**MPW 526: Writing the Review**

1 Units

Section

Fall 2014 Semester, Thursday, 4:00 - 6:15

Location

**Instructor: Dinah Lenney**

[Dinahlenney@gmail.com](mailto:Dinahlenney@gmail.com)

**Office Hours: Please email me to arrange individual meetings.**

**Introduction and Purposes:**

Oscar Wilde wrote: “To the critic, the work of art is simply a suggestion for a new work of his own.” And Tolstoy said, "Art is...a means of intercourse causing the receiver to enter into a certain kind of relationship both with him who produced or is producing the art, and with all those who, simultaneously, previously or subsequently, receive the same artistic impression.”Welcome to the larger conversation! Hooray for art and culture as richly inspiring. In this course—part seminar, part workshop—we’ll embrace the anxiety *and* the ecstasyof influence; also ourselves as “gatecrashers,” qualified to weigh in by virtue of nothing more than curiosity, passion, and writerly knowhow. Along the way we’ll read and discuss a range of literary reviews—both content and craft—from the capsule blog post to the personal essay, with a mind to the origins and the effects of the rant, the rave, and the meditation, and with the aim of making criticism accessible and rewarding for us as well as our readers. Students will be asked to engage with artists and their audiences in a variety of assignments that will allow them to discover or further cultivate their opinions about fine art, music, theater, and literature.

**Texts**

We’ll be reading from a variety of sources including the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, the Atlantic, Harper’s, The New Yorker, and digital venues including the Rumpus, the Millions, the Nervous Breakdown, Slate, Salon, Alimentum, Sweet, and the Los Angeles Review of Books. In addition, each student will be responsible for reviewing the book of his or her choice, and should plan to visit museums and restaurants as well as to view both film and live performance, outside of class.

**Course objectives**

* Students will learn to read and assess popular criticism both on its own terms and as part of the larger conversation.
* Students will learn to write their own criticism, creating reviews that work as both critique and discrete, fulfilling reading experiences.
* Students will offer critiques of their peers’ writing in a workshop setting.
* Students will develop, or enhance, their understanding of the role of the critical perspective in cultural life.

**Course Requirements and Grades**

* **Writing assignments (60%).** This is a six week intensive course, and you will be expected to turn in four reviews, in which you demonstrate the skills we have discussed. You will also be expected to revise one of those reviews for the final class. The work you review is for you to choose; that is a crucial part of the critic’s agenda — to find the work that speaks to you, either positively or negatively, and consider it from your point-of-view.
* **Active participation (15%).** This class is conceived as a conversation, so please come to class prepared to engage in an open-ended discussion about all aspects of the work at hand.
* **Final portfolio (25%)**. You will turn in a final portfolio of your work at the final meeting, along with a summary statement of at least one page addressing what you’ve learned.

**PLEASE NOTE:** This syllabus is dynamic and flexible and, as such, subject to change. This class, in other words, is organic, and its progress will be determined by all of us, working and talking together.

**Course Readings/Class Sessions**

October 23: Introduction to the material.

In-class writing: Art Shmart

**Assignment**: Selected readings. Fine arts review.

October 30: The critic’s voice.

In class writing: High stakes

**Assignment**: Selected readings. Music, live performance, or movie review.

November 6: Authority and Research:

In class writing: The first time ever...

**Assignment**: Selected readings. Food Review.

November 13: The Courage of Your Convictions

In class writing: The no-thank you bite

**Assignment**: Selected readings. Book Review.

November 20: Cultural context

In class writing: City life

**Assignment**: Selected readings. Revision of a previous review.

Prepare portfolio for final class.

December 4: Final class. Summary and overview.

**Statement for Students with Disabilities**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

**Statement on Academic Integrity**

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *Scampus,* the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.