

Fall 8-15-2010

# ENG 1091G-094: Composition and Language, Honors

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## Recommended Citation

Wixson, Chris, "ENG 1091G-094: Composition and Language, Honors" (2010). *Fall 2010*. 54.  
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# Eng 1091: Composition and Language

fall 2010 / Section 094

Dr. Chris Wixson

## syllabus

### course philosophy

The original prospectus for *The New Yorker* contained a phrase that is appropriate for our endeavor: "We assume a reasonable degree of enlightenment on the part of our readers." One might argue that we assume the same thing on the part of our writers. This course is an opportunity to strengthen your skills of reading, writing, and thinking. Essentially, the assignments are designed to help you cultivate your critical voice as a member of an intellectual community. Accordingly, we will discuss and practice strategies for reading texts with understanding, writing about them with style and precision, and researching sources in various media. English 1091 is designed to allow each student the flexibility to pursue topics within their chosen major/field of interest and a chance to reflect, challenge, and share reactions, questions, and ideas within a diverse group of thinkers and writers. Since true education happens in communities, there will be a fair amount of collaborative work.

English 1091 is a writing course designed to improve skills in critical thinking and analytical expression in order to enable you to meet the challenges of future academic tasks and the self-examined life. In addition to being writing-intensive, the course is reading and thinking intensive, necessitating a commitment to class discussion (beyond merely showing up) and courageous consideration of ideas about interpretation, writing, culture, existence, and desire. The format of each class will be relatively fluid, changing with regard to the material, my ideas, and your interests. Remember this is not MY class but ours, its success dependent on the contributions of every class member. 1091 is a *writing-centered* course, from which you may choose to submit essays for inclusion in your university-required portfolios. Please let me know if you wish to discuss this requirement and its procedure.

### Learning Outcomes

1. To write precisely, concisely, deliberately, self-reflectively, and articulately.
2. To read significant texts carefully and critically, recognizing and responding to the choices made by other writers.
3. To engage in reading, writing, and discussion experiences so as to establish a foundation for continued social, cultural, and intellectual discovery.

## course texts

*Me Talk Pretty One Day*, David Sedaris

*They Say / I Say*, Gerald Graff

*Art Objects*, Jeanette Winterson

*Pocket Style Manual*, Diana Hacker

Handouts:      Selections from *The New Yorker*  
                     Maggie Jackson, *Distracted*, Chapter 5  
                     Franz Kafka, "The Top"  
                     Paul Goldberger, "Quick! Before It Crumbles!"

E-reserve:      Jennifer Egan, "Love in the Time of No Time"  
                     David Browne, "On the Internet, It's All About 'My'"  
                     Christine Rosen, "Virtual Friendship and the New Narcissism"  
                     Charles Petersen, "In the World of Facebook"

## contact information

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Office Hours:

## assignments

- \*Three Critical Essays and Four Short Papers
- \*Manifesto
- \*Active, Engaged Participation in Class Discussion/Activities — defined as TALKING productively.
- \*Article Summary and Annotated Bibliography

## final grades

Your final grade in the course will be determined by your performance on the following assignments:

Manifesto (Intellectual Autobiography/Literacy Narrative)	10%
Essay 1: "Talk of the Campus"	20%
Essay 2: They Say / I Say (including Article Summary)	25%
Essay 3: Interdisciplinary Conversation (including Annotated Bibliography)	25%
Class Participation / Short Assignments and Essays	30%

**\*\*You must complete all assignments to complete the course. Failure to complete any one of the components represents incomplete work for the semester and anyone with incomplete work will not receive a passing grade for the course. Failing to participate in peer review or failing to bring to class required paragraphs or first drafts will result in the loss of half a letter grade per missing component from the assignment grade.**

## final grades

Mandatory.

I expect you to be in class awake and prepared every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon. In other words, arrive on time with your reading/writing assignment completed, prepared to participate in discussion. Because so much in this course relies upon in-class work, absences and habitual lateness will adversely affect your course performance. Attendance will be taken at each class session – you are allowed **two** unexcused absences before your grade is negatively affected. After two, each unexcused absence will lower your participation grade by a letter. **More than four unexcused absences will result in a "0" for participation. More than six unexcused absences will result in a grade of no credit for the course.** Habitual lateness (beyond once) will also affect your grade negatively since it is disruptive and disrespectful. Please notify me by email if there is unexpected illness or an emergency that causes you to miss class. Do not get in touch asking "for the assignment" or a "rundown of what you missed." My responsibilities as an instructor lie with the students who do come to class. Excused absences are accompanied by appropriate legal or medical documentation. Any unexcused absence will seriously undermine your success in this course.

## class participation

Mandatory.

Think of our meetings as potluck conversations and activities; everyone simply must contribute. Participation in an Honors writing seminar means careful, full preparation of the reading, frequent contributions to discussions, risk-taking in writing and thinking. You should come to each session armed with observations, opinions, questions, and insights, ready to take an active part in the ongoing dialogue about the course materials and your writing pieces. In addition to your required short papers, what else you bring to share need not be written out but should refer to specific passages in the reading as the basis for formulating a broader discussion topic or questions.

Besides preparation, class participation also means responding constructively, respectfully, and energetically to what other seminarians share, that you work actively to stretch yourself intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. In short, you are expected to work actively to contribute to the class's overall movement and to strive to promote dialogue between yourself and other seminarians. The goal is to demonstrate growth. **I TAKE THIS GRADE VERY SERIOUSLY.**

**If you plan on doing any of the following things, you should probably switch into another section of this class:**

1. Remaining in your comfort zone and not talking in class and justifying the silence by saying you are "just the type of person who likes to sit back and listen to what everyone else has to say." Certainly, listening is a premium in this class and is a crucial human skill. But real listening only happens in an exchange. Letting everyone else do the talking means that you're not really listening because you are busy keeping yourself safe. Of course, this 'safety' is an illusion.
2. Remaining in your comfort zone and not talking in class and justifying the silence because you assume that you don't know enough to participate in class and other people (especially those who talk) do. To approach the class and the work in a way that suggests that one can speak only about what is already known is not only dangerous, but it's also intellectually lazy.
3. Complaining when everyone does talk that it's a waste of time and inefficient. Or remaining so married to ways you have been taught in other courses and disciplines that you see as a 'tangent' any meaningful, principled discussion or creative exercise.

### late papers

These are no fun for me to keep track of and only put you further behind. For each day beyond the scheduled due date, late papers will be penalized a third of a letter grade. **After a week, I will no longer accept the paper, and it becomes a "O."** Again, if you become ill or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me as soon as possible and stay in touch.

### cell phone and computer use

You may bring your computer to class with you, assuming that you use it in a scholarly and responsible fashion. This means that you will only have applications and windows related to the current discussion open. **You may not check** email, news, or box scores, surf the web, use chat applications, play games, or otherwise distract yourself and those around you from the class conversation with your computer.

You are likewise expected to use cell phones in a responsible manner: **turn them off when you come in to class.** If you have an emergency for which you must be available, you must discuss it with me beforehand and keep your phone on vibrate. **Under no conditions are you allowed** to text message, take pictures or video (illegal in class), play games, or use the cell phone in any other manner during class. The nature of our scholarly endeavor together necessitates mutual respect and dedicated attention during the too short time we have to discuss these texts. Violating any of these policies will result in your participation grade being lowered by a full letter grade for each violation.

### academic integrity

Any paper with your name on it signifies that you are the author—that the wording and major ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by either quotation marks and/or citations. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use (appropriation and/or imitation) of others' materials (words and ideas). We will discuss how to avoid it. Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an F in the course, and a report filed with the Student Standards Office.

### special needs and situations

If you have a *documented* disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

# Eng 1091: Composition and Language

fall 2010

Dr. Chris Wixson

## course calendar

\*\* THIS SCHEDULE MAY CHANGE AT ANY TIME ACCORDING TO THE NEEDS AND DEMANDS OF THE CLASS. MAKE SURE YOU ALWAYS BRING IT WITH YOU FOR MODIFICATION.

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August	24	Introductory Comments / Writing Self-evaluation
	26	Winterson, "Art Objects" / <b>Short Writing Due</b> Kafka, "The Top"
	31	"Me Talk Pretty One Day," David Sedaris / <b>Short Writing Due</b>
September	2	"Go West," Peter Hessler (Handout from <i>The New Yorker</i> ) <b>Short Writing Due</b>
	7	<b>Manifesto Due</b> / Cartoon Captions
	9	"Talk of the Town" selections (handout) "Visiting Dignitary" / "Casting Call" / "Transformer" / "On The Street" <b>Short Writing Due</b>
	14	Goldberger's "Quick! Before It Crumbles!" / <b>Short Writing Due</b>
	16	"Talk of the Town" selections (handout) "The Toiler" / "A Timely Mystery" / "The Pull"
	21	"Talk of the Town" selections (handout) <b>Three Paragraphs Due</b>
	23	<b>First Draft of E1 Due (Two copies)</b>
	28	Mandatory Conferences
	30	"Talk of the Town" selections (handout) "Flag Man" / "Two-Sided"
October	5	<b>Final Draft of E1 Due / E2 Assignment Sheet handed out</b>
	7	Egan, "Love in a Time of No Time"

- 12 Peterson, "In the World of Facebook" Summary Due A-M  
Graff 28-38
- 14 Rosen, "Virtual Friendship" Summary Due N-Z
- 19 Thesis and Three Paragraphs Due / Peer Review
- 21 First Draft of E2 Due (via email)
- 26 Revision Workshop / E3 Assignment Sheet
- 28 Final Draft of E2 Due

- November
- 2 Research Workshop / Hacker 92-102 (Strategies)  
Graff 17-27; 51-63
  - 4 Research Workshop / Hacker 104-119 (Quotation)  
Graff 39-47; 74-87
  - 9 Mandatory Conferences
  - 11 Mandatory Conferences
  - 16 Essay #3 / Research Workshop  
Hacker 119-54 (Citation)  
Four Paragraphs Due
  - 18 First Draft of Essay #3 Due (Two Copies)

THANKSGIVING BREAK

- 30 Mandatory Conferences
- December 2 Mandatory Conferences
- 7 Self-assessment workshop
- 9 Final Portfolio Due

## Short Paper Assignment Topics:

**\*\*WARNING:** The intellectual pre-writing work for these assignments will be challenging and time-consuming. I provide the prompts here so that you may start early.

**8/26/10** Write (typed and double-spaced) two or three paragraphs responding to her ideas. Demonstrate your close, careful reading of Winterson's essay but do not summarize it. Also, discuss why we might be reading this piece at the beginning of a writing course.

**8/31/10** Using specific examples from the essay and examples from your own experiences, answer the following questions in two or three well-organized paragraphs. Demonstrate your close, careful reading of Sedaris' piece but do not summarize it.:

What, for Sedaris, is the relationship between sensibility and technical skill/knowledge in literacy?

What, for Sedaris, is the relationship between language, voice, and authority? (You might focus on the details Sedaris includes to illustrate the power of his instructor over the students.)

**9/2/10** Using specific examples from the essay, write two or three well-organized paragraphs in which you articulate your sense of Hessler's larger point for the reader and the evidence you use to support your interpretation. Again, demonstrate your close, careful reading of Hessler's essay but do not summarize it.

**9/9/10** In one paragraph, based on the selections we have read so far, describe the genre of the "Talk Of The Town." What are its conventions? What is its structure or narrative formula?

**9/14/10** In three to four well-organized and engaging paragraphs, using Goldberger's essay as a model, choose something and analyze it in terms of something else that a reader would not ordinarily think is related. Goldberger analyzes classic cookies in architectural terms. In a previous section, a student analyzed his class subjects in terms of dining hall food. Another analyzed her textbook covers as if they were guys at a party.

## Theme for English B (1951)

The instructor said,

Go home and write  
a page tonight.  
And let that page come out of you--  
Then, it will be true.

I wonder if it's that simple?  
I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.  
I went to school there, then Durham, then here  
to this college on the hill above Harlem.  
I am the only colored student in my class.  
The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem,  
through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,  
Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,  
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator  
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me  
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what  
I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:  
hear you, hear me--we two--you, me, talk on this page.  
(I hear New York, too.) Me--who?  
Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.  
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.  
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,  
or records--Bessie, bop, or Bach.  
I guess being colored doesn't make me not like  
the same things other folks like who are other races.  
So will my page be colored that I write?

Being me, it will not be white.  
But it will be  
a part of you, instructor.  
You are white--  
yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.  
That's American.  
Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.  
Nor do I often want to be a part of you.  
But we are, that's true!  
As I learn from you,  
I guess you learn from me--  
although you're older--and white--  
and somewhat more free.

This is my page for English B.

Langston Hughes

Slowly they came up, climbing the companion ladder, tired, swaying, powerful figures. "Am I the helmsman?" I asked. They nodded, but they had eyes only for the stranger, stood around him in a semicircle, and when, in a commanding voice, he said: "Don't disturb me!" they gathered together, nodded at me, and withdrew down the companion ladder. What kind of people are these? Do they ever think, or do they only shuffle pointlessly over the earth?

*Translated by Tania and James Stern*

### *The Top*

A CERTAIN PHILOSOPHER used to hang about wherever children were at play. And whenever he saw a boy with a top, he would lie in wait. As soon as the top began to spin the philosopher went in pursuit and tried to catch it. He was not perturbed when the children noisily protested and tried to keep him away from their toy; so long as he could catch the top while it was still spinning, he was happy, but only for a moment; then he threw it to the ground and walked away. For he believed that the understanding of any detail, that of a spinning top, for instance, was sufficient for the understanding of all things. For this reason he did not busy himself with great problems, it seemed to him uneconomical. Once the smallest detail was understood, then everything was understood, which was why he busied himself only with the spinning top. And whenever preparations were being made for the spinning of the top, he hoped that this time it would succeed: as soon as the top began to spin and he was running breathlessly after it, the hope would turn to certainty, but when he held the silly piece of wood in his hand, he felt nauseated. The screaming of the children, which hitherto he had not heard and which now suddenly pierced his ears, chased him away, and he tottered like a top under a clumsy whip.

*Translated by Tania and James Stern*

"ALAS," said the mo  
day. At the beginning  
ning and running, and  
away to the right and  
so quickly that I am in  
corner stands the trap  
change your direction.

I HAVE RETURNED, I  
around. It's my father's  
useless tools, jumbled  
The cat lurks on the b  
around a stick in a ga  
Who is going to receiv  
door? Smoke is rising  
for supper. Do you f  
don't know, I feel mo  
each object stands col  
with its own affairs, w  
known. What use can  
even though I am the  
don't dare knock at th  
tance, I only listen fro  
that I cannot be taken  
I am listening from a d  
of the clock passing o  
only think I hear it. W  
the secret of those sitti