

Department of English and Writing Studies

WRITING 2213G-650
LOL: HUMOUR WRITING
Fall 2020
Instructor: Mark Kearney



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Office Hours: Via Zoom Tuesdays 1:30 to 3 pm 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

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|----|----------------------------|-----|----------------|
| 1. | Humour Analysis/List story | 15% | Due by Oct. 1 |
| 2. | Personal Experience story | 25% | Due by Oct. 22 |
| 3. | Parody or Satire | 25% | Due by Nov. 11 |
| 4. | Final Assignment | 30% | Due by Nov. 28 |

5. Online Discussion/Exercises/Workshopping 5% Ongoing

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., please**). In certain circumstances with my permission, you may also place them in the drop box outside Room 2401 University College. **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) **a minimum of 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, and not just a reaction to someone else.** Extended absences, defined as a failure to post into the OWL classroom for more than seven consecutive days, must be coordinated with the instructor. **The use of racist or any language that works against the values of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion will not be tolerated.**

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 also 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/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.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: At least 65% in one of Writing 2101F/G, Writing 2125F/G (or the former Writing 2121F/G), Writing 2111F/G, Writing 2130F/G or Writing 2131F/G; or at least 65% in one of Writing 1000F/G, Writing 1030F/G, or Writing 1031F/G; or at least 65% in each of MIT 1020E (or both of MIT 1021F/G and MIT 1022F/G) and MIT 1025F/G; or permission of the Department (consult the Undergraduate Program Director, Writing).

Medical Accommodation Policy

The link to the official Western/Writing Studies Medical Accommodation Policy appears below. This remains in effect, but may be modified temporarily by the university during the academic year as conditions change. Western has a comprehensive policy covering requests for accommodation by students who are not registered with Student Accessibility Services. All students should review this policy here, under the heading 'Accommodation for Illness – Undergraduate Students', noting the procedures, restrictions, and notice requirements:

http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#Page_12

Academic Consideration for Student Absence

Students will have up to two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student's final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence, unless noted on the syllabus. Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:

- for exams scheduled by the Office of the Registrar (e.g., December and April exams)
- absence of a duration greater than 48 hours,
- assessments worth more than 30% of the student's final grade,
- if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the academic year

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are not met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate grounds for the absence in question. Students are encouraged to contact their Faculty academic counselling office to obtain more information about the relevant documentation.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds, or for other reasons. All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty

Students seeking academic consideration **must communicate with their instructors no later than 24 hours** after the end of the period covered by either:

- i. A Self-Reported Absence, or
- ii. Academic consideration supported by the Academic Counselling Office.

In Writing courses, students covered by this policy who are seeking academic consideration must proceed as follows.

Writing Studies' Basic Policy: students seeking academic consideration **on medical or any other grounds** for any missed tests/exams, class attendance/participation components, or late or missed assignments must either initiate a Self-Reported Absence (**for a grade component worth up to 30% of their final grade, but excluding final exams scheduled during the exam period**) or apply in person to the Academic Counselling or Undergraduate office of their home Faculty and provide a Student Medical Certificate (SMC) or other supporting documentation as required in accordance with official Western policy (linked above).

Exception: in Writing Studies courses, a student seeking academic accommodation **on non-medical grounds** for any missed in-class tests/exams, class attendance/participation components, or late or missed assignments **worth less than 10% of a final grade** may first consult directly with her or his

instructor, who will – in his or her discretion – elect either to make a decision on the request directly or instruct the student to follow the procedures set out in **Writing Studies’ Basic Policy**.

Please note that individual instructors will **not under any circumstances** accept or read medical documentation directly offered by a student, whether in support of an application for accommodation on medical grounds or for related reasons (e.g. to explain an absence from class which may result in a grade penalty under an ‘Attendance’ policy in the course). All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy **must** be submitted to the Academic Counselling or Undergraduate office of a student’s home Faculty.

Students who are or who feel they should be covered under Student Accessibility Services should review Western policy here:

http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#Page_10

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Other links you may find helpful are:

Registrarial Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

At least three days prior to the deadline for withdrawal from a 1000- or 2000-level course without academic penalty, students will receive assessment of work accounting for at least 15% of their final grade. Generally, students can expect some form of feedback on their performance in a course before the drop date.” November 12 is the last day to drop a first-term half-course without academic penalty.

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 Dec. 9, 2020. OUTSTANDING WORK AS OF THIS DATE WILL RECEIVE A GRADE OF ZERO.

Date	Meeting focus	Readings
Week 1 (starts Sept. 9 and goes to Sept. 20)	<p>Introduction to the Course/Beginning as a Humour Writer</p> <p>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 “Disgruntled Former Lexicographer,” (posted on OWL)</p>	<p>Read for next week “Approximately Seven Pillars of Humorous Fiction” (will be posted online)</p> <p>Read Demetri Martin “The Word Awards” and be prepared to discuss it after I post next week’s notes.</p>

<p>Week 2</p> <p>(Sept. 21 to Sept 27) This pattern continues until the final week)</p>	<p>Funny in the Past... Funny Now? / Wordplay, puns, funny language</p> <p>A look at humour from ancient times through the mid-20th century (which some of you might also consider as ancient ;-). Class exercise and discussion.</p>	<p>Assignment: Worth (15%) and due by Sept 27: Write a short essay (between 450 and 550 words.) analyzing “<i>Things That Will Happen If I Don’t Take My Phone Out Right Now</i>” by Scaachi Koul at</p> <p>http://www.newyorker.com/humor/daily-shouts/things-that-will-happen-if-i-dont-take-my-phone-out-right-now</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Using this story or any other funny list you might have read, write your own funny list of between 350 and 500 words. Another example of the list format is here: “A Guide to Summer Sun Protection” at http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/08/10/a-guide-to-summer-sun-protection</p> <p>Also, read this piece by Amy Poehler for next week as an example of personal experience writing.</p> <p>http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/10/14/take-your-licks</p>
<p>Week 3</p>	<p>Writing from Personal Experience/The Art of Parody</p> <p>Mining your personal life for comedy gems. Writing styles that can be imitated, twisted and massaged for effect.</p>	<p>Watch the Honest Trailer of The Hunger Games at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hp_xsUg9ws</p> <p>Read “Wikipedia Brown and the Case of the Missing Bicycle” B. J. Novak at http://www.dinnerpartydownload.org/b-j-novak/</p> <p>Post a joke or two to the class next week and explain why they’re funny.</p>
<p>Week 4</p>	<p>Parody (continued)/A man walks into a bar... and Writing Jokes</p> <p>Why do some jokes make you laugh and others don’t?</p>	<p><i>Assignment (25%): Write a short piece based on a personal experience. Due by Oct. 18. Details on OWL.</i></p> <p>Watch the following videos to get another taste of ways to do parodies.</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2cfxv8Pq-Q</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbhrz1-4hN4</p> <p>Read Demetri Martin’s “My Diet” at http://www.esquire.com/food-drink/food/a9795/demetri-martin-book-excerpt-5615929/</p> <p>Watch a satirical TV show (SNL, The Daily Show, etc.) before next week</p>
<p>Week 5</p>	<p>Satire: Cruel But Fair?</p> <p>Poking fun at institutions that need deflating. How to find humour in the tragic.</p>	<p>Watch Key and Peale’s “Substitute Teacher” at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRpsRKuyi3Y</p> <p>You may have seen this clip before but we’ll discuss it on</p>

	Workshop your personal experience drafts.	Forum.
Week 6	<p>The Boundaries of Humour: Are there any?</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 by Nov. 13.</i></p> <p>Read “Eight Rules for Writing Fiction” at http://www.newyorker.com/humor/daily-shouts/eight-rules-for-writing-fiction</p>
Week 7	<p>Fictional Humour</p> <p>Letting your imagination soar and getting rid of any literary boundaries</p> <p>Workshopping your satire or parody draft</p>	<p>Reading: excerpt from Dear Committee Members by Julia Schumacher and an excerpt from The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy by Richard Adams</p> <p>https://thingsthatmadeanimpression.wordpress.com/2013/03/02/excerpt-from-the-hitchhikers-guide-to-the-galaxy-by-douglas-adams-babel-fish/</p>
Reading Week Week Nov. 2 - 8	<i>No Classes</i>	
Week 8	<p><i>Found Humour/Writing From Existing Materials</i></p> <p><i>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.</i></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>Final Assignment (30%) – You will pick one of three kinds of humour pieces to write that I will provide. Due by Nov. 27. Details to follow.</p> <p>Read this piece by Mindy Kaling. http://www.glamour.com/story/mindy-kaling-guide-to-killer-confidence</p>
Week 9	<p>Group Humour Writing</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>Watch an episode of the Daily Show or John Oliver or Saturday Night Live News Update before next week.</p>

Week 10	<p>Journalistic Humour/Possible Guest Speaker</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>https://www.huffingtonpost.com/section/weird-news</p>
Week 11	<p>Writing to Perform and Short Films.</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>http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-ZNX1jqbOk</p> <p>Also read this excerpt from Mindy Kaling's book Why Not Me? at https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/08/10/coming-this-fall</p>
Week 12 Dec. 7 to 9	<p>Theories of Humour in 21st Century/ Markets for Humour</p> <p>How has humour changed... and where is it headed? Looking at where you can sell your work. I'll post a list of comedy films from the 1920s to the early 2000s for you to consider.</p>	