

## ENG 461-001 The Teaching of Writing

### The Writing Teacher as Researcher

M/ W 935—1050am | 312 Humanities Classroom | Fall 2015  
[www.461teachingofwriting.weebly.com](http://www.461teachingofwriting.weebly.com) | password: teachwriting

#### Dr. Hannah Rule

Office Hours: Tues 10—11 am; Wed 11 am—1 pm; & by appointment  
Office Location: 203 HUO (Welsh Humanities Office Building)  
Contact Info: [ruleh@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:ruleh@mailbox.sc.edu)

### Course Description

#### *The Writing Teacher as Researcher*

*[S]tudents preparing to teach writing in public school or college should understand important conceptual underpinnings of composition and the teaching of writing and should test them out in practice" (134)*  
Richard Gebhardt, "Balancing Theory with Practice in the Training of Writing Teachers" (1977)

*Writing is a "uniquely powerful multi-representational mode for learning" (125)*  
Janet Emig, "Writing as a Mode of Learning" (1977)

*It is in the nature of the reflective process for us always to be evolving. We never have the luxury of regarding ourselves as fully finished critical products who have reached the zenith of reflective evolution. We see our ideas and practices as needing constant investigation. In the aftermath of action, we try to find the opportunity to reflect back on the memories, experiences, and interpretations that caused us to make what felt like instinctual responses. When understood as a critically reflective process, good teaching becomes synonymous with a continuous and critical study of our reasoning processes and our pedagogic action" (42)*  
Steven Brookfield, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* (1995)

This course explores the theory and practice of teaching writing, mostly in middle and secondary school contexts. The course is designed to support programs in education and the Secondary Education English track, though it may be appropriate for students interested in college level writing instruction and/or tutoring in writing, especially as the course builds some allegiances with writing research and pedagogies at the collegiate level.

The above quotations introduce the three foundational tenets that organize this course: First, that teachers-in-training should understand and interrogate relationships between theory and practice—how our concepts, beliefs, and philosophies inform what we do in our classrooms and vice versa. Our textbook and other readings will help us think in this way: our readings will provide background and research on important aspects of writing pedagogies as they relate to practical applications, including assignment and activity suggestions. Second, that writing itself is a method of exploration, discovery, and learning. As such, you will **do** a lot of writing to reflect on the teaching of writing, and to experiment with approaches to writing in your own future classrooms. Lastly, as illustrated in the last quotation, you'll approach your developing role as a writing and ELA teacher as a critical, reflective practitioner, or said another way, as a teacher-researcher. The writing teacher-researcher is an approach to teaching practice that emphasizes inquiry, reflection, observation, revision & redesign, and ongoing development through immersion in the professional field.

In this course then, you will learn about important issues impacting the teaching of writing and you'll have the chance to evaluate, revise, and extend those issues toward building your own approach to teaching writing. You will cultivate your knowledge not only as a future teacher of writing, but also as a writer, thinker, and professional.

**Course Goals and Outcomes** Any education course won't be able to equip you with formulas for teaching to master. Teaching is not formulaic, but that's actually a good thing: the unpredictability and improvisational nature of teaching is what makes it both exciting and challenging. As a result, the course goals encompass habits of thinking about teaching, immersion in research and concepts in the teaching of writing, as well as attempts to try out "on-the-ground" practices including the drafting of activities and assessments of student writing. That is, throughout the course, we'll be working on balancing theory, research, and reflection with approaches to concrete practices you might try out in your own future classroom. Through this course, you will:

- Become familiar with major trends and challenges in the teaching of writing; understand and respond to current research and issues in the teaching of English Language Arts
- Engage in ongoing inquiry practices, including primary and secondary research methods to discover knowledge about your professional field/the teaching of writing/educational practices broadly
- Develop a philosophy of teaching writing and teaching portfolio
- Work on your own writing—write in a range of genres, including primary research, analysis, no-stakes, blog writing, etc.
- Articulate approaches and possible activities used to support the development of student writing
- Get practice in designing/approaching writing assignments and scaffolding activities
- Experiment with response and evaluation strategies

## Required Texts

1) Kelly Gallagher, *Teaching Adolescent Writers* (2006)

(Available at USC Bookstores and from online booksellers at the cost of approximately \$17)

2) Other required readings available through the Course Schedule (links and PDFs)

*Plan to always bring these readings, print or digital access, to class on the assigned days for discussion  
I recommend that you print and save materials or save docs digitally for reference/use beyond this class*

## Course Policies and Expectations

**Classroom Expectations** Please be courteous and respectful of everyone, particularly when we are sharing ideas, both written and verbal. Please be on time as habitual tardiness is disruptive. Be prepared every day to be an active participant as it is your activity—writing, thinking, reflecting, and speaking—that is the real content of this course. Be sure to bring printed or digital copies of the readings on the day there are due so that you may reference them during discussion and other activities.

**Technology and Multitasking** *to be determined by the class (see course website for the finalized policy)*

**Group Discussion Practices** *to be determined by the class (see course website for the finalized policy)*

**Attendance** Attendance in this course is mandatory. I'll take attendance at each meeting. Based on USC's "10 Percent Rule," you'll be allowed three absences (*either unexcused or excused*) in the course without penalty. This means that illnesses are *not* considered excused, even with a doctor's note (though extended, severe illness may qualify as an exemption worked out on an individual basis). I encourage you to use your three allotted absences strategically. In the case of a university-approved absence only (observation of a religious holiday, participation in a university-approved sporting or other event) you be able to make up any missed work, if you present proper and prior notification and/or documentation. Absences beyond the allotted three will result in a deduction of points from the final grade (deduction will be fairly determined by the instructor; you can anticipate a 1% (5 points) *minimum* deduction for each absence beyond the allotted three).

**Late and/or Missing Work Policy** Late work is not accepted. If you miss the deadline for a major assignment and too much time has passed, I may request that you drop the course. For daily in-class writing or activities, there can be no make-ups. Homework *may* be accepted for half-credit, if submitted via email before the start of the class in which it's due. For larger assignments, I'm willing to consider accepting something after its due date, *if* you notify me prior to the assignment's deadline of the circumstances. We will then negotiate an alternate due date. It's your responsibility to contact me to make these arrangements. *I can be very flexible if you make contact ahead of due dates.*

**Conferences** I strongly urge you to take advantage of my regular office hours to discuss your work in the course. In addition to in-person meetings, I am always willing to answer questions/respond to concerns via email.

**Recommended Study/Work Habits** I have found that students who succeed in this class tend to:

- Devote a notebook solely to this class—jot notes while doing the assigned reading, listening and participating in class discussion, reading over classmates' blog posts, during any instructor-led lecture, etc.
- Keep up with the reading—find intrinsic value in reading; participate in discussions as informed by the reading. Read and listen to *learn and reflect*.
- Ask questions about major assignments—ask for clarifications, pitch ideas, bring drafts to my office hours, etc.
- Post regularly on the blog at times when they feel compelled (when something's on their minds from discussion, a reading, etc.)
- Avoid procrastination on major assignments

**Formatting** Each assignment may require a different format for submission. You may need to bring a hard copy to class; you may need to submit through Blackboard. I will always make this clear in class, on our course website, and/or on assignment sheets. For informal writing/homework, you can generally either handwrite or type your submissions. For all assignments, in general, please use MLA style and documentation: e.g. 1-inch margins, reasonable font like Times New Roman, Garamond, Didot, etc., double-spaced, with correct MLA heading, etc. If you're more familiar with another documentation style, you may use it in place of MLA.

**Academic Integrity and Plagiarism** In accordance with USC's Honor Code, it is your responsibility to avoid dishonesty, fraud, or deceit in your work in this course (and all your courses). As writing our main activity, in particular it is your responsibility to avoid plagiarism. Violations of the University's Honor Code include, but are not limited to, presenting another's ideas as your own, improperly citing sources, using another's work as your own, allowing someone to write an assignment or part of an assignment for you, and any other form of academic misrepresentation. Any violation of this Code will result in a minimum academic penalty of your failing the assignment, and will result in additional disciplinary measures including referring you to the Office of Academic Integrity. For more information, please see the Honor Code from the Office of Academic Integrity, found here: <http://www.sc.edu/policies/ppm/staf625.pdf>

**Accessibility** The University of South Carolina provides high-quality services to students with disabilities, and we encourage you to take advantage of them. Students needing academic accommodations should: (1) Register with and provide documentation to the Office of Student Disability Services in LeConte College Room 112A (777-6142), and (2) Discuss with me the type of academic or physical accommodations you need as soon as possible.

**Revisions to the Course Schedule** It's important to me to take account of the vibe and interests of the class as a whole. I've planned out our term in detail, but may wish to make changes (skip some readings, add some, add a homework assignment, etc.) to the daily work in the course. In general, you can count on doing all the major assignments as listed (for the points/percentages listed), but there may be changes to readings, homework, in-class

writing, etc. In general you can use the initial schedule to plan out your work in the course. If course changes include changes to deadlines, I'll always try my best to give you *more* time rather than less.

## Assignments and Grades

*Creating a Community of Teacher-Researchers—35% total*

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### **Participation 10% | 50 points**

- As this is a course in teacher-preparation, your **active participation** is expected. This means that you should 1) come to class having thoroughly read the assigned material (and, as applicable, prepared the homework assignment), 2) actively listen to and respond to your classmates' comments in discussion, 3) **thoughtfully and regularly contribute your ideas to discussion**, 4) thoughtfully and actively participate in in-class activities.
- My expectation is that you'll do your best to contribute your thoughts to our discussion. Because this course focuses so much on reflective practice, it's important to me that everyone have a voice in the conversation. At the same time, I don't wish to "cold call" those wouldn't normally speak up in their classes. We'll work together during the term to encourage an inviting and balanced conversational atmosphere. *The expectation is that you'll speak at least some during our discussions.*
- You'll have the chance to evaluate your oral participation at the end of the term and suggest the points you believe you earned.

### **Informal Writing 15% | 75 points**

- This grade accounts for all the **in-class and out-of-class (homework) writing activities** you'll be doing day-to-day in the course, including workshops, peer reviews, responses to reading assignments, etc. You may also be "quizzed" on reading assignments. More often, I will ask you to do some writing along with our reading assignments as "homework."
- In general, these (semi-)daily assignments will not be accepted late. I'll consider giving you half credit on informal writing you've prepared but can't come to class *if* you send it in before class time.

### **Blog (hosted on [461teachingofwriting.weebly.com](http://461teachingofwriting.weebly.com)) 10% | 50 points**

- I will invite everyone as an editor on our class Weebly page. You will have access to post and comment on this part of our site. Over the course of the term, you'll be expected to make **at least FOUR posts** during the course of the term (of around 350-500 words minimum) as well as **respond to at least FOUR posts from your classmates** (at least 100 words in response).
- You should use the space to think through ideas from the course, or from your other courses/experiences—write when you feel compelled to! (don't wait to do all your posts at the end of the term!) It's your responsibility to engage and to ensure you're posting regularly.
- *Please see the "Assignments" tab on our website for a detailed assignment description*

*Reflective Practice: Primary and Secondary Research Methods—50% total*

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### **Primary Research: Observation & Interview or Survey 25% | 125 points total | (60 pts. Obs, 65 pts. Int)**

- After studying the practice of observation, you'll conduct an observation of a classroom, teacher, or other space with a specific question or interest in mind that is related to the teaching of writing. You'll submit your "raw" observational notes as well as a 2-3 p. evidence-based reflection asserting what you learned and what questions remain.
- In the next part of this project, you'll conduct an interview with an individual or an open-ended short survey to a group of people (at least 10) focused on a question or area of interest related to the teaching of writing. In addition to the raw transcript or results and/or notes, you'll write a 2-3 page evidence-based reflection asserting what you learned and what questions remain.

- In compiling these reports, for each, you'll also include a 1-page max rationale narrative that explains your reasons for choosing the methods, sites, people, and your *motivating questions*.
- These two methods may take the same, related, or a totally different focus.
- Please see the "Assignments" tab on our website for a detailed assignment description

**Praxis Report**                      **25 % | 125 points**

- Based on an extension of a concept we're discussing, or one you identify in your particular area—you'll write a rhetorical summary and application of 3 scholarly articles from academic journals related to your field. In the second half of the report, you'll develop a classroom practice, activity or assignment based and a short rationale based on what you discovered.
- Please see the "Assignments" tab on our website for a detailed assignment description

*Capstone: Reflecting on your Development—15% total*

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**Teaching Portfolio & Philosophy of Teaching Writing**                      **15% | 75 points**

- To create the portfolio, you'll choose 4 pieces of writing from the semester that you feel represent best your growth and thinking in the course (the writings can be *anything* from the course, even notes or blog posts, the observation assignment, etc). You'll write a Portfolio Memo that opens the portfolio that describes your rationale in selecting each piece.
- The additional (fifth) piece of writing everyone will put in the portfolio is Philosophy of Teaching Writing, a 1 page, single-spaced statement that reveals your beliefs and foundational practices in the teaching of writing
- Please see the "Assignments" tab on our website for a detailed assignment description

**Grades**

I follow the University's grade scale, grading on a 10-point scale:

A=90-100      C=70-74.99  
 B+=85-89.99    D+=65-69.99  
 B=80-84.99    D=60-64.99  
 C+=75-79.99    F=59.99 and below

|                          |             |                 |
|--------------------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Participation            | 10%         | 50 pts.         |
| Informal Writing/HW      | 15%         | 75 pts.         |
| Blog                     | 10%         | 50 pts.         |
| Observation & Int/Survey | 25%         | 125 pts.        |
| Praxis Report            | 25%         | 125 pts.        |
| Portfolio & Philosophy   | 15%         | 75 pts.         |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>100%</b> | <b>500 pts.</b> |

If you have a question about a grade you receive on an assignment, please feel free to discuss it with me. If you'd like to know where you stand in your grades at any point in the term, please contact me.