

ENC1145-28 Writing About Nothing: Seinfeld and Pop Culture

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First Year Composition Mission Statement

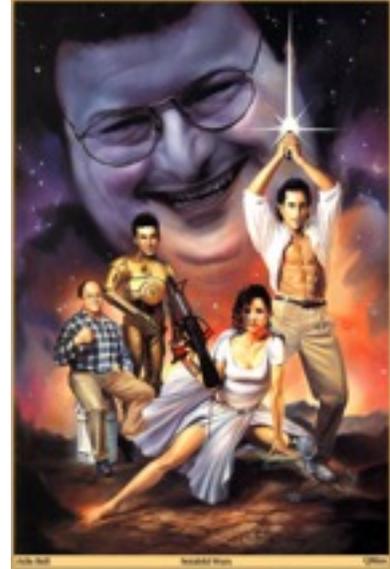
First-Year Composition courses at FSU teach writing as a recursive and frequently collaborative process of invention, drafting, and revising. Writing is both personal and social, and students should learn how to write for a variety of purposes and audiences. Since writing is a process of making meaning as well as communicating, FYW teachers respond to the content of students' writing as well as to surface errors. Students should expect frequent written and oral response on the content of their writing from both teacher and peers. Classes rely heavily on a workshop format. Instruction emphasizes the connection between writing, reading, and critical thinking; students should give thoughtful, reasoned responses to the readings. Both reading and writing are the subjects of class discussions and workshops, and students are expected to be active participants of the classroom community. Learning from each other will be a large part of the classroom experience.

If you would like further information regarding the First-Year Composition Program, feel free to contact the program director, Dr. Deborah Coxwell Teague (dteague@fsu.edu).

Course Goals

With this class, I want to help you break away from the writing styles and topics that you learned about in high school, and I also want to help you improve your ability to write and think critically in the college environment. In a world where everything can be read as a “text,” it is important that students become critical consumers of what they interact with everyday. The goal of this course is not to gather a few times a week to discuss the awesomeness that is *Seinfeld*; instead, the goal of this course is to lead you toward critically examining texts with which you are already familiar—to look at those texts in new, objective, analytical ways and to explore new and unfamiliar topics (and yourselves) through writing. I have chosen *Seinfeld* as the focus of this writing course for two reasons. First, *Seinfeld* is a cultural phenomenon that saturates culture globally;

even though the show has been off the air for nearly 20 years, we can see its lasting influence on current TV shows, movies, and even in our daily lives. Any text that holds such a status necessitates the (re)examination of both its position and influence within that culture. Secondly, the series is more than a goofy sitcom; you may not realize it yet, but the show provides us with examinations of morality, fate, social responsibility, isolation, gender, race, class, Otherness, and the power of discourse. By connecting our readings from our textbooks to *Seinfeld*, I hope you'll be able to see how seemingly mundane texts provide us with fertile grounds for examining our culture.



Required Textbooks and Materials

- *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, 5th edition, by John Storey, 2009
- *The Curious Researcher: A Guide to Writing Research Papers*, FSU Edition, by Bruce Ballenger, 2012
- *The McGraw-Hill Handbook*, FSU edition by Maimon, Peritz, & Yancey (McGraw-Hill, 2013)
- Access to a Computer (the university provides a number of computer labs)
- A Composition Book

First-Year Composition Course Drop Policy

This course is NOT eligible to be dropped in accordance with the “Drop Policy” adopted by the Faculty Senate in Spring 2004. The Undergraduate Studies Dean will not consider drop requests for a First-Year Composition course unless there are extraordinary and extenuating circumstances utterly beyond the student's control (e.g.: death of a parent or sibling, illness requiring hospitalization, etc.). The Faculty Senate specifically eliminated First-Year Composition courses from the University Drop Policy because of the overriding requirement that First-Year Composition be completed during students' initial enrollment at FSU.

Course Work and Policies

- All of the formal written assignments below must be turned in to me in order to pass the course. Attendance is also a requirement. (More than four absences in a TR class is grounds for failure.)
- Three papers, edited and polished
- Three drafts (one proposal and two drafts) and revisions of each of the three formal papers
- A Digital Portfolio
- Two individual conferences – which you MUST attend - scheduled by you and your instructor, in lieu of class time, to work one-on-one on a draft, writing strategy, etc. Again: **CLASSES WILL BE CANCELLED THE DAYS OF CONFERENCES.**
- Thoughtful, active, and responsible participation and citizenship, including discussion, preparation for class, in-class informal writing

Evaluation

Active participation in class discussion, conferences, workshops, and preparedness in class all factor into this section. Drafts will be graded on completeness and potential—not on editing or other mechanical issues. Final papers will be graded on audience awareness, organization, coherence, supporting evidence, thorough analysis, and editing (including grammar and mechanics). All other written and oral work will be graded on meaning or content and appropriateness to the assignment. Because we are using ePortfolios for this class, you will have the opportunity to revise your papers throughout the semester, and turn in the *final* final drafts at the end of the semester. This means that your papers you turn in throughout the semester don't really have a grade on them. I will, however, give your work "as-is" grades throughout the semester; your final grade shouldn't be a surprise.

Your final grade will be determined by the following percentages:

- Electronic Portfolio 80%
- Participation/In-Class Writing/Quizzes: 20%

ALL FORMAL PAPERS, THEIR DRAFTS, AND THE FINAL PROJECT MUST BE COMPLETED AND TURNED IN TO EARN A PASSING GRADE IN THIS COURSE.

Papers, Project, and Portfolio

The assigned papers are intended to build upon each other, allowing us to understand just how pervasive the influence of *Seinfeld* is. Paper 1 allows us to examine how *Seinfeld* is modified for different audiences and different cultures. Paper 2 allows us to research culture in and out of *Seinfeld* and how that might inform our understanding of our own culture. Paper 3 provides us with an opportunity to display a fuller understanding of genre and research through the presentation of that research in three different mediums. The final project is a fun, free-form, remix project where you will create something new from existing *Seinfeld* material. The Electronic Portfolio represents a culmination of these ideas, the presentation of these ideas for a new audience, and the circulation of those ideas beyond the classroom. The course will be based around drafting and workshopping these papers and projects.

Conferences

We will meet together in my office for two individual conferences this semester. Conferences are a chance for me to address your specific needs and concerns as a writer and as a student in my class. Because I will have to cancel class meetings to meet with you, missing your conference is equivalent to 2 absences. Remember that it is your responsibility to be at your conference on time and to bring the materials/drafts we will discuss.

Drafts, Revisions, and Final Papers

You'll need to make copies of your drafts and revisions (not final papers) before you come to class on days we workshop. The number of drafts needed will be provided to

you prior to each workshop. If you fail to bring copies of your draft to workshop, you will be counted absent in addition to losing points for that part of the process, and you will leave. I require that all drafts and revisions be typed (MLA format, 1-inch margins). You have access to a number of computer labs around campus, so if you don't have your own computer, take advantage of one of FSU's. Final papers do not need covers or title pages. All your written work must have your name, my name, course title and section number, and the date at the top of the first page (The standard MLA heading). You will be responsible for some photocopying expenses for this class on occasion, in order to share your writing with your peers. You will generally be choosing your own topics and structures for the drafts and papers in this class (after the first week). You will be required to share your work with your classmates so take care in what you choose to write about. Your writing for this class is nearly always public writing in the sense that others will be reading, hearing, and commenting on it. PLEASE: write about what interests you, what you're passionate about (this allows for much more interesting papers), but always be conscious of the fact that your peers and I will read what you produce.

Attendance and Tardiness

The First-Year Composition program maintains a strict attendance policy to which this course adheres: an excess of four absences in a MW class is grounds for failure.

This policy does not differentiate between excused and unexcused absences. Save your absences for when you get sick or for family emergencies. That being said, you're all adults and are responsible for your own decisions: miss class if you want, but understand the consequences. Tardiness disrupts everyone else's participation and the flow of class. If you arrive to class after I've taken role, you will be counted tardy. If you are tardy three times, you will receive an absence. Also, not showing up for a conference (beyond being extremely disrespectful) counts as TWO absences!



Late Work

For First Year Composition, university policy mandates that all work must be turned in to earn a passing grade. In accordance with this, late work will be accepted. However, you will be penalized half a letter grade for each calendar day the paper/project is late. For example: If you turn in your paper a day late, the highest possible grade you can earn will be an A-; two days late: B+; three days: B-; etc...

Reading/Writing Center (RWC)

The Reading/Writing Center, located in Williams 222-C, is devoted to individualized instruction in reading and writing. Part of the English Department, the RWC serves

Florida State University students at all levels and from all majors. Its clients include a cross-section of the campus: first-year students writing for composition class, upper level students writing term papers, seniors composing letters of applications for jobs and graduate schools, graduate students working on theses and dissertations, multilingual students mastering English, and a variety of others. The RWC serves mostly walk-in tutoring appointments, however it also offers three different courses for credit that specifically target reading, undergraduate-level writing, and graduate-level writing.

The tutors in the RWC, all graduate students in English with training and experience in teaching composition, use a process-centered approach to help students at any stage of writing: from generating ideas, to drafting, organizing and revising. While the RWC does not provide editing or proofreading services, its tutors can help writers build their own editing and proofreading strategies. Our approach to tutoring is to help students grow as writers, readers and critical thinkers by developing strategies for writing in a variety of situations. During the fall and spring semesters, the RWC is open Monday through Thursday from 10 - 6 and Friday from 10 -2. Hours of operation vary in summer. Visit the RWC web site website or call 644-6495 for information.

Digital Studio

The Digital Studio provides support to students working individually or in groups on a variety of digital projects, such as designing a web site, developing an electronic portfolio for a class, creating a blog, selecting images for a visual essay, adding voiceover to a presentation, or writing a script for a podcast. Tutors who staff the Digital Studio can help students brainstorm essay ideas, provide feedback on the content and design of a digital project, or facilitate collaboration for group projects and presentations. Students can use the Digital Studio to work on their own to complete class assignments or to improve overall capabilities in digital communication without a tutoring appointment if a work station is available. However, tutor availability and workspace are limited so appointments are recommended.



To make an appointment e-mail us at fsudigitalstudio@gmail.com or visit the Digital Studio in Williams 222-B. Hours vary by semester and are updated at website.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism (including self-plagiarism) is grounds for suspension from the university as well as for failure in this course. It's tacky and will not be tolerated. Any instance of plagiarism must be reported to the Director of First-Year Composition and the Director of Undergraduate Studies. Plagiarism is a counterproductive, non-writing behavior that is unacceptable in a course intended to aid the growth of individual writers.

Plagiarism is included among the violations defined in the Academic Honor Code, section b), paragraph 2, as follows: "Regarding academic assignments, violations of the Academic Honor Code shall include representing another's work or any part thereof, be it published or unpublished, as one's own." A plagiarism education assignment that further explains this issue will be administered in all first-year writing courses during the second week of class. Each student will be responsible for completing the assignment and asking questions regarding any parts they do not fully understand.

ADA

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodations should in the FIRST WEEK OF CLASS 1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) and 2) bring a letter to the instructor from SDRC indicating the need for academic accommodations. This and all other class materials are available in alternative format upon request.

Grading Rubric

The 'A' Student's writing...

- Demonstrates creative thinking rather than reliance on a predictable, formulaic style-goes beyond the scope of his/her assignments and has made it his/her own in some way.
- Shows insight-it appears the writer has discovered something through the act of writing.
- Offers analysis-has a clear, controlling idea that is sophisticated in both statement and insight.
- Consistently develops the controlling idea.
- Entices the reader with titles and introductions that make the reader want to keep reading.
- Includes well-chosen examples without stacking them.
- Makes connections between ideas.
- Is expertly organized.
- Uses meticulously crafted sentences.
- Has an absence of surplus words and filler.
- Has a strong writing voice and tone.
- Has very few errors in mechanics and usage.

The 'B' Student's writing...

- Shows some creativity and independent thought.
- Writes with a few inconsistent facts or concepts.
- Has a clear, controlling idea.
- Is titled thoughtfully and contains a strong introduction.
- Includes major points with appropriate supporting detail.
- Shows effort to link ideas rather than to stack them.
- Contains well-arranged paragraphs.
- Might have grammatical and/or mechanical problems.
- Might exhibit problematic word choice or syntax errors.
- Lacks the strength and confidence to say "Read me!"
- Shows some growth between first and final drafts

The 'C' Student's writing...

- Fulfills the assignment with little creative and original thought.
- Displays some factual, interpretive, or conceptual inconsistencies.
- Occasionally moves off topic.
- Contains a general main idea, but not an insightful one.
- Is titled appropriately, but it may be lackluster.
- May introduce the essay using a formula.
- May cinch the last page with a summary or re-cap.
- Offers shallow analysis.
- Leaves some ideas undeveloped or unsupported.
- Contains weakly unified paragraphs.
- Contains clumsy sentences and imprecise words.
- Has an awkward or stiff paragraph arrangement.
- Uses a bland tone and weak voice.
- Displays major grammatical errors.
- Shows little to no change from the first to final draft

The 'D' Student's writing...

- Does not respond directly to the demands of the assignment.
- Has significantly confusing or inconsistent concepts or interpretations.
- Has a vague controlling idea or is missing it entirely.
- Frequently veers off topic or loses focus.
- Is simplistic and superficial-it summarizes rather than letting the reader inside the subject.
- Is made up of language marred by clichés, colloquialisms, repeated and inexact word choices.
- Contains consistent immobilizing errors that interfere with readability.

- Consists of illogically arranged ideas.
- Shows a disappointing disregard to previous corrections.

The 'F' Student's writing...

- Is plagiarized.
- Is ridiculously undeveloped.
- Is so incoherent that even I can't understand what it is saying.
- Has no focus or topic.
- Has not been revised.
- Is very rare.



Paper 1 — *Seinfeld* and You: Looking In / Looking Out (1200-1800 words)

This paper is a chance for you to explore how watching *Seinfeld* has affected you as an individual, a student, and/or a writer. For this paper, I want you to think critically about how the show has affected you personally, analyze that effect, and convey it to an audience.

For example, you could:

- Write about how you have identified with different *Seinfeld* characters at different moments throughout your life.
- Write about your interactions with people, or situations you have been in, that seem like they could be in a *Seinfeld* episode.
- Connect a significant moment in your life to a significant plot point in *Seinfeld*. What does that connection mean? Can you connect this to something broader (the way readers connect to literature)?
- Did the series inspire you to change something about yourself? What? How? What were the results?
- Have you noticed *Seinfeld*'s influence on other shows, movies, and/or cultural artifacts? How has this realization affected the way you view these other texts?

***These are, of course, just a few suggested approaches; there are many ways of approaching Paper One. The only restriction that I will give you is that this paper does need to be analytic in nature. It's fine for you to relate to me your experiences with your *Seinfeld*, but I want you also to be able to interpret those experiences and how the texts have influenced you to see how they have contributed to the overall development of your character. Things I need to see in your paper: a personal change, analysis of that change, how *Seinfeld* impacted that change, an attempt to connect your own experience to the human experience at large.



Paper 2 — Researching *Seinfeld* (2400-3000 words)

This paper is an opportunity for students to do research (and not to fear it) via tracing a theme, or themes, through the show, through their representation (in media or culture), or their reception within a given culture. You will formulate a research question, examine the rhetorical situation of that question, and respond to an exigence. To make this process easier, I have broken the assignment down into shorter assignments. These will help you focus and refine your research as you prepare to draft a final text. However, this will not be a traditional paper. You will be crafting a web-text that conveys your argument to an audience of your peers. That means your language, tone, presentation of research, evidence, design, and layout will all be catered to your audience. You will compose in a platform of your choosing.

Short Assignment #1: Research Topic Reflection

This reflection will be based on your topic exploration and initial research. You'll reflect on what may have inspired the desire for further inquiry, including how you came up with the question, why it might be important, and how you plan to explore the question in your research. If you can't decide on a single question at this point, write about the top three you have in mind. We'll work together on narrowing your focus to evolve into one final research question, and we'll evaluate examples of strong research questions.

Short Assignment #2: Research Proposal (1-2 typed, single-spaced pages)

The proposal should identify the specific, final research question that you determine based on your initial exploration/research. Your proposal should discuss the same ideas as the topic reflection, but should be a more finely tuned presentation of the question your research will explore. Be sure to consider audience at this stage, specifically who might be interested in such an essay and for what type of publication it might be appropriate. NOTE: This assignment is the last chance to change your research question. Once your proposal has been approved, the question you propose is final.

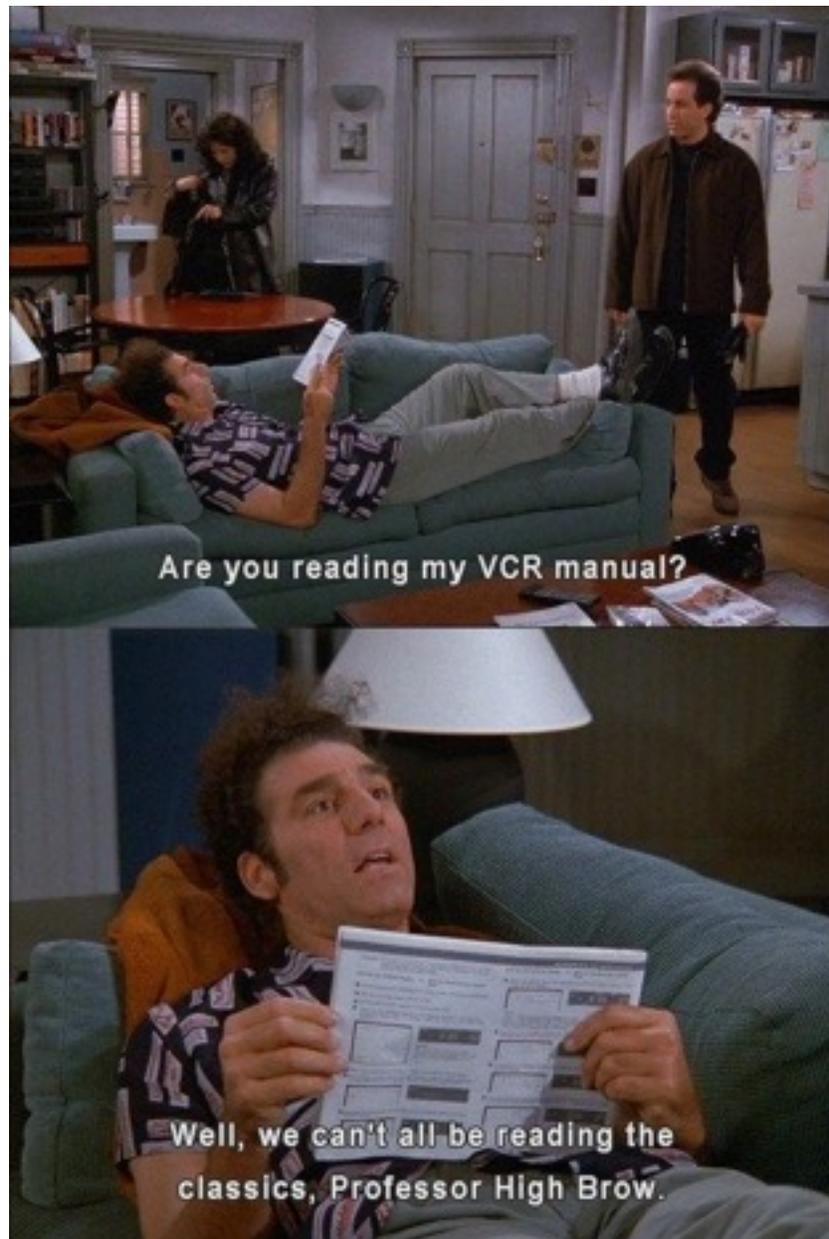
Short Assignment #3: Research Report

In this report you will provide an update on your research in progress:

- Discuss the sources you have found so far and analyze their credibility
- Provide details about each source: how was each found, what makes each viable and how do you imagine each one effectively supporting your ideas?
- Which source do you think will work best in your essay?
- Identify a source you found while conducting your research but have discarded, and explain why you are excluding it
- Discuss a source you are considering using, but about which you are still unsure

- Identify what's missing in your research, and speculate about information you are still seeking from additional sources

******Include at least five sources, only one of which can be a website/blog. The remainder must be scholarly articles and/or primary texts (the episodes of Seinfeld). You must have at least three sources from journals. In other words, you cannot just use the episodes as your sources.******



Paper Three — Viral Arguments

Multimodal Compositions and 1800-2400 words

Making your own media campaign

In your first project, you explored how *Seinfeld* has found its way into your life. In the second project, you wrote a researched analysis of *Seinfeld* using a particular lens and shaped that analysis for an audience of your peers. In all of these assignments, you have been exploring different genres, audiences, purposes, and general rhetorical awareness. Now it's time to put all of this into practice.

For this project, you will work with a group of 3-4 people to create your own rhetorically sensitive (viral) marketing campaign. In the upcoming weeks, we will look at what viral marketing is, how it functions in our culture, and which campaigns have succeeded and which have flopped. We will examine what really makes a media system popular and how you can harness that power for your own project. You will become media producers, not just consumers and analyzers.

First, you and your group will need to construct a cohesive campaign, combining your research topics and expertise from Assignment 2.

Second, your group will need to choose your audiences. What is it that you will want your audience member to do, think, act like, accept, reject, etc. when they see your marketing campaign materials? Who is your audience, specifically? How old are they; where do they live; why would they be interested in your topic; how can you reach them?

Third, now turn on that rhetorical knowledge we have been building on all semester. Considering your purpose and audience, what kind of materials would appeal to them? What genres? What kinds of rhetorical appeals? What kinds of media? What kind of language and tone? What about distribution mechanisms?

Finally, start creating the actual materials! Once you are all on the same page about the goal, audience, and approach of your campaign, will be graded collectively on the individual "texts" you create for the project and how they make a cohesive campaign for your argument(s). Make a Facebook group. Start up a website. Post up a video on YouTube. Design a logo and make some merchandise. Plan an event and create the advertising for it. Organize a protest and create the promotional materials. Create an informative pamphlet about the cause. Create a presentation about the topic. Take it to the streets and sidewalk chalk about your cause. Anything and everything is up for grabs with this assignment as long as it is consistent with your group's goals, purpose, audience, and rhetorical approach.

The Logistics:

- An Individual Proposal outlining what you plan to contribute to the group.
- A Group Proposal that outlines your goals and approaches for the project.
- A Group Rationale (3-4pp double-spaced) that explains and analyzes the rhetorical choices you've made in each of the "texts" the group creates.

- An Individual Reflection (3-4pp double-spaced) that articulates what you learned about composing in the process of this assignment.



The Digital Portfolio

While you will complete smaller assignments throughout the semester, the bulk of your grade will be determined by a digital portfolio: a compilation of the work you've done throughout the semester, reflections on that work, and nuanced understandings of both writing and pop culture that will (hopefully) culminate from both. The assessment of your portfolio will be based on the following: how well you exhibit an understanding of the key terms we have discussed in class, the depth of your reflection on the assignments and what you have learned from them, how well you make use of the limitations and affordances of the technology you choose, your level of professionalism, that you include all the necessary assignments, and a rubric that we will compose together in class.

Collection. Selection. Reflection. These are the three activities in which you will be engaging for this assignment. Here's how it will work:

As we go through the semester, you will deposit every separate draft that you complete in your digital portfolio. For example, for the part of your portfolio labeled "Assignment One," you will include your proposal, the draft you bring to conference, the draft you workshop in class, the fourth draft you submit for an "as-is" grade, and a final revision.

For each piece that you deposit in your portfolio, you must also submit a 200-word reflection on the particular draft. This reflection should concern what you learned from the process of writing the draft, the act of receiving feedback, and your plans for revision. I will be checking throughout the semester that you have completed these tasks.

At the end of the semester, you will become more discriminatory with what you include in your portfolio. You will include only pieces that reveal significant moments of learning over the course of the semester. Think about it this way: for each paper, when did you have the "big breakthrough?" How could you tell? How does that show in your writing? Those are the pieces you'll want to include for each assignment. You may also choose to include any journals or in-class writings to help illustrate what you've learned about writing.

Then, at the very end, you will reflect on the act of compiling the portfolio. What did you learn from re-tracing your steps? How do you plan to utilize those skills in the future? Essentially, I'd like you to tell me where you've going from telling me where you've been.

Collection. Selection. Reflection.

****This kind of reflection is reiterative and recursive, which means you will be working on your final portfolio at least once a week if not for every class period. I expect you to keep up with it - after all, it is eighty percent of your final grade.****

