

BE SOMEONE ELSE: INVENTING PERSONAE
WRI 140: INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE WRITING



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OFFICE HOURS
M, T, W: 2:30-4:00
AND BY APPT.

The persona looks across at the person and then sets about its own work.
—John Berryman

☞ You are, of course, not a single person. Nor are you a single writer. Think only of how you present yourself variously in an admissions essay, an email home, or in a conversation with a good friend. A writer thrives on just this diversity, and everyone (not just those who claim to be “writers”) becomes a more resilient thinker when he or she can respond appropriately— and creatively— to the *occasion*.

In this course different occasions involve different forms. Through a willingness to experiment with form and a commitment to critique and self-reflection you will expand the variety of your expression and explode your sense of “self.” This course will engage you repeatedly in the full process of writing: the insights and energy of prewriting exercises, the direction and assistance available from literary models, and the promise and payoff of revision. In a cooperative atmosphere we will *get outside the self* to explore the role of character in non-fiction, fiction, poetry, and drama.

The four parts of the course involve you in four genres, which are (briefly here and in more detail on the following pages):

- ☛ The Documentary: Descriptive Profile
- ☛ Their Story: Narrative Sketch
- ☛ A Testimony in Verse: Persona Poem
- ☛ The Talk & The Walk: Stage Monologue (with Blocking)

☞ **Required Texts:**

Didion, Joan. *The White Album*.

Earley, Michael & Philippa Keil, Eds. *The Modern Monologue: Women*. {Male students buy this.}

Earley, Michael & Philippa Keil, Eds. *The Modern Monologue: Men*. {Female students buy this.}

O'Connor, Flannery. *A Good Man is Hard to Find*.

Prose, Francine. *Reading Like a Writer*.

On Reserve:

Frank, Robert. *The Americans*.

📌 Requirements of the Course:

This is an active class, asking you to immerse yourself in reading, challenge yourself and others in discussion, and apply yourself to writing exercises both in and out of class.

📌 Reading

Reading is the writer's best aid. We'll learn to read as writers, moving carefully through a text to assess the choices the author makes. Read each assignment with care— even more than once— annotate, and come prepared to talk about how a text works.

📌 Discussion

In our discussions you'll learn the craft of each genre by replying to lectures, talking about things you discovered in reading, and asking questions about things that elude you. Listen well and contribute.

📌 Writing

Within each of the four units you will do three kinds of writing:

1) **In-class free-writing & exercises** will help immerse you in the week's text, prime you for discussion, and allow you to experiment with some tactics.

2) **Annotations** ask you to pursue a single aspect of craft in a single text. You might track the way Joan Didion builds her sentences with parallel constructions or follow some of Masters' irregular rhymes. An annotation is obsessive, focused, and short (2 pages).

3) **Genre Work** is the central creative work of each unit. These are the pieces— Profile, Narrative, Persona Poem, Stage Monologue— which you bring to workshop (at some stage of completion but not merely in rough draft) and which you revise for your portfolio.

📌 Workshop

At intervals class will be devoted to a workshop of your creative work. This, too, is active work. Your goal is to offer thoughtful criticism and purposeful suggestion to help the author revise his or her work. Still, you may find that you gain as much from delivering these critiques; play your own suggestions back into your own work. Each workshop piece should receive two levels of response from you: marginal comments and a prose note addressed to the author. I'll collect these and pass them along to the author.

📌 Writing Dates

Four times during the term you will have a Writing Date with one of your fellow writers in the class. A Date lasts exactly one hour, can occur at a time and place of your choosing, and involves an exchange of writing and thoughts on a topic that I will define based on the genre of the unit. The first Date will be a trial run of your field study. The second and third Dates will ask you to write together in response to a given prompt and then talk about it. The fourth Date asks you to attend a reading or performance together and afterward share your post mortem thoughts. Each Date should be documented to me by submitting a paragraph response telling me something that came of the meeting. You may draft this response collaboratively with your partner, but it should include specific input from you both.

📌 Portfolio

At the end of the semester, the body of your work is presented to me in a portfolio. We will have time in the last weeks dedicated to portfolios and revisions, but I recommend that you not wait until the end to try and revise all of your work. Your portfolio is an opportunity to demonstrate your learning for the semester both in terms of process and final product. A complete portfolio presents this evidence to me in an organized (and even creative) fashion. Show me the arc of each piece by including evidence that spans from the original emergence of your idea (perhaps via in-class writing) through its revision (as the result of both workshop and annotations). In addition, your portfolio begins with a narrative Preface in which you discuss what you have included in your portfolio, how each piece demonstrates your learning, and how you describe the final outcome on your writing and on yourself.

🍷 Evaluation

Your grades for each unit of the course are based on all the work surrounding that genre: in-class writing, workshop criticism, annotations, & creative genre work.

🍷 Profile	15%
🍷 Narration	15%
🍷 Persona Poem	15%
🍷 Stage Monologue	15%
🍷 Writing Dates	5%
🍷 Discussion	15%
🍷 Portfolio	20%

Course Outcomes & Assessment

Through this course you will become a critical reader of a variety of genres; focus your criticism to identify individual writing tactics; draft prose arguments that reflect these new understandings. You will use your knowledge of each genre to craft writing that fulfills each form; offer generous criticism to others as well as self-criticism; employ this feedback in thoughtful and purposeful revision of your work. We'll work together to establish the hallmarks of each genre. Having identified these characteristics, you'll marshal workshop critique designed to help each writer strengthen these aspects. In revision, you need not placate the workshop but will still aim to achieve these genre goals. Portfolios will be viewed both in terms of how they show an engagement in the revision process and for their attainment within each genre.

🍷 Units/Genres

🍷 The Documentary: Descriptive Profile

Our exploration of character moves from the outside in. Your first role will place you as a kind of documentarian. Following non-fiction profiles by Joan Didion you will learn an eye for detail, both what to put in and what to leave out. In addition, you'll conduct field work of your own to compile anthropological notes of appearance and behavior in some person either on campus or in the community. After shadowing this person and conducting an interview, you'll use your compiled data to build a character sketch that presents a detailed, sensory profile of your subject.

🍷 Their Story: Narrative Sketch

Next, with guidance from Flannery O'Connor we'll leave the position of fully external observer to begin to inhabit a subject's thoughts through narration. Through our reading of O'Connor's stories we'll learn how the writer can maintain the omniscience of the third person and still dip into the mind of a character through a technique called "free indirect discourse." Then, to prompt your writing we'll browse the tepid yet resilient post-War America depicted in the photographs of Robert Frank. His photos both tell national stories and whisper secrets. Your genre work will invent and retell one of these stories by "reading the minds" of those otherwise silent in photographs.

🍷 A Testimony in Verse: Persona Poem

Next, we will introduce monologue—a character speaking out—in the realm of the poem where speech is shaped by rhythm and line as much as voice. Diving into the complicated social (and vocal) world of Spoon River we'll find the rich possibilities for speaking poetically (and we may sample Robert Hayden's historical personae and Louise Glück's voiced garden, *The Wild Iris* as well). Your dramatic monologue can give voice to an invented, contemporary, or historical figure, or you can give some *thing* the gift of speech.

🍷 The Talk & The Walk: Stage Monologue (with Blocking)

Finally, we'll see how playwrights (from Shakespeare to Edward Albee) use the soliloquy and the monologue to allow a character to "speak her mind" on stage. Such speeches may at first seem like captioned thoughts, but soon we'll realize how they work to *present* a character. We'll see how a character strikes a pose and how stage blocking and other directorial notations can create context and action.

🍷 Essential Policies & Details

🍷 Attendance

Both our discussions and our workshops require your presence as we work in a collaborative and accumulative mode. Attendance (which means attendance with preparation) is mandatory. Missed work (including in-class writing and workshops) cannot be made up. Although you'll find the most success if you attend every class, you are allowed 3 absences to allow for interceding realities. Use these to cover illnesses and other unpreventables. Remember that shift work is never an excuse for missing class, and you should schedule routine medical appointments for hours when you are not in class. Any absences beyond the first 3 will negatively impact your final grade; chronic lateness or early departure is equivalent to absence.

🍷 Late Work

In-class assignments cannot be duplicated or turned in late. Likewise, worksheet material must be ready (with the appropriate number of copies) at the beginning of the class period when it is due. If you miss a deadline for your genre work or an annotation your grade will be lowered on that assignment. But it is better to turn in these major assignments late than never. If you are having difficulties with a particular genre, come see me— the earlier the better.

🍷 Academic Integrity

You will engage closely with the work of published authors and exchange many ideas collaboratively with other students. Still, all writing you submit for this course is assumed to be your own. If you are concerned that what you write might owe more than inspiration to another source, acknowledge that debt (we poets often use a note like, *After Ovid*). Willfully presenting the work of others as your own is a serious issue for which the College has penalties.

🍷 Accommodation

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact Deborah Braden, Educational Access Coordinator (Dodge House, ext. 3791, dbraden@warren-wilson.edu), as soon as possible to ensure that appropriate accommodations can be implemented in a timely fashion.

BE SOMEONE ELSE: CALENDAR

subject to revision

Genre	Wk	Month	Day	Today's Class:	Special prep for next mtg
Prof	1	Aug	28	Introduction & The Seduction of a Profile	
			30	Didion (51-58); Prose (35-62)	
	2	Sept	4	The Annotation; Didion (79-85); Prose (63-84)	
			6	Field Study	write up field study
			7	Mini-Workshop: Field Studies (¶s)	your 1 st annotation
	3		11	Annotation #1 DUE; Didion's openers	draft an opener
			13	Mini-Workshop: Openers (¶s)	complete your profile; copies
4		18	Bring Genre #1 w/ copies; Didion (180-186)	annotate & headnote	
		20	Workshop #1: Profiles	annotate & headnote	
		21	Workshop #1: Profiles		
Narr	5		25	O'Connor (1-22); Prose (13-34)	
			27	O'Connor (167-195)	2 nd annotation
	6	Oct	2	Annotation #2 DUE; Prose (193-208); [Frank]	draft detail sketch
			4	Mini-Workshop: Details	complete your narrative; copies
			5	Bring Genre #2 w/ copies; O'Connor (23-46)	annotate & headnote
	7		9	Workshop #2: Narrative Sketch	annotate & headnote
			11	Workshop #2: Narrative Sketch	
P Poem	8		16	Reading Persona Poems (Packet Poems)	
			18	Persona Poems (Packet Poems)	
			19	Persona Poems (Packet Poems)	
	FB	Oct	20-28	FALL BREAK	3 rd annotation
	9	Nov	30	Annotation #3 DUE; Line & Stanza	draft prose v. verse
			1	Mini-Workshop: Lines	complete your monologue; copies
	10		6	Bring Genre #3 w/ copies; Persona Poems	annotate & headnote
			8	Workshop #3: Persona Poems	annotate & headnote
			9	Workshop #3: Persona Poems	
	S Mono	11		13	The Monologue on Stage (Shakespeare, or ?)
15				Reading through Modern Monologues	
12		Nov	20	Modern Monologues; Prose (143-192)	transcribe a block of speech
			21-25	THANKSGIVING	
13			27	Mini-workshop: Speech vs. Dialogue	4 th annotation
			29	Annotation #4 DUE; Prose (209-232); Blocking	complete your monologue; copies
14			4	Bring Genre #4 w/ copies; Mod Monologues	annotate & headnote
			6	Workshop #4: Stage Monologues	annotate & headnote
			7	Workshop #4: Stage Monologues	
15			11	Portfolio Revision Workshop	
	13		Portfolio Revision Workshop		
	18		Portfolio Revision Workshop		
	20		In-class Portfolio Readings		