

Writing About Invention

Level

First-year to mid-level undergraduate writing course

Themes

- Multimodal Writing
- Histories of Composition and Rhetoric
- The Rhetorical Canons
- Digital Rhetoric and New Media
- Creative Writing Studies

Key Texts

Flynn, Nick. *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City*

Charlie Lowe and Pavel Zemliansky, *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*

Plato, *Phaedrus*

Anne Carson, *Nox*

Thoreau, H.D., *Walden*

Walden, A Game (waldengame.com)

Learning Outcomes

- Learn about basic theories of composition
- Historicize rhetorical practice
- Develop creative approaches to writing
- Experiment with digital poetics
- Create and design rhetorically compelling content
- Workshop and revise writing



The Greek Agora, photograph by Madison Jones

Writer's block—the condition in which one is unable to invent new work—predates even writing itself. This frustrating phenomenon is familiar to both novice and expert writers. Even Socrates experiences it in Plato's *Phaedrus* dialog. Invention (from the Greek *invenire*, “to find”) was one of the five canons of rhetoric. It was central to Aristotle's definition of rhetoric, “discovering the available means of persuasion.” Indeed, some see it as the central force behind the other four: arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. As a rhetorical practice, invention has evolved alongside the shifts from orality to literacy and from what Gregory Ulmer characterizes as the move from literacy to electracy.

This course traces conversations about rhetorical invention from ancient Greece (and before), to romantic conceptions of the genius, and finally to contemporary discourse on composition theory. Through the lenses of academic disciplines, new technologies, and legal restrictions, we will consider who owns the rights to creativity and invention. The course will also challenge students to consider the ways in which we relegate concepts of creativity to certain disciplines and individualize the process of invention. Drawing from influential composition theorists and from creative writers talking about how they invent, we will examine process- and product-based models for composing. The course will also examine the emerging potential of technologies to remix, revolutionize, and redefine the ways we compose, create, and invent in digital space. Students will unleash their inventive powers as writers and digital makers.

Major Assignments	Points	/100
<p>Weekly Responses, 3000 words</p> <p>Students will compose a total of 10 responses (300 words each) to weekly prompts. These responses will cover a range of genres, from creative to analytical writing. The responses will be carefully organized, and students will use critical thinking to reflect on and integrate course concepts into the disciplinary context. Students are allowed to skip a total of two responses throughout the semester with no penalty.</p>	15	
<p>Sense of Place, 2000 Words</p> <p>This assignment asks students to produce an analytical essay exploring the written relationship between place, process, and inspiration in a narrative style. Students will select an actual location to write about. The resulting essays will work to articulate a sense of place rhetorically, drawing on our discussions of emplaced techniques for rhetorical invention based on aspects of memory and style. Students will go beyond describing a place to attempt to define what that place means through observation, analysis, and description.</p>	10	
<p>Remix Essay, 1700 Words</p> <p>This assignment asks students to produce an expository essay exploring the relationship between a poem and a contemporary advertisement featuring that poem. Students will identify one of the four typologies of transformation from D.W. Edwards' essay and apply it to their poem and ad. Essays should draw from sources covered in class and additional research to explore the concepts of remix, copyright, and intellectual property.</p>	15	
<p>Mystory, 1800 Words</p> <p>Students will produce a website which weaves together the creative and scholarly writing experience they have gained throughout the semester. In many ways, this multimedia project will function like a research paper. However, the writing will blend informational detail with personal anecdote, forming complex patterns and connections. From this, students will compose a narrative using patterns rather than a traditional argument.</p>	15	
<p>Final Portfolio Reflection</p> <p>Students will compose an introduction to their portfolio which draws on the methods they employed during the process of invention and revision to describe their writing process in relation to the disciplinary context. Students will reflect on how their creative and inventive processes have evolved in relation to course content and peer feedback.</p>	15	
<p>Memorization</p> <p>As part of our study of the relationship between memory and invention, students will memorize and recite one brief piece of writing, either a poem or a short excerpt from an essay.</p>	5	
<p>Class Participation</p> <p>Class participation includes contributing to class discussions; coming to class prepared and on time, participating in class activities; providing adequate drafts for group work; participating once per week on Twitter, and paying close attention to lectures and class activities. In general, students are expected to contribute constructively to each class session. Because this course relies heavily on workshops, students should bring computers and writing tools to each class meeting. This grade includes minor assignments such as weekly writing as well as other homework and classwork assignments.</p>	25	