

Composition: Expression and Understanding

Semester One: The Art of Expression

This course is designed to help you develop essential writing skills that will form the basis for your long-term development as a writer. As with most important things in life, learning to write is a journey rather than a destination. That is to say, becoming a writer is a lifelong endeavor that will improve and change as you grow and learn to perceive the world with an increasingly complex appreciation of meaning and purpose.

At the heart of this journey, and all good writing, is the need to know yourself. The questions, “Who am I?” and, “What does it mean to be me?” must be answered in order for you to be able to place yourself into the context of the world you inhabit and the one you would like to build. They are also the essential questions that help you relate to the meaning and purpose of other human beings and the challenges, uncertainties, concepts, and ideas that form the core of their reality. In turn, once you develop the tools for understanding self and other, you have the basic ingredients needed to describe the things you understand or to argue a specific viewpoint—both key components of academic writing. For these reasons, this course is designed to give you multiple different ways of exploring who you are and how you come to be the way you are.

Week 1:

1. Write a one-two page letter to yourself, reflecting on the Essential Questions of the course: Who am I? What do I know?
 2. Read [“Joyas Voladoras”](#) by Brian Doyle: Take active notes on your reading: use your notes to help you understand what you read. Write down any ideas the reading sparks in your mind, even half-thoughts. Underline, ponder, disagree. Look up words you don’t know and write down their definition in your own words. Taking notes about a text is your chance to interrogate it as much as enjoy and learn from it. Active note taking helps you translate for yourself what the text means to you.
 3. Write Reading Narrative #1, a one-page response to the reading. The first half of your response should be about the reading, based on your notes. The second half should reflect on your individual reading process: strengths, challenges, and approaches to reading.
- Find further guidelines in the document “Reading Narratives & Reading Profile.”**

Week 2:

1. Select at least five objects or belongings (as tiny as a pendant or as large as a painting) that are meaningful to you and represent who you feel yourself to be as a person. Take photographs of each object and compile the photos in one place. Write a short paragraph (3-5 sentences) about the meaning of each object and why you feel it represents you. Pair

each photograph with the corresponding paragraph in a cohesive visual manner—it could be a paper collage, a handmade book, PowerPoint slides, you name it.

Semester Two: The Act of Understanding

In Semester Two: The Act of Understanding, you will take the skills and knowledge you've gained in the first semester out into the world by exploring your individual curiosities in a semester-long inquiry project. Using techniques of creative research, you will be guided each step of the way, culminating in a final essay of high-quality writing and in-depth research skills. We will use the processes and prompts in Philip Gerard's *The Art of Creative Research* to guide us.

Week 1:

1. Read the prologue to *The Art of Creative Research* by Philip Gerard. Take active notes on your reading: use your notes to help you understand what you read. Write down any ideas the reading sparks in your mind, even half-thoughts. Underline, ponder, disagree. Look up words you don't know and write down their definition in your own words. Taking notes about a text is your chance to interrogate it as much as enjoy and learn from it. Active note taking helps you translate what the text means to you.
2. Write a one-to-two page reflection on the idea of creative research. Did Philip Gerard's description of writing-related research seem similar to how you have thought about what research is and what it looks like? Did Gerard's descriptions broaden the definition of research for you? If so, how? Describe any previous experiences with research you have had in school and on your own—both formal assignments and moments in your life where you have experienced the qualities and emotions Gerard describes.

Week 2:

1. Read pages 1-8 from chapter one of *The Art of Creative Research*, "What Creative Research Is and How to Use It." Draw the diagram he describes on page 5, in precise detail. Submit a photo of your drawing below. Write a one-page response about the diagram and what you learned from it about working with source material.