

Western University, Department of Visual Arts
Writing for the Art World

VA 9586B / 9686B – Winter 2018
Tuesdays 11:30 am – 2:30 pm
John Labatt Visual Art Centre, Room 247



Jenny Holzer, *Inflammatory Essays* (detail), 1978-83, National Gallery of Canada

Professor Sarah Bassnett

Office – VAC 220

Office hours – Tuesdays 2:30 – 3:30 pm and by appointment

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Course Description:

This seminar focuses on forms of writing common in the art world. We consider evaluative, expository, and narrative writing, with specific attention to exhibition reviews and catalogue essays. Concentrating on recent exhibitions and other events in the world of visual art, we consider how to write for various kinds of publications and different audiences. Students in the course will apply techniques to improve aspects of writing such as structure, style, and narrative. Suitable for MA, MFA, and PhD students, the seminar includes group activities, discussion, and writing workshops.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- engage in writing as a process
- communicate ideas in writing at a professional level in a variety of forms
- demonstrate an awareness of the way different forms of writing address their audiences
- conduct research using the library catalogue and databases, and use sources effectively
- lead and participate constructively in group discussions and activities by sharing ideas and by listening respectfully to the views of others
- respond with consideration to the work of peers during class discussions and workshops

ASSIGNMENTS

Participation – 10%

The participation portion of your grade will be based on your commitment to the course, which includes attendance, preparedness, your contribution to class discussions, and your in-class writing exercises. The seminar format is dependent upon participation from all students, and at the graduate level, significant participation is expected in each class.

Workshop preparation & feedback – 20%

The workshops are a very important part of this course, and in order to receive feedback, you need to circulate a draft of your writing before the workshop. Also, in order to offer constructive feedback to peers, you need to be present and prepared (having read the workshop submissions). When we workshop writing, each person will have a few minutes to offer feedback to the author. You should also come prepared with a written blurb summarizing your comments, which you will hand to the author after the discussion of their writing. We will review how to offer constructive feedback early in the course.

Exhibition review – 20% (drafts due Feb 6 and 13. Final version due Feb 27)

For this assignment, you will write a 1000-word review of a recent exhibition. The review should be written in the style and format of a major art publication (such as *Art Forum*, *Art in America*, *Frieze*, *Canadian Art*, etc.) We will visit exhibitions at McIntosh Gallery together, and you may review one or both of these shows. Alternatively, you may choose to review another exhibition, but it must be one that you have seen in person recently. Reviews will be workshopped in Feb.

Discussion moderator – 10% (March 6 and 13)

Select a catalogue essay that relates to and offers a model for the essay you plan to write. Scan and upload the essay to OWL by February 28. You will be responsible for moderating the class discussion on the essay on in March. At that time, you should also outline your plans for your own essay.

Catalogue essay – 40% (drafts due March 27 and April 10. Final version due April 13)

This assignment is a 2000-word essay suitable for an exhibition catalogue. It should focus on a body of work by one artist, but it does not have to relate to an actual exhibition. A first draft of your essay will be workshopped during the last two classes of the term.

GRADING

Participation	10%	Weekly
Workshop preparation / feedback	20%	Workshop dates
Exhibition Review	20%	Workshop: Feb. 6 & 13. Due Feb. 27
Discussion Moderator	10%	March 6 & 13
Catalogue Essay	40%	Workshop: Mar. 27 & Apr. 10. Due April 13

Late Policies

Extensions will be granted in exceptional circumstances and typically only in cases of illness, bereavement or for other compassionate reasons. They should be negotiated before assignments are due. Late assignments not accompanied by official documentation will receive a penalty of 5% per day. If you suspect that you will be unable to meet a deadline, please talk to me before the deadline to discuss an extension.

Submission Policies

All assignments should be submitted through the assignments link on OWL by 11 am on the day they are due.

Accommodations:

Please talk to me during the first few weeks of the course if you require accommodation in course requirements or scheduling due to a disability. Students who want to request academic accommodation must register with the Centre, meet with a counselor, and provide appropriate documentation of a disability. For more information, see the Student Development Centre web site: <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/paths.html?students>.

Academic Honesty:

All work for the course **MUST** be entirely your own. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

All sources that you use for your assignments must be accurately cited using the Chicago Manual of Style, humanities format. If you have doubts about how and when to cite sources, consult the guide on Sakai in the Resources section, visit the Writing Centre, or talk to me well before the assignment due dates. All course work must be completed specifically for this course. Submitting the same work for credit in more than one course is considered cheating. Plagiarism and cheating are the most serious of academic offences and they will be dealt with strictly. Plagiarism includes:

1. Quoting verbatim or almost verbatim from any source, including all electronic sources, without acknowledgement;
2. Adopting someone else's line of thought, argument, or supporting evidence without acknowledgement;
3. Submitting someone else's work, in any form, without acknowledgement;
4. Knowingly representing as one's own an idea of another.

For information concerning Western's Plagiarism and Academic Offences (Scholastic Offences)

policies see: http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2013/print_pg113.html

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

The last day to drop this course without academic penalty is **March 7, 2018**.

Citation Style

The Chicago Manual of Style, Humanities format, is the standard style for art history. Use this style to cite your sources for your research paper and other assignments. Please refer to the guide in OWL and the Library website for examples: <http://www.lib.uwo.ca/services/styleguides.html>.

POLICIES & CONDUCT

Attendance

You are expected to attend and participate in every class. In particular, it is essential that you come prepared to discuss the readings. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed from a class mate.

Academic accommodation

Please talk to me during the first few weeks of the course if you require accommodation in course requirements or scheduling due to a disability. Students who want to request academic accommodation on these grounds must provide appropriate documentation.

Electronic devices:

Computers should only be used to for work related to the course. You will be asked to put your computer away if it becomes a source of distraction for you and others. Please ensure cell phones are off, and please do not check email, social networking sites, or engage in other distractions during the seminar.

Code of conduct:

Students will conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the Code of Student Conduct and treat all members of the Western community with respect. See <http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2017/pg111.html>. I will make every effort to foster a class environment that is comfortable for all students. We do not always have to agree with one another, however, it is important that we respect each other's viewpoints. Behaviour that is disruptive or discriminatory will not be tolerated.

Absences on Religious Holy Days: For purposes of this policy "the University has approved a list of dates which are recognized religious holidays which require members of those religions to be absent from the University; this list is updated annually and is available at departmental, Deans' and Faculty advising Offices." For Western's Policy on Religious Holidays see <http://westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2017/pg111.html>.

RESOURCES

Readings:

The readings for the course are available in pdf format on OWL under "Resources," and Gilda Williams's *How to Write About Contemporary Art* is available at the Bookstore.

Office Hours/ Email

Please feel free to drop in during my office hours to discuss any aspect of the course or other academic matters. If you would like to talk to me and cannot make it to my office hours, please ask for an appointment or contact me by email. During term, I will generally answer emails within 48 hours or less.

OWL

I will post the syllabus, readings, assignment sheets, and a range of other resources on OWL. Go to <http://webct.uwo.ca/> and use your Western user name and password to sign on. Please be sure to check your browser and make sure everything is working at the beginning of the course. See the ITS technical assistance info on the above-mentioned web site, and contact ITS for additional technical assistance. The ITS Support number is (519) 661-3800.

Writing Centre WSSB 4100

The Writing Centre is part of the Effective Writing Program at Western and is open to all registered students. It offers instruction on all aspects of writing and is not merely for undergraduate students or those who have difficulty with writing. Most effective are tutoring sessions, where you can work with a tutor individually. See <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing/> for details.

Health and Wellness

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western's Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. Please check out the Faculty of Music web page <http://www.music.uwo.ca/>, and McIntosh Gallery <http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>. Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at <http://www.health.uwo.ca/>

Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html

To help you learn more about mental health, Western has developed an interactive mental health learning module, found here: http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/module.html. This module is 30 minutes in length and provides participants with a basic understanding of mental health issues and of available campus and community resources. Topics include stress, anxiety, depression, suicide and eating disorders. After successful completion of the module, participants receive a certificate confirming their participation.

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

**University of Western Ontario
Department of Visual Arts
GRADUATE GRADING STANDARDS**

90 – 100 Work of **excellent** quality

(PhD / MA) Approaching if not already at professional standards.

Thoroughly and creatively engaged at high level of research, possibly with primary sources; very high standards in writing and evidence of sophistication in all aspects of the work

(PhD studio / MFA) Approaching if not already at professional standards.

Thoroughly and creatively engaged at a high level of artistic and/or written production; very high standards and sophistication evidenced in all areas of production

86 – 89 Work of **very good** quality

(PhD / MA) Demonstrably better than expected with respect to research effort, mastery of critical and analytical tools, and involves polished presentation style

(PhD studio / MFA) Demonstrably evolved beyond expected standards of critical, theoretical and creative engagement in artistic and/or written production

80 – 85 Work of **good** quality

(PhD / MA) Shows competence in research and writing but could be improved in one or more ways

(PhD studio / MFA) Shows competence in artistic and/or written production but could be improved in one or more ways

78 – 79 Work of **acceptable** quality

(PhD / MA) Needs substantial improvement in one or more areas

(PhD studio / MFA) Needs substantial improvement in one or more areas

70 – 77 Work of **passable** quality (a warning regarding removal of funding)

(PhD / MA) Shows sufficient ability and effort to allow the student to pass the course, but is seriously deficient with respect to research approach, or critical or analytical skills, or writing ability

(PhD studio / MFA) Shows sufficient ability and effort to allow the student to pass the course, but is seriously deficient with respect to critical, theoretical or practical engagement in artistic and/or written production

– 69 Work of **unacceptable** quality

(PhD/MA/MFA) Removal from program