RHET 105  
Spring 2016  
Writing to Learn and Participate

Instructor Jan Cooper  
Office King 139A  
Office phone It’s easiest to catch me on my cell phone 440-537-4828 and I don’t mind texting.  
Email jan.cooper@oberlin.edu  
Twitter wtg2participate

Writing Associate Rachael Andrews  
Email Rachael.Andrews@oberlin.edu

Class meeting time and place 11-11:50 am Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays in King 243

Course Objectives
• Increasing your awareness of your process of writing and the habits, skills, and technologies that enable you to produce the best writing.
• Enlarging your sense of how to develop critical thinking and reading skills by writing.
• Improving your confidence in your writing and your ability to take part in the larger discussions of the world around you.
• Expanding your ability to use the research tools of Oberlin’s library system and community and your knowledge of how to properly document what you find in multiple contexts.
• Increasing your skill in writing appropriately for a variety of audiences and understanding the equally important tasks of writing for academic and non-academic readers.
• Developing your awareness of the rhetorical dimensions of any act of communication, and acquiring a vocabulary to discuss it.

Most of all, we hope that this course gives you an opportunity to dig into topics that matter to you, the ideas that you’d like to test against the knowledge and values of your classmates and the research you’ll be reading.

Course Assignments Over the course of the semester you will write at least four finished essays of varying lengths (2-8 pages). You will write them in several stages, which you’ll submit once a week to Blackboard. In addition you will occasionally write smaller, quicker pieces in or out of class. We expect you to turn in your assignments by the deadlines given in the assignment instructions and to do all work to the best of your ability.

IN GENERAL A NEW DRAFT OF SOMETHING WILL BE DUE EVERY SUNDAY at 8 pm.
Here are the Essay Projects we’ll work on over the semester:

Day 1 Writing In-class writing to tell us why you are taking the class and more about your background in writing.

Response to Syllabus An invitation to tell us what you think of the goals and practices Jan has set up for the course.

Paper 1: Observation/Exploration of Rhetoric in a Recent Communication Act An opportunity to try rhetorical analysis by describing and discussing a conversation you’ve had and to use introspection as a source of information.

Paper 2: The Rhetorical Dimensions of Academic Honesty A chance to combine introspection, research reading, and annotated bibliography writing to create an argument about how intellectual honesty functions in American academic writing.

Papers 3/4: Practicing Rhetorical Fluency Two papers on the same topic of your choice that will challenge your ability to write for both academic and non-academic readers. Writing these papers will begin with
using background sources to identify a subject, then producing an annotated bibliography of research found in academic databases as a way to start shaping a focus for both kinds of readers.

Midterm and Final Reflections: In addition to the papers you write, we will ask you to read through all your work in chronological order and write a reflection on what you have learned twice during the semester, which will take the place of midterm and final exams.

There will also be numerous short assignments in class and as part of out of class work.

Patterns of work Usually your assignments will be due on Blackboard by 8 pm on Sundays. If for some unforeseen, catastrophic reason you are unable to submit your assignment on time, please email Jan and Rachel to let them know what the problem is and when you will submit your work.

Jan has observed that students who fail to submit an assignment on time more than twice a semester are experiencing a problem with their academic work in general, and so she requires that they consult their Class Dean to discuss ways of improving their situations. Please, if you find you’re having trouble getting the writing for this class done on time, talk to Jan or Rachael about it as soon as you realize it, so that we can determine if the problem is in your writing process or something else and how best to improve the circumstances.

Course Tools In this class our primary texts will be the writing that class members produce, which Jan will distribute via Blackboard. Occasionally she will also assign other readings posted in pdf format to download from Blackboard. There is no textbook to buy.

Please be sure to bring a laptop or tablet computer to every class and appointment. We will be using as little paper as possible, so it will be vital to have a computer available to access readings, assignments, websites, etc. Smart phones will NOT be sufficient for much of our use, so be sure to check out a laptop or tablet at Mudd if you do not have access to a portable computer. If you handwrite anything for this course, be sure to scan it electronically so that you can include it in your midterm and final portfolio. NEVER THROW AWAY ANYTHING you do for this class!

Individual Appointments About every 2 weeks Jan will ask you to make an appointment with either her or Rachael to discuss your writing one-on-one. Occasionally we will ask you to visit the Rhetoric and Composition Department’s Writing Associates in the Writing Center in Mudd, which will open about three weeks into the semester. Jan is very happy to talk to you even when you are not required to meet with her, so feel free to make an appointment on Blackboard with her any time. If you can’t come any of the times listed, just email her and she can probably fit you in.

How this course is not like others at Oberlin Expectations At the moment when Jan is writing this description, she is imagining that you may expect a number of things of her, such as knowing everything about academic writing, being an infallible (and obsessed) corrector of writing, or taking full responsibility for your learning. You probably have few, if any expectations of your classmates. It will help us work together if you know that instead Jan has found that she helps students learn the most when she undertakes the roles of planner and facilitator for a writing course. She has also found that the writing classes she teaches work best when students take responsibility for their classmates’ learning as well as their own.

Your classmates may not have as much experience in reading and judging writing as Jan and Rachael, but they bring a vaster background of other experiences than any one teacher can muster. That is why so much of our class will be devoted to reading and commenting on each other’s drafts. Along with your classmates, Jan and Rachael will read your writing first to hear what you’re trying to say, and later, when you’ve developed the ideas and structure of your essays sufficiently, they will point out ways of improving your mechanics and style so that it will be easier for your readers to hear your thoughts clearly. Your classmates will point out even more suggestions for developing your ideas and your ways of expressing them.

Your writing, however, belongs only to you, and you are welcome to use or ignore any of our suggestions in your final drafts. Ultimately our goal will be to help you find what enables you to be most satisfied with your writing.

We will do our best to facilitate the course activities for the maximum learning of everyone in the class, and we hope that we can count on you to support that effort by attending class consistently, participating as much
as possible and making suggestions when you have an idea for improving the course.

**Attendance/Communicating** In order for a course like this to succeed, all members of the course need to take responsibility for attending every class and listening to/speaking in the emerging dialogue about writing. Everyone needs to arrive on time and avoid interrupting the class by leaving temporarily or early. If for some absolutely unavoidable reason you cannot come to class or cannot attend an entire class, Jan expects you to communicate with her as soon as possible to explain your situation and negotiate a way to make up the work. If you miss more than 2 classes during the semester or have chronic problems getting to class on time, etc., Jan will ask you to discuss those problems with her and with your Class Dean, as such problems are indications that you are about to run into academic trouble. Attending individual appointments with Jan or Rachael or the Writing Associates are equally as important as the class meetings, and subject to the same attendance policy.

**Course Grading** Jan chooses to offer this course using the Pass/No Pass option because she has found that form of grading gives students the opportunity to take more risks in their writing without fear of damaging their academic records. Also, it helps students learn to interpret feedback more carefully. After your formal schooling ends, the people who read your writing will very rarely “grade” it; instead they will comment on it verbally. Thus it is vital that you learn to receive—and give—responses in the most productive way possible. By not worrying about letter grades or pluses and minuses, you should be able to use this course to develop the skills of response that will enable you to make the most of your writing experiences at Oberlin and beyond.

Other instructors at Oberlin rightly feel the need to give you a carefully calibrated assessment of what you have learned in the form of grade points that provide other observers like graduate schools a quick tool for rating your educational accomplishments compared to other students’. Other courses may be too large to accommodate discussing student writing as searchingly as we will. That is fine and to your benefit in other ways. In this course, however, we will operate a bit differently.

**Honor Code** Many generations of students at Oberlin College before you have worked long and hard to craft a tradition of honor in doing one’s own work, and negotiating with the faculties of their eras to obtain the maximum amount of trust from the faculty that they will do so. Sometimes, however, the way we work on assignments for this course will be highly collaborative, which may make it confusing for you to interpret how to apply the honor code. Jan will usually explicitly state what is and is not permissible in the instructions for assignments to help you, but feel free to ask Jan questions about what you’re doing if you’re uncertain about how the code applies. One requirement for all assignments is that you write the Honor Code at the beginning of every assignment and sign it. Please do not forget to do so; Jan and Rachael will not read and respond to a piece of writing until they see that. For the purposes of submitting assignments electronically, we will accept your typing your name after the Code statement as an electronic signature. Here’s the Honor code statement: “I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment.”

**Are you a person with physical or learning differences that may affect your work in this class?** Talk to Jan about them as soon as possible and remember that the office of Jane Boomer, Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities (Peters G27-28; x5-5588) can provide lots of help in addressing them.

**A Word About Writing Requirements** If you have not yet completed your writing requirement, this course may be a way of working toward that, depending on the degree(s) you’re pursuing and your previous work. If passing a writing requirement is a major concern for you, please be sure to discuss that with Jan in your first individual appointment with her.

**We look forward to getting to know you and your writing this semester.**