ENGLISH 030: Section 018: Honors Rhetoric and Composition – When There is Nothing to Say: the Rhetoric of Suffering and Service

Meetings: 101 Wagner, 9:05-9:55, MWF  
Instructor: Matt Newcomb  
Office location, phone, e-mail: 053 Burrowes Building, 865-1552, mjn154@psu.edu  
(I’m easiest to reach by email).  
Office Hours: Monday 11:00 am to 1:00pm, Wednesday 10:00 to 11:00 am.  
Mailbox: 112 Burrowes Building (organized by last name)

Texts:  
- Beloved by Toni Morrison  
- Night by Elie Wiesel  
- Regarding the Pain of Others by Susan Sontag  
- We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families by Philip Gourevitch  
- Country of My Skull by Antje Krog  
- Manifesto for Another World by Ariel Dorfman.

- Additional readings on Angel, library reserve, or by handout - to be accessed and printed throughout the semester (AL)

- Optional: College-level dictionary, handbook on documentation, citation, and bibliographic conventions, according to MLA (the Modern Language Association) or the MLA Handbook is a good idea. Used copies are available.

Computer Stuff: In addition to the texts, you need to have an active e-mail account. Obviously you also need to check that e-mail account regularly. During the course of the semester it may be necessary for me to be in contact with the class to send announcements, updated assignments, and writing prompts through e-mail. You may also find yourself using e-mail to communicate with other students in the class. In addition, various course assignments may be found and completed on the ANGEL website at https://cms.psu.edu.

We also may be using a wiki during class, for postings, discussions, and inventing ideas. Details on this will be covered in class.

Course Description:  
Most of you were early in your high school career on September 11, 2001. You saw the variety of efforts to respond to such a tragedy and attempted to do so yourself. Many of you may remember the post-Christmas tsunami and the relief efforts afterwards as a key event of your senior year. These are events where we often just don’t know what to say. How can one respond through writing and speaking in situations where words often seem insufficient to the size or pain (or even joy) of a situation? Whether as future political officials, businesspeople, non-governmental organization workers, educators, academics, parents, or citizens, we will all have to thoughtfully, ethically, and effectively use words to respond to suffering and perhaps to serve those needing aid. In this course we will examine a variety of texts that respond to significant suffering (and sometimes aid to those in need) in different ways. Classes will be discussion-based and will include numerous writing exercises. We will look at a variety of genres and historical situations – from a narrative around the holocaust, to a journalistic report on Rwanda in the 1990s, to court reporting from South Africa, to a text on photography - and read these texts both to learn about the situations they describe and to understand the strategies the writers use. Through this we will develop our own abilities to understand the possibilities of what to say and how to say it in specific
contexts to specific audiences. In the course of working on our own composition practices, we will address questions like “how is suffering defined?” “who can speak for others?” and “how does one ethically motivate an audience (to donate money for example)?” Throughout the course we will see many positive and effective responses to suffering, and students will write both analyses of texts and their own response to particular situations.

Course Goals:
English 30, a course that is grounded in the study of rhetoric, is designed to help you develop the communication skills that are necessary to function both in and out of the academic world. Specifically, the goals of this course are to:

1. provide you with an understanding of rhetorical principles
2. further develop your analytical skills
3. hone your written and verbal communication skills
4. establish solid research skills
5. help you understand yourself better as a writer, and help you connect that self to your potential audiences more intentionally
6. Prepare you for much of the writing that will be required in your PSU career and beyond

Our specific section also includes goals of:
7. Considering the difficulties of speaking for others, about that which seems to surpass words, and in emotionally charged situations.
8. Learning some of the strategies that have been used to write about conflict-filled situations and responses to them.
9. Gaining occasional historical knowledge of global rhetorical situations.
10. Making the ethics of our own rhetoric more explicit.

Course Requirements: You will be expected to (1) attend class meetings and be prepared. That means do the reading; this is a discussion-based class and if you haven't done the reading, you won't be able to contribute and the whole class will suffer accordingly. (2) participate in class discussions—this course is what you make of it and will work only if everyone participates; (3) actively participate in in-class writing exercises; (4) participate fully in writing workshops and group work; (5) submit ten (10) one-page statements of understanding—one full single-spaced page—with wherein you demonstrate your understanding or interpretation of that week's reading or my prompt—don't summarize the reading or the class discussion—I already know that stuff—tell me something new; (6) propose, draft, and write five papers of various lengths and purposes; (7) Attendance—you are allotted two unexcused absences during the semester for fatigue, burnout, individual holidays, various flus, personal reasons, malfunctioning alarm clocks, etc. You decide. For each unexcused absence after your first two, your final grade will be reduced down to and including "F." Absences accompanied by a note from a legitimate University source are considered excused; (8) submit all work on time—late papers will be docked one letter grade per day; (9) submit a one-folder portfolio of all your graded papers for this course on the last day of class. NO papers will be accepted after the last day of class; Portfolios can be picked up at my office the following semester or mailed to you in a stamped, self-addressed envelope. N.B.: Passing the course requires timely completion of all of the assignments, long and short, in-class and out-of-class.

Grades:
1. Personal Literacy Narrative (4-5 pp) - 15% (Assignment 1 is a story about some aspect of your own experience in gaining literacy in reading and writing.)
2. Book Review; with presentation (2-3 pp + poster) - 15% (50/50)
(Get a book approved by me that fits with the theme of the course. A review involves some summary and assessment. What issues does it focus on, what is it good for, and where is it weak?)

3. Rhetorical Analysis of applicable doc. (5-6 pp) 15%
(Using our class terms of ethos/logos/pathos, along with other rhetorical terms we cover, providing an analysis of the strategies for persuasion used in a short text.)

4. Exploring an Issue (in groups of 4) + lead class (4-5 pp) 15% (67/33)
(Each group will have one general topic or event, and each group member will explore one aspect of that event - providing multiple sides of a controversial issue. Individuals will write papers, then the group will lead one day of class discussion, putting their four parts together. Ex. – Terry Schiavo case – 1. role of state, 2. definition of life/death, 3. Who is financially responsible?, 4. Role of the media.)

5. Creative Research Essay on site of suff/serv (4-8 pp) 20%
(Your chance to use the different concepts and examples from the semester to create your own thoughtful document about a specific site of suffering and/or service. You will provide a short cover letter that explains some of your rhetorical decisions.)
- Class participation (attendance, discussion, preparation, in class writing,) -- 10%.  
- 10 journal statements, responding to the reading or my prompts (no more than one each week) = 10%.  
- Total -- 100%

You have five formal writing assignments in all. During the course of the semester you may revise one paper for a new grade.

You will receive points for each major assignment that match the percentage. For example, the Personal Literacy Narrative is worth 15 points, so your grade will be a number (to one decimal point) out of 15. 13.5/15 = 90%. A total of 100 points will be possible. You have 20% of the grade (participation and journals) that should be easy to get an “A” on from effort alone, so I do not round grades at the end of the semester. The grade ranges are below:

93-100 = A  
90-92.9 = A-  
87-89.9 = B+  
83-86.9 = B  
80-82.9 = B-  
77-79.9 = C+  
70-76.9 = C  
60-69.9 = D  
59.9 or less = F

**Accommodation and Alternative Formats:** The Pennsylvania State University encourages qualified people with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities and is committed to the policy that all people shall have equal access to programs, facilities, and admissions without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by University policy or by state or federal authorities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell the instructor as soon as possible.

**Academic Dishonesty:** Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Students who are found to be dishonest will receive academic sanctions
via the College Committee on Academic Integrity, including possible failure for the course, and will be reported to the University’s Judicial Affairs office for possible further disciplinary sanctions. (I do not think this will be an issue, but I also do not tolerate dishonesty – first offenses will be taken through the full disciplinary process.)

**Class Schedule** (subject to change): Readings and written assignments are listed on the day they are due. Additional reading and writing assignments, prompts for formal papers, and peer-response workshops will be inserted throughout the semester as will frequent, unannounced in-class writings.

**Attendance:** I expect you to attend class every day and to have your textbook and any necessary supplementary materials with you. I allow for two “free” absences. You need to notify me of the dates and reasons for any absences. If you have unexcused absences, your class grade may be docked up to one full grade per absence. In an emergency, please call or email me.

If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get the assignments, class notes, and course changes from a classmate; it is also your responsibility to keep track of and complete the missing work. In-class work cannot be made up. If you miss class on the day a written assignment is due, make arrangements to send it along with a classmate.

**Tentative Syllabus -- English 030 -- Fall 2005**

Writing due in bold, reading due in italics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction to course and theme, go over syllabus, introductions of students and instructor, class roster (name, e-mail, etc.). Introductory writing: &quot;Tell me about yourself as a writer and what you think it means to be a writer.&quot; Read <em>New Yorker</em> piece in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Frederick Douglass</em> handout; <em>Adrienne Rich</em> handout. Rhetorical situation. Analyze reading for today, intro paper #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 5</td>
<td><strong>Labor Day</strong> – no class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Rough Draft Paper 1 Due, workshop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>We wish to inform you...*(second third of book). Rhetorical analysis in class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Week 5
Sept. 26 11- *We wish to inform you...* (finish book). Definition in class (genocide).
Sept. 30 13- *Night* – (first half). Compare and contrast exercise (Night and We Wish?)

Week 6
Oct. 3 14- *Night* – (second half). Sample book reviews?
Oct. 5 15- *Paper 2* rough draft. Workshop in class.
Oct. 7 16- *Paper 2* Due (all). Presentations in class (10?)

Week 7
Oct. 10 17- Presentations in class (7?). Introduce paper #3 – Rhetorical Analysis.
Oct. 12 18- Presentations in class (finish).
Oct. 14 Study day – no class

Week 8

Week 9

Week 10
Nov. 2 26- *Beloved* (finish).
Nov. 4 27- Benjamin's 12 Theses – (handout). Historiography – apply to texts so far, own writing. Write own theses on history, suffering, service, rhetoric, other.

Week 11
Nov. 7 28—*Book of Job* (web). Charles Peirce and hypothesis.
Nov. 9 29- *Paper 4 rough draft* due. Workshop in class. First groups assign readings.
Nov. 11 30- *Paper 4 due* (all). Class discussion from groups 1 and 2. Next readings.

Week 12
Nov. 14 31- Class discussions from groups 3 and 4. Next readings. Intro paper #5.
Nov. 16 32- Class discussions from groups 5 and 6.
Nov. 18 33- Proposal for paper 5 due. Manifesto for Another World (first half). Deejay, mixing, juxtaposition, selection, editing.

Week 13
Nov. 21 34- Manifesto for Another World (finish).
Nov. 22 35- *Tuesday with Friday schedule*— Country of My Skull (first quarter).
Nov. 23 Thanksgiving Holiday – no class
Nov. 25 Thanksgiving Holiday – no class

Week 14
Supplemental notes/activities/information/ideas

THE DRAFT WORKSHOP

For each of the essays in English 15, you will participate with the other students (in our class) in one or more draft workshops, during which time you will help one another improve your drafts. I will provide you specific guidelines for evaluating and reviewing your peer's work, so don't worry. The important point for you to remember is this: participation in draft workshops—as a reviewer and as a drafter—are course requirements. Period.

The benefits of the draft workshops for you include:

• an opportunity for you to build a trusting, mutually beneficial academic relationship with one or more classmates;
• specific, written feedback on and about your draft from one or more other students.

Your responsibilities for each draft workshop include:

• coming to class, on time, with a complete, readable draft of your current essay,
• being open to suggestions, responses, and questions from other readers, and
• participating in the workshop with intelligence and a willingness to assist other writers.

It is important that the comments you offer your classmates reflect your specific responses as an engaged reader. Vague comments such as "this flows" or "good title" do not provide the specific guidance that writers need when they revise. Of course, if you like specific things the writer does, then say so—all writers appreciate positive responses. However, you should also comment in specific and helpful ways on how and why various passages of the writer's essay are effective or ineffective. A useful comment might be "This second example doesn't work for me as a reader because (it doesn't follow from the first example; it seems off the point; it's not in the best order; it contradicts what comes after it—you get the idea).

The workshops will be conducted in a variety of ways. Early in the semester you will be asked to provide specific types of feedback. Later in the semester, as you have gained more skill as a reader (of your classmate's writing) and as a writer, your responses may not be as structured. However, in all cases, you will furnish your classmates with written, signed responses to their writing. And, remember, when you turn in your folder for each essay, include one or more written and signed responses from your English 15 classmates.

How to Respond Helpfully to a Peer's Draft

Keep this list of questions by your side as you're reviewing your classmate's draft—or your own. Please know that these questions are suggestions, ideas to help you think of encouraging, truly helpful ways of responding. Responding does not mean criticizing—it means helping someone do his/her best work. (Besides, if you can answer these questions in terms of your peer's draft, you'll improve drastically and quickly your ability to answer these questions in terms of your own draft.)

1. The assignment. Does the draft carry out the assignment? How might the writer better fulfill it?
2. **The title and introduction.** Does the title tell the reader what the draft is about? Does it catch the reader's interest? What does the opening accomplish in terms of hooking the reader's interest, establishing common ground, and establishing the writer's ethos? How else might the writer begin?

3. **The thesis and the purpose.** Paraphrase the thesis as a promise: “In this essay, I will...” Does the draft fulfill that promise? Why or why not? What is the writer’s purpose? How does (not) the draft fulfill that?

4. **The audience.** Who is the audience? How does the draft establish good will with that audience? How does it capture the interest of that audience? What values does the audience hold that are different from the writer's?

5. **The exigence.** What is the situation (or context) that calls for this writer's rhetorical transaction?

6. **The rhetorical stance.** Where does the writer stand on issues involved with this topic? What words or phrases in the draft indicate the values the writer holds with regard to this topic? How does the writer identify her cause with the interests (or different values) of her audience?

7. **The supporting points.** List the main points, in order. Number them in order of interest to you. Which of them could be explained or supported more fully? What evidence, examples, or details might do the trick? Which of the supporting points could be de-emphasized or eliminated?

8. **The paragraphs.** Which paragraphs are clearest? Best developed? Which paragraphs need further development? What kinds of information might help?

9. **The organization.** How is the draft organized—chronologically, spatially, emphatically, or some other way? Given the organizational pattern, could the main points be presented in a more effective way? What suggestions can you make for transitions between paragraphs that would make connections clearer and easier to follow?

10. **The sentences.** Choose three sentences you consider the most interesting or best written—stylistically effective, entertaining, or otherwise memorable. Then choose three sentences you see as weak—confusing, awkward, or uninspired. Advise your peer on how to revise those three weak sentences.

11. **The words.** Circle the words that are particularly effective; underline those that are weak, vague, or unclear. Do those words need to be defined or replaced? Are there any potentially offensive words in the draft?

12. **The tone.** What dominant impression does the draft create—serious, humorous, satiric, persuasive, argumentative, objective? Is the tone appropriate to the topic and audience? Is it consistent? Mark specific places where the writer's voice comes through most clearly. Ask the writer if this is the tone she intended—and if her voice is surprising to her.

13. **The conclusion.** Does the draft conclude in a memorable way? Does it end abruptly? Trail off? Restate the introduction? How else might this draft end? If you like the conclusion, provide two reasons why.

14. **Final thoughts.** What are the main strengths of this draft? Weaknesses? What surprised you—and why? What do you want to know more about? What was the single most important thing said?

**Revision suggestions**

Follow the guidelines for “How to Respond Helpfully to a Peer's Draft.” Using your peer’s response, your teacher’s response, and your own response, significantly re-think your essay. In order for a revised essay to receive an improved grade, “cosmetic” revision will not be enough. In other words, don’t rely on just your teacher’s comments for ideas about revising. Don’t stop at fixing up a few things here and there, changing a few words, correcting typos—that will not be enough. This revision should be significant.

A **significant revision** means that you must make several of the following improvements:

- refine and focus your thesis statement;
- expand and develop your supporting assertions using new evidence, examples, and illustrations
- include and respond to counter-arguments
- develop more fully your introduction and/or conclusion

and/or
- significantly modify or change your thesis—and thus your argument (you could even argue the opposite of the original), which means that you’ll use different lines of reasoning and respond to different counter-arguments.

In addition to the above, you may also
- write to a different audience (which will require changes in the overall argument as well)
- change or refine your ethos, appropriately
- rearrange your argument, your material
- improve your style and tone, appropriately

Note: You must turn in the original essay with the revision. And it goes without saying that your revision will take into account the comments (from your teacher and peers) on the original.

Exercises in Style

A: Avoiding Sexist Language
(adapted from the NCTE Guidelines for Nonsexist Language)

Rewrite each of the following sentences that contains sexist language:

1. All men are created equal.
2. The world needs honest men.
4. My mailman told me that Saturday mail delivery may soon be dropped.
5. Every time a student flunks English, he complains to the chairman of the department.
6. I think I’d like to be a stewardess.
7. Give each student his paper as soon as he is finished.
8. The average student is worried about his grades.
9. If the student was satisfied with his performance on the pretest, he took the posttest.
10. Let each student participate. Has he had a chance to talk? Could he feel left out?
11. Anyone who wants to go to the game should bring his money tomorrow.
12. Penn State faculty and their wives are invited to a tail-gate party at the home of the university president and his wife.
13. My mom’s a lady professor.
14. Running for Student Body president are Bill Smith, a straight-A sophomore, and Kathie Ryan, a gorgeous junior.
15. Senator Kennedy and Mrs. Clinton both voted for the patients’ rights bill.
16. I always ask the girl in the doctor’s office if she can get me in after school.
17. My sister doesn’t want to get married; she wants to be a career girl.
18. We put in a swimming pool over the summer—it was a man-sized job.
19. Poetess Elizabeth Barrett Browning was married to poet Robert Browning.
20. Writers become so involved in their work that they neglect their wives and families.
21. Sally’s husband lets her teach part-time.
22. Ask your mother to send cookies for our party, ok?
B: Copia

Copia is a stylistic devise by which writers practice and invent various ways of saying the same thing. Being able to vary a message (by using colloquial diction or a more formal tone, by expanding or condensing a message) is of utmost importance for writers who want the style of their message to be appropriate to the rhetorical situation.

The following exercise is based on one used by Desiderius Erasmus in his 16th-century textbook, *Copia: Foundations of Abundant Style*. In one section, Erasmus demonstrates his facility with copia by composing the expression “Your letter pleased me very much” in 150 different ways. Erasmus performed and taught copia exercises because he believed, along with Cicero, that the most effective rhetorician was one who could turn from amplitude to terseness as the situation dictated.

“I would like to invite you to a party this Friday night.”

Restate this invitation in at least 15 different ways. Then exchange your sentences with a classmate, choosing your favorite sentence of the 15. Write your favorite sentence on the board.

C: Determining a Thesis Statement in Four Steps

1. For each of the general subjects, make a controversial claim in the form of a debating resolution. In other words, write something like the following: “Resolved: Cats make better pets than dogs.” Or “Resolved: College students binge drink because they’re immature.”

   - general education requirements
   - minimum wage
   - grammar exercises
   - tuition
   - social security

   - freshman English
   - college athletes
   - racism
   - feminism
   - the United Nations

2. Pick three claims from your list. Drop the “Resolved” and add a “because clause,” something like, “The general education requirements should be abolished because they are a waste of student tuition dollars.”

3. Make each of your three claims more easily acceptable by eliminating the direct “because clause” and adding qualifications, such as “Despite the importance of a shared knowledge base, the general education requirements are so varied in content that they may be leading to greater division among the student body.”

4. Turn each of your three statements around so they assert the opposite, remembering to include all the features of the original, “Although the general education requirements may seem irrelevant during college, they are meant to prepare students to enter the ongoing intellectual conversations of the nation.”

D: Meeting a Paragraph

(paragraph taken from John Horgan’s *The End of Science*)

With one or two classmates (or by yourself), reorder the following sentences so that they comprise a cogent and coherent paragraph. Be prepared to supply reasons for your choices and order—and to share your finished paragraph.

When I first thought about writing a book, I envisioned it as a series of portraits, warts and all, of the fascinating truth seekers and truth shunners I have been fortunate enough to interview.

But gradually, I began to imagine that I knew; I convinced myself that one particular scenario was more plausible than all the others.

That approach, I felt, would be more in keeping with my conviction that most assertions about the limits of knowledge are, finally, deeply idiosyncratic.

I decided to abandon any pretenses of journalistic objectivity and write a book that was overtly judgmental, argumentative, and personal.

I intended to leave it to the readers to decide whose forecasts about the future of science made sense and whose did not.
While still focusing on individual scientists and philosophers, the book would present my views as well. After all, who really knew what the ultimate limits of knowledge might be?

E: Sentence Practice
(answers will vary)

1. Write three short sentences that invert “normal’ order for emphasis: “That I like.”
2. Write three simple sentences (no subordinating clauses). Write one sentence that now uses a clause to complicate the subject, one that compiles the verb, and one that compiles the object.
3. Write three sentences in the passive voice. Rewrite each of these sentences in the active voice.
4. Write six compound sentences, two using each of the following coordinating conjunctions: and, but, or (or nor).
5. Write five sequences of simple sentences on the pattern: “I finally reached home. I was tired. I went to bed.” Then, changing the verbs to participles (-ing words), subordinate two of the sentences to the remaining one in each sequence.
6. Eliminate the extraneous words (especially “that,” “which,” “who,” “there is”) from the following sentences:
   a. There is a certain tendency to defend one’s own position which will cause the opponent’s argument to be ignored.
   b. It is the other requirements that present obstacles, some of which may prove insurmountable in the teaching of certain subjects.
   c. In the sort of literature-centered course being discussed here, there is usually a general understanding that essays will be based on the various literary works that are studied, the theory being that both the instruction in literature and that in writing will be made more effective by this relationship.
   d. The person whom he met was an expert who was able to teach the fundamentals quickly.
   e. They will take pride which is wholly justifiable in being able to command a prose style that is lucid and simple.
   f. Methods which are unique to the historian are illustrated throughout the volume in order to show how history is written and how historians work. The historian’s approach to his subject, which leads to the asking of provocative questions and to a new understanding of complex events, situations, and personalities is probed. The manner in which the historian reduces masses of chaotic fact—and occasional fancy—to reliable meaning, and the way in which he formulates explanations and tests them is examined and clarified for the student. It is its emphasis on historical method which distinguishes this book from other source readings in western civilization. The problems which are examined concern themselves with subjects which are dealt with by most courses in western civilization.