

Bill Wolff
Core 2: Research Methods for Writers, Spring 2010
Syllabus

Course Info

Course Location: Education Hall 2094

Office Location: Education Hall 3075

Contact: wolffw@rowan.edu, @billwolff

Course Web Sites: <http://williamwolff.org/courses/core2-spring-2010/>
<http://netvibes.com/wolffcore2s10>
<http://groups.diigo.com/group/wolffcore2s10>
<http://www.zotero.org/groups/wolffcore2s10>

Course Hours: W 6:30 – 9:00pm

Office Hours: T 1:30 – 3:00, H 3:00 – 4:30
or by appointment

Office Phone: 856-256-5221 (email, first)

Course Description

Core 2 introduces MA in Writing students to qualitative research that they may use in preparing their thesis or in future descriptive research or nonfiction projects. Fiction writers and poets benefit from learning qualitative research to do the initial fieldwork needed to write strong, plausible prose.

This semester Core 2 will have two themes—Write What You Don't Know and Share What You Research—and we will be using a variety of contemporary communication technologies in order bring those themes into practice. Through the use of social networking applications we will rethink how and where research is conducted. Our assignments will bring us into libraries and into our local communities. Readings and class discussions will challenge us to think in new ways about texts, objects, and facts. And everything we do in the class will ask us to rethink our traditional ideas about the role of research in the writing process.

Students will not need to know how to do survey research or statistical programming for this class. If you are interested in pursuing quantitative analysis, sign up for Introduction to Communication Research in the Public Relations graduate program.

Brief Descriptions of Assignments

This course consists of a 15-week research project, with the final result being an 8 – 10 page investigative article that could be submitted for publication in a magazine or newspaper. The topic or subject of the investigation is up to the individual student, but grounded in his or her local community. Because writing an extended research-driven article is a process, the assignments we complete will help that process emerge more effectively. The assignments leading up to the article are:

- a **research blog** in which the researcher will detail and reflect on each stage of their research process;
- a **research proposal** written with a specific audience in mind explaining the need for the investigation;

- an **annotated bibliography** of 8 scholarly and 4 creative/journalistic sources relating to your research;
- a **document annotation** modeled on those published in *Harper's* (e.g. <http://j.mp/6TPLfh>);
- a **series of interviews** conducted in person and on line;
- and a **5 – 7 page rough draft** that must be completed in order to write the final article.

Throughout the process of completing the above assignments, we will **interact with members of the Diigo and Twitter communities** who are interested in or in some way related to our areas of research. These connections will broaden our research potential, introduce us to new ideas, and provide us with people who we will be able to interview.

Students will also complete the NIH certification process required by the Grants Office and The Graduate School to ensure protection of human subjects in research in case Institutional Review Board paperwork is needed for their thesis.

Required Texts and Materials

Gubrium, J.F., & Holstein, J.A. (Eds.). (2003). *Postmodern interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Syverson, M.A. (1999). *The wealth of reality: An ecology of composition*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press

Fleck, L. (1981). *Genesis and development of a scientific fact*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Daston, L. (Ed.). (2004). *Things that talk: Object lessons from art and science*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

In an effort to reduce textbook costs, multiple readings will be available for free online.

You will also need access to:

- APA Citation Manual 6th Edition (print or online)
- Computer with Internet access
- Microsoft Word or any of many online alternatives (see <http://j.mp/4LnxAW>; I do not accept Word Perfect files)
- Rowan email address
- Other materials as needed

Discussion Leader

Starting the second week of the course, each week will have at least one discussion leader who will introduce and lead a discussion about the assigned text(s). The leader will make a 10-minute opening statement about the text(s). The presentation must contain at least the following: an overview of the goals of the text(s), an overview of the main points/arguments made by the author(s), a discussion of the theories the author(s) uses to contextualize the arguments made in the text(s), a discussion of some of the places in the text that were particularly challenging, and some questions that you might have about the text. Do not go through the text point-by-point. Rather, pull out the key issues that will help start discussion. Accompanying the presentation will

be a handout that lists key terms and ideas the author(s) introduce, as well as their definitions as understood by the presenter. These materials will help ground the discussion.

Some of you have participated in similar activities in other classes with mixed results. Let me explain that I ask for some decorum in our conversations (this decorum is to extend to online spaces, as well). We come to this course with varying levels of expertise and various backgrounds academically. Let us respect all of those positions. No question is stupid if it is related to the readings and all responses should be valid ones. We are to use this element of the course to enrich our understanding of the material.

While there are no stupid questions, there are more effective questions to encourage richer discussions. Please refrain from discussion that will elicit or center on whether or not you liked or disliked the text. It is true that some texts are more attractive than others. Ultimately, however, whether we like the text or not doesn't matter, and such discussions become rather tiresome. What does matter is how the text furthers the overall goals of the class, asks us to reconsider previous understandings and rethink the other texts we read, and so on. Because we will be discussion of the texts on our blog (which you then will have the opportunity to announce on Twitter) our ideas will be open will be open to a discussion by a larger readership, as well. So, be sure that your reviews are grounded in the text and not in your own life.

Office Hours

Office hours are designed for you, giving you a more private environment in which we may talk about your work, your performance in class, etc. If you are unable to see me during my office hours, do not hesitate to make an appointment to see me at a different time. My office hours are T 1:30 – 3:00, H 3:00 – 4:30 and by appointment.

Contacting Each Other

There will be times during the semester when I will need to contact the class and you will need to contact me. I will contact you via your Rowan email account, so please be sure that you are checking it regularly and/or forwarding it to the email service you use most regularly. I am in my office only during office hours and the brief times before and after class. As a result, calling me in my office will not get you an immediate response.

I strongly suggest you contact me via email or Twitter, which I check all day long. Email, however, tends to be seen as an informal medium. This, however, should not always be the case. All emails that I send to you will have a meaningful subject line and a proper salutation (“Hi Class,” or “Hi Jane,” etc.). The first sentence will notify you of the purpose of the email, and then will get to the heart of the matter. It will end with a formal closing (“Thanks, BW”). I expect the same from any email you send. Any email that does not will immediately be deleted and not responded to.

Students with Disabilities

Your academic success is important. If you have a documented disability that may have an impact upon your work in this class, please contact me. Students must provide documentation of their disability to the Academic Success Center in order to receive official University services and accommodations. The Academic Success Center can be reached at 856.256.4234. The

Center is located on the 3rd Floor of Savitz Hall. The staff is available to answer questions regarding accommodations or assist you in your pursuit of accommodations. We look forward to working with you to meet your learning goals.

Attendance and Late Work

You are expected to attend class every day. You cannot pass this class if you miss more than 25% of the scheduled meeting times, including excused and unexcused absences. For our section, which meets once a week, the **maximum number of permissible absences is 3**.

Excused Absences

You will be permitted to make up missed work for excused absences only. These include:

- religious observances
- official University activities
- illness
- death of a family member or loved one
- inclement weather

You must provide verifiable documentation. Consult with your instructor for what is considered acceptable.

In the case of religious observances or official University activities, you must inform your instructor **in advance** of your absence for it to be excused.

In the case of illness, death of a family member or loved one, or inclement weather, you must inform your instructor as soon as possible after the fact.

If the events described above lead to your exceeding the maximum absence limit, you will be referred to the Dean of Students for a hardship withdrawal from the class.

Excused and Unexcused absences will be treated using the following scale:

1 or fewer	no penalty
2 absences	-2/3 final grade (a B would become a C+)
3 absences	-1 1/3 final grade (a B would become a C-)

This rate of deduction continues until reaching the maximum, after which you will receive an F for the course.

Course Strands

In this course all work will be dedicated to students developing their skills in the following Course Strands:

Research: Students will gain greater familiarity with the theories and practices relating to qualitative research as well as the reflective processes involved in writing extended investigative articles.

Critical Reading, Thinking, and Writing: Students will develop their ability to read judiciously, think about, filter information about, and write about texts in a variety of genres and media.

Communication Technology: Students will learn about and will use contemporary communication technologies to enhance the research process.

Reflection: Students will develop their understanding of the important role of reflection in the writing process.

Collaboration: Students will develop their ability to work collaboratively in a variety of in- and out-of-class activities and settings.

Grading

Final grades will be calculated in the following way:

Research Blog	20%
Research Proposal	5%
Annotated Bibliography	15%
Document Annotation	15%
Interview Preparation and Reflection	10%
Diigo / Twitter / Zotero Integration	10%
Final Draft of Article	20%
Discussion Lead / Contribution to Class Discussions	5%
Total	100%

Grades will be determined on the following scale:

A+ 100;	A 96	B- 82	D+ 69
A- 92		C+ 79	D 66
B+ 89		C 76	D- 62
B 86		C- 72	F 59 and below

Detailed criteria will be provided for each assignment. For every missing major assignment, your grade will be lowered by one full letter grade. For every 3 late non-major assignments, your final grade will be lowered by one full letter grade. It is better to complete an assignment late then to not complete it at all.

Major Assignments will be assessed according to the following grading criteria:

- A, A-** Represents outstanding participation in all assignment-related activities; all assigned work completed, with very high quality in all work produced for the assignment. Work at this level demonstrates activity that goes significantly beyond the required assignment work in one or more Course Strand.
- B+, B, B-** Represents excellent participation in all assignment-related activities; all assigned work completed, with consistently high quality in assignment work. Work at this level demonstrates activity that goes beyond the required assignment work in one or more Course Strand.
- C+, C, C-** Represents good participation in all assignment-related activities; all assigned work completed, with generally good quality overall in assignment work.
- D+, D, D-** Represents uneven participation in all assignment activities; some gaps in assigned work completed, with inconsistent quality in assignment work.
- F** Represents minimal participation in all-assignment activities; serious gaps in assigned work completed, or very low quality in assignment work.

Final grades correspond to the Graduate Handbook (A-C) for graduate students. All work is expected to be the student's own. Any plagiarism—intended or not—will result in a failing grade for the course.