

Department of English and Writing Studies

**WRITING 2213G-650**  
LOL: HUMOUR WRITING  
Winter 2018

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Office: Room 3270, Lawson Hall

Office Hours: Tuesdays ----- or by appointment.

**Text:** In lieu of a text, there will be a range of handouts and/or links to websites posted on the syllabus and the course OWL site for you to read.

**Recommended Texts:**

*Writing Humor: Creativity and the Comic Mind*, by Mary Ann Rishel, Wayne State University Press, 2002. (This can be found on Google Books if you type in the title and author)

**Course Requirements**

LOL: Humour Writing is designed to help you write for greater impact while introducing you to different aspects of the genre, using a blend of online lecture and workshop. You will have the opportunity to write something funny for most weeks, get feedback from me and fellow students, read and critique a variety of humorous stories and watch and critique humorous videos. You should also develop skills in the ability to communicate information, arguments, and analyses accurately and reliably, orally and in writing to a range of audiences while appreciating and writing a range of humour styles for different audiences. Early in the course you will be assigned to small groups that may take turns leading online discussion as well as provide you with peers who can give you feedback on your draft assignments. You will examine your own work and that of others to better understand what makes us laugh and why.

**Assignments**

1.	Humour Analysis/List story	15%	Due Feb. 2
2.	Personal Experience story	25%	Due Feb. 16
3.	Parody or Satire	25%	Due March 8
4.	Online Discussion/Exercises/Workshopping	5%	Ongoing
5.	Final Assignment	30%	Due March 26

## Assignment Format

All assignments should be double-spaced as they are easier to grade and as close to the assigned word count as possible. **Assignments must be submitted via the OWL site for the course.** Emailed assignments may be acceptable in certain circumstances.

\*Workshops will be done electronically in small groups of about five to which you may be assigned. Prior to any week in this syllabus that mentions workshopping, you should provide copies of your draft work to fellow students so they have time to provide you feedback before you submit your final version to me.

## Submitting Assignments

I don't like to penalize late assignments; however, since one of the purposes of this course is to familiarize you with the writing profession, you need to know that deadlines are crucial. For this reason, all assignments will be due on the date specified unless you negotiate an extension at least 48 hours in advance. Following any other policy would be an injustice to you as a future writer. Assignments must be submitted electronically via OWL and in Word (**no pdfs, Pages etc.**). In certain circumstances with my permission, you may also place them in the drop box outside Lawson, Room 3270. **Late assignments will be penalized at 3 marks per day, including weekends.**

## Attendance Policies

Obviously we do not meet formally as a "class" in a Distance Studies course. Therefore "attendance" and participation on the Discussion Board are intertwined. Distance Studies classes are generally self-paced, so you must attend class (defined as logging into our OWL section) and participate by introducing yourself, and posting questions and thoughts each week based on the given week's set discussion topic(s) **at least two times weekly. This means at least two separate posts per week (a week is defined as running from Monday to Sunday), at least one of which must be a "new" post.** Extended absences, defined as a failure to post into the OWL classroom for more than seven consecutive days, must be coordinated with the instructor.

Postings on the Discussion Board must have the following characteristics:

- Must contribute something meaningful to the Board;
- Must support your opinion with sufficient reasons or evidence;
- Must display good grammar and organization.

Postings should not:

- Contain disrespectful or insulting language;
- Be excessively long or excessively short;
- Be unrelated to the week's topic;
- Say things that do not contribute anything, e.g. "I agree with you" or "nice comment".

- I will track your postings to the discussion Board, and it will be part of your 5% Online Discussion/ Exercises/Workshopping mark indicated above. **Failure to meet the minimum posting requirements may result in your final grade in the course being reduced by 10% (e.g. an earned final grade of 80% will be reported as a final grade of 72).**

Although this is an online course, you are expected to check into the OWL site on a regular basis, to participate in online discussions and to interact online with your fellow classmates by workshopping your drafts as much as online allows you. This policy will be waived only for medical or compassionate reasons. If your absence is extended and prolonged (over one week of continuous non-attendance), then

you should discuss it with your academic advisor in your home faculty, who may require documentation. That advisor may then contact all of your instructors. See also: '**Medical Accommodation Policy**' below.

**Note:** a class meeting missed in order to write a test, exam, or other form of 'make-up class' in another course **will** count as non-attendance, and **will** attract penalties as defined above if applicable. Instructors at the University of Western Ontario **shall not require** a student to write a make-up test or similar at times which conflict with that student's other scheduled class times. If you are asked or 'required' to do this, you should immediately contact an academic counsellor in your Dean's office. If you elect to miss a class in order to write such a test, that is **your** choice; your absence will not be excused.

### **Scholastic Offences, including Plagiarism**

The University Senate requires the following statements, and Web site references, to appear on course outlines:

"Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholoff.pdf>.

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy as above).

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>)."

### **Prerequisites**

The University Senate requires the following statement to appear on course outlines:

"Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites."

*The prerequisite for registration in this course is a) a final grade of 65 or more in one of Writing 2101F/G, 2125F/G (or the former 2121F/G), 2111F/G, 2130F/G, or 2131F/G; or b) a final grade of 70 or more in one of Writing 1000F/G, 1030F/G, 1031F/G, or c) Special Permission of the department.*

### **Medical Accommodation Policy**

For UWO Policy on Accommodation For Medical Illness, see:

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medical.pdf>

(downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC): <https://studentservices.uwo.ca> under the Medical Documentation heading)

Students seeking academic accommodation **on medical or other grounds** for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments **worth 10% or more of their final grade** must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation on medical grounds cannot be granted by the instructor or Writing Studies, and Writing Studies requires students in these circumstances to follow the same procedure when seeking academic accommodation on non-medical (i.e. non-medical compassionate or other) grounds.

Students seeking academic accommodation **on medical grounds** for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments **worth less than 10% of their final grade** must also apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Where in these circumstances the accommodation is being sought on **non-medical grounds**, students should consult in the first instance with their instructor, who may elect to make a decision on the request directly, or refer the student to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive medical documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for accommodation on medical grounds, or for other reasons (e.g. to explain an absence from class which may result in a grade penalty under an ‘Attendance’ policy in the course). **All** medical documentation **must** be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student’s home Faculty.

**Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western:**

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

### **Special Requests: Special Examinations, Incomplete Standing, Aegrotat Standing**

Please refer to the “Information for All Students in a Writing Course” for more detailed information. Briefly, remember that your instructor does not have the discretion to initiate, consider, or grant (or not) such requests; you must go directly to the Dean’s office of your home faculty.

**NO ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER April 11, 2018. OUTSTANDING WORK AS OF THIS DATE WILL RECEIVE A GRADE OF ZERO.**

### **Class Meeting Schedule**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Meeting focus</b>	<b>Readings</b>
Week 1 (starts Jan.8)	<b>Introduction to the Course/Beginning as a Humour Writer</b>  What makes us laugh and why. Introduction to readings, different forms of humour, how to analyze humour, funny words and phrases. Reading and discussion of “ <b>Disgruntled Former Lexicographer,</b> ” (posted on OWL)	Read for next week “ <b>Approximately Seven Pillars of Humorous Fiction</b> ” (will be posted online)  Read Demetri Martin “The Word Awards” and be prepared to discuss it after I post next week’s notes.
Week 2	<b>Funny in the Past... Funny Now? / Wordplay, puns, funny language</b>  A look at humour from ancient times through the mid-20 <sup>th</sup> century (which some of you might also consider as ancient ;-). Class exercise and discussion.	Assignment: Worth (15%) and due Feb. 2: Write a short essay (500 words max.) analyzing “ <i>Things That Will Happen If I Don’t Take My Phone Out Right Now</i> ” by Scaachi Koul at  <a href="http://www.newyorker.com/humor/daily-shouts/things-that-will-happen-if-i-dont-take-my-phone-out-right-now">http://www.newyorker.com/humor/daily-shouts/things-that-will-happen-if-i-dont-take-my-phone-out-right-now</a>

		<p><b>OR</b></p> <p>Using this story or any other funny list you might have read, write your own funny list of <b>no more than 500 words</b>.</p> <p>Another example of the list format is here:  “A Guide to Summer Sun Protection” at  <a href="http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/08/10/a-guide-to-summer-sun-protection">http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/08/10/a-guide-to-summer-sun-protection</a></p> <p>Also, read this piece by Amy Poehler for next week as an example of personal experience writing.</p> <p><a href="http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/10/14/take-your-licks">http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/10/14/take-your-licks</a></p>
Week 3	<p><b>Writing from Personal Experience/The Art of Parody</b></p> <p>Mining your personal life for comedy gems. Writing styles that can be imitated, twisted and massaged for effect.</p>	<p><b>Watch the Honest Trailer of The Hunger Games at</b>  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hp_xsUg9ws">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hp_xsUg9ws</a></p> <p><b>Read “Wikipedia Brown and the Case of the Missing Bicycle” by B. J. Novak at</b>  <a href="http://www.dinnerpartydownload.org/b-j-novak/">http://www.dinnerpartydownload.org/b-j-novak/</a></p> <p><b>Post a joke or two to the class next week and explain why they’re funny.</b></p>
Week 4	<p><b>Parody (continued)/A man walks into a bar... and Writing Jokes</b></p> <p>Why do some jokes make you laugh and others don’t?</p>	<p><b>Assignment (25%): Write a short piece based on a personal experience. Due Feb. 16. Details on OWL.</b></p> <p><b>Watch the following video to get another taste of doing a song parody.</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mqyv1_EtHk">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mqyv1_EtHk</a></p> <p><b>Read Demetri Martin’s “My Diet” at</b>  <a href="http://www.esquire.com/food-drink/food/a9795/demetri-martin-book-excerpt-5615929/">http://www.esquire.com/food-drink/food/a9795/demetri-martin-book-excerpt-5615929/</a></p> <p><b>Watch a satirical TV show (SNL, etc.) before next week</b></p>
Week 5	<p><b>Satire: Cruel But Fair?</b></p> <p>Poking fun at institutions that need deflating. How to find humour in the tragic. Workshop your personal experience drafts.</p>	<p><b>Watch Key and Peale’s “Substitute Teacher” at</b>  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRpsRKuyi3Y">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRpsRKuyi3Y</a></p> <p><b>You may have seen this clip before but we’ll discuss it on Forum.</b></p>

<p>Week 6</p>	<p><b>The Boundaries of Humour: Are there any?</b></p> <p>Be prepared to discuss what kind of humour you consider offensive. Discussion of dark/edgy jokes as well as the difference, if any, between men’s and women’s humour.</p>	<p><i>Assignment: (25%) Write EITHER a parody or a piece that satirizes a current event, person, or trend. Due March 8.</i></p> <p><b>Read “Eight Rules for Writing Fiction” at</b></p> <p><a href="http://www.newyorker.com/humor/daily-shouts/eight-rules-for-writing-fiction">http://www.newyorker.com/humor/daily-shouts/eight-rules-for-writing-fiction</a></p>
<p><b>Reading Week</b></p>	<p><b>Feb. 19 – 23</b></p> <p><b>No Classes</b></p>	
<p>Week 7</p>	<p><b>Fictional Humour</b></p> <p>Letting your imagination soar and getting rid of any literary boundaries</p> <p>Workshopping your satire or parody draft</p>	<p><b>Read “The Whore of Mensa” (link posted on OWL)</b></p> <p><a href="http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1974/12/16/the-whore-of-mensa">http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1974/12/16/the-whore-of-mensa</a></p>
<p>Week 8</p>	<p><b>Found Humour/Writing From Existing Materials</b></p> <p>Using your senses to find what’s funny in the world. Working with existing print and other materials to create original work that not only reads funny but looks funny.</p>	<p>Post two examples of found humour for next week on the OWL site and comment on what you liked about them.</p> <p><b>Final Assignment (30%) – You will pick one of three kinds of humour pieces to write that I will provide. Due March 26. Details to follow.</b></p> <p>Read this piece by Mindy Kaling.</p> <p><a href="http://www.glamour.com/story/mindy-kaling-guide-to-killer-confidence">http://www.glamour.com/story/mindy-kaling-guide-to-killer-confidence</a></p>
<p>Week 9</p>	<p><b>Group Humour Writing</b></p> <p>What’s it like to write as a team. Although there is no group assignment, you will examine how to generate comedy in a group format.</p> <p>Choose your topic/format for your final assignment and start working on it.</p>	<p><b>Watch an episode of the Daily Show or John Oliver or Saturday Night Live News Update before next week.</b></p>
<p>Week 10</p>	<p><b>Journalistic Humour/Possible Guest Speaker</b></p> <p>What’s funny about the news and/or history? Hearing other perspectives on humour from a possible online guest speaker.</p> <p>Workshop your final assignment with fellow students before handing it in.</p>	<p>There are lots of sites online with weird/funny news stories. Here’s one link to check:</p> <p><a href="https://www.huffingtonpost.com/section/weird-news">https://www.huffingtonpost.com/section/weird-news</a></p>

<p>Week 11</p>	<p><b>Writing to Perform and Short Films.</b></p> <p>Writing material to be heard/seen by an audience. Watching some short films to be followed by analysis/critique.</p>	<p>Watch the following video from Mr. Show, which is a performance that comments on performance.</p> <p><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-ZNX1jqbOk">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-ZNX1jqbOk</a></p> <p>Also read this excerpt from Mindy Kaling's book Why Not Me? at <a href="http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/08/10/coming-this-fall">http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/08/10/coming-this-fall</a></p>
<p>Week 12</p>	<p><b>Theories of Humour in 21<sup>st</sup> Century/ Markets for Humour</b></p> <p>How has humour changed... and where is it headed? Looking at where you can sell your work.</p>	
<p>Week 13</p>	<p><b>Final Thoughts/Comedy Films List</b></p> <p>I'll post a list of comedy films from the 1920s to the early 2000s for you to consider.</p>	