

# Writing 210

## Academic Research & Writing

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Why don't scientists write poems about their research findings? Why don't historians write songs about theirs? These questions may seem ridiculous, but the reasons for which scientists and historians (and indeed, any researcher) employ particular genres and write in particular ways tell us much about what a discipline values. By studying the texts of a given discipline of field, we can learn about what sorts of questions it deems legitimate, how its practitioners seek answers, what "counts" as evidence, how that evidence is connected to prior knowledge, what assumptions writers make about their audiences, and how their findings are communicated.

This course will engage these and other questions around the broad topic of *sustainability*. This topic is timely, important, and ubiquitous, which makes a rich target for explorations into the rhetorical and genre-related features that characterize writing across disciplinary and professional boundaries.

We begin the semester by reading widely and deeply about sustainability and thinking about how the concept is presented across a range of genres, disciplines, texts, and media. We will write several short papers and other responses/reflections before turning to the major project of this course, which is a research project that you will present in two forms: as a researched essay and as a group presentation about the way your discipline(s) or field(s) take up your topic.

### Learning Outcomes

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

- 1.) Recognize and articulate the research and writing conventions of their chosen academic field(s);
- 2.) Compose in field-specific genres;
- 3.) Synthesize material from a range of sources;
- 4.) Situate their own arguments within existing academic or professional conversations;
- 5.) Articulate how and why certain genres or conventions shape epistemic and research practices in their field(s).

### *What That Means:*

As you know – or will soon discover – writing and research practices differ across the academy. A literature analysis is not a lab report, and a lab report is not a regression analysis. The kinds of evidence that a literature scholar would draw upon – such as direct quotes from a primary text

or literary theory – would not be considered valid evidence in a science report. Similarly, the kinds of hard data that scientists rely on would not necessarily be acceptable as evidence in a philosophy argument. The readings in this course, both those that I have selected and those that you will choose, are designed to help illuminate the different *epistemic* (knowledge-making) practices across academic disciplines. We will analyze how genre-related and rhetorical features reveal kinds of evidence a field accepts, what kinds of argumentation practitioners tend to use, and what sorts of assumptions practitioners tend to make about their audiences.

Your major project for the course will be a literature review and analysis of the research undertaken by practitioners in your field/major (or one that interests you). While you will not actually conduct your own original research (the constraints of this class prevent us from doing so), the research you conduct and analyses you perform will help you see how and why people in your field/major communicate the way they do.

Because this is an interdisciplinary class, and because the projects you undertake will also, in all likelihood, be interdisciplinary, you will practice drawing from and synthesizing (putting together) sources from academic journals, books, popular sources, Internet resources, and others. Academic writing is often described as a conversation, and part of your job will be to put different sources in conversation with one another, perhaps in unexpected ways.

Similarly, your own ideas, argument, and claims will need to be situated within an existing conversation. New knowledge only comes about because we all share and build upon existing knowledge. While there are new ideas in the world, they are almost never *ex nihilo*, but rather extensions of prior study and experimentation. As a writer, you are responsible for learning what others have said about your topic and showing how your contributions extend, complicate, refine, interrogate, refute, or confirm what others have said.

Finally, it is important to recognize that disciplines and professions have chosen their privileged genres because they perform certain kinds of rhetorical work. In other words, there are valid reasons that companies don't send poems to their shareholders instead of quarterly earnings reports. Yet genres are never exhaustive; they never allow a writer to say everything that could be said about a topic. We will discuss how genres both *enable* and *constrain* the writers who employ them.

### **Required Materials (all are available in bookstore)**

Coursepack for WRI 210

Booth, Colomb, & Williams. *The Craft of Research*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition

Cronon. *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*

### **Course Policies**

The “rules” governing this class are the same “rules” that govern civil discourse anywhere. As this is a seminar, your active participation is crucial. Participating means coming to class on time, every day, having completed the assigned reading and/or writing tasks, and being prepared to engage the material. You are welcome to disagree with one another and with me; however, I ask that you do so respectfully. Participating also means refraining from distracting

behaviors, such as falling asleep in class or using any electronic devices (cell phones, computers, Kindles, etc.) without instructor permission.

### **Late Work**

Except in cases of severe medical or other emergency, late work will not be accepted unless you have made advance (i.e., >24 hours before a due date) arrangements. Remember that long lines at the printer or technology glitches do NOT constitute excuses for late work. All late work is subject to grade penalties at the rate of 10% per day.

### **Attendance**

I expect you to attend every class unless you are ill or must miss class for a University-sponsored event, such as Varsity athletics. All students may miss 3 class sessions without penalty; subsequent absences will result in deductions from your final grade (1/3 letter grade per absence), unless there are medical or other extenuating circumstances. Missing 5 or more class sessions is grounds for failure.

### **Technology**

We will use our laptops for workshops and other activities. Please ensure that your laptop is in working order, with a charged battery and/or power cord, on the days that we use computers in class. Be sure to back up your work on an external drive or online in case of computer crashes.

I will almost always ask you to submit your work on Sakai. Make a habit of **double checking** to ensure that your paper has uploaded. It is YOUR responsibility to make sure your work is submitted on time. I do not accept papers submitted via email.

### **Grades**

Because grades cause so much anxiety and because they distract us from the real work of composition, this course employs a method known as contract/portfolio grading. This method allows you to cultivate the *practices* and *habits* that make for effective research and writing without focusing overmuch on the final product.

Each of you will sign a contract guaranteeing you a particular grade provided you meet all the stipulations of the contract. During the semester, I will give you regular written and verbal feedback on your written work and classroom performances but not grades. Unless you violate the terms of the contract, you can assume your grade is the contracted one.

At the end of the term, you will submit a research and writing portfolio. You can potentially earn a *higher* grade than your contracted one with an especially strong portfolio. Similarly, a weak portfolio can result in your not fulfilling the terms of your contract and earning a *lower* grade than that for which you contracted.

### **Assignments**

As this is a course in academic research and writing, the major project is a literature review and analysis of (you guessed it) academic research and writing. We'll also write several shorter

papers and a lot of reflective and other low-stakes writing. We will do some non-written projects, too, but you should expect to write *something* nearly every day for this course.

We will discuss portfolio requirements in greater detail at the end of the term, but there will certainly include revised versions of some of your smaller writing projects and of course your major project.

### **Special Accommodations**

If you have a documented learning difficulty or believe you qualify for special accommodations (such as extra time to complete tests, etc.), please speak to me as soon as possible so we can develop a plan to ensure your successful completion of the course. Contact the [Learning Assistance Center](#) if you aren't sure whether your issue qualifies you for special accommodations.

### **Resources**

There are many resources available to help you here at Wake Forest. Please avail yourself of the [Writing Center](#), where you can make appointments with tutors who will help you think through your writing assignments. You can also seek help through the [Learning Assistance Center](#). Keep in close contact with your adviser; he/she can also connect you to people and offices who can help.

### **Calendar (subject to change)**

CP=CoursePack

CR=*The Craft of Research*

UG=*Uncommon Ground*

GD=Google Drive (PDFs or links to readings)

**August 27** Welcome, Introductions, Ecological Footprints

**August 29** Reading: "What is Sustainability?" (CP) and Chapter 1, Introduction to Sustainability: Humanity and the Environment (CP)

DUE: Response to "What is Sustainability?"

**September 3** Reading: "Beyond Sustainability" (CP) and Chapter 10, Sustainability: Ethics, Culture, History"

DUE: Response to "Beyond Sustainability"

**September 5** Reading: Chapter 6, "Engaging Sources" (CR)

DUE: Freewriting/Brainstorming for Short Paper #1

**September 10** Draft Workshop: Short Paper #1

**Challenges and Realities of Feeding the World**

**Panel: Make Every Bite Count**  
**7-8:30 p.m.; Brendle Recital Hall (REQUIRED)**

**September 12** Discussion: Make Every Bite Count

Research Project Introduction

DUE: Short Paper #1

**September 17** Complicating Matters: the Four Pillars of Sustainability

Reading: Goodland, "Sustainability: Human, Social, Environmental, and Economic" (GD)

**September 19** Environmental Sustainability

Reading: *Earth in the Balance* Introduction (Google Drive); excerpt from *Sand County Almanac* (GD)

**September 24** Economic Sustainability

Reading: "RX: How We Get Out of This Mess" (GD), "Designing a New Materials Economy" (GD) and "Looking for Nature at the Mall" (UG)

**September 26** Human & Social Sustainability

Video: "Country Boys" (excerpt from PBS Frontline documentary)

Reading: "Nature as Community" (UG) and "Why Poverty Persists in America" (GD)

**October 1** Wrap-up/catch-up discussion on the four pillars of sustainability

Draft Workshop: Short Paper #2

**October 3** Reading: "In Search of Nature" (UG) and Chapter 1 (CR)

Field-specific Research

DUE: Short Paper #2

*October 7* **Challenges and Realities of Feeding the World: GMO OMG**  
**7-9 p.m.; Brendle Recital Hall (OPTIONAL)**

**October 8** Reading: "On the Search for Root Causes: Essentialist Tendencies in Environmental Discourses" (UG) and "Simulated Nature and Natural Simulations" (UG)

DUE: Response to one of the readings

**October 10** Panel: rhetoric(s) of discipline group(s)

**October 15** Panel: rhetoric(s) of discipline group(s)

- October 17** No Class; Fall Break
- October 22** No class; conference with instructor 10/21)
- October 24** Reading: "Genre as Social Action" (CP)  
Discussion on Disciplinarity and What Genres Do
- October 29** Reading: Chapters 3 & 4 (CR)  
Developing research questions and problems
- October 31** Reading: Chapter 5 (CR) and review Chapter 6 (CR)  
DUE: revised research question
- November 4** **Vandana Shiva, "Challenges and Realities of Feeding the World 7-9 p.m.; Wait Chapel (optional, but HIGHLY recommended)**
- November 5** Summary and Analysis & Making Arguments  
Reading: Chapters 7 & 8 (CR)  
DUE: working bibliography (15+ sources)
- November 7** Synthesis of Sources  
Reading: Chapters 9-11 (CR)  
DUE: Outline of Lit Review
- November 12** Drafting/Writing/Discussion Day  
Reading: Chapters 12 & 13 (CR)  
DUE: Working Draft of Lit Review
- November 14** Draft Workshop: Lit Review
- November 19** Rhetorical and Genre-based Analyses  
Reading:  
DUE: Revised Lit Review (read Chapter 14 in CR as you revise)
- November 21** Draft Workshop: Analysis Essay
- November 26 & 28** **Thanksgiving Break (no class)**
- December 3** Final Presentations
- December 5** Final Presentations; Conclusions & Farewells

*Portfolios are due by Friday, December 12 at 5 p.m. I will be available during the week of December 8 to meet with you.*

