avenues for fair assessment of your coursework. The University of Waterloo has a long-standing commitment to support the participation and access to university programs, services, and facilities by persons with all types of disabilities. All students who have a permanent disability as well as those with temporary disabilities have the right to what UW calls “AccessAbility Services.” To register for these services, you must provide documentation from a qualified professional to verify your disability. Please contact them at 519-888-4567 ext. 35082 or drop into Needles Hall 1132 to book an appointment to meet with an advisor to discuss their services and supports.
Keys to Success
I will grade your work in this course by marking your commitment to your own learning, your willingness to help others learn and so learn more yourself, by your dedication, hard work, and, ultimately, the progress you make as a writer. Every one of you should be able not only to pass this course, but also to learn well and deeply. Effort will matter: I will reward you for effort and your effort will also result in better writing. Take these simple steps to ensure your success in this course:

- **Show up for class!** Attendance is required and you will lose marks for absences. Additionally, while class PowerPoints and handouts will be available on Learn, you will not be able to recover the in-class work you miss. *I will not be able or willing to “fill you in on what you’ve missed.”*
- **Do the reading!** We will be discussing every reading assignment in class. You will be drawing from each course reading in both your formal and informal writing assignments. Take notes on the readings. Come to class with questions about each reading. Be ready to talk with me and with your fellow students: to exchange ideas, debate, explore, and learn.
- **Participate in class!** Participation means showing up for class on time, staying for the full class period, and being intellectually as well as physically present for each class discussion. This is not a class in which you can or should seek to remain invisible. You will know if you are participating well (enough) if I know your name by the end of the second week of classes.
- **Choose to be interested!** My commitment to you is that I will work very hard to make this course not only useful to you, but enjoyable as well. No amount of good teaching can compensate for bored or boring students, however, as enjoyment is a two-way street. If you look bored, I will notice. If you act bored, I will be offended. If you are bored, not only will your work also be boring, it will also be badly done and your grades will suffer.
- **Here’s a little secret:** students who sit closer to the front of the room receive better grades than those who sit closer to the back of the room. Choose where you sit carefully and make your choice based not on how invisible you will be to me, but rather on how well I will be able to see and hear you. If you must sit closer to the back of the room, make extra sure you participate vocally in class. Extra participation will help to compensate for your location in the classroom.
- **Here’s another little secret:** whether you are doing informal or formal group work in the classroom, stay on task and ask for my advice if your group runs out of things to discuss. If you or your group appear to be bored or disengaged, your work and your marks will suffer.
- **Stay off your phone and social media in class.** I do not ban laptops, cell phones, and other electronic devices from my classrooms. I recognize that there are legitimate reasons for having such devices at hand and for using them on occasion during class – for class-related activities. *Using your electronic devices for purposes other than those related to our class while I am talking or during times when you have been asked to write or to do group work in class will result in lowered marks.*
- **Hand your assignments in on time!** This term, I am not accepting late assignments. Every writing assignment should be uploaded to Dropbox by class time on the due date. You have a grace period until midnight and then your window of opportunity to turn in your work closes.
- **Visit my office hours!** Invest in your own success by spending some time talking with me one-with-one. Our conversations will help me get to know your work better and to help you more effectively and you will be able to ask me questions specific to your needs and interests.
- **Ask for my help if you need it!** I like talking with my students and enjoy being able provide support for them. If you need help – if you get stuck or overwhelmed, suffer from writer’s block, aren’t sure how to start, aren’t sure how to finish, aren’t sure what to do – talk with me without delay. Do not wait until the last moment to tell me you need my assistance!
Course Readings


“If you don't have time to read, you don't have the time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that.”
— Stephen King

[New Zealand soldiers with a copy of New Zealand at the Front, 20 Nov 1917, Alexander Turnbull Library, Reference No. 1/2-012980-G]
Course Units

UNIT ONE: The Rules of the Game
Topics: rhetoric: definition, rhetorical triangle, rhetorical situation; argument: claim, support, warrant, conclusion, causality and correlation

Seed Writing 1

a) Write one - two pages addressing the following questions
b) How might ethos be affected by outcome-by-design of any game? That is, how might the effectiveness of any particular appeal to ethos be impacted by the purpose or desired “end” of a game? Would ethos associated with finite game be different than ethos associated with infinite game? Why or why not? How or how so? Use concrete examples of both a finite and an infinite game.
c) This is an informal assignment. That is, you need not concern yourself with making an argument per se, but rather with thinking aloud, as it were, and making that thinking accessible to a reader. You should be concerned with getting your ideas out onto paper, and then revising your writing so that your ideas are organized, so that each idea follows from the one that preceded it and leads into the one that comes after. Each paragraph should have a main point or topic and each sentence in each paragraph should develop that point or topic (not repeat it).

Seed writing 2

a) Look at this website: http://www.tylervigen.com/spurious-correlations
b) establish your own spurious correlation or pick one from the website
c) write a one to two page argument for the significance of this “correlation” to a particular course of action applying your understanding of logos, pathos, ethos, as well as the elements of argument.
d) One inch margins. Line spacing: 1 ½. Font: Times New Roman. Font size: 10. Citation style: APA. For citation guidelines see: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/

UNIT ONE FORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT Argument Analysis: Littlewood’s Law

a) Write an essay that addresses the following: what point was Littlewood seeking to make in crafting the Law? What does Littlewood’s Law have to do with mathematics? Can his law be proven mathematically? How might you express Littlewood’s Law rhetorically (as claims, supports, warrants, and conclusions)? What are the flaws in the argument for which Littlewood’s Law stands? What are its strengths?
b) Apply your understanding of argument analysis not only to your examination of Littlewood’s Law, but also to your own essay: building an argument about the incisiveness, precision, meaningfulness, and significance of the Law for your readers.
c) Four pages. One inch margins. Line spacing: 1 ½. Font: Times New Roman. Font size: 10. Citation style: APA. For citation guidelines see: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/
d) You may start learning more about Littlewood’s law at the following websites. This assignment will require you to research beyond these sites, however. Think of them as starting rather than ending points:
   https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Littlewood's_law
   http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Littlewood's_law

1 This is a footnote. You should learn to read footnotes when you encounter them in any text as they frequently include important information. This footnote includes a definition of seed writing. Seed writing is well developed, but experimental writing. In it, you may explore ideas, genres, registers and voices, tenses, etc. Seed writing does need to be reader-based (your audience should be able to follow along with your lines of reasoning; you should include a narrative arc or an argument that proceeds from point to point to a reasonable conclusion). Your seed writing doesn’t have to be perfect though. You will have an opportunity to choose two of your seed writing attempts for revision and polishing during the final unit of this course.
UNIT TWO: Unruly Writing
Topics: discourse: definition; grammars: descriptive and prescriptive; meaning-making, the social construction of “error”, “correctness” and belonging; performative writing

Seed Writing 3

a) write two to three paragraphs in which you reflect on a discourse that you use on a regular basis. See if you can describe three grammatical features of that discourse using Barnett’s work as a model for how this work is done by linguists.

Seed writing 4

b) Revisit the discourse about which you wrote in the first writing exercise of this unit. Revise your short essay so that it is well written in what we might think of as standard academic English.

c) Now, reading through the lens of the alt-discourse - “as if” the conventions of the alt-discourse are “correct” and the conventions of SAE are “incorrect” – mark every error in the “standard” version.

Seed writing 5

a) This writing assignment invites you to consider the relationship between complex ideas and complex sentence and paragraph structure. Your job in this assignment is to try to communicate a complex idea or concept or relationship between two or more events or phenomena effectively to an audience while messing with the rules of standard academic English. Write a paragraph composed of a single sentence using both coordinating conjunctions and appropriate punctuation to make your sentence/paragraph meaningful.

b) One page. One inch margins. Line spacing: 1 ½. Font: Times New Roman. Font size: 10. Citation style: APA. For citation guidelines see: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/

UNIT TWO FORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT: Argument analysis: Should writers use their own English

a) Write an essay in which you examine the relationship between the discourse in which Young composes his essay and the argument he is making. What are Young’s primary claims and supports? What warrants does Young expose in Stanley Fish’s argument? What flaws in Fish’s reasoning? How do Young’s rhetorical and discursive choices both make and support his argument?

b) Apply your understanding of rhetorical analysis not only to your examination of Young’s essay, but also in the crafting of an argument about the meaning and significance of his essay to your readers.

c) Apply your understanding of the differences between descriptive and prescriptive grammar, of rhetorical and linguistic agency, and of socially constructed notions of correctness and error to your analysis.

d) Produce your essay in rhetorically (and discursively) purposeful code meshed English. Choose an alt-discourse in which you are fluent and use it performatively (using Young’s work as a model) to make your argument not only by what you say, but also by how you say it.

UNIT THREE: Collaboration and teamwork I (the right story for the right audience)
Topics: co-authoring and collaborating; writing for public speaking; public speaking; audience awareness

1. Galloping Gertie: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KqqyAZDpV6c

2. With your small group prepare a presentation with powerpoint for the class:
   a) Your group should research the collapse of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge as a group of news reporters. Prepare a news segment reporting on the Bridge’s collapse. Choose the network for which you work and make sure your writing and your performance reflect the production values of that network. Include a report, an interview, and a debate between “experts” or “talking heads”.
   b) Your group should research the collapse of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge as a group of concerned taxpayers. Prepare a presentation with powerpoint that you will deliver to the Tacoma City Council as part of their deliberations about a replacement for the fallen bridge. Make sure your group stakes out a clear position and supports your arguments about replacement costs and who should pay them with historically informed arguments.
   c) Your group should research the collapse of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge as if you are the group of engineers tasked with reporting on the collapse to a group of non-experts (the Tacoma City Council, for example). Using the Federal Works Administration Report on the collapse of the bridge, translate the findings of its authors into language that may be understood by a layperson. Prepare a powerpoint presentation and distribute speaking roles to explain what went wrong with the bridge, from an engineering standpoint, to a non-engineering audience.
   d) Your group is tasked with representing the environmental and/or cultural impact of bridge building. What factors should the Tacoma City Council consider as they deliberate about rebuilding the Tacoma Narrows Bridge? What damage may have been done to the environment by the collapse of the bridge? If the engineers of the original bridge were too focused on design aesthetics at the expense of structural soundness, what would a better balance of form and function look like? You may use modern reports and cases to make your case. Prepare a powerpoint presentation and distribute speaking roles to explain to your audience what their environmental and cultural foci and priorities should be in rebuilding a span across the Tacoma Narrows.

Twenty-five year old college student Winfield Brown decided to walk onto Gertie shortly before 10 a.m. that morning. "I decided I'd like to get a little fun out of it," he later said. So, he paid the 10-cent toll and strolled onto the rolling bridge.

"After walking to the tower on the other side and back, I decided to cross again. It was swaying quite a bit. About the time I got to the center, the wind seemed to start blowing harder, all of a sudden. I was thrown flat. A car came up about that time. The driver got out, walking and crawling on the other side. We didn't have time for any conversation."

"Time after time I was thrown completely over the railing. When I tried to get up, I was knocked flat again. Chunks of concrete were breaking up and rolling around. The knees were torn out of my pants, and my knees were cut and torn."

"I don't know how long it took to get back. It seemed like a lifetime. During the worst parts, the bridge turned so far that I could see the Coast Guard boat in the water beneath."

"As soon as I got off the bridge, I became sick. So, I went to the home of a cousin and laid down for a while. I've been on plenty of roller coasters, but the worst was nothing compared to this."
UNIT THREE: Collaboration and teamwork II  
Topics: deep and surface revision; feedback; collaboration

Choose two of your seed writings from our work together this term to expand, develop, and revise. Pick an assignment that you enjoyed, that you care about, that you want to continue to work on.

a) Re-write your original essay, expanding and developing it with the help of your workshop group.

b) Exchange essays: you are responsible for providing feedback for each member of your group. You should give one copy of your feedback to your group member and one copy to me. You must use a minimum of three of the terms provided to you on your feedback handout that apply to deep revision. You may not give any feedback that pertains to sentence level revision unless the writer is attempting a code meshed essay and your feedback is focused on the rhetorical effect of sentence level choices.

c) Revise your essay a second time based on the feedback you receive from your group.

d) Exchange essays: you are responsible for providing feedback for each member of your group. You should give one copy of your feedback to your group member and one copy to me. You must use a minimum of three of the terms provided to you on your feedback handout that apply to surface revision.

e) Polish your essay based on the feedback you receive from your group.

“Work on a good piece of writing proceeds on three levels: a musical one, where it is composed; an architectural one, where it is constructed; and finally, a textile one, where it is woven.”
— Walter Benjamin, One Way Street And Other Writings
Grading Criteria

Attendance and participation 30 POINTS
Informal (seed) writing 30 POINTS
Five Assignments 6 points each

Formal Writing 50 POINTS
Assignment 1 25 points
Assignment 2 25 points

Co-writing and presenting 30 POINTS
Workshopping and feedback 30 POINTS

Revisions of seed writing 30 POINTS
Revision 1 15 points
Revision 2 15 points

TOTAL POINTS AVAILABLE 200 POINTS*

*Final grade calculated as percentage of total available points

University of Waterloo Undergraduate Grading Scheme

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Letter Grades</th>
<th>Average Calculation Values</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>89</td>
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<td>F-</td>
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Course Policies

Attendance: Your presence in this class is required. In order to be excused, every absence must be documented with a doctor’s note (or other appropriate authority). Missing four or more classes will result in a failing grade for the course. If you must miss a class due to illness, you may mitigate the consequences of your absence by emailing me in advance of the class you will be missing. A class missed in order to finish an assignment for another class will not be excused.

Academic Integrity: Although we will talk at length in class about writing from research and citation practices, take the time now to familiarize yourself with the summary of Policy #71. In order to avoid offences such as plagiarism, cheating, and double submission, consult “How to Avoid Plagiarism and Other Written Offences: A Guide for Students and Instructors”. Consult Academic Integrity at UW for more information. Visit this link to learn about the University of Waterloo’s expectations and policies regarding Academic Integrity.

Accommodations: The University of Waterloo has a long-standing commitment to support the participation and access to university programs, services, and facilities by persons with disabilities. Students who have a permanent disability as well as those with a temporary disability get AccessAbility Services. To register for services, you must provide documentation from a qualified professional to verify your disability. Please contact them at 519-888-4567 ext. 35082 or drop into Needles Hall 1132 to book an appointment to meet with an advisor to discuss their services and supports.

Grievances: In case that a decision affecting some aspect of a student’s university life has been unfair or unreasonable, they may have grounds for initiating a grievance according to Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70. When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department’s administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Discipline: Familiarize yourself with “academic integrity” to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for your actions. Consult Policy 71 for all categories of offences and types of penalties.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70 (Student Petitions and Grievances) (other than a petition) or Policy 71 (Student Discipline) may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to Policy 72 (Student Appeals) http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm
## Course Calendar (Tentative)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>UNIT/READING</th>
<th>DISCUSSION TOPIC</th>
<th>CLASS ACTIVITY</th>
<th>ASSIGNMENTS DUE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 January</td>
<td></td>
<td>Course overview: the rhetoric game</td>
<td>Introductions</td>
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<td>5 January</td>
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<td>Communication Matters</td>
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<td>10 January</td>
<td>UNIT ONE</td>
<td>Introduction to rhetoric – logos, ethos, pathos; audience, purpose, context</td>
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<td>12 January</td>
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<td>Introduction to rhetoric: claims, supports, warrants, conclusions</td>
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<td>17 January</td>
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<td>“The missing media: the procedural rhetoric of computer games”</td>
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<td>19 January</td>
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<td>Writing Workshop</td>
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<td>Writing Workshop</td>
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<td>2 February</td>
<td>UNIT TWO</td>
<td>Grammars, rhetoric and writing</td>
<td>Final Writing Assignment 1: “Littlewood’s Law”</td>
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<td>7 February</td>
<td>Phenomenology</td>
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<td>7 March</td>
<td>Writing Workshop</td>
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<td>Choose seed writings for development</td>
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<td>UNIT THREE</td>
<td>Galloping Gertie</td>
<td>Final Writing Assignment 2: “They Own English”</td>
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<td>14 March</td>
<td>NO CLASS</td>
<td>Galloping Gertie</td>
<td>Work together, independently, on Gertie presentations</td>
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<td>16 March</td>
<td>NO CLASS</td>
<td>Galloping Gertie</td>
<td>Work together, independently on Gertie presentations</td>
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<td>21 March</td>
<td>Galloping Gertie</td>
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<td>Group Presentations</td>
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<td>28 March</td>
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<td>30 March</td>
<td>LAST CLASS</td>
<td>Wrap-up and farewells</td>
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<td>6 April</td>
<td>ALL REVISIONS DUE</td>
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STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY
Frankie Condon
Fall 2016

For many years, I have been both moved and inspired by a question posed to Mary Rose O’Reilly by one of her professors, Ihab Hassan: “Is it possible to teach English so that people stop killing each other?” (The Peaceable Classroom 9). Removed from the social and educational context in which the question was originally posed, however - a widespread, collective recognition of the brutality and senselessness of war during the Vietnam era - the pairing of the teaching of English with peacemaking is more likely to provoke confusion than insight among readers of a statement of teaching philosophy such as this one. To understand whether or how there might be any sort of intersection between the study of English - of rhetoric and writing in particular - and the transformation of human relations requires something more than allowing the query to stand, functionally, as a rhetorical question.

In his book, The Geometry of Violence, criminologist Harold Pepinsky, argues that violence plays out along a spectrum of human relations ranging from the least affiliative and most violent to the most affiliative and least violent. Societies and cultures with expansive definitions of affiliation and higher valuations of affinity, care, contingency and mutuality are less likely to be riven by either systemic violence (e.g. political or social violence) or by widespread patterns of individual violence. The study of rhetoric and writing, it seems to me, constitutes one means by which we may examine, engage, and extend the critical, analytical, interpretive, performative and communicative means by which we have historically made and continue to make our relations: preserving and reproducing conditions produced by existing or inherited relations or, alternatively, creatively resisting and shifting or transforming those relations.

That the process of insertion into existing social relations and, by extension, into particular perspectival horizons begins at birth and continues throughout our lives is true. It does not necessarily follow, however, that we possess no agency within those relations; we can, in fact, shift, alter or even transform those relations. How we do this work, by what means, within what limits, for what purposes, and to what effect are questions with which I am most concerned both as a scholar and as a teacher.

There are, Linda Alcoff notes, two aspects to what we might understand as social identity: “our socially perceived self within the systems of perception and classification and the networks of community in which we live;” and our lived subjectivity or who we understand and experiences ourselves as being (Visible Identities 93). Rather than representing these two aspects of social identity in binary terms (exterior and interior or embodied and felt, for example), Alcoff asks us to consider the ways and degrees to which disparate experiences of being a self and of being called to perform as if one is a particular sort of self fail to map neatly onto one another. She asks readers to notice and make sense of the discontinuities among and between the range of experiences that constitute our being in and of the world. While we cannot possess objective understanding of our lives as we live them, as Gadamer points out, our situatedness in place, time, and experience do enable ways of knowing. We are capable of what Gadamer terms effective historical consciousness: capable, in other words, of “reflective awareness of the horizon of our situation.” We are capable of recognizing that horizon as fluid and dynamic rather than static and given, and capable of recognizing that this horizon is not the only determinant of our understanding and our ability to make meaning. (Alcoff 95)

My aim in the classroom is to invite students to notice, wonder at, and engage critically the power not only of language, itself, but of particular rhetorical modes and strategies for communicating (and performing) the known and the production of new knowledge. I challenge students to question and critique representations of social relations as natural and given and to recognize the ways and degrees to which these relations are, in fact, the products of human labour. I want students to recognize the ways in which they are always, already knowledge producers and rhetorical agents in the construction of meaning. I want also to support and sustain students as they recognize the degree to which as they exercise rhetorical agency they are in fact participating in the reproduction or potentially at least the struggle to transform social
relations. I want to support and sustain students, providing them with appropriate conceptual and practical scaffolding as they acquire broader and deeper fluencies in the range of analytical, interpretive, performative and communicative modes of engagement or acts that constitute the means by which individual and collective perspectival horizons are recognized and shifted for themselves and others. I hope to teach my students also to recognize the degree to which these modes of engagement are constituted by complex, ongoing processes of affiliation and disaffiliation or the making and unmaking, creating, inhabiting, and destroying or transforming of human relations. In other words, the study of rhetoric is also necessarily the study of how human relations are forged in and through language: shaped, enabled, and constrained through our representations of ourselves, of others, and of that which constitutes knowledge within particular contexts or communities. The study of rhetoric should engage all of us in the study not only of what is said and how, but also toward what ends and for whose benefit. We make and claim our relations as we compose across a wide variety of contexts asserting the legitimacy of our presence as rhetors and knowledge producers within communities to which we do or hope to belong. We may pass on the ideological as well as the intellectual legacies of our forebears, but we may also transform those legacies as we compose. I hope students leave my courses with an expanded sense of their intellectual and rhetorical antecedents as scholars, rhetoricians and writers, as citizens of the world, to those who will come after us.

I recognize the political and hence contested nature of the work I aim to do as a teacher. I believe that the purpose of critical theory is not only to explain the world, but also to change it. By extension, I believe that the purpose of writing as an activity central to higher education curricula is not merely to prove that one has learned, but to contribute meaningfully to the conditions in which learning is possible: to participate in the collective creation and sustenance of learningful relations as well as in the making of meaning and the production of new and usable knowledge.

Often, I believe, critical pedagogy is misunderstood and misrepresented as being inherently coercive and critical teachers as being engaged in the political inculcation of their students. These misconstruals are, I believe, an effect of an inadequate understanding of the range of conceptions of change and change-agency that inform the theory and practice of critical pedagogy. While I am not dismissive of the power of the agon in the cultivation of rhetorical agency or of oppositional pedagogy (a praxis distinct from the tradition of critical pedagogy) per se, these are not modes or approaches that play a significant role in my own teaching. I tend to see both oppositional pedagogy and the agon as being tactically useful on occasion, but more generally ineffective (and often dishonest) in argument, persuasion, as well as in teaching and learning. Neither am I terribly interested in the pedagogical potential of traditional practices of negotiation, which I believe preserve the status quo by, in effect, purchasing or manufacturing consent. Instead, as a teacher I labour to both enact and teach an array of interconnected intellectual and rhetorical processes that, taken together, constitute both a rhetorical appeal and a rhetorical means by which shifts in perspectival horizon and, consequently, in the character and quality of human relations might be initiated.

In brief, these processes might be categorized into four types: those associated with decentering; those associated with nuancing; those associated with kairotic engagement; and those associated with readiness. Decentering is the ongoing process of listening (recognizing and acknowledging) to the meaning-making practices of others while, simultaneously recognizing and honouring difference by displacing one’s self (social and lived subjectivities) from the center of meaning. I understand the process of decentering as a continuous revisioning of the quality of one’s presence with/for and attentiveness to the other. Nuancing is the ongoing process of transmemoration and witness: of situating one’s own story of being and becoming - of social and lived subjectivity - in relationship to the histories, epistemologies, and rhetorical traditions of others without privileging one’s own story or using that story to overwrite, subvert, or appropriate the stories others might tell. Kairotic engagement is the ongoing process of recognizing,
articulating, revising, and re-articulating the rhetorical exigence that attends analysis, interpretation, critique, creative intervention, and the making of meaning or new knowledge; that is, of continual engagement with the ways and degrees to which problems, contradictions, or questions are amenable to address (or redress) through discourse. Readiness is the ongoing process of cultivating and sustaining a mindscape capable of wonderment: capable of being surprised by and interested in the world, in why the world is as it is and how it came to be so, and in the marvellous variety of ways in which the world might be created, inhabited, and represented by others. Here I understand “interest” in the double sense of being both intrigued by others - by what others say and know and do - and being needful of affiliation and of the recognition and care co-created through affiliative relationships with others. Finally, however, none of these processes taken singly or together nor the variety of in-class discussions and activities and writing assignments that I might engage in any given course seem sufficient to me to justify a claim that mine is a critical praxis absent an ongoing, reflective consciousness of the constancy of failure to the endeavours of teaching and learning and a shared commitment to learn from failure. That is, humility is central to any meaningful practice of critical pedagogy and integral to humility is the recognition that failure is inevitable. I strive for willingness to learn from failure and, when appropriate and ethical, to make pedagogical failures visible to students such that they might engage reflectively and learningfully with them as well.

Frequently, critics of critical pedagogy assert that the greatest risks associated with this approach to teaching are that students will feel pressured to adopt the politics of their teachers in order to succeed in the course or, alternatively, be so alienated by the fact of their political differences with their teacher that learning becomes impossible. My own experience suggests a different kind of risk or challenge altogether. To engage - to really engage - critically in the study of writing as a communicative act requires that we study the epistemological and rhetorical means by which knowledge is produced and disseminated. To engage - to really engage - critically in the study of writing as a communicative act requires that we study public rhetorics that, by design, shape how we think, perform our selves, and act in relation to others. But to engage - to really engage - at all in any of these studies requires both interest and a sense of need for learning. The greatest challenge I face in the classroom is the extent to which students tend to confuse exchange-value and use-value or, more frequently, to believe that the only thing to be gained from any given writing assignment or any writing course is the exchange-value represented by a grade. My challenge is not that students adopt my politics in service of achieving a good grade; they just don’t nor do I require or expect them to. My challenge is that some of my students have learned too well the lesson that school is boring; that the subjects about which one might write as well as the activity of writing are boring; that being curious is boring; that the only knowledge worth acquiring in school are the usable skills that might be associated with workplace competencies and that learning those is boring. Too many of my students have been schooled for years by the ringing of bells that not only tell them it’s time to move from one classroom to another, but also to shut off the past moment from the current one--that there are no integral or fruitful intersections, continuities, or intriguing discontinuities between the subjects that they study (Gatto 1-5). The interferences of an audit culture in public education seem to have had the prevailing effect of teaching students that the value of learning and the quality of one’s education is measured by the number and range of information bytes emptied of nuance and complexity one might acquire that can be easily and quickly performed and judged.

And so perhaps it is most accurate to say that my greatest challenge as a teacher is to create and sustain conditions in which joy is possible in the classrooms I share with students and to help students recognize the necessity of joy to learning well and deeply. I am speaking less here of fun - though, of course, I think having fun is good - than of the affective dimensions of learning at the conjoinment of interest and pleasure, seriousness and absurdity. These are the intellectual and creative intersections where learners discover in themselves and one another the strange and unfamiliar and find it good; where laughter fractures totalities; where the possibility exists for both gentle and exuberant celebrations of the miracle of our collective presence on this earth, at this place - together at the interstices of learning and knowing, being and becoming, of self and other (Ehrenreich 261). The value of joy to learning is not the degree to
which momentary pleasure releases us from labour, from pressure, anxiety, or loss. I do not think of joy as a safety valve, for example (Ehrenreich 257). Rather, I think the value of joy derives from the ways in which the experience of joy releases us from bondage to the expected and the familiar - from rigid adherence to rules and compulsive adherence to social constraints. To experience joy in learning is to experience, even momentarily and provisionally, a release into creative intellectualism - into the as-if, the what-if, and the whys of matters that viewed without joy seem either exceptionally mundane or so permanent, so fixed as to be beyond question. In some sense, I suppose I am suggesting that learning - really learning - constitutes an act of misbehaviour in relation to the familiar and the known and that, similarly, writing well demands a certain mischievousness - the willingness to play the trickster as well as an openness to being tricked and making sense of that. I am interested and, I’ll admit, invested as a teacher, a co-learner, and as a writer in the ebullient joy that erupts among students as they learn to collude in the making of mischief as well as in the gentler joy that emerges in moments of recognition and acknowledgement of mutuality, contingency, interdependence, for it is in such moments that I am most convinced that not only are we all learning, but that our lives as learners and as writers are and will be changed for the better by having learned together.

Works Cited


