

**Bill Wolff**

**Core 2: Research Methods for Writers, Spring 2012**

**Syllabus**

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**Course Info**

**Course Location:** Education Hall 3091B

**Office Location:** Education Hall 3075

**Contact:** wolffw@rowan.edu, @billwolff

**Course Web Site:** <http://williamwolff.org/courses/core2-spring-2012/>

**Course Hours:** T 6:45 – 9:15pm

**Office Hours:** W 11 – 2 or by appointment

**Office Phone:** Not the best way to reach me

**Course Description**

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding,” *Four Quartets*

This semester Core 2 will have two themes—Write What You Don’t Know and Share What You Research. We will be engaging those themes by completing a semester-long research project that will challenge us to consider the various roles that research plays in the composing process.

Your research is not going to be the usual look online, grab a few books, and write a paper that attempts to “prove” a point (as if a point can be proven in a 5 page paper), though you will certainly conduct library research. Rather, you will be going out into your local and online communities to explore a topic of your own choice about which you know virtually nothing but about which have always curious to learn more. The key, as suggested by the Eliot quote above, is exploration: when you begin you will have no preconceived notions and no end-point in sight; your only goal will be to see where your (re)search takes you and to learn as much as you can along the way. And through this process you will not only learn quite a bit about your topic, you will also learn quite a bit about what it means for a (creative) writer to conduct research and how that research informs the resulting writing (results that we will record online so others can learn from our experiences).

Through your research process you will be conducting in-person and online interviews with people familiar with your area of research. You will be analyzing various documents associated with your research subject and will be taking detailed fieldnotes that record experiences, observations, and conversations that happen in the spaces (virtual and real-life) you enter. And in the end, you will consider what you have learned, and you will compose a new piece of writing in a genre of your choosing that is directly informed by what you have learned.

To facilitate the research process you will be leveraging contemporary communication technologies (namely blogging with Wordpress, Twitter, and the social library site, Zotero) and as a result we will rethink how and where research is conducted. You will learn about qualitative research methods and how to conduct ethical research. You will learn how to compose the query letters necessary for sending out your writing for publication and will send out one piece of

writing, an Annotation, to *Harper's*. 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 a final piece of writing in a genre of your choice that is geared for a specific publication. The topic or subject of the investigation is up to the individual student, but grounded in his or her local community. Because writing a research-driven piece is a process, the assignments we complete will help that process emerge more effectively. The assignments leading up to your final piece are:

- a **research blog** in which the researcher will detail and reflect on each stage of their research process;
- a **research proposal** written with specific publications in mind explaining the potential value of the investigation;
- an **annotated bibliography** of 12 sources relating to your research;
- a **document annotation** modeled on those published in *Harper's* (e.g. <http://j.mp/6TPLfh>) accompanied by a **query letter**;
- a **series of interviews** conducted in person and on line and **reflections on those interviews**;
- a collection of **detailed fieldnotes** that have been **digitized and reflected upon**.
- **rough and final drafts of your writing project** in a genre of your own choosing that will be accompanied by a **query letter** written for a specific publication as well as a **critical reflection** of the final product and your research process.

Throughout the process of completing the above assignments, we will **interact with members of the Twitter community** 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**

I recommend you buy the texts from your favorite online retailer (links below go to Amazon), as you will receive a significant discount that is not available in the bookstore. If there are e-versions of the books, feel free to buy them as long as you can annotate well. *Writing Ethnographic Field Notes* is not available in the bookstore; you must buy it online.

Burt-Thomas, Wendy. (2008). *The Writer's Digest guide to writing query letters*. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books.

- Daston, L. (Ed.). (2004). *Things that talk: Object lessons from art and science*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Emerson, R.M., Fretz, R.I., & Shaw, L.L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Gubrium, J.F., & Holstein, J.A. (Eds.). (2003). *Postmodern interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2003). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Students will also need to subscribe to Writer's Market (<http://www.writersmarket.com/>) and purchase/have access to the Writer's Market text in the genre of their final project, such as *2012 Poet's Market*, *2012 Novel and Short Story Writer's Market*, and so on.

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

You will also need access to:

- a citation guide (print or online) for the genre you're writing in and the publication you are writing for
- a small notebook for recording fieldnotes---this should be small enough to fit in your pocket or purse (I recommend Fieldnotes Brand 3-1/2" wide by 5-1/2" notebooks with graph paper, which can be purchased online at <http://fieldnotesbrand.com/shop/>)
- 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

### **Class Discussions**

You are expected to come to class with the text(s) read, annotated, and thought-about so that you can contribute to discussion. I expect all voices to be heard in class.

Having a laptop in class does not mean you are free to check email and/or social networking sites (that we are not engaging with at the time). Use the laptop to enhance your learning experience not to detract from it.

### **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 W 11 - 2 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 a response.

I strongly suggest you contact me via Twitter (@billwolff) and/or email, both of which I tend to 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. Twitter is less formal, so feel free to just tweet me questions. Please add the course hashtag (#core2s12) to all course related tweets.

I’ll get back to your tweets and emails as soon as possible—usually within a day. If I don’t get back within a day, it may be that I did not see your tweet or email for one reason or another, such as an email going in my spam folder. Send me a polite reminder and/or ask me in class if I got it, and I’ll get back immediately.

### **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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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**

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**. If you exceed the maximum absence limit—whether excused or unexcused—you will be referred to the Dean of Students for the possibility of a hardship withdrawal from the class. Note: it is your responsibility to know how many absences you have. If, at the end of the semester, I enter your grades and you are over the limit, the hardship withdrawal courtesy will not be extended to you.

### **Excused Absences**

You will be permitted to make up missed work for excused absences only (note below that excused absences are still absences; the main difference is that you get to make up missed work). 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-)

Lateness is equal to .5 absences. You are late if you arrive in class after the sign-up sheet has made it around the room.

### **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

| 15%

Research Proposal	2.5%
Annotated Bibliography	15%
Document Annotation and Query Letter	15%
Interview Preparation and Reflection	10%
Fieldnotes and Fieldnotes Reflection	10%
Final Draft of Semester Project, Query Letter, and Reflection	25%
Twitter Integration	5%
Contribution to Class Discussions	2.5%
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 than to not complete it at all.

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.