DPI-810MB:
INTRODUCTION TO WRITING FOR POLICY AND POLITICS
FALL 2017
MON WED 10:15-11:30, T275

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Description
This intensive six-week course in effective writing focuses on the strategies and techniques behind great persuasive writing in both politics and policy. Every element of the writing process will be explored and addressed, with special attention paid to those special problems you will face as a writer in the public, discursive world of emails, memos, articles, editorials, blogs, arguments, recommendations, refutations and explanations. Weekly writing assignments, along with many focused exercises, will hone skills and provide ample opportunity for feedback. Students whose goals include longer-form writing, extended policy writing, or writing for publication should strongly consider taking this course in a sequence with DPI-811M.

Recommended Experience Level
While Introduction to Writing for Policy and Politics is intended for both novice and experienced writers, you should already be adept at English language grammar and usage. This class is not recommended for students who are new to English. We will focus on matters of style, construction, persuasive technique, and other aspects of writing for publication.

Course Objectives
• Students will learn to analyze how persuasive writing works, and be able to extract techniques from published writing for use in their own prose.
• Students will use these techniques to write well thought-out pieces in several main persuasive genres.
• Students will gain an understanding of the idea generation, drafting, and revision processes that go into published work.

Assignments and Grading
There will be four main graded written assignments, all due to the course website by midnight on their Sunday deadlines. Included in the grade for each is timely submission of its draft if required. Further details on each assignment will be distributed in class and via the course website. Please see the chart below for due dates. All assignments must include word count.
1. A blog post responding to an op-ed of your choice. Length: 400-600 words. (10% of grade)
2. An op-ed. Length: up to 750 words. (25% of grade)
3. A letter of advocacy. Length: 500-1000 words. (25% of grade)
4. A critical review or personal political essay. Length: up to 1500 words. (20% of grade)
The remaining 20% of your grade will go to class participation, assessed on the basis of contribution to class discussion and comments on classmates’ blog posts when required.

Policy on Attendance and Participation
Lateness and both excused and unexcused absences will count against your grade, as will checking technology. Laptop use is not permitted except when required for an in-class project. Turn off your cell phones. This class relies heavily on group discussion, and all students are expected to come to class having read the assigned materials and ready to thoughtfully engage with them. As the semester progresses, you will at times meet in pairs or small groups to discuss each others’ writing. You are expected to provide thoughtful, constructive feedback for each other.

Policy on Rewriting
The schedule of the class is designed to encourage rewriting. For most assignments, drafts are due one week before the assignment deadline, and you will sometimes work with your classmates to workshop those drafts. Depending on the assignment, you will receive feedback from me on the version submitted for grading in either written form or through an editorial meeting. You will not receive feedback from me on the critical review or personal essay (the last assignment) but you may show me a draft of the assignment in office hours to receive feedback and you will be workshopping your draft in class. For all assignments, you may submit a revision by the revision deadline (see chart). In general, throughout the course, you are encouraged (and at times required) to meet with me and each other to discuss your writing and revision plans.

Office Hours
Please sign up for office hours appointment slots via the link emailed by my assistant. You will be required to meet with me at least twice during the semester: once to receive your feedback on assignment two, the op-ed, and once in the last week of office hours, before the final revision deadline. That is the minimum; you are of course welcome to schedule more appointments. As the semester progresses, office hours will become longer. I may also sometimes need to change the timing of office hours, either because of my own schedule or to better accommodate the needs of the class. Any such changes will be reflected on the sign-up page.

Policy on Late Assignments
Late assignments will be marked down one-third of a grade (e.g., A to A-, B+ to B) per day, no exceptions. If a late assignment is revised for a new grade, the deduction for lateness will apply to the new grade as well. What this means in practice is that it always benefits you to avoid the lateness deduction by meeting the assignment deadline.

Required Texts
Texts are referred to by acronym in the schedule below.

Garfinkle, Political Writing (ISBN 978-0765631244) (PW)
Shopping Days Draft Syllabus—Final syllabus to be distributed first day of class

Clark, Writing Tools (ISBN 978-0316014991) (WT)
Course packet, consisting of readings available electronically on the course website or distributed in class (CP)

Schedule of Class Topics
The class meets Mondays and Wednesdays. Graded assignments are due on Sundays (see chart for date per assignment), always uploaded to the course website by midnight EST.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Week</th>
<th>Sunday deadline</th>
<th>Monday class session</th>
<th>Wednesday class session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week One</td>
<td>(N/A)</td>
<td>(N/A)</td>
<td>October 18: Introduction &amp; Public discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Two</td>
<td>October 22: Blog post due</td>
<td>October 23: You as the Writer</td>
<td>October 25: Practicing Clarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Three</td>
<td>October 29: Rough draft of op-ed due</td>
<td>October 30: Engaging Your Audience</td>
<td>Nov 1: Rewriting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Six</td>
<td>Nov 19: Letter due</td>
<td>Nov 20: Book Reviews &amp; Memos</td>
<td>Nov 22: Thanksgiving Recess (NO CLASS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Seven</td>
<td>Nov 26: Rough draft of essay or review due</td>
<td>Nov 27: Pitch Letter Discussion &amp; Revision Workshops</td>
<td>Nov 29: Pitch Letter Workshops &amp; Getting Published, Keeping Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Eight</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>(Required editorial meetings)</td>
<td>(Required editorial meetings)</td>
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Sunday, December 10th at midnight: Final revision packet due

Schedule of Readings and Discussion Questions

Wednesday, October 18th: Introduction & Public Discourse
Think of the voices published in the world’s newspapers and on the Internet as in conversation with each other, engaged in acts of rhetoric and persuasion. How do writers
stand out from the crowd and make their voices heard? In this session, we will discuss general principles and read and analyze a published op-ed together.

- **For discussion:** What makes a piece of writing particularly persuasive? What does it mean to have a sound argument? What signals do writers use to guide their readers through arguments?

*** Sunday, October 22nd deadline: Blog post due to course website.***

**Monday, October 23rd: You as the Writer**
The intent of this course is to help you develop your written voice such that you, too, are able to enter the public fray. To do so, you must get in the habit of writing regularly, learning the sound of your own voice and how to shape it on the page.

- **To read before class:** Anne Lamott, “Shitty First Drafts” (CP); PW Chapters 1 & 2; WT Chapters 41 and 48; KSG Communications Program, “How to Write an Op-Ed or Column” (http://shorensteincenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/HO_NEW_HOW-TO-WRITE-AN-OPED-OR-COLUMN.pdf); Duke University Office of News and Communications, “How to Write an Op-ed Article” (http://newsoffice.duke.edu/duke_resources/oped); 5 op-eds of your choosing from major newspapers

- **Writing due in class:** On one typewritten sheet, (1) list the 5 Op-Eds you read in preparation for today’s class, and (2) write a 300-word self-evaluation of your strengths and weaknesses as a writer. Turn this sheet in to me at the end of class. In your notebook, list three op-ed topics you’re interested in writing about. Come to class prepared to discuss issues of timeliness, research, your particular approach, etc.

- **For discussion:** How do you transform a topic you’re interested in into a topic you’re prepared to write about? What are some common elements of op-ed articles?

**Wednesday, October 25th: Practicing Clarity**
Two basic principles lie at the heart of successful writing: first, the reader must be able to understand it, and second, it must not bore the reader. We’ll begin by talking about clarity, then move on next week to discussing audience engagement.

- **To read before class:** S Chapters 1-3; George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language” (CP); Susan Orlean, “On Voice” (CP); WT Chapters 1, 2, 11, 23

- **Writing due in class:** Before class, comment on at least 3 of your classmates’ blog posts, engaging with their use of the analytical categories.

- **For discussion:** What distinguishes clear prose from convoluted prose? How can you develop a writing voice that is clear and yet distinctive?

***Sunday, October 29th deadline: Rough draft of op-ed due to course website.***

**Monday, October 30th: Engaging Your Audience**
In the real world, no one is obliged to read your published writing, and it must compete with many other demands on readers’ attention. This session we’ll discuss strategies for holding readers’ interest.
• **To read before class:** S Chapters 4-6; WT Chapters 12-22; Roy Peter Clark, “The Short Sentence as Gospel Truth” (http://opinionatorblogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/07/theshort-sentence-as-gospel-truth)
• **Optional reading:** Emily Hiestand, “On Style” (CP)
• **Writing due in class:** Take another look at the 5 op-eds you read in preparation for your blog post. In your notebook, jot down moves the writers made that particularly caught your attention. Also bring the printout of your op-ed draft.
• **For discussion:** What is the “engine” of a piece of prose? What rhetorical moves grab readers’ attention without diminishing credibility?

### Wednesday, November 1st: Rewriting
Once you have a solid first draft, you must rewrite. It is often said that writing *is* rewriting, for many successful writers spend much longer revising than they ever do drafting. It’s at this stage, though, that writers sometimes get overwhelmed—what do they do first? How do they overcome their attachment to their original draft?

- **To read before class:** WT 3-10; S Chapters 7-11
- **Optional reading:** Susan Bell, “Micro-Editing Checklist” (CP); PW Chapter 6
- **Writing due in class:** Bring in a complete draft of your op-ed. The number of copies will be specified in advance in class.
- **For discussion:** How do you currently approach revision? What are some strategies to help you approach revision more effectively?

***Sunday, November 5th deadline: Op-ed due to course website.***

### Monday, November 6th: The Letter of Advocacy
The letter of advocacy engages its audience to try to call attention to the need for, and bring about, change.

- **To read before class:** PW pages 123-130; WT Chapters 25, 28, 29; Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (CP); Cesar Chavez, “Letter from Delano” (CP); Ju Hong, “President Obama, Stop Separating and Deporting Our Families” (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ju-hong/president-obama-stop-sepa_b_4371244.html)
- **Writing due in class:** Brainstorm a list of five potential topics for your letter of advocacy. Be prepared to discuss this list, including why you chose each topic and how you plan to engage your audience.
- **For discussion:** What techniques are used here to engage audience? What are the particular challenges of this persuasive form (separate from content), and how can writing be shaped to address or overcome them?

### Wednesday, November 8th: Using Metaphor
There are many different ways to express any given informational content; much of any message is in its delivery. Today we’ll discuss how metaphorical language can be used to further argument.

- **To read before class:** Katrina Vanden Heuval, “The Collateral Damage of Cutting Postal Service” (http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-02-
12/opinions/37048371_1_postal-service-usps-postmaster-general-patrick-donahue); George Lakoff, *Don’t Think of an Elephant* Chapter 1 (CP); George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* Chapters 1-3 and Chapter 5 (CP); WT 32

- **Optional reading:** Paul H. Thibodeau and Lera Boroditsky, “Metaphors We Think With: The Role of Metaphor in Reasoning” (http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0016782)
- **Writing due in class:** Be prepared to discuss a few metaphors you noticed in use in public discourse after doing the reading for this week. Also bring a copy of your letter of advocacy draft and be prepared to brainstorm places to use metaphor.
- **For discussion:** In what way do words carry more meaning than we may be aware of on a literal level? How can a writer effectively choose words that do more work?

***Sunday, November 12th deadline: Rough draft of letter due to course website.***

**Monday, November 13th:** Leadership and the Personal Essay (Part I)
Increasingly, the personal narrative is seen as vital to an authentic position of leadership. Today we’ll begin discussing how writers have crafted persuasive narratives from the raw material of life.

- **To read before class:** PW Chapter 9; Vivian Gornick, Excerpt from *The Situation and the Story* (CP); Deneen L. Brown, “First Person Singular: Sometimes, It Is About You” (CP); George Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant” (CP)
- **For discussion:** What distinguishes the personal essay rhetorically from the genres previously discussed? How is audience consideration similar, and how is it different?

**Wednesday, November 15th:** Leadership and the Personal Essay
Today we’ll plunge more deeply into the challenges that await the writer of personal essay. How can you move smoothly between the dramatic, evocative sections that bring an essay to life and the kind of deeper, contemplative thinking on the page that makes the essay satisfying?

- **To read before class:** WT 34, 35, 38, 39; Shelby Steele, “On Being Black and Middle Class” (CP); full text of President Obama’s remarks on Trayvon Martin from *The Washington Post* (CP)
- **Optional reading:** PW Chapter 3; Eula Biss, “White Debt” (CP)
- **For discussion:** When is drawing on personal experience an appropriate move, and when might it backfire? How can it be done effectively? What are the classic structures of personal essays?

***Sunday, November 19th deadline: Letter due to course website.***
Monday, November 20th: Articles and Book Reviews
By addressing the larger framework that underscores a book’s content, reviews and academic articles become persuasive pieces—and the publication of book becomes the occasion for political commentary. Additionally, we’ve been talking a great deal about how to inject personality into your writing to make it engaging, but sometimes persuasion requires removing your personal voice from written work. The policy memo is an example of adopting an institutional voice to try to persuade.

• To read before class: PW Chapter 5; WT Chapters 31 and 36; Wendy Laura Belcher, “Writing the Academic Book Review” (http://www.wendybelcher.com/pages/documents/WritingtheAcademicBookReview.pdf); Michel Kinsley, “War of Umbrage” (www.nytimes.com/2013/11/10/books/review/double-down-by-mark-halperin-and-john-heilemann.html); additional book reviews as assigned in class

• Optional reading: Katha Pollitt, “Who’s Afraid of Sheryl Sandberg?” (http://www.thenation.com/article/173238/whos-afraid-sheryl-sandberg#axzz2bgi2wEk1)

• For discussion: How can you use your research and reading to create occasions for writing? How does critical analysis become persuasion? How does the memo fit into the genres we’ve discussed thus far?

Wednesday, November 22nd: Thanksgiving recess / No class

***Sunday, November 26th deadline: Rough draft of essay or review due to course website.***

Monday, November 27th: Pitch Letter Discussion & Revision Workshops
At some point, you’ve got to call your work done and send your writing out into the world to join the public discourse. In addition to discussing your personal essay or critical review drafts in this class, we’ll also begin to discuss strategies for sending your work out.

• To read before class: WT 43, 49, 50
• Distributed in class: Pitch letter resources from the Op-ed Project (CP)
• Writing due in class: Before class, post a brief (200-300 words) reflection to the course website identifying two topics you have not yet written about but would like to, as well as publications you might write about these topics for.

Wednesday, November 29th: Pitch Letter Workshops & Getting Published, Keeping Writing
Course wrap-up and discussion.

• To read before class: Jan Winburn, “Finding Good Topics: An Editor’s Questions” (CP); “Crossing Over: From Advocacy to Narrative” by Samantha Power (CP)
• Writing due in class: Before class, comment on at least 2 of your classmates’ ideas of what to write about in the future, noting what about their ideas you find particularly promising or engaging. Also write a “shitty first draft” pitch letter for
a piece you wrote in this class. Bring a printout to class and be prepared to share it with a classmate.

• *For discussion:* How has your approach to writing and revision changed in this class? What are best practices for ensuring you continue to generate ideas and draft written work without the framework of a class and explicit deadlines? How do you connect topics you’re interested in with what editors need?

***Sunday, December 10th deadline, midnight: All revisions due to website, compiled into one document with word counts for each assignment.***