

Academic Writing in REL
REL 504—Spring 2020
Monday 1:30-3:20, Manly 210

Professor: K. Merinda Simmons
Email: merinda.simmons@ua.edu

Office: Manly 300 (348-9911)
Office Hours: Monday 12:30-1:30 and by appt.

REL Main Office: Manly 212 (348-5271)

Our errors are surely not such awfully solemn things. In a world where we are so certain to incur them in spite of all our caution, a certain lightness of heart seems healthier than this excessive nervousness on their behalf.

—William James, "The Will to Believe"

Course Overview/Description:

The purpose of this required seminar, is to shape a piece of each student's critical writing into publishable form. Offered each Spring for MA students in their second year, the course is an opportunity for students to seek input from the Graduate Director and their peers prior to their thesis defense. To this end the class will be run as a workshop, with the students' own writing as our primary material. On days when we focus on a single student's essay, another class member will be assigned to present that essay to the class, by identifying its thesis, describing its situation in a larger critical field, and outlining its argument. At other times students will be asked to bring in pieces of their essays for more intense focus. At the end of the class each student will submit his or her essay to a refereed journal.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Students in REL 504 will:

- 1) Gain experience with the academic publishing process
- 2) Learn and apply academic editing skills
- 3) Demonstrate knowledge of and include the critical components of an academic essay
- 4) Identify relevant/appropriate refereed journals for essay submission
- 5) Identify elements of successful and unsuccessful introductions, thesis statements, field situations, and conclusions

Texts/Web Resources:

UA Box: All course readings (including drafts of your own work) will be in a shared Box folder.

Statement on Academic Misconduct:

Academic misconduct is a serious offense and is taken very seriously at UA and in the

class. Suspected cases of plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic misconduct will be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. You are bound by UA's Honor Code in this class.

Consultations/Safe Zone:

All students are encouraged to come by during my office hours, set up an appointment, and/or contact me by phone or email for assistance or with any questions. Please speak with me well in advance if you are having difficulties satisfactorily completing the course's requirements on time or if you anticipate routine absences. Although I cannot guarantee that accommodations can be made, speaking with me before a problem arises will greatly enhance my ability to address the situation in a way that is both fair to your classmates and beneficial to you. Keep in mind that I have set aside my office hour specifically for meeting with students, so feel free to show up during that time or make an appointment via email for a different time slot. Also, please note that I am a Safe Zone Ally, one of many resource people on campus who provide an open door for individuals seeking information or assistance regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, harassment, and/or discrimination. Feel free to talk to me any time if you or someone you know has questions or concerns.

- The University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility. The UAct website (www.ua.edu/uact) provides a list of reporting channels that can be used to report incidences of illegal discrimination, harassment, sexual assault, sexual violence, retaliation, threat assessment or fraud.

Classroom Environment:

In this small group setting, students are responsible for contributing to both their own learning experiences and the learning experiences of others. Because the contribution of ideas from each student is critical to the learning process, any behavior that creates an uncomfortable learning environment will not be tolerated. This includes interrupting others while they are talking, carrying on conversations separate from the class discussion, or making comments that could be perceived as offensive in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, nationality, disability, etc. Please make every effort to maintain an atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable sharing and responding to ideas.

Disability Accommodation:

If you are registered with the Office of Disability Services, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss any course accommodations that may be necessary. If you have a disability, but have not contacted the Office of Disability Services, please call 348-4285 or visit Houser Hall, Suite 1000, to register for services.

UA Severe Weather Protocol:

UA's primary communication tool for sending out information is through its web site at www.ua.edu. In the event of an emergency, students should consult this site for further directions. In the event of an emergency, I will provide additional course information via email. If you have not done so already, please set up your weather advisory through Connect-ED--

faculty, staff and students (sign up on myBama). Alternatively, you can listen to weather advisory broadcasts over WVUA 90.7 FM, Alabama Public Radio 91.5 FM or use WVUA 7 Storm Watch, which provides a free service you can subscribe to that allows you to receive weather warnings for Tuscaloosa via e-mail, pager or cell phone.

Requirements and Course Policies:

- **Attendance and Participation:** Each student is expected to attend every class meeting, to be on time, to have read completely and with care all assignments, and to engage actively and intelligently in our discussions. After one absence, the student's final grade will be reduced by one letter for each additional absence. In other words, if your grade average was A at the end of the semester but you had three absences, your final grade for the course would be C. If the absences are beyond your control due to health or family reasons, let me know as soon as possible. You remain responsible for anything that you miss in class, including announcements. Your positive participation in the class is also vital. I expect everyone to do the readings and to speak up during classes. Be prepared to ask questions about the readings and class material and/or contribute your own ideas. Occasionally, you will be asked to locate and bring in an example of a writing element (thesis, field situation, etc.) that you think is particularly effective.
- **Peer Essay Presentation:** Each student will be responsible for a close reading of a peer's draft and presenting its arc and elements in class. This will happen a couple of times through the semester.
- **Book Notes:** Everyone will be required to write two book notes (~200-400 words) for *Religious Studies Review*. We will discuss guidelines in class.
- **Final Essay:** Each student will demonstrate effective graduate-level writing and argumentation in the final term paper. The writing process (of drafting/revising) will be evident in the work.
- **Submission to Academic Journal:** At the end of the semester, students will submit their final essay drafts for peer review at an academic journal. We will discuss strategies for locating/selecting a relevant journal.

Grading:

This course has a total of 1000 possible points, broken down as follows:

Attendance and Participation	100 points (10%)
• Locating/bringing outside material to workshop	
Presentation of peer essay	100 points (10%)
Book Notes	200 points (20%)
Final essay	500 points (50%)
• Thesis	
• Introduction	
• Field Situation	
• Body	
• Conclusion	
Submission to academic journal	100 points (10%)

All academic work must be the product of the student submitting it. Plagiarizing the work of someone else (quoting or summarizing another person's ideas or intellectual labor without giving them credit through proper quotations, citations, and acknowledgment) is a serious offence. Cases of plagiarism will be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Calendar

January

- 13 Introduction to writing/revising process and elements of academic essay
*Discuss overview of needs/questions/directions for individual papers
*Finalize scheduling
*Distribute books for RSR notes
- 20 **MLK, Jr. Day, no class**
- 27 **Presentations** (make outline based on paper and write observations/suggestions):
*Ana presents Morgan; Morgan presents Jeremee; Jeremee presents Ana
****book note 1 due!**

February

- 3 **Presentations** (make outline based on paper and write observations/suggestions):
*Allison presents Savannah; Savannah presents Jack; Jack presents Allison
- 10 **Thesis statements:** all
*Bring in your own thesis draft and example from a journal article
[introduce elements of field situation]
****book note 2 due!**
- 17 **Field Situations/Review of the Literature:** Ana, Morgan, Jeremee
*Bring in your working draft of field situation and annotated bibliography, as well as one FS from journal article
*Bring in annotated list of 5 journals for possible submission (give overview, editorial board, and submission guidelines, and address, if relevant)
[Discuss elements of submission process]
- 24 **Field Situations, cont'd:** Allison, Jack, Savannah
[introduce elements of Introduction]

March

- 2 **Introductions:** Ana, Morgan, Jeremee

*Bring in your own, plus one from journal
[introduce elements of Conclusion]

9 **Introductions, cont'd:** Allison, Jack, Savannah

16 **Spring Break, no class**

23 **Theses, part 2: all**

30 **Conclusions:** Ana, Morgan, Jeremie
*Bring in your own, plus one from journal
—*Aronov lecture*

April

6 **Conclusions, cont'd:** Allison, Jack, Savannah

13 **Presentations:** Jack presents Savannah, Savannah presents Ana, Ana presents Allison,

20 **Presentations and submit!** Allison presents Morgan, Morgan presents Jeremie,
Jeremie presents Jack

*Bring in ready-to-go manuscript, cover letter, and either **a)** a laptop or **b)** an
addressed, stamped envelope (depending on journal submission requirements).

**We will submit articles to journals in class (or, if journal requires hardcopy, KMS
will collect and drop them in the mailbox)*