

ENCI 145: Writing About Theatre  
Sect.7401

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Class Time/Period:  
MWF 6  
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**Course Description** (available at [english.ufl.edu](http://english.ufl.edu))

This course will specifically focus on canonical, modern plays (starting with Chekhov) as a way to address the ways in which authors employ theatre to tackle questions of gender, sexuality, race, class, and religion. Departing from the idea that theatre is a form of written *and* visual rhetoric, we will discuss the connections between *how* a text is written and/or performed, as well as the effects such rhetoric has on the audience. In order to directly examine this issue, we will read plays and see theatre around Gainesville, along with filmed stage productions and filmed stage adaptations. This process will allow us to observe how plays—unlike other forms of literature—always invite translation and redefinition. Since this is a course about writing, we will pay special attention to building logical arguments, writing clear and concise sentences, and transferring thoughts into the page. At the same time, through our study and analysis of the plays, we will emphasize methods to build a persuasive argument across genres (reviews, literary criticism, reports, proposals, etc.). Hence, we will complete a variety of writing exercises in class, including peer reviews, outlines, and drafts. We will also visit the library to learn how to use campus resources to complete research, as well as learn how to seamlessly incorporate this research into your writing.

**Course Objectives**

By the end of the course, you should be able to

- identify and understand different ideological aspects of contemporary plays/playwrights
- understand specific language and terminology associated with different aspects of the theatre
- analyze theatre thoroughly and efficiently both as a written *and* a visual medium
- produce a solid, well-supported and thoroughly thought out argument
- organize your ideas efficiently
- seamlessly incorporate research into your analysis
- write clear and concise sentences
- understand proper punctuation
- critique and revise your own writing
- give written and oral feedback to peers

The University's General Education student learning outcomes for this course are detailed in the Undergraduate Catalog at <http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/advisinggened.html> - [requirements](#)

## **Required Texts**

NOTE: The following titles are available in most online bookstores, such as Amazon.com, as well as the UF Bookstore.

## **Textbook:**

*Short Guide to Writing About Theatre* by Marcia L. Ferguson (ISBN: 032113673X)

## **Plays:**

*Angels in America: Millennium Approaches & Perestroika* by Tony Kushner (ISBN: 1559363843)

*August: Osage County* by Tracy Fettes (ISBN: 1559363304)

*The Seagull* by Anton Chekhov (ISBN: 0393338177)

*A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams (ISBN: 0811216020)

*Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill (ISBN: 0573630232)

*Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* by Christopher Durang (ISBN: 0802122388)

## **Live Plays**

You are required to watch two live plays this semester:

- One of the following productions:
  - o **The Hippodrome Theatre** (25 SE 2<sup>nd</sup> Pl, 32601): *Good People* by David Fintzsay-Abaire (Jan 8-Feb 2) (thehipp.org) (Student tickets: \$15)
  - o **Acrosstown Repertory Theatre** (619 S Main St.): *The Peppermint Kid* by Darren Willis (Jan 24-Feb 9) (acrosstown.org) (General admission tickets: \$10 cash/check, \$11 online)
  - o **Gainesville Community Playhouse** (4039 NW 16<sup>th</sup> Blvd): *Aida* by Elton John/Tim Rice (Jan 31-Feb 23) (gcplayhouse.org) (Student tickets: \$12)
- **The UF School of Theater & Dance** production of *Angels in America: Perestroika* at the **Constans Theatre** (March 28-April 6) (<http://www.arts.ufl.edu/news/story.aspx?ID=491>)

## **Filmed Productions/Film Adaptations**

In class, we will watch some filmed stage productions and one film adaptation of a play. You must be in class the days of the screenings (see schedule below for specific dates) to receive full points for the assignments associated with these:

- Excerpts from: *King Hedley II* (Wilson), *The Heidi Chronicles* (Wasserstein), *August: Osage County* (Fettes, stage and film), *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* (Durang), *Angels in America* (film adaptation).
- *Blue Jasmine* (Dir: Woody Allen, 2013; loosely adapted from *A Streetcar Named Desire*)
- *Into the Woods* (Directed for the Stage by: James Lapine; Music and Lyrics by: Stephen Sondheim; Book by: James Lapine; filmed stage production; 1991)

## Assignment Descriptions:

### **Participation** (7Opts)

This is a discussion-based course, so participation is key to your success in the class. Plenty of the material we learn in class will come in the form of class discussions, so you must be ready to participate every day. Be prepared to answer questions about the course material, make comments and ask your own questions to the class. Participation points will be given to those students who actively engage with the discussion, and create useful contributions to the class through their comments and questions. **Participation points are not guaranteed, they are earned.** NOTE: Keep in mind that attendance has a strong effect on your participation grade; at the same time, just attending class does not mean you are guaranteed a good participation grade.

### **Reading Quizzes and Homework** (10Opts)

- **Quizzes** (5-10 questions): Quizzes are unannounced. **Quizzes can only be made up through extra credit, no make up quizzes are given regardless of excused/unexcused absences.** There are two types of quizzes:
  - o **Reading quizzes:** Reading is required. I will give reading quizzes throughout the semester as a way to make sure you are keeping up with the reading. These quizzes will ask you fact-based questions about the reading (ie. “what happens at the end of Act One?” or “according to the textbook, what is a *proscenium stage*”). There is no analysis required,
  - o **Review quizzes:** Once in a while, I will give you a quiz the day after a lecture to make sure you retained the information from the previous class.
- **Homework assignments:** For some texts, I will assign two-three discussion questions. These questions ask you to analyze or respond to a specific part of the text in preparation for the following class. Homework assignments can be typed or handwritten, as long as they are eligible. While I will comment on your writing, your points will be based on the level of your analysis.

### **Peer Reviews** (3 @ 20pts/each, total: 60pts)

Before papers are due (except for responses and the final paper), you are required to complete a peer review. Peer reviews consist of reading your classmates’ papers in class and providing constructive criticism to help them improve their writing. The day of each peer review, you must bring **two hard copies** of your paper to class. You must be in class to receive credit for a peer review. If you do not have a paper, you cannot participate in this assignment.

*The following are a brief description of the writing assignments. You will get assignment sheets during the semester with more detailed instructions.*

### **Responses** (2 @ 500 words/50pts each, total: 1000 words/100pts)

You will watch two live plays this semester. After each play, you will submit a reaction paper with your thoughts on the live production.

### **Paper #1: Theatre Review - Evaluation Argument** (900 words, 100pts)

For this paper, you will write a formal review of *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* (Durang) according to the guidelines in Ch.3 of *Short Guide to Writing About Theatre*.

**Paper #2: Literary Criticism - Critical Essay** (1100 words, 150pts)

For this essay, you will come up with an argument about the treatment of ideological issues (such as gender, race, sexuality, class, etc) in: *The Seagull* (Chekhov), *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* (Durang), *Top Girls* (Churchill), or *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Williams). You must model your essay after Joseph Marohl's "De-Realised Women: Performance and Identity in *Top Girls*," and follow the guidelines in Ch.4 of *Short Guide to Writing About Theatre*.

**Paper #3: Stage Adaptation Treatment - Proposal Argument** (900 words, 100pts)

After reading *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Williams) and watching *Blue Jasmine* (Dir: Allen), write about your own idea for a film adaptation of one of the following plays: *The Seagull* (Chekhov), *Top Girls* (Churchill), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Williams), *Angels in America* (Kushner). You must explain how this adaptation would be relatable to a modern audience. You cannot write about a play you have already written about in a previous paper.

**Paper #4: Dramaturgical Argument - Research Paper** (2100 words, 220pts)

For your final paper, you will act as a dramaturg for an imaginary production of one of the plays we read this semester. You will submit a dramaturgical report (we will study in detail what this means exactly) about the play of your choosing. You must use at least 5 secondary sources for this assignment. In preparation for this assignment, you will submit a 4-5 page rough draft and set up a conference with the instructor to discuss your writing.

**Panel Discussion** (100pts)

The last day of class, the entire class will be responsible for conducting a discussion of one of the plays we read this semester without instructor's input. Students will come prepared with discussion questions and topics of discussion related to the play and discuss them among themselves. The objective of the assignment is to display ability to independently conduct an academic discussion about theatre with your classmates.

### Grading Scale

A	930-1000
A-	900-929
B+	870-899
B	840-869
B-	800-839
C+	770-799
C	740-769
C-	700-739
D+	670-699
D	630-669
D-	600-629
E	0-599

### Grade Breakdown

	Word Count	Points	Percentage
Assignments			
<b>Participation</b>	N/A	70pts	7%
<b>Quizzes/Homework</b>	N/A	100pts	10%
<b>Peer Reviews</b>	N/A	60pts	6%
<b>Student-Led Discussion</b>	N/A	100pts	10%
<b>Response Papers</b>	1000 words	100pts	10%
<b>Paper #1</b>	900 words	100pts	10%
<b>Paper #2</b>	1100 words	150pts	15%
<b>Paper #3</b>	900 words	100pts	10%
<b>Final Paper</b>	2100 words	220pts	22%
<b>Total</b>	6000 words	1000pts	100%

## **Grading Criteria**

### **A**

Student must demonstrate: excellent and insightful analysis of the plays, taking into consideration issues of race, gender, sexuality, religion, and class; ability to build compelling, well-organized, thorough arguments about theatre; attention to all aspects of rhetoric (ethos, pathos, logos) when writing about theatre; writing style that pays attention to proper punctuation and grammar; ability to discuss theatre at an academic level; active engagement with the course material and the class; excellent attendance and participation.

### **B**

Student demonstrates: above average analysis of the plays which takes into consideration issues of race, gender, sexuality, religion, and class with some minor errors; meaty analysis that might rely on plot summary more than an “A” paper/response; discusses text in an intelligent manner, but does not fully realize a compelling analysis; presents a competent argument that might have some issues with organization, structure, etc; some glaring mechanical or grammatical errors or misreadings; good participation and attendance.

### **C**

Demonstrates: average analysis of a text; an analysis that does not create a fully realized study of literary techniques or ideological issues involved in the plays; little effort to contextualize text in history, criticism, etc or effort is not fully realized; superficial analysis that relies heavily on plot summary; contains enough grammatical or mechanical errors which hurt the overall effect of the piece; lack of meaty responses; argument is unclear, unfocused and/or disorganized; lack of sufficient/meaningful support; misreadings; average attendance and participation.

### **D**

Demonstrates below average ability to analyze a text; ignores disciplinary terminology necessary to write an effective piece about theatre; disregard of ideological issues; consists mainly of plot summary with little or no analysis; plot description is wrong or misguided; glaring misreadings throughout; offers little to no support; argument suffers from major structure or organization issues; multiple usage/grammar errors throughout; difficult to read; fails to make word count; below average attendance and participation.

### **E (failing grade)**

Insufficient evidence to judge; complete lack of effort; no attempt to get close to word count; intelligible; plagiarized.

## Course Policies

### Attendance

Discussions cannot be replicated, so if you miss a day of class, you will have missed the lesson for that day. Therefore, I take attendance very seriously and expect you to come to class every day on time. You are allowed **up to three** unexcused absences; your grade will automatically drop a grade after each following unexcused absence. Two tardies (5 minutes after class starts) count as one absence. **If you reach six unexcused absences, you will automatically fail the course and should withdraw from the class, or you will receive an “E” for the semester.** No Incompletes are given for this course.

Unfortunately, given the nature of the course, if you miss more than two weeks of classes in a row—unless you can provide documents to confirm the absences qualify as excused according to the University of Florida Undergraduate Catalog—you will automatically fail and receive an E. If you have an excused absence (religious holidays, athletics, band, theatre activities, illness, or family emergency), you still must make up the work. To receive a excused absence, you must provide appropriate documentation to the instructor.

See <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx> for questions concerning excused/unexcused absences and correct procedure to document your absences this semester.

### Reading and Class Discussions

You should have read the pages assigned before coming to class on that day. **All** reading is required; that means the fiction, the textbook chapters and the academic articles assigned. Make sure you bring the reading material to class and that you highlight, mark, or underline sections you wish to discuss. If you do not have your book with you, you will not be allowed to take the quiz for that day. Remember a large portion of your participation grade will come from your ability/willingness to discuss the texts in class.

**NOTE:** Be respectful and polite to your classmates. Some of the material we read in class will include high levels of profanity, explicit sexual imagery, drug use, and other material you might not be comfortable with; **if you are uncomfortable reading and talking about any of these in a professional manner, you should drop the course right away.**

### Cell Phone Use

Please put your phones on silent/vibrate to make sure they don't ring, and refrain from using your phone in the classroom during class time (even if you are done with your work). If I see you texting once, I will give you a verbal warning, and you will lose all participations points for that day. If I see you texting a second time, you will be marked as absent for that day and will be asked to leave for the remaining of the period. If you have an emergency that requires you to be alert to your phone, discuss it with me before class.

### Plagiarism

**DO NOT PLAGIARIZE!** Plagiarism consists of presenting someone else's work as your own without acknowledging the original source. This can happen intentionally or unintentionally; however, regardless of intention, plagiarism is illegal and will be penalized accordingly. When you plagiarize you risk failing the course, and the infraction will become part of your permanent record. If you have any questions about citing sources, please ask. **There is a zero tolerance plagiarism policy in this class; if you plagiarize any assignment, you will fail that assignment and the Dean of Students will be notified.**

**Evaluation:**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <http://evaluations.ufl.edu>.

**Department Policies****Final Grade Appeal**

Students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant.

**General Education Requirement***Composition (C) and Humanities (H)*

This course can satisfy the UF General Education requirement for Composition or Humanities. For more information, see:

<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/advisinggened.html>

*Writing Requirement (formerly Gordon Rule)*

This course can provide 6000 words toward fulfillment of satisfy the UF requirement for writing. For more information, see:

<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/advisinggordon.html>

**University Policies***Disability Sendees*

The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides students and faculty with information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities in the classroom. It is your responsibility to contact the school administration regarding any disability you may have, and to inform me so we can make any necessary arrangements.

For more information, see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

*Academic Honesty*

All students are required to abide by the Student Honor Code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

*Harassment*

UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.eduU/studentguide/studentconductcode.php#s4041>

## **Tentative Schedule**

**NOTE:** While I will do my best to stay on schedule, sometimes schedule changes are unavoidable throughout the semester, so please keep in mind that there's a chance you will get a revised schedule later in the semester.

### **Week One: Intro and Diagnostic**

**Mon 1/6**

Syllabus and Intro to the Class

**Wed 1/8**

In-Class Reading: Excerpt from *Blood Wedding*

Brief discussion

Short Writing Diagnostic #1 (theatre as written rhetoric)

**Fri 1/10** (drop/add ends)

In-Class Screening: Excerpts from stage productions of *King Headley II*, *The Heidi Chronicles*

Short Writing Diagnostic #2 (theatre as visual rhetoric)

### **Week Two: "Making an Entrance": Writing Basics**

**Mon 1/13**

Lecture: Phrases vs. Clauses

Assignment Sheet: Response Papers

Assignment Sheet: Paper #1, Theatre Review

**Wed 1/15**

Reading: *Short Guide to Writing About Theatre*, Ch.1: Writing About Theatre

**Fri 1/17**

Reading: *Short Guide*, Ch.2: Preparing to Write and Writing the Essay (pp.25-37, 44-46)

Assessment: Phrases vs. Clauses

### **Week Three: Let's Start at the Very Beginning: The Birth of Modern Drama**

**Mon 1/20**

**Happy Martin Luther King Jr. Day! No Class**

**Wed 1/22**

Reading & Discussion: *The Seagull* by Anton Chekhov (1896)

Lecture: Anton Chekhov and Modern Theatre

**Fri 1/24**

Discussion: Cont. *The Seagull*

### **Week Four: A Pan or a Rave? The Theatre Review as an Evaluation Argument**

**Mon 1/27**

Reading: *Short Guide*, Ch. 2: Preparing to Write and Writing the Essay (pp.46-59)

Lecture: Writing a Thesis Statement

Organizing an Essay

Lecture: Independent vs. Dependent Clauses

**Wed 1/29**

Reading: *Short Guide*, Ch.3: The Review Response and the Production Response

In-Class Activity: Critiquing *The New York Times* Review

Fri 1/31

Lecture: Elements of Rhetoric (ethos, pathos, logos)

Lecture: Run-Ons and Comma Splices

**Week Five: Crying Is Easy, Comedy Is Hard: Comedy and Chekhov in Today's Theatre**

Mon 2/3

Reading & Discussion: *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* by Christopher Durang (2013)

Handout: Christopher Durang

Wed 2/5

Discussion: Cont. *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*

Assessment: Phrases vs. Clauses, Dependent vs. Independent Clauses, Run Ons and Comma Splices

**Paper #1 Outline Due (in class)**

Fri 2/7

**Peer Review #1**

**Week Six: Introducing Literary Criticism**

Mon 2/10

Discussion: Cont. *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*

Assignment Sheet: Paper #2, Literary Criticism

**Assignment Due: Paper #1, Theatre Review (by 11:59pm via E-Learning)**

Wed 2/12

Reading: *Short Guide*, Ch.4: The Analytical Theatre Essay

Fri 2/14

Reading & Discussion: *Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill ...

Handout: Caryl Churchill and Feminist Theatre

**Week Seven: No Longer A Doll's House: Feminist Theatre and Contemporary Culture**

Mon 2/17

Reading: "De-Realised Women: Performance and Identity in *Top Girls*" by Joseph Marohl

Discussion: Cont. *Top Girls*

Wed 2/19

Discussion: Cont. *Top Girls*

Fri 2/21

Handout: Tennessee Williams..

Handout: Sample Literary Criticism

**Assignment Due: Response #1 (by 11:59pm via E-Learning)**

**Week Eight: Method Acting and Modern American Theatre**

Mon 2/24

Reading & Discussion: *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams....

Wed 2/26

Discussion: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Fri 2/28

**Peer Review #2**

**Week Nine: Epic Theatre**

**Spring Break! March 3<sup>rd</sup>- March 7<sup>th</sup>**

**Week Ten:**

**Mon 3/10**

Reading & Discussion: *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches & Perestroika*

Handout: Tony Kushner and Epic Theatre

**Assignment Due: Paper #2, Literary Criticism (by 11:59pm via E-Learning)**

**Wed 3/12**

Discussion: *Angels in America* Cont.

**Fri 3/14**

Discussion: *Angels in America* Cont.

Assignment Sheet: Paper #3, Adaptation Proposal

**Week Eleven: Woody and Tennessee: Studying Adaption through Allen's *Blue Jasmine***

**Mon 3/17**

In-Class Screening: *Blue Jasmine* (loosely adapted from *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Dir: Woody Allen, 2013)

**Wed 3/19**

In-Class Screening: Cont. *Blue Jasmine*

**Fri 3/21**

Discussion: *Blue Jasmine*

**Week Twelve: Research**

**Mon 3/24**

**Peer Review #3**

**Wed 3/26**

Reading: *Short Guide*, Ch.5: Research: Methods and Materials

Assignment Sheet: Final Paper, Dramaturgical Report

**Fri 3/28**

**Assignment Due: Paper #3, Adaptation Proposal**

**Week Thirteen: The Dysfunctional Family in Contemporary American Theatre**

**Mon 3/31**

Reading & Discussion: *August: Osage County* by Tracy Letts

Handout: Tracy Letts

**Wed 4/2**

Discussion: *August: Osage County* Cont.

**Fri 4/4**

Discussion: *August: Osage County* Cont.

**Week Fourteen: Parts of the Whole: Analyzing a Scene/Character**

**Mon 4/7**

Discussion of *Angels in America* performance

**Wed 4/9**

Reading: *Short Guide*, Ch.6: Character/Scene Analysis

**Fri 4/11**

**Research Day** (meeting at Lib West)

**Assignment Due: Response #2**

**Week Fifteen: Last Midnight: Sondheim and the Post-Modern Musical**

**Mon 4/14**

In-Class Screening: *Into the Woods* (filmed stage production; Music & Lyrics: Stephen Sondheim, Book: James Lapine)

**Wed 4/16**

In-Class Screening: *Into the Woods*

**Fri 4/18**

Discussion: *Into the Woods*

**Week Sixteen: Curtains: Last Meetings**

**Mon 4/21**

Mandatory Conferences

**Tues 4/22**

Mandatory Conferences

**Wed 4/23**

**Student-Led Discussion**

**Final Paper Due**