Writing about the New York Times
WRTG 3020, Sects 72, 73 & 74
Spring Term 2005
Catherine Lasswell, Instructor

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REQUIRED TEXTS:
- A subscription to The New York Times Monday through Friday (Phone 1-888-698-2655 for your subscription.) They will ask you for course/instructor information. The NYT is also available at Jones’ Drug.
- Writing Analytically (Third Edition) by Rosenwasser and Stephen
- NYT Course Packet (instructor will discuss availability)
- A good collegiate dictionary

WRITING GOALS:
Designed for juniors and seniors in the College of Arts and Sciences, this course will help you do the following:
- Gain familiarity with formal and popular writing genres and with strategies of presenting information to a general public
- Craft an analytical or argumentative thesis with strong, supporting evidence appropriate to its defense
- Raise and answer counterarguments effectively
- Use a range of strategies to address various audiences in different rhetorical situations
- Hone analytic writing and critical thinking skills

SEQUENCE OF ASSIGNMENTS:
We will begin by reading essays by well-known media analysts who will provide us with a context with which to view our nation’s most influential newspaper. These essays will include writers such as Neil Postman, Gregory Mantsios, Jeff Cohen, Davod Althied, Walter Lippman, and Michael Massing among others. Together, we will consider the extent to which their perspectives and criticisms of today’s media are true, determining this through close reading of their works, class discussions, and short written assignments. Simultaneously, we will study the New York Times’ Opinion Page pieces, studying the way in which the NYT columnists portray and interpret the issues of the day. Times ‘regulars’ Maureen Dowd, Paul Krugman, David Brooks, Bob Herbert, and William Safire will be read to assess not only the validity of their arguments, but to determine whether their columns provide the diversity of voices needed to stimulate public discussion. There will be weekly Op-Ed quizzes covering the various aspects of rhetoric and organization displayed in the writings of these two important pages.

As we read critics’ perspectives of the American press as well as journalists who write for it, we will respond by writing our own letters to the editor, writing various short response pieces, including a short summary of an argument. These shorter assignments will establish a common vocabulary of rhetoric upon which we can prepare for two in-depth essays.
• The first longer essay (4-6 pages) will involve choosing an article from the *Times* which raises a "why?" question that can be explored and researched in more depth. You will use the article as an "occasion" to define and explore the issue raised, using an analytic approach in your development. (details of the longer assignments will be provided later in the term.)

• The second longer essay (5-7 pages) will involve using media criticism to measure the extent to which the *New York Times* fits or does not fit such criticism. For example, you might choose criticism contending that the press misrepresents class so as to make class distinctions invisible. Then, choosing a specific area, such as poverty, you will determine if this is true, collecting articles such as the *Times* coverage of low-income schools, or welfare recipients. You will then determine the extent to which the author is correct in making such criticisms or whether perhaps the Times provides the rigorous, diverse coverage of multiple perspectives. This second paper involves assembling and analyzing many articles on your topic over time, requiring you to decide no later than the third week which criticism and topic you will examining.

Other possible papers will be discussed when assignment sheets are given out for these papers later in the term.

**WORKSHOP STYLE LEARNING:**
This course is run as a workshop which means we will share our writing ideas with one another and work collaboratively to improve one another’s work. This means that you will pick up and read your classmates’ writing in advance of the class. As such, you’ll be ready to comment on your classmates’ work and to share in the process of inquiry. Commit to carefully considering and critically appraising the work of your peers; you, in turn, will receive the benefit of your classmates’ thoughtful consideration of your own work (along with oral and written comments from me.) Your feedback to your peers should include suggestions on how to improve the shortcomings you have identified in their writing.

Because email is not 100% reliable, I will be asking you to distribute your writing in hard copy. Email submissions are not acceptable and will reduce your grade. If your hard copies are not distributed on schedule, your draft will not be workshopped again until your turn comes up in the next rotation. **All essays must pass through the workshop process** (i.e., at least one full workshop for the two major essays and at least one review for the short one) in order to receive a grade.

**GRADING:** Individual assignments will be weighted as follows:

- Letter to the Editor  
  5%
- Shorter Writings  
  20%
- Quizzes* (Friday Op/Ed and others)  
  15%
- Quality of class participation based on preparedness, quality of workshop contributions, and peer evaluations  
  15%
- Essay #1  
  20%
- Essay #2  
  25%

*The lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

**ATTENDANCE:**
As writers, we rely on those reading our work to let us know how well we are conveying our ideas to them. For this reason, regular attendance and active participation are crucial to this course. Students who miss class more than four times can expect to have their final grade lowered by one fraction of a letter (i.e. A to A-) for each absence after the fourth. Even when excused, more than six absences can result in an IW, IF, or F for the course. In the event that you must miss class, you are responsible for getting any missed material from a classmate. Class begins promptly; tardiness is not acceptable. Two late arrivals of more than 5 minutes count as one absence.

Refer to the grading policies of the Program in Writing and Rhetoric described below. I will not deviate from these standards in assigning you grades for your work. I may on occasion ask a colleague to critique your paper. In this event, I will take that opinion into consideration when assigning a grade.

Program of Writing and Rhetoric Grading Criteria:

A: A paper that is excellent in form, content, and style: original, substantive, insightful, persuasive, well organized, and written in a clear, graceful, error-free style. Although not necessarily “perfect,” an “A” paper rewards its reader with genuine insight, gracefully expressed

B: A clearly written, well-developed, interesting paper that shows above-average thought and writing craft. The paper may have some relatively minor difficulties in content or style, but contains no major flaws that compromise the general effectiveness of the case it presents or the readability of its prose.

C: A paper that represents a mixture of strengths and weaknesses. The paper may be readable, reasonably well organized, and support a focused thesis satisfactorily, but it has some important unresolved problems in content and form, distracting grammatical errors, and stylistic flaws. The paper may fulfill the basic requirements of the assignment, but, finally, say little of genuine importance or significance.

D: A paper seriously deficient in content, form, style, or mechanics. It may be disorganized, illogical, confusing, unfocused, or contain pervasive errors that impair readability.

F: A paper that is incoherent, disastrously flawed, unacceptably late or does not meet the workshop review requirements.

Grading Scale for Participation:

A Always prepared for class; participates without being called upon; criticism of other student essays shows insight, close reading; comments clear, succinct, and helpful.

B Generally prepared for class; occasionally participates without being called on; criticism of other students’ work shows mastery of the course goals; comments generally clear and helpful.

C Adequately prepared for class; only participates when called on; mastery of the course goals generally evident, but criticism of other student essays, although somewhat helpful, demonstrates a less than thorough reading of the essay.
D Preparation is less than adequate; never participates unless called on; criticism of other student papers demonstrates a casual reading, at best; comments demonstrate a failure to master the course goals.

F Disruptive in class (reading newspaper, talking, continual tardiness, etc.), unprepared when called on, unable or unwilling to participate in class discussions.

NOTE: This class assumes a certain skill level on your part. If grammatical problems constitute part of your current writing style, you will most likely experience a great deal of frustration and disappointment in this course.

Essay Format
All assignments should be double-spaced with one-inch margins. No handwritten assignments will be accepted. Please include your name, the draft number and the date of submission at the top of the first page. Essays that are longer than one page should be stapled before being distributed.

Jane Smith
UWRP 3020
Feb. 13, 2003
Essay 1, Draft 3
Group A

Plagiarism
CU is very clear on its stance toward plagiarism given the adoption of the Honor Code. You will receive an "F" for the course if you plagiarize a paper in this class. In addition, the matter will be referred to the dean. Please do not compromise your own integrity. All students must understand what constitutes plagiarism. Honor code information can be found at [www.Colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/]

Students with Special Needs
The University of Colorado makes reasonable accommodations for those with documented disabilities. Students should notify the counselor for Students with Disabilities located in Willard 322, (303-492-8671) and their instructors of any special needs. Instructors should be notified the first week of classes so accommodations can be discussed.

Religious Observances
Please notify me at least one week in advance if you will be absent due to religious observances. These missed classes will not be counted as absences. I will make every effort to accommodate your absence including giving make-up exams or extra credit work for in-class assignments missed.

A new classroom behavior policy has been adopted. All students need to read it. Consult [www.Colorado.edu/policies/index.html]

Instructor reserves the right to make changes on this syllabus at any time. I will notify you if I do.