SYLLABUS
WRIT 100: “OUT OF YOUR MIND,” SALERNO, SPRING 2005

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QUICK COURSE DESCRIPTION
This class helps students develop their writing, communication, and debating skills by exposing them to one of the most satisfying forms of written expression. The coursework focuses on reading, writing, and discussing short opinion pieces, longer essays, and personal-experience articles. Among other things, students learn to (1) get their thoughts and feelings on paper in a more structured format than they might use in journal or diary writing; (2) relate their own unique experiences to the "big picture"; (3) heighten the impact of their thoughts through the use of literary devices; and (4) the rudiments of efficient research and proper sourcing. The course also features a mini-unit called "being serious about humor," which equips students to use one of the most important tools in the persuasive writer's tool box. Finally, this class includes diagnostic techniques for self-assessment—discovering your passions, translating them into story ideas, and beginning to develop a distinctive writing voice.

I've titled the course "Out of Your Mind" because that's what you're literally putting to paper—ideas that originate with you, and your own singular perspective on life.

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WELCOME to one of life's most exciting, depressing, rewarding, frustrating, ego-boosting, ego-wrecking undertakings: the attempt to write something that (1) talks about you and your ideas in a way that actually holds the interest of another human being besides your mother, and (2) motivates that other human being to think differently about the world—and perhaps even take some action based on that new way of thinking.

Though we'll focus primarily on short, first-person nonfiction, you can also expect this class to give you some sense of the requirements and goals of nonfiction writing in general. These distinctions will become clear as the class moves along.

The material I plan to teach is rooted in the lessons of my own experience in the writing business—the good, the bad, and the ugly. Since 1981 I've been contributing personal essays, opinion pieces, and more journalistic writing to such diverse publications as Esquire, Good Housekeeping, Harper's, The New York Times Magazine, Reader's Digest, Sports Illustrated, and many others. I've also held high-level editorial jobs at several major publications, most recently Men's Health. I've seen all forms of nonfiction from all sides of the editor's desk.

SPECIAL NOTE for those who've ever thought, "Gee, maybe I'd like to write someday": While this class is not vocational in nature, I've included material that should improve your odds of making the cut in one of the most competitive realms known to humankind. I am willing to make this
BASIC COURSE OVERVIEW

In this class you will write, revise, polish (and possibly submit for publication):

1. An opinion piece of standard op-ed length (600-800 words). An op-ed is a short essay that runs in the editorial or opinion section of a daily newspaper like the Morning Call. Many magazines also run short essays that are much like op-eds.

2. A personal-experience piece (or memoir) of medium length (1500-2000 words). These are the "my true story"-type articles that you'll find, characteristically, in many women's magazines, some men's magazines, general-interest publications like Reader's Digest, and elsewhere.

3. A humorous essay—that is, an op-ed-like piece that makes its basic point through satire, parody, or some other form of humor (750-1250 words).

4. A longer, research-based essay (2000-2500 words). This will be an expanded version of the op-ed noted in No. 1 above, incorporating a much greater degree of independent substantiation via statistics, surveys, quotes, anecdotes, and other back-up. In effect, you'll be using your op-ed as the launching point for a more comprehensive, journalistic piece of writing. We'll discuss this at length, and you will be given prepared materials that both guide you in this endeavor, and also establish basic research/writing procedures that should help you in the remainder of your Moravian career.

You will also do shorter exercises or mini-essays in which you practice the writing elements taught and discussed in class. And, you will critique each other's work in writing (sometimes in class, sometimes as homework). All of these works should be kept in a portfolio that you'll turn in at semester's end. Again, we'll discuss the format and requirements of these portfolios as the semester progresses.

Bear in mind that your critiques of your classmates' work are expected to be more than just off-the-cuff, two- or three-sentence summaries. Indeed, in some cases these critiques may be as long as the pieces they're critiquing.

The grade you receive for the quality of these critiques will have a significant impact on your final grade for the class.

THE TWO BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF ESSAY WRITING (and thus, this course):

One. Your piece must have a point of view. In other words, it's not just a bland recitation of facts, but rather an attempt to sell a given idea or agenda; editors sometimes call this idea or agenda the "take-away." An essay without a pointed take-away is like an ice-cream cone without the ice cream.

Two. “The writing matters.” You'll hear me say this till you're sick of hearing it. It means that, though your primary job is to sell that idea, the language you use should have a certain elegance of phrasing and presentation that goes beyond what you'd say in an email to a friend or what you'd write in a journal or diary.

SPECIFIC ELEMENTS OF THIS COURSE

You'll attempt the various forms of first-person writing, as outlined above.

You'll experiment with a variety of writing-process methods, to see which is the best fit for you.

You'll practice some of the techniques of literary journalism as they apply to nonfiction
essay/memoir writing.
You'll critique each other's work, relying on your gut-level intuitions as well as what you've learned about writing. Through this process,
You'll work at taking direction from an "editor" (me, or each other in groups) and rewriting to an editor's specifications. That editor might be me, or it might be a fellow student.
You'll begin to discover your strengths and weaknesses as a writer—and maybe even as a person.
You'll find topics to which you can bring the force of personal conviction.

GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, ETC.
Strictly speaking, this will not be a course in basic grammar and punctuation, which you were supposed to have mastered in high school; I hope that doesn't come as too much of a shock. However, we will spend a reasonable amount of class time on some of the flaws in grammar and usage that can make writing sound weak and amateurish, and we will work out of the Bedford Handbook, which is your only required text for this course (though I will recommend others to those who express interest in writing, or show special aptitude for it).

MISSED OR LATE ASSIGNMENTS
Aside from being helpful to your professor's sanity and ability to work in an orderly fashion, your ability to meet deadlines is the lifeblood of writing at all levels. If you hand in an assignment late and you don't have an absolute killer of an excuse, the best grade you can hope to receive on that assignment is a C. (Here's a sample killer excuse: You disappear in a flash of light and I hear on CNN that you were later found floating incoherently in the Bermuda Triangle.) If this becomes a pattern, you will receive Fs. NOTE: The responsibility for staying current with all coursework rests with you, not me. Upon your return after an excused absence, you should get class notes from another student and determine what assignments you need to make up. If you don't promptly approach me about making up an assignment, I'll assume you have no interest in doing so, and I'll grade accordingly.

MY GRADING FORMULA
Your final grade will be an arithmetic average of the marks you receive for the various classroom exercises, take-home projects, and assigned essays, plus my perception of your understanding of the material, as demonstrated in class.
Assuming a normal level of attendance (see below), your final grade will break down as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Pieces &amp; Critiques</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation and related issues</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There will be no final exam, per se.

GOOD WRITING = GOOD THINKING
Here's something else you'll hear me say often enough to make you want to kick things: Good writing = good thinking. Even if you're the kind of student who's always been praised for his or her ability to "write beautifully," don't expect to get by in this class on flash alone. There has to be some
GOOD WRITING = REWRITING

I will accept rewrites throughout the course of the semester. Because successful writing is so much about revision, the grade you receive on a given essay will be weighted heavily toward the grade you receive on the final rewrite. This gives you every possible opportunity to earn an excellent grade for the course. (This also means that the grade you receive on any essay is not "final" until portfolios are handed in for end-semester evaluation.) I reserve a great deal of leeway for myself in making these grading determinations.

You are not required to continue rewriting your pieces beyond the second finished draft. If, for example, you receive a C on the first draft, then a B on the second draft, and you're happy with that, so be it. However, such complacency does not speak too highly of your dedication to the craft or the course. Thus, I also reserve the right to factor that complacency into the grade I give you for "participation and related issues"—which, I remind you, counts 25% toward your overall grade.

NOTE: The foregoing does not apply to critiques. The grade you receive for any given critique of your fellow students' work is final at the time you receive it.

MY WORK ON YOUR WORK

Please don't expect an overnight turnaround on work you hand in. I take my time and try to provide thorough, thoughtful guidance. Also, I would encourage you to think of me as your editor, more than your teacher. It's not an editor's job to fix your work. I prefer to ask questions and raise issues that should enable you to make appropriate changes on your own.

ATTENDANCE

The coursework for this class is rooted largely in my own experience, including my collaborative work with, and for, many of the top names in the writing business. Further, much of what you learn will be a byproduct of the give-and-take that occurs in the classroom. Realize that (a) this specific curriculum is not easy for you to obtain elsewhere, (b) it's hard for me to get a productive give-and-take going if we're always missing students, and (c) there's no way to recreate the ebb and flow of what took place in class on the day you were absent. For those and other reasons, you must attend class.

And you must attend punctually. Lateness not only disrupts the class but shows disrespect for me and your fellow students. If there's some special reason why it's a hardship for you to be on time, let me know ASAP. Otherwise, late students may be barred from class and penalized as though absent.

This would be a really good place for me to mention that poor attendance and/or punctuality in and of themselves may get you an F in the class, regardless of the quality of your work when you're actually here.

PARTICIPATION

I expect it. Please understand that mere attendance is not the same as participation. Participation means adding your voice to class discussion and workshop sessions. Because participation counts 25% toward your final grade, truly poor participation can have a disastrous effect on an otherwise successful semester. Please see me SOON if you're pathologically shy about speaking in class. You
will not get yourself off the hook by visiting my office the last week of the semester to say, "I'm sorry I didn't speak up more, but, see, I've just always been a really quiet person…"

**TYPED WORK**

*All handed-in work must be typed.* No exceptions unless I give you specific permission on that individual assignment. Also, I assume no responsibility whatsoever for manuscripts submitted to me via email, and I strongly discourage the practice, except when I have instructed you to submit by that means.

**CENSORSHIP**

As a rule, I'm not a fan of it. I like to approach writing as a "political-correctness-free zone," meaning that no subject or personal belief is automatically off-limits. From my personal perspective, there are no taboos in what you write. (NOTE: This does NOT mean you can do anything you please in class or act abusively toward your fellow students and *their* ideas. I'll be giving examples that make this distinction clear.) If you have specific sensitivities that are based on religious beliefs or tragic personal experiences, *please see me ASAP.* Otherwise I'll assume that we can all tolerate the written views of our classmates, no matter their eccentricity, unpopularity, or outrageousness.

**A FEW WORDS ON PLAGIARISM AND THE ETHICS OF WRITING**

I expect you to conduct yourself with integrity in my class. Typical breaches of writing ethics include fabrications (such as making up sources, events, quotes, etc.); “lifting” material from other sources, like the Internet, without proper attribution (see notes on plagiarism, below); and creating so-called composite characters that you do not identify as such. You create a composite character when you combine the attributes or actions of several people into one fictitious person for the purpose of using that person as a convenient symbol of a trend or phenomenon you're describing.

In a broad sense, plagiarism is the practice of passing off somebody else's ideas, words, writings, or experiences as your own. More specifically, it can be defined as copying from a book, article, notebook, online citation, or other source material—published or unpublished—with or without giving proper credit through the use of quotation marks, footnotes, and/or other customary means of identifying sources. The "or unpublished" part is important, because it means that you can commit plagiarism simply by using ideas or descriptions supplied by someone else during casual conversation. Bottom line, you have committed plagiarism if you give me the impression that you wrote or thought up something that, in fact, you "borrowed" from elsewhere.

In a very real sense, plagiarism is theft. It is the theft of what's commonly called intellectual property. If you have questions about what's ethical and what's not, please ask me BEFORE you submit the work in question. Better yet, bring it up in class so we can all benefit from the issue you raise. Once the work is submitted, and determined to have been plagiarized, it's too late. Because such offenses are almost always committed knowingly and with intent to deceive—and because the real-world penalties for such infractions are so harsh—you may end up with an *F for the course if you engage in any of these practices even once.*

Let's hope none of the bad stuff ever comes up. I expect this to be a rewarding semester for all of you, and I encourage you to look upon this class as a great opportunity to find out what real writing is all about.
**IMPORTANT FINAL NOTE:** Please review the yellow and blue sheets attached to this syllabus. These additional sheets are general guidelines that will not apply specifically to every aspect of every section of WRITING100; Moravian, like most colleges and universities, gives its individual instructors considerable discretion in putting together their coursework. However, the guidelines do provide you with a good idea of the broad goals of the course, as well as some of the expectations I'll have for the research you do on your journalistic pieces (Item #4 under "basic course overview," page 2 above). As always, if these sheets raise any questions, PLEASE ASK. In my experience, for every student who actually raises his or her hand to ask a question, there are at least a half-dozen others who have the same concern, but for some reason don't raise their hands. Thus by raising your hand, you can usually settle a lot of students' minds about any given issue.

—Steve Salerno, December 2004