

**Expos 20, Spring 2024**  
**Preceptor: Tracy Strauss**  
**Preview Syllabus**

**Course Summary:**

**To Thine Own Self Be True? Persona in Literature and Film**

According to the founder of analytical psychology Carl Jung, a persona is “a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and on the other to conceal the true nature of the individual.” In this course, we'll consider the creation and consequences (intended and unintended) of persona. When might we embody a persona academically, professionally, or personally, and what are the benefits, downsides, or other effects on our lives and relationships with others? In Unit 1, we'll explore the idea of persona through a close examination of Ingmar Bergman's 1966 horror/psychological drama film *Persona*, a work heavily informed by Jung's theory of persona. We'll consider the intersection of one's persona and one's underlying identity, how one's voice may embody a persona or reveal true nature, and how visual language communicates point of view and perspective in the construct of persona. In Unit 2, we'll apply theories of socialization to the idea of persona in real life scenarios by looking at a sampling of nonfiction works, including *Don't Look Back*, pioneer filmmaker D.A. Pennebaker's “direct cinema”-style documentary of singer-songwriter Bob Dylan. We'll read short memoir pieces written by a diverse set of well-known literary voices, such as American poet and social activist Langston Hughes's “Salvation,” Chinese-American novelist and memoirist Amy Tan's “Two Kinds,” and “The Jacket,” by Gary Soto, a writer known for his honest portrayal of marginalized communities. Within these personal stories of truth, we'll look at the influence that socialization has on the generation of persona. This unit will ask us to weigh in on what happens when people pretend to be someone they're not in order to be loved, to belong, or even to avoid persecution. We'll consider the choices individuals have made to either create or deconstruct their persona, as well as the complexities, contradictions, conflicts, and paradoxes of identity in relationship to the formation and use of persona as a type of social performance. Finally, in Unit 3, we'll explore the destruction of persona as portrayed in a selection of films, possibly including Anthony Minghella's *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan*, and one of Orson Welles's most famous films, *Citizen Kane*. In this endeavor, we'll enter into a scholarly conversation about persona, debating whether living and building relationships via persona leads to the ultimate gain or loss of the self. Is the false construct of persona completely deceitful or could there be elements of authenticity and/or integrity that can forge personal growth and true connections with others? Might artificial constructs serve the individual, and, by extension, our greater community in constructive ways?

**Required Texts (Finalized Version TBA, but see the Unit Breakdown for possibilities)**

Also available online:

The Harvard College Writing Program's Harvard Guide to Using Sources  
The Harvard Writing Center's Strategies for Essay Writing

The MLA Style Center

Purdue Online Writing Lab's MLA Guide

**Course goals:** An intensive seminar that aims to improve each student’s ability to discover and reason about evidence through the medium of essays. Each section focuses on a particular theme or topic, described on the [Expos Website](#). All sections give students practice in formulating questions, analyzing both primary and secondary sources and properly acknowledging them, supporting arguments with strong and detailed evidence, and shaping clear, lively essays. All sections emphasize revision.

We will use this class to develop, sharpen, and master the foundational skills of both college and “real world” success: how to listen, think, read, and write critically. An important goal of the course is to develop your ability to write clear, engaging, and coherent analytical essays of the kind that you will be asked to produce frequently at Harvard, as well as to demonstrate an awareness of the writing process, to properly cite sources, and to show an ability to critique your own work and the work of others. With this in mind, the class is structured to give you the opportunity to work in a sustained and systematic way on improving your skills.

During the semester you will write three essays. The thematic units and their associated writing assignments are described below. Each essay will include response papers, a draft, a revision, and cover letters. A more detailed breakdown of each unit can be found in the syllabus calendar section.

Some of our writing goals in this course will change unit by unit, as you take on the distinct challenges of several important versions of the academic essay. Other goals will remain our focus throughout the whole of the course: developing your sense of what you do well and challenging yourself to grow as a writer; expanding your repertoire and practice of revision techniques; and increasing the complexity and originality of your analysis as well as the effectiveness and elegance of your prose. One of the most exciting things to learn in a writing course is that the learning process never stops; one doesn’t “arrive” at being a good writer, but rather continually becomes one. With these goals in mind, we begin with three important premises:

- Good writing is a *recursive* process: you will develop and write preliminary response papers and essays, which we will discuss in conference and for which you will receive feedback from your fellow writers; you will then revise those essays, giving your analysis time to evolve and grow more complex.
- Your writing will improve most when you possess clear ideas about what *you* want to accomplish in each assignment: what aspects of the writer’s craft matter to you, and how you want to grow and improve. This class asks you to be thoughtful and *self-reflective* about your writing process: to question and evaluate your own work in each assignment (in your Cover Letters with each essay) and in the course as a whole (in your introductory Writer’s Letter).

- While inspiration is the moment we all hope for in our writing, it comes most readily when that inspiration is earned – in other words, when you have dedicated *sustained effort to the process* of reading, thinking, questioning, drafting and revising.

**Course format:** Seminar

**Typical enrollees:** First-year students

**Who is this course primarily designed for?** First-year students

**When is course typically offered?** Fall and spring

### **Assignments and grading:**

**Unit 1 Essay assignment: close reading of a text (length: 4-6 pages). Writing focus: close reading, asking analytical questions, evaluating arguments, composing thesis statements and arguments, gathering and effectively analyzing evidence.** Using Ingmar Bergman’s film, *Persona*, students will observe, analyze, interpret, and debate Bergman’s position on the value of embodying persona versus one’s true identity.

**Unit 2 Essay assignment: lens essay (length: 5-7 pages). Writing focus: close reading, critical analysis, applying a theoretical lens, key terms, use of secondary sources.** Through the lens of socialization theory, students will weigh in on the consequences of pretending to be someone they’re not, as well as the complexities, contradictions, conflicts, and paradoxes of identity in relationship to living via persona. Primary texts: *Don’t Look Back* (D.A. Pennebacker) and short nonfiction works by Langston Hughes, Amy Tan, and Gary Soto.

**Unit 3 Essay assignment: entering into a scholarly conversation/researching and using multiple sources (length: 10 pages). Writing Focus: complex arguments; the research process; framing a successful research question; identifying, evaluating, and incorporating multiple sources and different kinds of evidence.** Students will select a film (from a short list provided by the preceptor) and enter into scholarly conversation about persona, debating whether persona (versus true nature) can embody integrity while it also consists of a false construct, and whether embodying a persona leads to the ultimate gain or loss of the self. Possible primary texts: *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, *Black Swan*, *Citizen Kane*.

### **Grades**

I will grade only the revisions (that is, the final version) of your essays, not the drafts. You should expect to extensively revise each of your drafts (after receiving feedback from your instructor) before submitting your work for a grade. Course grades will be earned according to the percentages listed below.

(Revised) Essay 1: 20%

(Revised) Essay 2: 30%

(Revised) Essay 3: 40%

Engagement: 10%

Grading will become more stringent as the semester progresses since I expect you to develop as a thinker and writer. Please be advised that final grades (that is, grades on revised essays) are indeed final. I will not read or grade a further revision of a revision. Certain course activities will not be graded directly: response papers, drafts, cover letters, in-class discussions, conferences, responses to fellow students' writing. These activities count toward your engagement grade and are assignments that will have a direct bearing on how well you will do on the final revisions of your essays.

**Enrollment cap: 15**

**Absence and late work policies:**

**Completion of Work: Official Writing Program Policy**

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must complete all of the three major assignments to pass the course, and you must complete them within the schedule of the course (not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind). If you are unable to complete your work on time due to medical or family issues, please contact me before the deadline to discuss both the support you might need as well as a possible new arrangement for your deadline. Communication about your situation is essential so that we can determine how best to help you move forward. If we have not already discussed your situation and you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an assignment by the final due date in that unit, you will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements and asking you to meet with me and/or your Resident Dean to make a plan for catching up on your work. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work. If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the assignment by this new date, *and* if you have not documented a medical problem or been in touch with your Dean about other circumstances, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.

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**Attendance and Lateness: Official Writing Program Policy**

The Writing Program attendance policy is intended to make sure that you get everything you can out of your Expos course. Because Expos has fewer class hours than some other courses; because the course is largely discussion-based; and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential to your learning in the course.

While I of course encourage you to be present every day in class, you are allowed two *unexcused* absences for the semester with no consequence. Some absences (religious holidays and medical situations) are automatically considered excused; some family circumstances may also be counted as excused absences. You are expected to notify me ahead of time about those absences unless circumstances make that impossible. If you miss a third class

for unexcused reasons, I will ask you to meet with me to discuss your plan for catching up with any missed work, as well as issues that may be affecting your attendance or that might require attention or support from your advisers or from other College resources. If you miss a fourth class, your Resident Dean will be notified about those absences, so that your Dean can give you any support you may need to help you get back on track in the class. Missing four classes—the equivalent of two full weeks of the semester—puts you at risk for missing crucial material necessary to complete your work. Unless there is a medical or other emergency issue preventing consistent engagement with the class, students who miss four classes will receive a formal warning that they are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.

In the case of a medical problem, you should contact me before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours; you should also copy your Resident Dean on that message. In the case of extended illness, you may be required to provide medical documentation. Absences because of special events or extracurricular involvement are *not* excused absences. If such circumstances lead you to want to miss more than two unexcused absences, you must petition the Associate Director of the Writing Program for permission.

Whatever the reason for a class absence, you are responsible for finding out what you missed and for catching up on any work that is due.

- Please note: our class begins promptly at our designated time and typically runs for the full 75 minutes, sometimes in a full-group meeting and sometimes in smaller groups. If you are more than ten minutes late for class or need to leave early more than twice, we will meet to discuss what might be causing the issue. Further latenesses or early leaving may add up to a class absence.

### **Academic Integrity**

One of the essential elements of the Expos curriculum is the work we do on effective source use, appropriate acknowledgement of sources, and expectations for citing sources in academic writing. In each unit, we will practice strategies for working with the ideas of other authors and sources, and for developing your own ideas in response to them. Most forms of academic writing involve building on the ideas of other writers and thinkers, contributing ideas of your own, and signaling clearly for readers where each idea comes from. This complex relationship with sources is part of our work through the whole semester, and you should always feel free to ask me questions about this material.

As we become familiar with the expectations of an academic audience, we will also work on strategies to avoid errors in citation and unintentional plagiarism. As with all your courses, the expectation in Expos is that *all the work that you submit for this course must be your own. Your work should not make use of outside sources unless such sources are explicitly part of the assignment.* Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to review by the Honor Council, including potential disciplinary action.

In addition to acknowledging how other writers have contributed to your work, doing your work with integrity means developing ideas that are wholly and genuinely yours. For this reason, students are prohibited from using ChatGPT or other generative AI tools for any stage of the writing process in Expos. The reasons for this policy in Expos are important: you discover your ideas in the messy process of drafting and revising them. Engaging with that writing process develops your ability to think clearly, organize that thinking, find appropriate evidence, pursue deeper nuances in and counterarguments to your claims and the evidence you use to present them, and work through alternative positions and evidence. To outsource any of that process to AI robs you of the practice with these skills that will strengthen your thinking; turning to AI essentially means you are giving up *your voice* in an essay, accepting instead an average and generic answer (which is what generative AI produces). In your Expos course, submitting work as yours that you did not develop or create on your own is a violation of the Harvard College Honor Code.