

Spring 2014 - RHE 309K: Rhetoric of Confession

In the 21st century US, we are told that confession is good for the soul, that the truth will set us free. We feel legal, religious, social and psychological imperatives to disclose crimes, desires, beliefs, identities and traumas. We gobble up confessional memoirs and tell-all celebrity interviews. We write our darkest truths on postcards and mail them to the blog Postsecret. We take guilty pleasure in watching meltdowns on reality television and reading the salacious tales in *Cosmo* Confessions. But we also mock oversharing, squeal “TMI!” when we see detailed posts about our friends' romantic lives or health problems on Facebook.

Radical honesty is sometimes posited as an attempt to break free of rhetoric, but in this course, we will consider self-disclosure as a persuasive genre, often a complex game of disclosure and withholding. We will critically examine cultural conversations around confession and emotional release confession and emotional release: Aristotle's discussion of catharsis; Freud's development of the talking cure; radical feminists' idea of the personal as political. Students will analyze self-disclosing texts and the controversies that spring up around them. We will research politicians who apologize for affairs and lapses in judgment; athletes who admit to using performance-enhancing drugs; celebrities who confess to addictions or liaisons; journalists and memoirists who admit to lying or plagiarizing; artists who confess traumas through poetry, music or installations; bloggers who document their own everyday habits or self-destructive behavior. How do race, gender, class and context affect public responses to self-disclosure? How do public figures convince (or attempt to convince) their fans or constituents to believe their confessions, accept their apologies and continue to admire them, even as they reveal their former dishonesty and misbehavior? How can self-disclosure and self-deprecation establish credibility? How do different strategies for and theories about self-disclosure appeal to different audiences? Your research and writing throughout the semester will culminate in your own imaginative deployment of the confessional strategies we've explored and analyzed.

Textbooks

Textbook: *Rhetorical Analysis (RA)* by Mark Longaker and Jeffrey Walker. Pearson.

Handbook: *Easy Writer: A Pocket Reference* by Andrea Lunsford. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009.

All other readings provided by instructor in class and on Canvas

Assessment

This course utilizes the Learning Record. See attached documents & <http://www.learningrecord.org/>

Assignments

- 3 short assignments
- 2 longer essays with required peer reviews and revisions
- 1 group presentation on a popular memoir
- 1 final project
- 3 Learning Record self-assessments (initial, midterm & final)

Course Goals

When you compose your Learning Record evaluations, you will analyze how and how much you have learned in each area or Course Goal. Read and re-read these descriptions carefully (especially while you write your evaluations): you will likely cite from these descriptions as you craft your argument.

1. RHETORIC

This course will introduce students to key concepts from classical rhetoric (commonplaces, kairos, ethos, pathos, and logos) and contemporary rhetorical analysis. Students should demonstrate the ability to to argue persuasively for a position or claim, include the abilities to incorporate evidence, to analyze and explain

evidence, to connect evidence to claims, to responsibly appeal to emotions, and to solicit trust and to demonstrate goodwill. Students should also demonstrate the ability to organize information persuasively and according rhetorical priorities (such as clarity or emotional impact). Students should also demonstrate the ability to analyze arguments in rhetorical terms, analyze how specific arguments appeal to specific audiences, and analyze visual rhetoric and delivery.

2. WRITING PROCESS

Writing involves much more than the final product you turn in when the deadline arrives. The writing process includes a range of activity that often begins with research and reading and continues from planning (perhaps through brainstorming, note-taking, outlining, etc.) through drafting to revision. Revision is a crucial part of the writing process in which writers evaluate their work, identify changes they wish to make in their argument and its structure, and even reconceptualize their argument in response to new information or circumstances. Students should demonstrate the ability to schedule, plan, draft, and deeply revise their writing projects. They should also demonstrate attention to structure, style, and the mechanics of Standard Edited English.

Writing is a social process, a form of communication. Students will be required to participate in peer review, during which they should demonstrate their reading and editing skills and strategically respond to and incorporate the feedback of other readers.

3. RESEARCH

Research is a process of discovering useful, credible, and reliable sources of information or argument. Research is also an inventional process, or a way of preparing to write. Research enables writers to enter a network that connects writing in a shared conversation. Good citation practices enable one's readers to follow this conversation. In addition to providing appropriate citation in a requested style (such as MLA), students should demonstrate an understanding of research and citation as conventional practices belonging to respective communities, including our own class. Students should also demonstrate the ability to use the university library, search online databases, locate and distinguish different types of media. Finally, students should demonstrate the ability to incorporate sources effectively in their own writing through direct quotation, summary, and paraphrase.

4. CONFESSION

In this course, students will be asked to consider self-disclosure as a persuasive genre, a rhetorical style, and a cultural phenomenon. Students will be required to identify and analyze the historical, social and political contexts of confessions; to identify the purpose(s) and argument(s) of a self-disclosing text; to identify and accurately summarize multiple perspectives within and around particular confessions; and to identify and analyze how a text interprets, challenges or promotes an idea of confession/self-disclosure and contributes to an ongoing conversation or conversations. We will explore such questions as: How do we evaluate credibility in self-disclosure? How do we evaluate sincerity? Appropriateness? How do we evaluate the success of a confession? How do race, gender, class and context affect public responses to self-disclosure? What ideologies do different kinds of confessions appeal to? Is confession good for the soul?

When assessing their learning in this area, students should consider how their own thinking has developed or changed and what new facets or perspectives they have considered. They should also think critically about their own strategic use of self-disclosure in the classroom and/or in their LR self-assessments.

Course Schedule

	unit 1: contextualizing confession	reading & assignments due
Tues, Jan 14	intro & definitions	student info sheet due in class
Thursday, January 16	kairos & the rhetorical situation	RA, Chap. 2 (kairos), pp. 7-21 Kellman, "TMI? Ann Romney Shares Miscarriage, Depression" Johnson, "Web Privacy: In Praise of Oversharing"
Tuesday, January 21	the recovery movement	brainstorming exercise & LR self-assessment due Alcoholics Anonymous - the Big Book (selections) browse the Radical Honesty website http://www.radicalhonesty.com/
Thursday, January 23	writing / style + the personal is political	Hanisch, "The Personal Is Political" Forewards to <i>This Bridge Called My Back</i>
Tuesday, January 28	classic confessions	short assignment #1 due RA, Chap. 3 (logos/argumentation) pp. 44-64 Selections from Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> & Rousseau, <i>Confessions</i>
Thursday, January 30	the personal is political II	Michel Foucault, "We Other Victorians" & "Scientia Sexualis"
Tuesday, February 4	confessional poetry	radical revision due RA Chapter 4 (structure) poetry packet
Thursday, February 6	confession in the digital age	browse PostSecret read selected secondary sources from the cultural conversation around PostSecret
Tuesday, February 11	presidential confessional	annotated bibliography due RA Chapter 5 (style) in class: watch videos of Bill Clinton & Ronald Reagan speeches
Thursday, February 13	the personal is political, redux	read Riot Grrrl manifesto and selections from <i>Doris</i> & <i>Hoax</i> zines

	unit 2: analyzing confession	
Tues, Feb 18	peer review!	draft of essay 1 due for peer review

Tuesday, February 25	is coming out confessional?	essay 1.1 due RA Chapter 6 (ideology) selected recent celebrity coming out pieces
Thur, Feb 27	paper conferences	
Tuesday, March 4		essay 1.2 due sign up for project groups
Thur, Mar 6		Learning Record midterm due
Mar 10-14	SPRING	BREAK !!!
Tuesday, March 18	lies & crimes	RA Chapter 8 (ethos) selections from Simpson, <i>If I Did It</i>
Thur Mar 20		group work time
Tues Mar 25	the memoir craze	group project presentations
Thursday, March 27	lies & crimes II	RA Chapter 7 (affect) listen to <i>This American Life</i> : “Retraction”

	unit 3: style & strategies of confession	
Tues, April 1	writing workshop	let’s talk about style!
Thurs, Apr 3	peer review	draft of essay 2.1 due
Tuesday, April 8	honest to blog or, contemporary online confessional culture	essay 2.1 due browse XOJane’s “It Happened to Me” email Laura a link to the online confessional of your choice
Thur, Apr 10	paper conferences	
Tuesday, April 15	honest to Instagram	essay 2.2 Donald “Childish Gambino” Glover’s controversial Instagram posts
Thur, Apr 17	PostSecret, revisited	selected posts from Hyperbole and a Half
Tuesday, April 22	brainstorming final projects	PostSecret assignment due final project brainstorming sesh
Thursday, April 24	The confessional mode in fiction	Diaz, “The Cheater’s Guide to Love”
Tues, Apr 29	peer review!	draft of final project due for peer review

Thur, May 1		final project due
Thursday, May 8	(final)	final Learning Record self-assessment due optional final project revision due by 5 PM

Grade Criteria

These criteria describe the performance that must be evidenced by your Learning Record evaluations in order for you to justify a request for the grade described. Read and re-read these descriptions carefully (especially while you write your evaluations): you must cite from these descriptions when you explain your grade request.

A Continual participation in all course activities, perfect or near perfect attendance, and all assigned work completed on time. Excellent quality in work produced for the course along all dimensions of learning and in all Course Goals. LR reflections cite explicit and accurate evidence for quality of work. LR demonstrates both an awareness of student's place along the dimensions of learning and development along the dimensions throughout the semester, showing an awareness of both strengths and areas to work on in the future.

B Almost continual participation in all course activities, near perfect attendance, and all assigned work completed on time. Good quality in work produced for the course along all dimensions of learning and in all Course Goals. LR reflections cite explicit and accurate evidence for quality of work, but do not provide the most appropriate evidence or fail to connect some claims about quality of work and development to evidence in the LR. LR demonstrates both an awareness of student's place along the dimensions of learning and development along the dimensions throughout the semester, showing an awareness of both strengths and areas to work on in the future.

C Varied participation in all course activities, minimal absences, and all assigned work completed on time. Average quality in work produced for the course along all dimensions of learning and in all Course Goals. LR reflections cite explicit and accurate evidence for quality of work, but do not always provide appropriate evidence or fail to connect some claims about quality of work and development to evidence in the LR. LR demonstrates some awareness of student's place along the dimensions of learning and development along the dimensions throughout the semester, but does not describe development fully.

D Intermittent participation in course activities, poor attendance, some late, incomplete or missing assignments, and/or below-average quality of work produced according to the Course Goals. LR provides little evidence of awareness of development along the dimensions of learning, not discussing one or more dimensions and/or Strands.

F Minimal or no participation in course activities, poor attendance, several late, incomplete or missing assignments and/or well below average quality of work produced according to the Course Goals. Evidence of development across the dimensions of learning is not given or does not support claims made in the LR reflection, and LR does not discuss multiple dimensions and/or Goals.