



ENGL 4670-001 (86469): Special Topics in Writing

Public Writing and Rhetoric

PH 325 | Mon./Wed. 12:40 – 2:05 p.m. | 3 credits

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Name: Dr. Eric Detweiler

Email Address: eric.detweiler@mtsu.edu

Office: Peck 376

Office Phone: 615-898-2585

Office Hours: 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. on Mon., 4 – 5 p.m. on Wed., and by appointment

To mitigate the spread of COVID-19, I'll be holding office hours in the courtyard below Peck Hall when possible. If it's raining or if it gets too cold to hold office hours, I'll hold them in my office. I'm also happy to meet via Zoom using the link below.

- Link:
<https://mtsu.zoom.us/j/6811476561?pwd=ZE9mSzNUWklOWng5T0F3UkpGc2ZjQT09>
- Meeting ID: 681 147 6561
- Passcode: 678935

COURSE INFORMATION

Prerequisites and Co-requisites

Completion of 1000- and 2000-level English requirements with a grade of C- or better.

Description

This course is an introduction to the study and practice of writing for public audiences. Students will gain a better understanding of terms like "rhetoric" and "public" and what it means to think about writing in those terms. Students will both analyze and produce writing meant for public audiences that move between and extend beyond narrow academic and professional settings. Along the way, we will consider the rhetorical and ethical decisions involved in the crafting and

circulation of such writing. Ultimately, coursework will be directed toward the practice and production of public writing.

In addition to being an elective for English majors and writing minors, this course is the introduction to MTSU's brand-new [Public Writing and Rhetoric](#) major. If you're interested in adding that major based on your experience in this course, let Dr. Detweiler know.

Objectives

This course is designed to teach students to

1. analyze and produce effective and informed writing in a range of public genres;
2. exercise rhetorical awareness, adapting written communication to various public audiences, purposes, and platforms;
3. consider and navigate the ethical issues involved in communicating complex information and arguments to public audiences; and
4. collaborate effectively and ethically with others on complex public projects that involve substantial written components.

COURSE MATERIALS

Required Textbooks

There are two required texts for this course. Print or digital copies are fine:

- Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, [*Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies \(Classroom Edition\)*](#)
- Patricia Roberts-Miller, [*Demagoguery and Democracy*](#)

Supplementary Materials

Other course readings will be available as PDFs or links via D2L.

ASSESSMENT AND GRADING

Grading Procedure

With the COVID pandemic still happening, this semester is going to be much more unpredictable than most, and that will come with challenges. Because of that, I've tried to make the grading system for the course as straightforward as possible. Your grades on all individual assignments will be pass/fail. That means if you meet a set of basic requirements for an assignment, you'll get full credit for it. If you don't, you'll get no credit. See the tables below for a breakdown of coursework and how it will correspond to different letter grades. It's a little different from how grades work in most courses and may take a minute for you to wrap your head around. But my hope is that, in the end, it will make it simpler for you to succeed in the course and keep the focus on actually learning to write instead of hitting specific percentages with each assignment just so you can maintain the GPA you want. I will update the D2L gradebook regularly, so you'll be able to keep track of the work you've completed there.

I will provide more detailed prompts for all the assignments listed below as the semester unfolds.

| Assignment | Percentage of Grade |
|--|---------------------|
| <i>Recurring Work</i> | |
| <i>Writing Journal:</i> You'll keep a digital or analog journal in which you document things you notice about writing—your own and others'—throughout the semester. | 10% |
| <i>Reading Notes:</i> You'll take notes on assigned readings and submit them via D2L dropboxes. | 10% |
| <i>Peer Feedback:</i> You'll provide feedback on classmates' writing throughout the semester. | 10% |
| <i>Major Projects</i> | |
| <i>Publication Venue Guide:</i> You'll provide an overview of a venue that publishes the kind of writing you'll go on to do in this course. Everyone's pieces will be compiled into a single shared document accessible to students in future versions of this course. | 15% |
| <i>Issue Explainer:</i> You'll choose an issue of public concern, then research the subissues, types of writing, rhetorical strategies, and publics involved in that issue. Finally, you'll write a piece explaining the issue to a relevant public audience. | 15% |
| <i>Midterm Reflection:</i> In a short piece of reflective writing, you'll reflect on what you've learned and continuing to learn in the course. | 10% |
| <i>Scripted Presentation:</i> In a scripted in-class or prerecorded presentation, you'll present on the public issue you've been studying and summarize your final project (Writing in Action). | 10% |
| <i>Writing in Action:</i> You'll craft a piece of writing that addresses the public issue you've been studying throughout the semester. Includes a supplementary element in which you frame and reflect on the main part of the project. | 20% |
| Total | 100% |

The grading scale for this course is as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| A: 90-100 B+: 87-89 B: 83-86 B-: 80-82 | C+: 77-79 C: 73-76 C-: 70-72 D+: 67-69 | D: 63-66 D-: 60-62 F: 59 and under |
|---|---|--|

Incomplete Grades

Incomplete grades are given rarely and only in extenuating circumstances. Page 56 of the [MTSU Undergraduate Catalog](#) states: "The grade I indicates that the student has not completed all course requirements because of illness or other uncontrollable circumstances, especially those which occur toward the end of the term. Mere failure to make up work or turn in required work on time does not provide the basis for the grade of 'I' unless extenuating circumstances

noted above are present for reasons acceptable to the instructor.” Please refer to the Undergraduate catalog for the complete Incomplete Grade Policy.

Feedback

- I will provide feedback on all your major writing projects via the D2L dropboxes where you submit those assignments. I will provide feedback no more than two weeks after you submit the assignment. In most cases, you will receive audio recording of my feedback. If there is any reason why audio feedback will not work or be accessible for you, please let me know and I’m happy to find a form of feedback that will.
- Major writing assignments must be submitted to the corresponding D2L dropbox and will not be accepted via email. If you ever have trouble getting a file uploaded to a D2L dropbox, please let me know and we can figure out a solution.
- I will also provide short written feedback as needed on smaller course assignments. For instance, if you submit a set of reading notes that don’t meet the requirements, I’ll note that in the D2L dropbox.
- All assignment deadlines are listed in the calendar in D2L.

Deadlines and Late Work

I have deadlines in my classes for three main reasons, which I think it’s worth taking a moment to explain as a way of helping you understand where I’m coming from as a teacher:

1. Because of my own limitations. If I have every student turning in every assignment at a different time, it gets easy for me to overlook things, which can delay my feedback and cause confusion for you all.
2. Because you all will be learning to write together. As much as we sometimes think of writing as a solitary activity (a lone author sitting in their room typing away at a novel or essay), learning to write is a deeply social experience. We’ll discuss this point in this course. But for now, it means you’ll be developing your writing in conversation with each other, and you’ll be providing each other feedback on what you’re writing. For that to work, you’ll need to be working on writing assignments at roughly the same time as your classmates.
3. Because the writing assignments in this class build on each other. That means you’ll apply things you learn from writing earlier assignments while you’re working on later assignments. If you try to do everything in the last few weeks of the semester, then you won’t be able to build on what you’ve already learned. It would be like trying to climb a ladder by immediately jumping to the highest step—a difficult if not impossible task.

So there will be deadlines in this class, which you’ll be able to see using the D2L calendar. I ask that you stick to those deadlines as much as possible. That said, if something comes up that prevents you from turning something in on time—an illness, a technological issue, a family emergency—please let me know. I am often, though not always, willing to give extensions as needed. I just ask that, if you anticipate needing an extension on a major writing project or other recurring work, you email me in advance of the deadline so that I can plan accordingly. If you don’t provide me with advance notice, I may not be able to provide you with a way to make up coursework.

Academic Integrity/Misconduct

Please review MTSU's policy on [Academic Integrity and Misconduct](#).

When it comes to detecting and addressing plagiarism, I refuse to use Turnitin because I have [major problems](#) with its business model and the assumption that students are guilty of plagiarism until proven innocent. I've been teaching for over a decade and am pretty good at noticing when a student is plagiarizing. If I do, I will almost always use it as an opportunity to start a one-on-one conversation about plagiarism rather than automatically failing the student or reporting them to university authorities. If you're ever concerned that you might be plagiarizing in a project you're working on (by not citing sources correctly, etc.), I encourage you to check in with me. I hope this is obvious, but I won't penalize you for accidentally plagiarizing in an early draft of a project that you share with me. If you submit a plagiarized assignment to one of the D2L dropboxes, you will have to redo it to get credit for the assignment. Resources on how to cite work correctly are available through the website of the [University Writing Center](#). You may read more about how to avoid plagiarism from the [Office of the University Provost](#).

Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to:

- submitting someone else's work (papers, themes, reports, drawings, laboratory notes, computer programs, etc.) as if it's your own;
- knowingly assisting another student in obtaining or using materials they attempt to pass off as their own work (this does *not* include collaborating with each other while you're working on a writing project, which I encourage you to do);
- submitting assignments previously used in other courses where you received credit for the work (in other words, you can plagiarize yourself); and
- improperly crediting or not crediting another author's work.

Ultimately, the consequences for plagiarism are my call. If you repeatedly and intentionally plagiarize assignments in this course, possible disciplinary sanctions (including expulsion from the university) may be imposed through the regular institutional procedures for addressing academic misconduct. I have the option of not giving you credit for plagiarized assignments until they're redone or of giving you an F for the course. Students guilty of plagiarism may be reported to the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs.

OTHER COURSE POLICIES

Attendance

I ask that you miss no more than four class meetings. If you miss more than four, you **must** schedule a one-on-one meeting with me to develop a plan to make sure you can keep up with the course. If you don't schedule that meeting, you won't be able to pass the course.

Masks

Tennessee's state government has made it illegal for MTSU to require masks on campus unless the governor declares a state of emergency, which is unlikely. That said, a classroom like ours is an easy place for COVID to spread, particularly without masks and particularly for people who are unvaccinated or with health issues that make the vaccine less effective. For the sake of your

health, my health, your classmates' health, and the health of at-risk people in our communities, I will be wearing a mask this semester unless COVID numbers drop significantly. I ask that you do the same, but cannot require it.

Email

If you need to get in touch with me outside of office hours, my MTMail address is the best way to do so: eric.detweiler@mtsu.edu. In most cases, I'll reply to emails I receive during the workweek within 24 hours. I don't always check my email on the weekend, so if you have an urgent question and the weekend is approaching, email me by 5 p.m. on Friday.

Per the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#), all communication related to your grade will happen inside D2L. While I do not typically use my D2L email account, if you ask me a grade-related question via MTMail, I may suggest we continue the conversation using D2L email because it provides a little more privacy. While we're on the topic of FERPA: I cannot and will not communicate with your parents, guardians, or others about your grades or how you're doing in the course. That's because of the privacy protections FERPA grants you as a college student. If there is a parent, guardian, or other person you want to grant access to your grades and other educational records, they will need to register through the [Partners in Education program](#). Once they are enrolled in that program, they can request relevant records through the MT One Stop.

MT Engage Designated Course

This is an MT Engage course. MT Engage promotes active engagement in learning and integrative thinking and reflection across educational experiences. In this MT Engage course you will participate in a beyond-the-classroom activity and submit at least one assignment to the D2L ePortfolio. You will also answer questions about your MT Engage experience in an end-of-course survey. You will receive important informational emails from the MT Engage program about ePortfolio training and how you can qualify for the MT Engage scholarship competition. For more information, go to <http://www.mtsu.edu/MTEngage>.

OTHER MTSU RESOURCES AND POLICIES

Students with Disabilities

Middle Tennessee State University is committed to campus access in accordance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Any student interested in reasonable accommodations can consult the [Disability & Access Center \(DAC\)](#) website and/or contact the DAC for assistance at 615-898-2783 or [DAC Email](#).

I know that students may encounter accessibility needs and challenges that extend beyond what is officially on file with the DAC. If I can assist with any additional accessibility issues, please don't hesitate to get in touch. I'm happy to help.

University Writing Center

The University Writing Center is a great resource for students. Its physical location is room 362 of the James E. Walker Library, and it's online at www.mtsu.edu/uwc. The UWC offers students valuable one-on-one assistance with their writing, and they offer virtual appointments. You can

make an appointment for a conference using their website or by calling (615) 904-8237. Whether you feel like you're the best or the worst writer in the class, the UWC is a wonderful resource.

Title IX

Students who believe they have been harassed, discriminated against or been the victim of sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence or stalking should contact a Title IX/Deputy Coordinator at 615-898- 2185 or 615-898-2750 for assistance or review [MTSU's Title IX website](#) for resources.

MTSU faculty are concerned about the well-being and development of our students and are legally obligated to share reports of sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence and stalking with the University's Title IX coordinator to help ensure student's safety and welfare. Please refer to [MTSU's Title IX website](#) or contact information and details.

Grade Appeals

[University Policy 313, Student Grade Appeals](#), provides an avenue for MTSU students to appeal a final course grade in cases in which the student alleges that unethical or unprofessional actions by the instructor and/or grading inequities improperly impacted the final grade.

Hope (Lottery) Scholarship Information

Do you have a lottery scholarship? To retain the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship eligibility, you must earn a cumulative TELS GPA of 2.75 after 24 and 48 attempted hours and a cumulative TELS GPA of 3.0 thereafter. A grade of C, D, F, FA, or I in this class may negatively impact TELS eligibility.

If you drop this class, withdraw, or if you stop attending this class you may lose eligibility for your lottery scholarship, and you may not be able to regain eligibility at a later time.

For additional Lottery rules, please refer to your [Lottery Statement of Understanding form](#) or contact your [MT One Stop Enrollment Counselor](#).

COURSE CALENDAR

This calendar lists the reading and writing assignments for this course. In some cases, I have also listed key topics or other important things we'll be covering that day. Reading assignments are in *italics* and writing assignments are in **bold**. If you can submit reading notes, there is an asterisk (*) by the date. Readings, reading notes, and drafts of writing assignments are due by the beginning of class (12:40 p.m.) on the day they're listed in the calendar below. With the exception of *Demagoguery and Democracy* and *Naming What We Know*, all readings can be found in the Content section of our course's D2L shell as PDFs or links.

I will do my best to keep us in line with this schedule throughout the semester. However, I may make changes as needed (in the event of things like personal health issues, natural disasters, etc.). If I do make changes to this calendar, I will announce them via a news item on our D2L homepage. If you ever see any discrepancies between this calendar and a deadline listed somewhere else in D2L, please let me know and I'll address it ASAP.

| Week 1 | |
|---------------|--|
| Aug. 22 | Syllabus/Introductions |
| Aug. 24 | Introduction to "Public," "Writing," and "Rhetoric" Read and Discuss Prompts for Reading Notes and Writing Journal <i>Reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee – <i>Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students, Chapter 1</i> |
| Week 2 | |
| Aug. 29* | Read and Discuss Prompt for Publication Venue Guide <i>Reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sarah Seeley, Kelly Xu, & Matthew Chenn Melzer – "Read the Room! Navigating Social Contexts and Written Texts" |
| Aug. 31* | Introduction to Stasis Theory <i>Reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee – <i>Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students, Chapter 3</i> |
| Week 3 | |
| Sept. 5 | LABOR DAY |
| Sept. 7* | Overview of Rhetoric and Writing Studies <i>Reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle – <i>Naming What We Know, pages 1 – 14</i> |
| Week 4 | |
| Sept. 12* | <i>Reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michael Warner – "Publics and Counterpublics" |

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| Sept. 14 | Guest Speaker: Ellen Whitfield, Publicity Director at Books Forward |
| Week 5 | |
| Sept. 19* | <i>Readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka</i> • <i>Patricia Roberts-Miller – Demagoguery and Democracy, pages 1 – 31</i> |
| Sept. 21* | <i>Readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "An Appeal for Law and Order and Common Sense" • "A Call for Unity" • <i>Martin Luther King, Jr. – "Letter from Birmingham Jail"</i> |
| Week 6 | |
| Sept. 26* | <i>Reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Danielle Allen – Talking to Strangers, Chapters 1, 4, and 10</i> |
| Sept. 28* | <i>Reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Patricia Roberts-Miller – Demagoguery and Democracy, pages 32 – 77</i> |
| Week 7 | |
| Oct. 3 | Peer Workshop 1 |
| | Publication Venue Guide – First Draft Due |
| Oct. 5* | Read and Discuss Prompt for Issue Explainer |
| | <i>Reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Promise, Episodes 2 & 3</i> |
| Week 8 | |
| Oct. 10 | FALL BREAK |
| Oct. 12 | Guest Speaker: Tristen Gaspardarek, Founder and Editor-in-Chief of Please Vote Nashville |
| | Midterm Reflection |
| Week 9 | |
| Oct. 17 | One-on-One Conferences instead of Full-Class Meeting |
| Oct. 19 | Publication Venue Guide – Revised Draft Due |
| Week 10 | |
| Oct. 24* | Read and Discuss Prompts for Scripted Presentation and Writing in Action |
| | <i>Reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Patricia Roberts-Miller – Demagoguery and Democracy, pages 78 – 129</i> |
| Oct. 26* | Guest Speaker: Chris Pilny, Manager of Internal Content and Communications at Asurion |
| Week 11 | |

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Oct. 31 | Peer Workshop 2 Issue Explainer – First Draft Due |
| Nov. 2* | <i>Reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle – Naming What We Know, pages 15 – 58</i> |
| Week 12 | |
| Nov. 7* | <i>Readings:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Gloria Anzaldúa – "How to Tame a Wild Tongue"</i> <i>Rusty Barrett – Other People's English, Chapters 1 & 2</i> |
| Nov. 9* | <i>Reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee – Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students, Chapter 5</i> |
| Week 13 | |
| Nov. 14 | Issue Explainer – Revised Draft Due |
| Nov. 16* | <i>Reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee – Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students, Chapter 8</i> |
| Week 14 | |
| Nov. 21* | Test Out D2L ePortfolio for MT Engage <i>Reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Anna M. Young – Prophets, Gurus, and Pundits, Chapters 4 & 6</i> |
| Nov. 23 | THANKSGIVING BREAK |
| Week 15 | |
| Nov. 28 | Peer Workshop 3 Writing in Action – First Draft Due |
| Nov. 30* | Reflect on Class <i>Reading:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle – Naming What We Know, pages 59 – 79</i> |
| Finals | |
| Dec. 2 – 8 | Scripted Presentations (due by/to be presented during our final exam period, 12:30 – 2:30 p.m. on Mon., Dec. 5) Writing in Action – Revised Draft Due (by 11:59 p.m. on Wed., May 7) |