

WRIT 150: WRITING AND CRITICAL REASONING
IDENTITY AND DIVERSITY IN AMERICAN CONTEXTS

University of Southern California, Spring 2023

Section(s): 64110; 64745

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Office Hours: Mondays 12:30-1:30pm

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This Spring, you will develop your ability to critically read, think, and write in a manner and level of depth that you have most likely been unaccustomed to. We will be harnessing several tools, perspectives, and techniques in order to assist you in developing your unique scholarly voice, as well as strengthening your ability to dialogue with the larger academic community you have now entered.

We will experience *writing as thinking*, recognizing that the most original ideas often happen in the actual process of creation, a challenge that will push you to write by listening to your critical voice and being willing to follow as well as push your ideas to new places.

To this end, we will focus on writing as a process. In doing so, you will be given some powerful tools for **invention** in order to get down to the root of the questions or issues we are considering – down to your very own ideas. You will experiment with the most effective way to **arrange** and state (**style**) your ideas; you will develop your **critical voice**; and you will acquire and apply solid techniques for **revision**. The development of your capacity for argumentation and analysis will allow you to make the most of these tools. This combination of skills and analysis will form the groundwork for your success as a USC scholar and in the effective communication of your ideas to the world at large.

Keep in mind that Writing 150 is not a religion class, a philosophy class, a political science class, or even a cultural studies class. As the name implies, it is a *writing* class, but one in which our discussions will necessarily touch on the broad and often personal subject areas related to *identity and diversity*.

As you no doubt have already realized, terms like *identity* and *diversity* are rather vague terms used in a variety of contexts. But rather than be dismayed or even intimidated by this, I propose we use this to our advantage and see the broad scope of 'identity and diversity' as being an issue at the heart of almost any situation involving human beings (more on this later).

Ultimately, this topic provides us with a unique opportunity to ask questions across disciplinary boundaries, think locally and globally, and make connections between seemingly unrelated parts of our own lives and the world around us. This coming to a deeper, more critical understanding can be hard, much like the act of writing itself. Rather than running from this, we will use the writing process to work through these challenging questions and concepts, ideally helping us all become better able to engage with a world that rarely presents us with uncomplicated choices.

Regardless of the insights you arrive at by the end of the semester, by taking an active approach to viewing, reading and thinking (rather than simply accepting the apparent "truth" of texts we encounter), you will learn to establish and support your own position through the construction of reasoned arguments.

You have an exciting, challenging semester ahead of you. Expect to benefit and grow on both a personal and scholarly level from the experiences provided by this classroom.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS:

- ✓ *WRITING 150 Course Book*. *You can purchase the course book directly from the publisher at the following link: <https://hmpublishing.redshelf.com/app/ecom/book/2154332>. You may also purchase an access card for the Course Book from the campus bookstore.
- ✓ Additional readings/handouts, as assigned. Readings will typically be available on Blackboard in the “Readings” folder but may also be distributed via email or shared in class.

COURSE POLICIES:

Attendance and participation: Because this class is primarily a workshop, your learning depends in large part upon your peers’ generous, alert participation in class, just as their learning depends upon your active engagement. Please complete any readings assigned and come to class prepared to share your ideas and questions in discussion.

Missing class negatively impacts your grade not only because of formal attendance policies but because doing so deprives you of in-class discussions and lessons designed to help you write better essays. Patterns of frequent absence or tardiness—being more than 10 minutes late to class—will likely result in lower grades. More than three absences will affect your participation grade for the course. Six absences will result in failure.

Ancillary activities: Ancillary writing activities are short writing assignments designed to prepare you to participate in class discussions and to keep you on pace with the essays. Some will be done in the classroom, while others will be done as homework and submitted online.

Essays: You will write four thesis-driven, argument-focused essays of five to seven pages each. A specific prompt, writing guidelines, and schedule of relevant readings and assignments for each essay will be distributed in class.

Writing 150 teaches writing as an act of ethical commitment. This involves asking you first, to clarify to yourself your own beliefs and values; to recognize and respect that there will be opposing points of view; and then to engage in reasoned debate in order to arrive at the best solutions to our common human problems. The assignment arc of the course is designed to facilitate this movement from self-awareness to critical engagement with the world through writing.

Conferences: For each essay assignment cycle I will offer at least one 15-minute one-on-one conference period. These conferences are your best opportunity to receive individualized and highly targeted feedback on your writing. In general, students who come to conferences prepared to discuss their essays perform significantly better on the final draft. During each assignment cycle I will provide a link to an online sign-up sheet for available conference times, and I may cancel class as needed to accommodate the need for conferences. If you must miss a conference, please let me know in advance so that I can offer the slot to another student.

Please note: if you miss a scheduled conference and do not provide advance notice of your inability to attend, this will count as an ‘absence’.

Paper formats: All papers are formal essays and should follow MLA conventions. These include 12-point font, Times New Roman, double-spaced, one-inch margins and a Works Cited page.

Late papers: Late papers will be penalized as outlined in the Grading Contract. Please note that in-class ancillary writing activities are due by the end of class and cannot be made up.

Final portfolio: For your final writing project of the semester, you will submit an essay designed to showcase what you have learned over the course of the semester. The portfolio may also include an ancillary component to be announced near the end of the semester. Portfolios will be graded collaboratively—that is, I will grade them in consultation with other faculty teaching *WRIT 150: Identity & Diversity*—to ensure consistent grading across the various sections.

Communication: Please **check your email daily** as I may use email to alert you to changes in the schedule, clarify assignments, etc. In addition, I may post assignments and copies of additional readings on Blackboard.

Feel free to get in touch with me via email to request clarification of assignments or to inform me of issues that arise during the course of our semester. I promise to respond as soon as possible, but please don't expect me to respond to frantic emails sent the night before a paper is due.

Please note: in an effort to maintain a work/life balance, I will not be checking or responding to emails on the weekends. Please do not email me drafts of your essays unless requested to do so. As a rule, discussions about your writing are far more productive during our one-on-one conferences than over email.

ANTICIPATED DEADLINES:

January 29	Paper 1
February 22	Paper 2
March 21	Paper 3 [Proposal / Annotated Bibliography]
April 16	Paper 4
April 30	Final Portfolio Due

Other Important Dates:

January 16	Martin Luther King Day (Holiday)
February 20	Presidents' Day (Holiday)
March 13-17	Spring Break (No Class)
March 27	(No Class)
April 28	Last day of classes

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Getting Outside Help with Your Writing:

One of the best resources on campus is the Writing Center, located on the second floor of Taper Hall. Besides the fact that it's free to use, the Writing Center is full of instructors who are there to help any student at any stage of the writing process. Though they do allow walk-ins, it's best to make an appointment before coming in. To find out more, or make an appointment, visit <http://dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter/>

Counseling Services:

College can be difficult in many ways, and many students find it helpful to speak to a professional about their stress. Counseling Services offers free, confidential services to all currently enrolled students who have paid the health fee. They are located in the Engemann Student Health Center; you can call Student Counseling Services at (213) 740-7711 for more information.

Getting Help with Time Management, Study Skills, and Strategies for Reducing Academic Stress:

USC's Kortschak Center for Learning and Creativity is an on-campus resource that assists students with building time management skills, goal setting, strategies for reducing stress and anxiety and getting prepared for finals. Their mission is to serve individuals with diverse learning needs and to empower students to reach their full academic and creative potential.

Getting Help with Learning Differences:

I am more than willing to provide accommodations for students with learning differences. Please let me know if you require specific academic accommodations for this class. Students requesting such accommodations are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP, which 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.

Plagiarism:

If you incorporate someone else's words or ideas in your writing, you must properly attribute them to their original source. Otherwise, you are committing plagiarism, which is not tolerated in this course or at USC in general. Plagiarism is considered grounds for failing and possible expulsion from USC. We will discuss plagiarism in detail during class, but you should also read the relevant sections in the Course Book on academic integrity. I'm always happy to answer any questions you have about proper attribution/avoiding plagiarism, so don't hesitate to ask.

Final Note:

If I change the syllabus or schedule, I will make sure to notify you and upload the most current version to Blackboard. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions about this syllabus or the policies outlined here.