

## 3901G: Hitting the Right Notes: Lyric Writing

Winter 2020

Section 001

M 12:30 – 3:30pm, UC-1220

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### Course Objectives

This course introduces students to the basics of effective lyric writing in several forms/genres using tools such as prosody, sensory images, repetition, fictional persona, and narrative forms. After analyzing the work of accomplished songwriters, students will workshop their own lyrics while building towards a thematically coherent final project.

Students who successfully complete Writing 3901G should be able to do the following:

- Generate ideas and sensory imagery for lyrics through object writing exercises
- Write lyrics in basic metrical form that will allow them to be set to music
- Understand the different conventions of several lyrical genres (including spoken word)
- Analyze the work of accomplished songwriters
- Understand and articulate how different musical settings can help support the content of a lyric
- Understand the roles of persona, narrative, and performance in the writing of lyrics
- Work effectively with classmates, giving and receiving constructive feedback
- Incorporate feedback into revisions of course work

### Required Texts

Pattison, Pat. *Writing Better Lyrics (WBL)*. Second edition. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 2012.

Zollo, Paul. *Songwriters on Songwriting (SOS)*. Fourth edition. Cincinnati: Da Capo Press, 2003.

- Students must have access to YouTube and/or iTunes for songs in weekly playlists; access to Garage Band (or other recording software) is ideal but not mandatory.
- A bound notebook for writing exercises is strongly recommended.

### Course Requirements

Term Work	Grade Value
Lyric Analysis Essay (1000-1200 words)	20%
Midterm Songbook (3 lyrics with musical context notes)	20%
Album Project Pitch (oral presentation)	15%
Album Project (6-7 lyrics with musical context notes)	35%
Recording/reading (performance element)	10%

## Assignment Format

All assignments must be typed and stapled; make sure that prose assignments are double-spaced and that verse assignments are single-spaced. All assignments must have your name, course name, section number, and the instructor's name on the first page. Whenever using sources in a paper, you will be expected to follow MLA style.

## Submitting Assignments

Assignments are due in-class on the date specified on the schedule. **Late assignments will be penalized 5% per day unless I have granted you an extension.** You must talk to your instructor about extensions ahead of the due date; they are not automatic.

In this course you will be required to submit the final version of each of your written assignments electronically, through OWL, to Turnitin.com. If necessary, please submit assignments to the Department of English and Writing Studies Drop Box outside of University College 2401, **making sure you include your instructor's name, the course code, and your name on the first page.** Do not fax or email assignments. Also, be aware that you are responsible for keeping copies of all assignments submitted.

## Attendance policies

Attendance at class is required to improve as a writer. Here is the Writing Studies attendance policy in this class:

- You may miss up to three hours (the equivalent of one week of class) of class meetings during the term without explanation. That means that the first three class hours you miss will be recorded as absences but *excused provided you don't miss any more.*
- However, if you miss a total of four to nine class hours (the equivalent of up to three full weeks of class), your final grade will be reduced by 10% (e.g. an earned final grade of 80% will be reported as a final grade of 72).
- If you miss a total of more than nine hours of class meetings (the equivalent of more than three weeks of class meetings) your final grade will be reduced by 15% (e.g. an earned final grade of 80% will be reported as a final grade of 68).

This policy will be waived only for medical or compassionate reasons. If you have good reasons for waiving an absence of one class meeting (e.g. if you've missed three hours, and need or want to miss another class meeting) discuss these reasons with your instructor within one week of that absence. 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 Western University **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 Writing class in order to write such a test in another class, that is **your** choice; your absence will not be excused.

**Attendance also extends to tardiness.** If you **are more than 20 minutes late**, you will be penalized an hour of attendance. Please make every effort to be on time as late entry can disrupt the flow of discussion in our class. Early departures from class, which have not been previously arranged with the instructor, will also be counted as an absence. If you leave during the break, you will be docked an hour of attendance.

## **Classroom Policies**

You will be expected to read all the chapters assigned from your textbook before coming to class. Your instructor will not summarize the reading, but will instead focus on salient issues arising from a particular chapter. In turn, you must participate in class and contribute your observations to the discussion. This is an active learning environment, so be prepared to engage with your instructor and your peers.

## **E-mail Policy**

I respond to e-mails within 24 hours. If you have not heard from me in 48 hours, please resend your message. I do not check e-mail on the weekend.

## **Scholastic Offences, including Plagiarism**

“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](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.

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 Western and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.”

*Note: In this course you will be required to submit an electronic copy of the final version of each of your essays to [turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) through your section’s OWL HomePage.*

## **Prerequisites**

“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**

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

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).

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.

**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 (above).

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 medical documentation 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](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/>) 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.

### Class Meeting Schedule

Date	Meeting focus	Readings (subject to minor changes)
Week 1	-Class introductions -Object writing and imagery -Blues couplets	<b>WBL:</b> Ch. 1 (p.3-18)
Week 2	-Introduction to music basics -Blues lyric workshop -Ballad metre and narrative	<b>WBL:</b> Ch. 14, 15, 16 (p.147-167) <b>SOS:</b> Willy Dixon interview (p.19-25) <i>Week 1# and #2 Playlists (YouTube)</i> <b>OWL Article:</b> “Elements of Music”
Week 3	-Review of poetic devices -Avoiding clichés -Bob Dylan -Narrative ballad workshop	<b>WBL:</b> Ch. 5 (p. 47-54) and Ch. 6 (p. 55 - 81) <i>Week #3 Playlist (YouTube)</i> <b>OWL Article:</b> “An Integrated Poetics of Bob Dylan’s Voice, Personae, and Lyrics” by Christophe Lebold

Week 4	<b>Lyric Analysis Essay Due</b> -Personas: being somebody else -Prosody	<b>WBL:</b> Ch. 18 (177-188) <b>SOS:</b> Randy Newman interview (p. 265-292) <i>Week #4 Playlist (YouTube)</i>
Week 5	-Personas: being yourself -Singer-songwriters -Point of view -Persona lyric workshop	<b>WBL:</b> Ch.10, 11, 12 (p. 111-138) <b>SOS:</b> Alanis Morissette (p. 651-662) <i>Week #5 Playlist (YouTube)</i> <i>OWL Article:</i> "Why Joni Mitchell's Blue is the Greatest Relationship Album" by Jack Hamilton
Week 6	<b>Midterm Songbook Due</b> -Playing with form -Spoken word poetry -Hip Hop	<b>WBL:</b> Ch. 19 (p. 189-228) <i>Week #6 Playlist (YouTube)</i> <i>OWL Article:</i> "A Lyric Essay: Spoken Word Variations" by Sheri-D Wilson
Winter Reading Break	<b>No Class</b>	<b>No readings</b>
Week 7	-The album as thematic unit -Alternative approaches to lyric writing -Lyric worksheets -Visit from CHRW recording engineer	<b>WBL:</b> Ch. 4 (33-46) <b>SOS:</b> Paul Simon interview (p. 87-122) <i>Week #7 Playlist (YouTube)</i> Album: <i>Graceland</i> by Paul Simon CHRW recording handout
Week 8	<b>Oral Presentations</b>	<b>SOS:</b> Leonard Cohen interview (p. 329-349) Album: <i>Nebraska</i> by Bruce Springsteen
Week 9	<b>Oral Presentations</b>	Album: <i>The Suburbs</i> by Arcade Fire
Week 10	<b>Oral Presentations</b>	
Week 11	<b>Major Album Project workshop</b> - Bring album project draft for workshop (10% penalty on final for no draft) -Work on recording CHRW demos	
Week 12	<b>Album Project Due</b> -Where and how to market your songs -Class reading/performance	Review <i>Songwriter's Market</i> (2020)