

# **The Art of the Personal Essay**

**June 27th - July 27th**

**Zoom**

**MT.TH.F. 01:10pm-3:15pm**

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Zoom Office Hours: Fridays from 10:30am- 12:30pm est and by appointment (schedule by email)

## **Course Description**

We all have stories to tell. But it takes hard work to transform our intimate experiences into meaningful and captivating pieces of writing. This course dives into this labor by focusing on the craft of personal essay writing. This means reading and writing a lot. Students will keep a writer's journal, respond to readings, discuss readings with one another, participate in writing workshops, and produce a multitude of short writing assignments culminating in a polished personal essay.

## **Course Goals**

- Develop, practice, and learn about your writing process and values
- Fine tune your writing skills through regular low-stakes writing activities, including, but not limited to, discussion posts, reading responses, and short writing activities
- Practice writing from and for the self as well as for others
- Read critically and ethically in order to generate thoughtful questions that develop an understanding and a language for how essays work on the level of form as you consider theme and content
- Refine close reading and analytic skills by surveying the rhetorical and narrative choices made by authors of contemporary personal essays
- Reflect regularly and consider how this course will inform your future learning experiences

## **Required Texts**

All required readings are available on Moodle. Though you are not required to purchase texts for this course, I encourage you to donate money (what you might have spent on books) to individual and grassroots coalitions that deliver books into underserved communities. For example: a local little library, [Donate to prison libraries](#), [NYC Books Through Bars](#), or [The Distribution to Underserved Communities Library Program](#).

## **Classroom Environment**

*The Art of the Personal Essay* will run entirely online through a mixture of in-person synchronous class meetings and asynchronous work on Moodle. Though this is different from meeting regularly in person, it allows us to practice writing more often, learning to differentiate between high-stakes writing (like a final essay) and low-stakes writing (moodle posts). So, too, does the online format

allow all us all to have access and participate in our classroom discussions in a multitude of ways - making space for different forms of participation beyond in-class discussion.

That being said, for online classrooms to be both educational *and* engaging we must rely on each other. Our online space will only be exciting if we regularly check in and respond to one another with curiosity and gusto.

We will all abide by a digital decorum. Each and every student should: address each other using our names and pronouns; respond to each other's ideas with respect and attention to detail; ground your comments in the text(s) assigned for that week to keep discussions pertinent and to engage your classmates about a shared cultural artifact.

When sharing your opinions about a topic that is not directly from the readings, cite as often as possible so we can learn about where your ideas are coming from; when sharing personal opinions be clear about how they are specific to you – your knowledge, experience, belief systems etc. and be prepared to hear about other belief systems, knowledges, and experiences that might come into conflict with your ideas. There is a zero tolerance policy for harmful behavior or speech. For complete details see *Guidelines for Classroom Civility and Conduct*:  
[http://www.umass.edu/dean\\_students/codeofconduct/classroomcivility/](http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/classroomcivility/).

Please read each other's comments as a launching pad for our own original thoughts; never reproduce an idea another student has posted previously (if you had a similar idea, point us towards a different example or take that thought in a new direction). Most importantly: ask as many questions of the text, each other, and the instructor as you can come up with!

Finally, this course runs for roughly four weeks, yet it covers a full semester's material, which means it will be work-intensive. As such, it is crucial that you work out a schedule for yourself early on so that you can keep up with the workload. If this is proving difficult, feel free to reach out to me to help you develop a plan that will allow you to get through all the readings AND actively engage in discussions.

### **Office Hours and Email**

Office hours are a time and place for you to meet with me directly to discuss course materials, assignments, and your ideas more generally. Please allow up to 24 hours for me to read and respond to emails during the week and at least 48 hours during weekends and holidays.

### **Submitting Work**

Assignments must be submitted on time. Every day the assignment is late, the grade will drop by 1/3 of a letter grade. If you believe you need more time to do your best work, contact me at least 48 hours in advance of the deadline for an extension.

### **Academic Honesty**

This course is about developing yourselves as readers, writers, and thinkers. You will be expected to read materials and integrate others' writing into your own by being clear about attribution through citational practices. In short, the work produced in this course should be from you and for this

course specifically. Wesleyan takes its honor code quite seriously. Any form of academic misconduct, including but not limited to cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, or facilitating others' academic dishonesty will be reported to the Honor Board. If you have any questions about the Honor code, please see me and/or consult the discussion in the student handbook at: <http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/index.html>.

### **Technical Support**

Working entirely online means that we will likely run into some technical difficulties. If you have difficulty accessing the internet where you live, especially streaming videos let me know ASAP. Similarly, if you are experiencing technical difficulties contact me as soon as possible to keep me up to date on your issues. Though I am not an expert, I can direct you to some resources including the ITS Desk at Wesleyan.

A reminder: SAVE and BACK UP EVERYTHING! Sometimes computers and software, including our Moodle site, will fail to work. I expect that you backup everything, either on remote disk space (such as google drive or Dropbox) or on a thumb drive. You should also save course materials you download, such as this syllabus and assignment sheets, in case you find yourself working on readings or written assignments when you can't access the internet.

### **Accessibility and Academic Support**

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Accessibility Services.

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability or are interested in additional academic support, please contact Student Academic Resources by calling 860-685-5581. For more please visit: <https://www.wesleyan.edu/sar/>

### **Writing Workshop**

Make use of *free* one-on-one appointments with peer writing tutors at the Writing Workshop. Trained to help Wesleyan writers at any stage of the writing process, writing tutors will be available for online/remote appointments starting on July 7th. Make an appointment by going to Wesportal→ Academics→ Writing Workshop Account. You'll be asked to make an account before being brought to our online scheduler.

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### **COURSE RHYTHM**

This course runs entirely online. As such, it's imperative you understand the course rhythm with its layered assignments. Be sure to post the correct assignment in the correct place at the correct time!

The general rhythm of the course is as follows:

**M- Reading; T- Discussion; W- Writing; Th - Workshop; F- Revision and Reflection**

| Sunday   | Monday   | Tuesday   | Wednesday   | Thursday | Friday   | Saturday                |
|--|--|---|---|----------|--|-------------------------|
| (1) Reading impression posted to Moodle by 11:59pm est | (1) Watch lecture and comment on lecture question by 11:59pm est<br>(2) Synchronous Class Discussion<br><br>**Writing assignment explained*<br>* | (1) Synchronous Class Discussion<br>(2) Draft of writing due by 11:59pm est | (1) Read and prep for workshop (read peer's writing, write letter to them about the piece)<br>(2) Continue working on your writing assignment | Workshop | **Office Hours 10:30 - 12:30pm est**<br>(1) Synchronous Class Discussion<br>(2) Revised writing assignment due | (1) Writing Journal Due |

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**ASSIGNMENTS**

More details provided on assignment sheets in the “Assignment” Folder on Moodle

**Participation (30%)** This course is student oriented. As such, the majority of your grade will be derived from engaging with readings, lectures, and each other’s ideas. Active and timely participation are crucial components of the class – you are expected to check into Moodle regularly, complete reading and discussion assignments on time, and produce written responses that excite your classmates, making online discussion forums interactive spaces where we will all look forward to learning and being inspired by each other. Because the course runs online, student participation will be assessed in three ways (see assignment sheet for more details):

- **Reading Impressions (10%):** *Every Sunday by 11:59pm est*, students will post their initial impression of *one* of the assigned readings.
- **Lecture Comments (10%):** Each week, I will post a short lecture that provides background and some ways into our readings for the week. I will post discussion questions throughout the lecture. You must post a response to *one* of these discussion questions by *Monday at 11:59pm est*.
- **In Class Participation (10%):** During our Zoom meetings, we will discuss materials, watch videos, and listen to short lectures. So, too, will we engage with each other over video/audio, Moodle discussions, and breakout groups. Students should plan to always have Moodle open and available during class meetings.

**Weekly Writing Assignments (30%)** Every week you will be assigned a writing task that will use our readings as inspiration for practicing nonfiction writing techniques. Though you will be drafting and tinkering with your writing independently all week, there are a few deadlines in place so that you can discuss your writing with others: Tuesdays by 11:59pm est you will a first-ish, what you got draft to share with your workshop crew; you will then submit a more refined draft by Friday at 11:59pm est to me, your Professor. Every revised draft *must* be accompanied by a revision reflection that explains the choices you made from Tuesday - Friday. More details can be found in the “Assignment” folder on Moodle.

**Workshop Attendance and Letters (15%)** Students will be placed into small groups that will meet weekly to discuss each other’s writing in detail. To prepare for those meetings, students will read each other’s work and write each other’s short, detailed letters that reference specifics in each other’s work.

**Writer’s Journal (5%)** Every week, you will reflect on your experience reading and writing over the week. Entries are private and should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. These posts will create a timeline of experiences for you to draw from for your *Final Reflection*. Journal entries are due by *Saturday at 11:59pm est*.

**Polished Personal Essay (15%)** The goal of this course is to leave with a polished personal essay that you are proud of. Though we will read, discuss, and practice writing throughout the course, the final project will be a polished personal essay of your own design. Page limits, genre expectations, citational practices, style, and other writerly elements will be decided by the writer

**Final Reflection (5%)** At the end of the course, you will write a short reflection (2-3 pages) that details your growth as a reader, writer, and thinker.

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### **Weekly Reading Schedule**

This schedule is subject to change. Check your email and Moodle regularly for updates.

#### **Week 1**

**Monday, June 27,** Introductions, zoom class meeting

- Review syllabus, assignment sheets, and Moodle
- Introduce yourself to your peers via Moodle forum
- Complete Welcome Quiz on Moodle
- Complete Introductory Survey
- Read for Tuesday’s Class
- Watch/listen to Week 1 Lecture
- Post your first “Reading Impression” by 11:59pm est
- Post your first Lecture response by 11:59pm est

**Tuesday, June 28,** First Discussion, zoom class meeting

- Discussion on Toni Morrison's [Nobel Speech](#), "That Crafty Feeling" by Zadie Smith, and "[The Importance of Angry Art](#)" by Jenny Zhang
- Review instructions for first writing assignment and begin drafting

**Wednesday, June 29,** No class meeting

- Complete rough draft of Week 1 writing assignment by 11:59pm est

**Thursday, June 30,** Zoom Workshop Meetings

- First peer workshop meetings
- Read peer's writing, write letters to them, and share by 11:59pm est
- Revise writing assignment

**Friday, July 1,** No class meeting for holiday

- Revised writing assignment submitted due by 11:59pm est
- Complete first writer's journal entry due Saturday by 11:59pm est

### Week 2

**Monday, July 4,** NO zoom class meeting because of holiday

- Reading Impression on *one* of the week's readings: Karla Cornejo Villavicencio's "I Don't Have Children, But I'm Still a Mom - Kind of" (*Glamour*) and "My Father, My Dictator" (*New York Times*) and Jesmyn Ward's "My True South: Why I Decided to Return Home" (*TIME*) by 11:59pm est
- Comments on lecture due by 11:59pm est
- Begin working on Week 2 writing assignment

**Tuesday, July 5,** zoom class meeting

- Complete draft of Week 2 writing assignment due by 11:59pm est

**Wednesday, July 6** no synchronous meeting

- Read your workshop groups writing projects and post your letters to them by 11:59pm est

**Thursday, July 7,** Zoom Workshop Meetings

- Attend Workshop
- Revise Week 2 writing assignment

**Friday, July 8,** Zoom class meeting and office hours

- Submit Week 2 writing assignment by 11:59pm est
- Complete second writer's journal entry by Saturday at 11:59pm est

### **Week 3**

**Monday, July 11,** Zoom class meeting

- Reading Impression on one reading due by 11:59pm est: Kiese Laymon's ["My Vassar College Faculty ID Makes Everything OK"](#) and Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl"
- Comments on Lecture due by 11:59pm est
- Begin working on Week 3 writing assignment

**Tuesday, July 12,** Zoom class meeting

- Complete draft of Week 2 writing assignment due by 11:59pm est

**Wednesday, July 13,** no synchronous meeting

- Read your workshop groups writing projects and post your letters to them by 11:59pm est

**Thursday, July 14,** Zoom Workshop Meetings

- Attend Workshop
- Revise Week 3 writing assignment

**Friday, July 15,** Zoom class meeting and office hours

- Submit Week 3 writing assignment by 11:59pm est
- Complete third writer's journal entry by Saturday at 11:59pm est
- Begin drafting your final personal essay

### **Week 4**

**Monday, July 18, No class meeting,** One-on-one meetings with professor

- Attend meeting with Professor to discuss final project (sign up on Moodle)
- Share a personal essay that inspired your final project on Moodle forum by 11:59pm est

**Tuesday, July 19,** Zoom class meeting

- Read personal essays posted on Moodle for inspiration
- Post discussion questions/comments about readings by 11:59pm est
- Draft of final personal essay due by 11:59pm est

**Wednesday, July 20,** no synchronous meeting

- Read your workshop groups writing projects and post your letters to them by 11:59pm est

**Thursday, July 21,** Zoom Workshop Meetings

- Attend Workshop
- Revise Final Personal Essay

**Friday, July 22,** Zoom Class Meeting

- Attend meeting with Professor to discuss final project (sign up on Moodle)
- Complete fourth writer's journal entry by Saturday at 11:59pm est

### **Week 5**

**\*\*No Coursework or Class Meetings\*\***

**\*\*Office Hours remain available by appointment\*\***

**Monday, July 25:** Revision Exercise Day

**Tuesday, July 26:** Last Day of Class, Zoom Class Meeting

**Wednesday, July 27:**

- Polished Personal Essay Due by 11:59pm est
- Final Reflection due by 11:59pm est