

Expository Writing 20: War Stories

Course Overview

How should we represent the horrors of war, and how should we remember it? These are questions that have fascinated writers since the time of Homer, but the answers to these questions changed in the modern era, when war started to seem less noble and heroic and more totalizing and destructive. This course looks at artistic representations of modern warfare and asks what effects war has on those who survive it. What happens when the body is whole, but the mind is broken? How does war live on the memories of those who fought, or in the collective memory of a nation? Can — or should — art be made out of these painful, violent experiences? By studying art and literature that engages these questions, we'll debate whether the experience of war can ever be adequately communicated to those who weren't there, and whether these attempted communications can prevent future generations from repeating the mistakes of the past.

We'll work to understand writing about war by discussing, and practicing, the principles of good academic writing. Over the course of the semester, you'll learn the elements of an academic argument, develop a vocabulary for talking about writing (both yours and your classmates), and practice refining your ideas as you revise your written work. Each unit will have specific goals, which will build on each other as we move from unit to the next. At the end of the course, you'll emerge a stronger writer, with a better sense of your strengths and a new set of skills with which to work on your weaker areas. You'll also find yourself to be a more creative and supple thinker; after all, writing is simply a mode of thinking. You'll be well prepared to meet the intellectual challenges that await you at Harvard and beyond.

Required Reading and Schedule of Assignments

The course is divided into three units. In addition to all assigned reading and any class preparation (e.g. reading excerpts, providing feedback for workshop, etc.), each unit will require you to complete:

- 1-2 response papers
- 1 essay draft (including a cover letter)
- 1 draft conference
- 1 essay revision (including a revision letter)

A packet with the additional assignments and deadlines will be handed out before the start of each unit. **Read the unit packet and mark your calendars! You are responsible for remembering assignment due dates.** Here's how the units break down:

Unit 1: How to Write a War Story

For our first unit, we'll read Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, a powerful collection of stories based on O'Brien's experiences as a soldier in Vietnam. The stories encourage us to ask how much of a war story is fact, how much fiction, and what moral judgments we make

when we decide which stories to tell. Based on your *close analysis* of O'Brien's stories, you'll develop an *analytical question or problem* and will write a paper that uses *evidence* from the collection to make an *argument* that offers an answer to the question or problem you've posed.

Unit 2: War, Patriotism, and Propaganda

In our second unit, we'll use excerpts from works of literary criticism and journalism; these will be our **lens texts** for our reading of poetry and prose about World War I (the Great War). We'll start by getting our heads around the arguments made by literary critics. Then, we'll read selected poetry and Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. We'll ask what these literary texts suggest about the relationship between language and patriotism during wartime. You'll then *test a theory* by analyzing Hemingway's novel or one or more poems and seeing how they support or contradict the arguments made by the critic you selected.

Unit 3: War Stories on the Big Screen

Our last unit will focus on the medium of film. We'll watch Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, a movie that quickly became a classic of New Hollywood, and *Zero Dark Thirty*, Kathryn Bigelow's recent depiction of the War on Terror. You'll have the chance to pursue a *research topic* about one of these films: you might research how audiences received it, how historically accurate the film is, or what theories of race or gender might help us understand about the war story the film tells. Whatever research topic you'll pursue, you'll want to learn to how integrate *multiple sources* and how to enter a *critical conversation* about the film you've chosen to analyze.

** Please purchase the following books, from the COOP or from another source **

- Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*
- Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*

Please also be prepared to print additional readings and handouts. You'll be expected to bring the assigned book or reading to class on the day it's discussed. The films for our course will be placed on reserve at Lamont Library and can be found on Netflix, iTunes, and other sites.

Conferencing, Workshopping, and Revising

Writing is a process, and this course gives you the opportunity to pursue this process fully. After you turn in each draft, you'll set up an appointment to meet with me, one-on-one, and discuss how to revise your writing. I'll send you comments on the draft before our meeting, and I'll ask you to come prepared with some specific ideas or questions.

Each unit will include an in-class workshop, which will focus on two student drafts. The purpose of these workshops is for you to learn how to recognize strengths and weaknesses in *your own writing* and to find inspiration for your revision.

Depending on the unit, your *revisions will be due five to seven days after your draft conference*. The revisions will be substantial, so build in time to reflect on feedback, experiment with new approaches, and, of course, to proofread your work.

Grade Breakdown

Your final essays are your only graded assignments. They compose the majority of your final grade. Essay 1 is worth 25% of your term grade, Essay 2 is worth 30%, and Essay 3 is worth 35%. The expectations for each paper increase as the term proceeds, since you'll be building off skills you developed in the prior unit. The remaining 10% of your grade reflects your thoughtful completion of response papers, your cover letters, your participation in class discussion and in workshops, and your preparation for class and for your draft conferences.

Course Policies

Attendance and Lateness

Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. It is an official program-wide policy that if you are absent without medical or religious excuse more than twice, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and failed. On your second unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you of your situation.

You are expected to let me know promptly if you have missed or will miss a class; you remain responsible for the work due that day and for any new work assigned.

Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In those circumstances, you should contact me before class (or within 24 hours); you may need to provide a note from UHS or another medical official, or from your Freshman Dean. Absences because of special events, such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts are not excusable absences. If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences, letting me know in advance. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you must directly petition the Director of Expository Writing, who will grant such a petition only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

Class begins promptly at seven minutes past the hour. Three late arrivals will be counted as an absence. Additionally, a missed draft conference will be counted as an absence.

Completion of Work

Because this course is a planned sequence of writing, **it is an official Writing Program policy that you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course** (not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind). If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit, you will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements. The letter will specify the new date by which you must submit the late work. If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date (unless you have

documented a medical problem), you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and failed.

Once during the course of the semester, you may turn in one assignment, a response paper OR a draft, 24 hours after it is due. (All revisions are due on the stated deadline.) You must request this extension in advance of the deadline. No other extensions will be granted outside of emergency circumstances.

Electronic Submission

You will submit at least some of your work electronically this semester. Most often, you'll upload it to the course website. As you send or upload each document, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have saved the document in a form compatible with Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx). It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you are sending is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the essay will be subject to a late penalty.

Policy on Collaboration

The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students or through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the *Student Handbook*, "Students need not acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading." However, *all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.*

Academic Honesty

Throughout the semester we'll work on the proper use of sources, including how to cite sources and how to avoid plagiarism. You should always feel free to ask me questions about this material. *All the work that you submit for this course must be your own, and that work should not make use of outside sources unless that is explicitly part of the assignment.* Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to disciplinary action by the Administrative Board.

Electronics

Please leave your laptops at home, your cell phones on silent, and any other gadgets in your bags. We want to create the best environment for productive discussion. If there's a day when computers will be useful for our discussion topic, I'll be sure to tell you beforehand.

Resources

Office Hours

In addition to meeting during your draft conferences, you should feel free to come meet with me during my office hours, which will be Monday, 2-4pm, Tuesdays 1-3pm and by appointment for a morning meeting. My office is located at 1 Bow Street, #224. If you're going to drop by, please give me a heads-up so you don't find yourself waiting!

Writing Center

The Writing Center (located on the garden level of the Barker Center) offers hour-long appointments with trained tutors. I can't stress strongly enough the benefit of the service they provide; regardless of the "strength" or "weakness" of the essay, any piece of writing benefits from further review and a fresh perspective. Visit the Writing Center's web site at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr> to make an appointment. Tutors also hold drop-in office hours at other campus locations; see the Writing Center website for details.

Harvard Guide to Using Sources

I'll ask you to consult the *Harvard Guide to Using Sources* several times during the semester. It's available online: <http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do>.

MLA Style Guide

For this course, you'll use the Modern Language Association's Style Guide. (Your other courses may require different citation formats.) You can find a hard copy in the library or find it online through university websites. I'd also recommend a style guide like Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*.

Final Recommendations

Read attentively and take notes as you do; save and backup your work; keep a calendar of assignments and deadlines; check your email; eat well; sleep enough; be generous with your classmates and with yourself. I'm always available as a sounding board, first reader, or reality check. Feel free to email me at any time.