

CRITICAL WRITING: THE ART OF THE REVIEW
JOUR 5590/7590, FALL 2009

Professor Valerie Boyd

Office: Room 225, Grady College

Contact Info: 706-542-0887; vboyd@uga.edu

Office Hours: 3:30 to 4:30 Tuesdays and Thursdays, or by appointment

COURSE INTENTION:

This course is for students who want to learn to express themselves more cogently about the works of art they love—and those they don't. In addition to honing fundamental opinion-writing skills (using descriptive language, constructing arguments, selecting and analyzing evidence, developing a personal style), we will read a variety of film, television, theater, book and restaurant reviews to get a sense of the many forms a review can take. Over the course of the semester, students will write a series of reviews covering a wide range of topics, including music, books, dance, theater and food. Students will be challenged to think critically and creatively, and to write often and under deadline. Class sessions and assignments will be devoted to nurturing the skills needed to become a successful reviewer or critic. The class also will include visits from several professional critics.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- To attend class regularly and actively participate in all discussions
- To read all assigned material
- To complete all in-class writing assignments
- To maintain a weekly Reader's Journal
- To write six 600- to 800-word reviews, as assigned
- To develop an Internet blog with classmates as final project

Students also must attend plays, movies, music performances, etc. Please set aside some money early in the semester for these assignments.

GRADES WILL BE DETERMINED AS FOLLOWS:

- 60 percent of grade—Your six reviews (10 percent each)
- 10 percent of grade—Reader's Journal
- 15 percent of grade—Class participation, including attendance and in-class exercises
- 15 percent of grade—Final group Weblog project

SIX REVIEWS: Because students have varying interests, each subject (book, film, dance, etc.) selected to review will be a matter of personal choice. If you are a slow reader, note that your book review is due in mid-November. Allow as much time as you need to read a NEW book (© 2008 or 2009).

READER'S JOURNAL: Students will be required to read and respond to at least one review each week from a newspaper, weekly magazine or online publication. You will keep your journals electronically, on the eLearning Commons (formerly WebCT) page for this class. Using your UGA MyID, log on at:

<https://www.elc.uga.edu/webct/entryPageIns.dowebct>

Once you reach the page for this class, go to Course Tools, click on Discussions, then click Reader's Journal. Each week, you will read a review—of any kind, but no less than 500 words—from a newspaper, magazine or online publication. When you begin a new journal entry, click Create New Entry and, if possible, paste a link to the review that you are analyzing. Then write your 500- to 700-word analysis of the review. What did the reviewer do well? Where did she fall short? Is the language descriptive enough? Does the review offer a strong enough opinion? Some weeks I will assign a Reader's Journal exercise; other weeks, you will be free to analyze a review of your choice.

Note: It is best to keep your Reader's Journal updated, as I will regularly go online to review the journals with only one day's notice. The Reader's Journal will be reviewed for a midterm grade and then reviewed again near the end of the semester.

ATTENDANCE: Writers learn from each other, so you are expected to come to class—and to come prepared. More than five absences will automatically result in an "F" in class participation, which is 15 percent of your grade. You will not be allowed to make up any in-class assignments. Also, detailed instructions for all out-of-class assignments will be given in class. So it is clearly in your best interest to attend all class sessions. (If you have a serious illness or other emergency that causes you to miss multiple classes, you'll need to provide appropriate documentation of the problem.)

CLASS PARTICIPATION: Please keep in mind that class participation is not simply speaking a lot in class. The most important factor is the **quality** of your participation, which includes how prepared you are for each activity, and how focused you are on class discussions, even when you are not speaking.

FORMAT/DEADLINES: All assignments must be typed and submitted in standard journalistic format, following Associated Press style. Always check for typographical, grammatical and punctuation errors to make sure your work is clean and error-free. **No late papers will be accepted.** If you find yourself hard-pressed for time, please put forth as much effort as it takes to turn something in, even if you don't consider it your best work. **Meet deadlines. Period.**

FINAL WEB PROJECT: Students will work together in editorial teams to develop Weblogs, or blogs. To publish a wide selection of the reviews you write for class, the groups will create blogs in the following areas:

- Movies & TV
- Music
- Books & Performing Arts (theater/dance)
- Food

We will devote the last three weeks of class to the final blog project, dividing into teams to create, design and edit each of the four blogs. This will be an opportunity for you to publish your own work—and to be as creative as you like.

TEXTS: We will not use a particular textbook; instead I'll be distributing photocopies of various articles, reviews and essays in class. You also will be asked to bring in examples of reviews that you think work and those that don't. If you don't have one already, please buy a copy of *The AP Stylebook*. And if you don't have a good dictionary, please buy or borrow one and get in the habit (as do all professional writers) of referring to it regularly.

HONESTY AND INTEGRITY: Plagiarism, cheating and conflicts of interest will not be tolerated. To plagiarize is to use and pass off the ideas or writings of another as your own. This includes lifting blocks of copy from the Internet. Conflicts of interests include writing about your boyfriend, girlfriend, parents or others with whom you have close relationships. If you're not sure if a particular situation constitutes plagiarism or a conflict of interest, please feel free to ask. Don't let an innocent mistake cause you serious problems. Also, please note that you will be expected to abide by the UGA Student Honor Code: "I will be academically honest in all of my academic work and will not tolerate academic dishonesty of others." For further information, please consult *A Culture of Honesty*, at www.uga.edu/ovpi.

PROFESSIONALISM: Just as professional journalists represent the publications they write for, you represent the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication. Therefore, you should conduct yourself appropriately in class, when out on assignment—and in your online blogs. You are expected to approach your classmates, teachers and others with courtesy and respect.

COURSE SCHEDULE

(This is a general plan for the course and is subject to change as needed.)

Week of Aug. 18

Introduction and class goals
The art of observation

Week of Aug. 25

The role and relevance of the critic
Writing descriptively

Week of Sept. 1

From pop-culture consumer to pop-culture critic
The five essential elements of a good review

Week of Sept. 8

Point of view; building an argument; writing persuasively

Week of Sept. 15

Reviewing film: How to analyze a movie

Week of Sept. 22

More on reviewing film: Structuring the review
Peer editing
DUE Thursday, Sept. 24: Film review

Week of Sept. 29

Using the senses
Reviewing music

Week of Oct. 6

More on reviewing music; style and voice

DUE Thursday, Oct. 8: Concert review

Week of Oct. 13

DUE Tuesday, Oct. 13: Reader's Journal
Reviewing television
How who you are impacts what you like

Week of Oct. 20

Reviewing books

More on peer editing

DUE Thursday, Oct. 22: Television review

Week of Oct. 27

Reviewing theater and dance

Week of Nov. 3

Reviewing food

DUE Tuesday, Nov. 3: Performance (theater or dance) review

Week of Nov. 10

Citizen journalists: The power of blogging

DUE Thursday, Nov. 12: Food review

Week of Nov. 17

Conceptualizing and developing blogs

DUE Thursday, Nov. 19: Book review

Week of Nov. 24

Thanksgiving Break!

Week of Dec. 1

Revising your writing; editing constructively

Refining your blogs

Last day of class, Thursday, Dec. 3: Blog party

DUE Thursday, Dec. 10: Final blog essay, to be assigned