

Department of English & Writing Studies

**English 2091F (001)**  
**Special Topics: The Personal Essay**  
Fall 2023

Course Description

This is a course is for students interested in the liberal arts. We will study a particular kind of writing—the personal essay—but the goal is an introduction to the humanities. The personal essay has been called the freest form in all of literature and it covers an enormous range of topics including politics, journalistic observation, intimate confessions, and meditations on life and death. Their only commonality is that they express the personal perspective of the writer. In this course, we study the history of the personal essay from the premodern to modern era, engaging with writers of diverse backgrounds and experience.

**Objectives:**

By the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

- Analyze the styles, forms, and rhetorical strategies of the personal essay
- Gain knowledge and exposure to a range of viewpoints from around the globe about human experience
- Practice critical essay writing

Course Materials

The course materials will be available in a **printed coursebook**. Purchase of the coursebook is required. This is not negotiable.

You will also need a paper notebook and pens/pencils for every class.

No laptops, phones or other devices during class. All writing assignments will be done in class.

Methods of Evaluation

The grade for the course will be arrived at as follows:

**All written work will be done in class:**

1. No grade: Diagnostic exercises: short reading comprehension, reflection, and vocabulary assessment
2. Graded: 3 quizzes (20% total) for reading comprehension and analysis. Your lowest grade of the three will be dropped in calculation of final grade.
3. Graded: 2 in-class essays (15% each; 30% total) one analysis essay and one creative essay; both will be revised in the following week's class. Only the revised assignment will be graded.
4. Graded: in-class midterm (20%) and in-class final exam (30%)

**NOTE: If you miss a class when a writing assignment is scheduled and your absence is accommodated, you will have one chance to make it up.**

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/Student%20Information.html>.

### Attendance

Attendance is mandatory in all classes and tutorials. In cases of excessive absenteeism (e.g. more than 3 classes (more than 9 unexcused hours for a half course), which are not accounted for by either academic consideration or accommodation, students may be debarred from taking the final examination, and will receive an official warning to this effect by or before the course drop date (see Senate policy).

### Intellectual Property/Copyright

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

### Additional Information

**No laptops, phones or other devices during class. All writing assignments will be done in class.**

### Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf).

The full policy is set out here:

[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf).

**Religious Accommodation:**

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

Academic Integrity Tutorial

All students are required to enroll in and complete the Centre for Teaching and Learning's Academic Integrity Tutorial. To access the tutorial, please use the link provided in the Resource tab in the course OWL site. Once the tutorial has been completed, you will receive a downloadable certificate. You must upload the certificate and submit it through the course Assignments tab in order to complete this assignment. The tutorial must be completed by Friday in the second week of term. This tutorial is mandatory in order for you to complete and pass the course. If you have completed the tutorial already for another course, you may upload the same certificate for this course; you do not need to repeat the tutorial.

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

**Plagiarism:**

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Academic Support & Engagement <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

### Timetable

Sept 13

Introduction

Diagnostic: Martin Amis, "Princess Diana: A Mirror, Not a Lamp"

Grading scale and procedures will emerge from the results of the diagnostic and class discussion

Sept 20

Yoshida Kenko, from *Essays in Idleness* (late 13<sup>th</sup> -early 14<sup>th</sup> century Japan)

Samuel Johnson, "Idleness," "Sleep," "Conversation" (18<sup>th</sup> century England)

Quiz #1

Sept 27

David Hume, "Of Money," "Of Moral Prejudices" (18<sup>th</sup> century Scotland)

Oct 4

Henry David Thoreau, "Walking" (19<sup>th</sup> century U.S.)

William Hazlitt, "On Going on a Journey" (19<sup>th</sup> century England)

In-class writing #1

Oct 11

Lu Hsun "This Too Is Life" and "Death" (late 19<sup>th</sup> -early 20<sup>th</sup> century China)

Virginia Woolf, "The Death of the Moth" (late 19<sup>th</sup> -early 20<sup>th</sup> century England)

In-class writing #1 revisions

Oct 18

Walter Benjamin, "Hashish in Marseilles" (20<sup>th</sup> century Germany)

James Baldwin, "Stranger in a Village," "Notes of a Native Son" (20<sup>th</sup> century U.S. African-American)

Quiz #2

Oct 25

George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language" (mid 20<sup>th</sup> century England and empire)

Amy Tan, "Mother Tongue" (late 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S. Chinese-American)

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, from *Decolonizing the Mind* (late 20<sup>th</sup> century Kenya)

Nov 1

Mid term

Nov 8

Jorge Luis Borges, "Everything and Nothing," "From Someone to No One," "The Aleph" (20<sup>th</sup> century Argentina)

In-class writing #2

Nov 15

Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Patriots" (late 20<sup>th</sup> century England/U.S. Ghanaian-British)

Elaine Scarry, "The Difficulty of Imagining Others" (late 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S.)

In-class writing #2 revisions

Nov 22

Class choice of readings

Nov 29

Joan Didion, "Goodbye to All That" (late 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S.)

Atul Gawande, "When Doctors Make Mistakes" (21<sup>st</sup> century U.S. Indian-American)

Quiz #3

Dec 6

Ross Gay, from *The Book of Delights* (21<sup>st</sup> century U.S. African-American)

Roxane Gay, from *Bad Feminist* (21<sup>st</sup> century U.S. African-American)

Exam Review

Final Exam: TBA Dec 10-22