



## Guided Self-Placement for the First-Year Writing Requirement Academic Year 2025-2026

To support students' academic and professional activities at COA and beyond, every student must take a writing course *during their first year* to facilitate their literacy development. Our writing courses are designed to increase students' understanding of writing, literacy, and research as a *social practice*: what do we do with writing in various contexts to accomplish social actions? In what ways are genres (types of texts) that we produce shaped by purpose, audience, and context, in other words, rhetorical situations? What is the connection between rhetorical situations and language structures in different genres? How is writing and language connected to our identities and communities we come from? How do we use multiple modes of meaning-making beyond written words, including visuals, design choices, and sounds? How do we identify, locate, and evaluate the credibility of information? These questions, and many others, are addressed in our writing courses.

Our writing courses focus on teaching and developing *transferable skills* by building students' genre knowledge and rhetorical awareness. We do not teach fixed writing rules because writing is dynamic, complex, and ever-changing. Instead, our courses develop students' abilities to navigate the evolving nature of writing and different expectations across contexts and genres. Our courses refine literacy skills that students need in order to help them understand writing from a broader perspective and in a contextualized manner.

Our courses also help students understand *writing as a process*. It's through revisions that students refine their ideas, engage critically with texts, and support their overall learning. By participating in writing workshops and individual conferences, students will develop their abilities to articulate complex ideas, familiarize themselves with nuances of writing across various genres, and achieve social actions and goals. Our writing courses sharpen students' rhetorical awareness and genre knowledge and refine their overall understanding of writing as embedded in social activities and discourse communities. Additional information about the [Writing Program](#), [Writing Center](#), [student resources](#), and [faculty/staff resources](#) can be accessed on the website. The [FAQ](#) might be particularly helpful.

This guided self-placement creates space for students to select the courses that fit their interests and needs. Please read through the entire document and then consult with your advisor about what course would best fit your interests and needs. Courses are listed chronologically based on when they are offered. Note that courses listed as a College Seminar indicate that there's one extra writing lab/class each week to give you more time to engage with the material and hone the craft of writing. If you have any questions about the writing requirement and courses, please contact [WritingProgram@coa.edu](mailto:WritingProgram@coa.edu) or Su Yin Khor, the Director of the Writing Program, [skhor@coa.edu](mailto:skhor@coa.edu). Questions about writing support and note-taking services can be directed to Valeria Tsygankova, the Director of the Writing Center, [vtsygankova@coa.edu](mailto:vtsygankova@coa.edu).

## FALL 2025

### HS3131 Writing Goes Wild: Environmental Adventures and Impacts

Katharine Turok, Lecturer in Comparative Literature and Writing

How does the environment affect our sense of place as well as national, regional, and personal identity? Taking a multifaceted view of human relationships with nature, students will generate research projects driven by questions about tourism and eco-tourism, species population change, climate degradation, the role of technology, and development of wildlands and waterways. Local excursions will provide opportunities for taking field notes and students will experiment with different forms of writing through genre analysis to deepen their genre knowledge, while developing rhetorical awareness and research practices. The coursework will deepen students' relationship with nature. Sharing work during peer-reviews is integral to the course and will uncover and inspire various writing processes to further critical thinking and engagement with the course material and the world around them.

Meets the following degree requirements: W, HS.

#### **Students who enroll in this course should have an interest in:**

- Learning about human relationship with nature in various ways, such as tourism and its effects on species populations, climate, human activities and populations
- Research and explorations of various ways of examining links between humans and the environment, including various species
- Developing their understanding of writing as a social practice through genre knowledge and rhetorical awareness

#### **To be successful in this course, students should:**

- Have an open mind and curiosity about writing, the environment, and research
- Be prepared to discuss diverse viewpoints to push critical thinking and engagement with texts
- Be committed to the writing process and understanding literacy as a social practice
- Be curious and step outside their comfort zone and pay attention to details

#### **By the end of this course, students will have:**

- Developed their genre knowledge and rhetorical awareness through investigation, creation, and engagement of various environment-related texts
- A deeper understanding of writing as a process through participation in workshops and revisions
- Sharpened their analytical skills

## HS1110 Food and Identity in Writing: Multimodality in Composition

Su Yin Khor, Professor of Writing and Rhetoric and Director of the Writing Program

Parts of our identities bleed into the texts that we create. Our identities are reproduced, maintained, and created discursively through words but also multimodally through visuals, colors, design choices and more. Food might be overlooked or taken for granted due to its mundaneness, but culinary practices, traditions, and rituals are embedded in larger social, cultural, and historical contexts such as migration, nationalism, and politics. Through *genre analysis*, we can uncover the elements and conventions that establish written and multimodal connections to our identities. Genre analysis is an activity that helps writers identify conventions and patterns of genres (different types of texts, such as menus, business cards, letters, and resumes). Conventions and rhetorical choices in both high-stakes and low-stakes food-related genres reflect and connect to various culinary practices and related identities. In other words, identifying features of a text can help us see the links between our identities and texts that we produce, as well as the formats and conventions of a particular genre. The questions in this class will address intersections of food, identity, writing, and multimodality, including, but not limited to: how does migration shape the development of local and global identities? What role does nationalism play in food-related identities? How do people express who they are explicitly and implicitly through food and food-related writing? Through genre/rhetorical analysis activities, discussions, and readings about food and identity, students will build their genre knowledge and rhetorical awareness.

Meets the following degree requirements: W, HS.

### **Students who enroll in this course should have an interest in:**

- Investigating the connection between writing, identities, food, and multimodality
- Developing writing and analytical skills through non-traditional texts and approaches
- Questions about identity, migration, and food
- Doing work to explore their own identities and relationships with writing and food

### **To be successful in this course, students should:**

- Be curious about exploring diverse kinds of writing
- Have an interest in delving deeper into questions about identities and who we are
- Be committed to the writing process and doing analytical work
- Be prepared to leave their comfort zone to be exposed to diverse ideas and perspectives

### **By the end of the term, students will have:**

- An understanding of how genre analysis can uncover the links between writing, food, and identity to support overall writing knowledge
- A refined ability to analyze writing and doing analytical work
- A deeper understanding of genre knowledge and rhetorical awareness
- A better understanding of their relationship with writing and food

## HS2110 College Seminar: The World of Ms. Marvel

Palak Taneja, Professor of Literature and Writing

In this course, the students will dive into the world of Kamala Khan as she follows in the footsteps of her role model and the first Ms. Marvel, Carol Danvers, one of the few female superheroes in the universe. The students will engage with the ideas of race, religion, culture, power, and teenage angst, and more as they read *Ms. Marvel* comics (2014 onwards), paying attention to storytelling through the genre of sequential art. They will also watch the TV adaptation (2022) and do a comparative analysis of the two genres. Part of your focus will be on understanding the writing process by composing in many genres, such as short blog posts, reviews, and fan fiction. We will use the written assignments and our reading to develop a better understanding of the rhetorical situation and how that influences our writing.

Meets the following degree requirements: W, HS.

### **Students who enroll in this course should have an interest in:**

- Understanding the mechanics of comics as a medium of storytelling
- The world of Marvel comics in general, *Ms. Marvel* in particular
- Questions of race, religion, identity, and politics

### **To be successful in this course, students should:**

- Consider comics as a serious genre
- Be engaged in all aspects of class, including critical reading and class discussions
- Think of writing as a process and submit drafts of their work for feedback
- Be comfortable with asking questions

### **By the end of this course, students will have:**

- Developed a nuanced understanding of comics as a genre and their role
- Be able to have informed conversations about the Marvel universe, especially Ms. Marvel
- An understanding of the relationship between the text and the world
- Worked on and worked in varied genres of writing/composing

## HS1126I Pushing the Boundaries of the Essay

Valeria Tsygankova, Teaching Staff and Director of the Writing Center

What do you think of when you hear the word “essay”? A common formula might come to mind: five paragraphs supporting a single thesis, with no room for anything else. But if we look at the essay’s long history and the way it’s been used—by writers like Michel de Montaigne, James Baldwin, Cathy Park Hong, among many others—we find that essay-writing has never been formulaic. Writers from across linguistic and intellectual traditions have used essays not only to present their opinions, but, more interestingly, to delve into questions that don’t have easy answers. And their writing has taken an infinite number of shapes. Exploring the outer boundaries of the essay universe, we will meet essays in all their diversity: those written linearly and those written in fragments, in one language or in many, in one medium or multimodally. You will gain a deeper understanding of the choices you can make as essay writers for different academic, professional, and public audiences and rhetorical situations (including, eventually, senior project proposals, fellowship applications, the Human Ecology Essay and many others) and practice using essayistic writing as a powerful medium for investigating mysteries in the world and in themselves. You will come away with an expanded sense of what counts as an “essay,” as well as a sharper capacity to analyze specific essay genres—such as research articles, op-eds, and application essays—each of which comes with its own range of conventions and expectations.

Meets the following degree requirements: W, HS.

### **Students who enroll in this course should have an interest in:**

- Reading writers from diverse national, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds
- Creatively repurposing strategies from their reading for their own writing
- Using writing as a way of thinking
- Sharpening their awareness of genre and rhetorical situation

### **To be successful in this course, students should:**

- Be willing to build new knowledge and skills on top of what they already know
- Be curious about the diverse individual perspectives in our readings and in the classroom
- Be eager to reflect on their own writing processes
- Be committed to helping their classmates develop as writers

### **By the end of the term, students will have:**

- A better understanding of writing for multiple purposes and audiences
- An expanded ability to read texts rhetorically
- A capacity to use composition research to inform their own writing practices
- A better understanding of the essay as an expansive and diverse genre

## WINTER 2026

### HS2125 Journeys: Writing for Voyagers, Trekkers, and Wanderers

Katharine Turok, Lecturer in Comparative Literature and Writing

How can witnessing and reporting other worlds—whether a country, a village, a river, a mountain, or a back alley—make us more sensitive travelers, sharpen awareness of cultural biases, and empower place-based writing? Transdisciplinary projects will deepen a sense of place as the course explores the rhetoric of travel and its transformative impacts. This course highlights the allure, the dangers, uncertainties, risks, and joys of travel expressed in student writing. Maps, infographics, letters, newspaper articles, and social media, for instance, constitute genres that may be examined and created. We will consider the relation between travel writing and ethnography, between travel and identity. What words, images, foods, music, rituals, or other sources of inspiration spark curiosity and passions that make us want to go places?

Meets the following degree requirements: W, HS.

#### **Students who enroll in this course should have an interest in:**

- Developing their overall writing and literacy skills
- Exploring diverse genres and be interested in traveling as long-standing human activity
- Learning about the connection between genres (texts we produce) and broader social structures they're embedded in and how these shape micro-level elements (e.g., words choices, formatting)
- Exploring the connections between traveling, ethnography, and identities such as gender and race

#### **To be successful in this course, students should:**

- Be willing to develop writing and literacy skills through writing, reflection, and revision
- Be prepared to acknowledge and discuss diverse viewpoints
- Be committed to the writing process and understanding literacy as a social practice
- Be curious, step outside their comfort zone, and sharpen awareness of concrete details

#### **By the end of the term, students will have:**

- Developed their genre knowledge and rhetorical awareness through investigation, creation, and engagement of various travel-related texts
- A deeper understanding of writing as a process through participation in workshops and revisions
- Developed their research literacies and multimodal approaches
- Sharpened their analytical skills

## **HS3118M Communicating Science**

Jenny Rock, Adjunct for the Writing Program

This course is designed for science students developing their professional communication skills. It will improve students' writing ability by introducing them to writing for the scientific community and for the general public. The course involves learning to write an abstract and literature review, as well as how to construct a poster and talk for a scientific conference. We also examine the process of science and how it determines protocols for writing and publishing a scientific paper. A class project gives the opportunity to apply learning about public science communication in a community context.

Meets the following degree requirements: W

### **Students who enroll in this course should have an interest in:**

- Learning and practicing protocols for writing a scientific paper
- The process of science and communication obligations of scientists
- Learning and practicing visual and oral communication skills to construct and present a scientific poster
- Using writing to communicate complex scientific ideas for the general public

### **To be successful in this course, students should:**

- Have had basic research science experience already, either through college-level science classes or ideally through past field/laboratory research experience

### **By the end of this course, students will be able to:**

- Effectively communicate in the sciences to both a public and professional audience
- Understand the protocols for writing a scientific paper and proposal
- Write an abstract and literature review
- Use graphics effectively in science communication
- Develop and present a scientific poster
- Understand ethical considerations involving research and communication in science

## HSXXX How Writing Works: Looking Under the Hood

Valeria Tsygankova, Director of the Writing Center

What actually happens when expert writers write? How do they become experts? How does anyone progress as a writer? It might feel like the answer to all of these questions is *innate genius*, or *magic*, but composition researchers, who study writing, find that development is actually a product of specific practices, dispositions, and acquired knowledge. In this class, students will get to know the composition research that focuses on these three questions and will try out its findings. Through experimenting with their writing processes and trying out new practices, students will get to know themselves better as writers. They will also have an opportunity to practice the skills that researchers use to carry out research projects. At a moment when students' writing universes are expanding, as they encounter new areas of study and new genres in class and in the wider world, this course helps students develop strategies for meeting those challenges.

Meets the following degree requirements: W, HS.

### **Students who enroll in this course should have an interest in:**

- Getting to know a research field that studies writing and writers
- Trying out a variety of new writing practices and experimenting with the writing process
- Building new knowledge and skills on top of what they already know
- Using writing as a way of thinking

### **To be successful in this course, students should:**

- Practice self-reflection
- Be willing to help their classmates develop as writers
- Be eager to creatively repurpose strategies from their reading in their own writing
- Be curious about the diverse perspectives in our readings and in our classroom

### **By the end of the term, students will have:**

- A better understanding of research articles as a genre
- An expanded ability to carry out a research project
- A greater capacity to use composition research to inform their own writing practices
- A sharper awareness of genre and rhetorical situation

## HSXXX Entry Point: Identity, Language, and Power

Su Yin Khor, Professor of Writing and Rhetoric and Director of the Writing Program

Zach Soares, Director of A/V Services

How do ideas about language maintain and perpetuate stereotypes and social hierarchies? What role does language play in social issues? Where do language standards come from? Do only foreigners have accents? Using identity as the entry point to understand human experiences, we will examine how identity intersects with linguistic diversity, social issues, the creation and maintenance of social hierarchies, and asymmetrical power relations in everyday, professional, and educational settings. While language and discourse are embedded in social issues, they remain invisible and are often absent from discussions about solutions to social issues due to the invisible nature of language and discourse. We will use readings from applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, migration studies, rhetoric and composition and other related areas to examine these questions and many more. This course is for all students, regardless of their linguistic background. Diversity is inherent to *all* languages.

Meets the following degree requirements: W, HS

### Students who enroll in this course should have an interest in:

- Understanding the invisible forces, i.e., language and ideas about language, that shape various social issues and social hierarchies
- Other people's stories and sharing their own as they relate to identity and language
- Understanding how two disciplines—audio production and writing/applied linguistics— connect and intersect despite appearing to be incompatible
- Learning about another perspective, i.e., understanding discourse, to understand social issues
- Engaging critically with course material and re-think their own definition of what writing is
- Developing technical skills to understand audio production

### To be successful in this course, students should:

- Be curious and open to learning a new and different way of understanding social issues and how they are connected to identity
- Do the work, come prepared to class, and contribute to discussions to facilitate their learning
- Challenge and push themselves and ask questions about the role of language in social issues
- Examine the complicated nature of human identities and experiences, including difficult aspects like linguistic discrimination and social hierarchies
- Reflect on their learning and writing process, i.e. willing to shift their conceptualization of *writing as product* to *writing as process*
- Be interested in developing technical skills for audio production to understand it as a process and a craft that can be blended with writing

### By the end of the term, students will have:

- Developed metacognitive and metacognitive abilities, i.e., learn more about the processes of writing and developed the ability to talk about writing
- A refined genre knowledge and rhetorical awareness
- Improved ability to plan, implement, troubleshoot, and complete projects with many moving parts
- An understanding of how identity, language and discourse intersect with social issues
- Learned how to make connections between different disciplines that appear to be very different
- Developed technical skills to record, import, mix, edit, master, and export sound

## SPRING 2026

### HS2121 Writing as Art, Craft, and Social Action (I/M)

Martha Andrews Donovan, Lecturer in Writing

In this course students will explore writing as both an art and a social action that can change both writer and audience. Students will read and analyze various forms of writing (genres) on a broad range of social and policy issues (from the value of wonder to the importance of antiracist work) and will consider the craft, context, audience, purpose, and possibilities of these texts as guides for their own writing. Students will address issues of pressing concern and personal relevance in their own writing in different selected genres focused on invitations/calls to action.

Meets the following degree requirements: W, HS

#### **Students who enroll in this course should have an interest in:**

- The writing process (in all its messiness and urgency)
- The agency and possibilities of their own voice
- Writing for a public audience in various genres (e.g., personal essay, commentary, testimony, proposal, open letter, personal statement, etc.)
- Examining and developing strategies for writing with curiosity, clarity, complexity, creativity, courage, and compassion

#### **To be successful in this course, students should:**

- Be curious (“*Pay attention. / Be astonished. / Tell about it.*” – Mary Oliver)
- Be committed to attending class faithfully
- Be interested in engaging in collaborative work (including peer review)
- Be willing to engage in the writing process (including writing conferences)

#### **By the end of the term, students will have:**

- Created a portfolio of writing that reflects their commitment, learning, and growth as writers
- Gained skills in writing with insight, clarity, coherence, passion, and reason to enlighten, move, inspire, motivate, and/or persuade
- Developed a fuller understanding of the rhetorical situation of the genres that they read and write
- Provided evidence of an ability to weave in and cite researched material