

Writing Animals

Honors 345B · Spring 2011

TTh 1:30–3:20 · MGH 248 · 5 credits

<http://tiny.cc/writinganimals2011>



Instructors

Neil Banas, Oceanography, neil@apl.washington.edu

<http://faculty.washington.edu/banasn/>

office: Ben Hall Research Building 580 (RTB on campus maps: on the Burke-Gilman, west of the University Bridge and the dorms),

office hours: I will stick around MGH after class on T and Th. Or email to make an appointment (don't be shy!)—we can meet in my office, in the Suzzalo cafe, or Cafe Allegro on the Ave, depending on the day and time.

Sarah Read, English, reads@u.washington.edu

office hours: I too will stick around after class on T and Th. I will also pass around a conference sign up sheet during the second or third week of class.

Overview

This course will explore how writers in a variety of genres from scientific articles to children's books address the question of what connects us to and divides us from other animals, and the moral and psychological implications of our answers. We will read popular and technical science writing, fieldwork memoirs, food journalism, eco-philosophy, fiction, mythology, and art criticism, with particular attention to the uses and limitations of science in all these contexts. Students will choose one of the genres above as the focus of their writing and research for the quarter. We will also consider what it means to be writing animals, animals who write, ourselves: can we view academic discussion and the activity of writing as particular kinds of embodied, social primate behavior? Species considered in the course will include gorillas, ravens, whales, bears (grizzly, teddy), ants, professors, and goats.

Objectives

At the end of this course, students will be able to

- 1) think expansively about *connections* between humans and other animals (evolutionary, behavioral, psychological, social, ecological, economic) and why they matter, while also thinking critically about *difference* between humans and animals and why it matters.
- 2) make a purposeful contribution to a public or academic conversation about course themes that is meaningful to an identifiable audience.

Books

- course reader (available at Ave Copy Center, 4141 University Way NE)
- Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (available at the University Bookstore)

Assignments

1) Do the reading. This is really important. We will lecture sometimes, but only *after* you guys have raised your questions, answered as many as you can among yourselves, and worked as far as you can into each week's material. We can suggest directions and provide background as requested, but **the primary responsibility for bringing good questions to the table is yours**. Use us as a resource; ask our opinion about specific things; ask us for help, and don't be shy; but don't wait for us to take the lead.

2) Each class for which reading is assigned, **post at least one short comment or question** on the course discussion board. A couple of sentences is fine. Respond to each other where possible. Do this **before noon on the day of class** (longer lead time very helpful when possible!).

3) **Your term project**: make a contribution to an ongoing conversation about course themes. The only constraints on this contribution are that 1) the contribution makes an argument (in other words, has a rhetorical aim); 2) it takes the shape of a genre that is recognizable by an identifiable audience; 3) it is reasonable to complete this contribution by the end of the quarter.

This term project has 8 steps along the way...

a) **Brainstorming post**. By noon before class on Thur 4/7, write 1-2 paragraphs on the discussion board about ideas and genres you might want to explore in your term project. Issues you find intriguing, animals you want to spend time with (in the field or in the library), authors you want to learn to write like, conversations you want to join, audiences you want to learn to reach.

b) **Paper #1: writing from observation**. The purpose of this assignment is to let you practice the methods and consider the demands of one of the observation-based genres we will discuss in the first part of the course: popular science writing, technical science writing, literary nature writing, or other narrative non-fiction.* Write **5 pages** in one of these genres that uses direct observation** of one or more animals *** to support an argument****. In addition, include a **1+ page reflection** on how your choice of genre shaped the argument you were able to make.

* If you have an alternate idea you're excited about, ask us, and we'll try to make it work.

** Either your own firsthand observations (a day or two at the zoo, watching animals on campus, memories from your childhood in Antarctica, life with your pet wallaby) or someone else's observations (perhaps scientific work that you've read about: see Annie Dillard, week 4).

*** Humans count as animals.

**** "Argument" in the broad sense: we'll develop this idea in class.

c) **Paper #2: project proposal**. Includes an abstract that states your argument (i.e. purpose); a genre analysis and samples of the genre you will write in; preliminary list of sources with annotations (from the developing class resource list: see below); and a proposal for the form of your in-class presentation. Overriding question: Is this project 1) relevant, 2) meaningful to you and your intended audience, and 3) actually doable given available time, resources and access to people/places/technology? More info to come.

d) **Class bibliography and resource list**. In a dedicated area on the class discussion board, we will assemble a collective list of books, articles, websites, images, and other sources, loosely organized by topic, based on the outside research you all are doing for your term projects. Annotate each of your entries with 1-2 sentences on how it's helpful to you; include direct links or attach PDFs where possible.

e) **In-class peer review of paper #1 and #2.** See course calendar. Have a complete draft ready by class time. More guidelines for this to come.

f) **Conferences outside of class with Neil and Sarah.** Meet with each of us at least once during the quarter. This is how we're going to give you feedback on your written work, in addition to whatever else you'd like to ask us about.

g) **In-class presentation** of your project in week 9 or 10. You have ten minutes; the format is your choice. We'll discuss the possibilities in class.

h) **Paper #3: final reflections** (5 pages) tying together your project, your experience producing and presenting it as a writing animal among writing animals, and the course objectives above.

Grading

paper #1 (writing from observation)	20%
paper #2 (project proposal)	20%
paper #3 (final reflections)	20%
participation	40% (C/NC for each component)
discussion board posts	10
contribute to resource list	2.5
project brainstorming post	2.5
in-class peer reviews	5
conferences with Neil and Sarah	5
in-class presentation week 9/10	10
completing term project	15

Revision policy: either paper #1 *or* paper #2 may be revised and turned in with a writer's memo making an argument for how revision has improved the paper. The grade of the revised paper will be averaged with the grade of the original paper.

Extensions policy: it's worth asking. But ask in advance. A lot of the deadlines are interlinked with other people's work, not just your own, so talk to us about it—don't just make assumptions.

OUTCOMES FOR EXPOSITORY WRITING PROGRAM
COURSES

University of Washington

1. To demonstrate an awareness of the strategies that writers use in different writing contexts.

- The writing employs style, tone, and conventions appropriate to the demands of a particular genre and situation.
- The writer is able to demonstrate the ability to write for different audiences and contexts, both within and outside the university classroom.
- The writing has a clear understanding of its audience, and various aspects of the writing (mode of inquiry, content, structure, appeals, tone, sentences, and word choice) address and are strategically pitched to that audience.
- The writer articulates and assesses the effects of his or her writing choices.

2. To read, analyze, and synthesize complex texts and incorporate multiple kinds of evidence purposefully in order to generate and support writing.

- The writing demonstrates an understanding of the course texts as necessary for the purpose at hand.
- Course texts are used in strategic, focused ways (for example: summarized, cited, applied, challenged, re-contextualized) to support the goals of the writing.
- The writing is intertextual, meaning that a “conversation” between texts and ideas is created in support of the writer’s goals.
- The writer is able to utilize multiple kinds of evidence gathered from various sources (primary and secondary – for example, library research, interviews, questionnaires, observations, cultural artifacts) in order to support writing goals.
- The writing demonstrates responsible use of the MLA (or other appropriate) system of documenting sources.

3. To produce complex, analytic, persuasive arguments that matter in academic contexts.

- The argument is appropriately complex, based in a claim that emerges from and explores a line of inquiry.
- The stakes of the argument, why what is being argued matters, are articulated and persuasive.
- The argument involves analysis, which is the close scrutiny and examination of evidence and assumptions in support of a larger set of ideas.
- The argument is persuasive, taking into consideration counterclaims and multiple points of view as it generates its own perspective and position.
- The argument utilizes a clear organizational strategy and effective transitions that develop its line of inquiry.

4. To develop flexible strategies for revising, editing, and proofreading writing.

- The writing demonstrates substantial and successful revision.
- The writing responds to substantive issues raised by the instructor and peers.
- Errors of grammar, punctuation, and mechanics are proofread and edited so as not to interfere with reading and understanding the writing.

Week 1: Meeting the relatives

popular science writing, narrative non-fiction

Thur 3/31: Dawkins, “Gaps in the Mind”
Adams and Carwardine, “Meeting a Gorilla”
both from from *The Great Ape Project* (Cavalieri and Singer, eds.)

remember to post a comment/question on the discussion board before class

Neil: “Both Dawkins and Adams call our attention to the **evolutionary family tree** that connects humans with other great apes like chimps and gorillas. The anthology these essays are from has a definite moral and practical agenda—it’s worth looking it up and finding out what that agenda is. I’m interested in the **uses of science**—how evolutionary science doesn’t just sit in a biology textbook being neutral and “objective” and impersonal, but gets transformed by writers like Dawkins and Adams into metaphors, stories, jokes, or moral exhortation. And whether you think it’s effective.”

Sarah: “I’m interested in these two pieces **as arguments that are part of a larger conversation**. What is the situation that these arguments are responding to? What is the main argument that each author makes? On what grounds does the author have the authority to make that argument persuasive? What kinds of evidence and appeals does each author use? Would you consider these arguments scientific? Literary? Personal? Having answered these many questions, are you more or less persuaded by these arguments? Finally, **how would you respond to these arguments?**”

Week 2: Like me / not like me

popular science writing

Tues 4/5: Patterson and Gordon, “The Case for the Personhood of Gorillas,” from *The Great Ape Project*
Midgley, “What is anthropomorphism?” from *Animals and Why They Matter*



Mr. Rogers with Penny Patterson and Koko (not in that order)

Thur 4/7: Today, a wide variety of perspectives on humans *as* animals. Read **at least two** of de Waal, excerpts from *Peacemaking among Primates*
Thomas, “On Societies as Organisms,” from *The Lives of a Cell*
Morris, “The Stimulus Struggle,” from *The Human Zoo*
Griffin, “Cows: The Way We Yield,” from *Woman and Nature*
and be prepared to tell your classmates about about them.



project brainstorming post due on the discussion board by 12 before class

Week 3: “All cats are ornithologists”

popular science writing, scientific journal articles

- Tues 4/12: Heinrich, *The Mind of the Raven*, chapters 2, 4, 5 and other excerpts
- Thur 4/14: Marzluff, Heinrich, and Marzluff, “Raven roosts are mobile information centers,” *Animal Behavior* 51:89-103 (1996)
Chapter 2 from Tuesday’s reading describes the same field project as this journal article: reread chapter 2 and be ready to compare the two in class.

Neil: “The quote we used as the title for the week is from the naturalist William Davis, ‘the Cicada Man of Staten Island.’ I found it in a beautiful book on backyard insect behavior called *Near Horizons*, by Edwin Way Teale, and can’t get it out of my head. If cats who hunt birds are by their nature ornithologists, does this mean that human ornithologists, beneath their professional credentials, are basically cats? What is science about, anyway, as a human—that is, primate—activity? Does doing science to animals connect us with them or divide us from them?”

Sarah: “...and all scientists are rhetoricians and all science is an argument.’ Let’s take this statement apart in class on Thursday and think about its implications for how you will respond to the course material for your term projects.”



(Jean Grandville)

Week 4: Science and wonder

literary nature writing

- Tues 4/19: Dillard, “Heaven and Earth in Jest” and “Intricacy,” from *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*
Dillard, “Living Like Weasels,” from *Teaching a Stone to Talk*
Lopez, “Törnârssuk: Ursus maritimus,” from *Arctic Dreams*
- Thur 4/21: Dillard, “Teaching a Stone to Talk,” from *Teaching a Stone to Talk*
Lopez, “A Presentation of Whales,” from *Crossing Open Ground*
optional: Lopez, “The Lives of Seals,” from *Crossing Open Ground*

in-class peer review of paper #1 (writing from observation): come to class with a complete draft.

- Fri 4/22: **paper #1 (writing from observation) due via CollectIt at midnight**



Week 5: Children and nature

children's books

Tues 4/26: Berger, “Animals as Metaphor,” “Vanishing Animals,” and “Why Zoos Disappoint”
Lopez, “Children in the Woods” and “Trying the Land,” from *Crossing Open Ground*

optional: Shepard, “The Pet World,” from *The Others: How Animals Made Us Human*

Thur 4/28: the reading for this day will be children’s books selected and brought in by the class—stay tuned for details of this assignment.

Neil: “Animals are almost invisible in modern urban and suburban life, compared with their central significance to hunter-gatherer and agrarian societies. But at the same time, animals are absolutely everywhere in the cultural world of children. What is going on? The essays for this Tuesday place this strange combination of presence and absence in long historical context, and give us starting points for thinking about what it does to children or adults in our society to be surrounded by symbolic animals but hardly any real ones. These questions have a deep personal pull for me—I find the Berger essays really poignant.”

Sarah: “My daughter is three years old and I read to her every day. Almost all of her books have animal characters or are about animals, and I don’t even try to make this the case. Why are animal so ubiquitous in children’s books? Why are young children so interested in animals? Why are animals such a popular (read: safe) subject for children? What kinds of arguments do children’s books make about animals? How do illustrations either limit or expand childrens’ (and adults’) conceptions of animals?”

Week 6: Ecology, interconnection, and food, part 1

fiction and myth

Tues 5/3: Berger, “A Calf Remembered,” “A Question of Place” and “The Great Whiteness,” from *Pig Earth*
Skaay of the Qquuna Qiighawaay, “The Man Who Married a Bear,” from *Being in Being* (Bringhurst, transl.)

Thur 5/5: **in-class peer review of paper #2 (project proposal): come to class with a complete draft.**

Fri 5/6: **paper #2 (project proposal) due via CollectIt at midnight**

Week 7: Ecology, interconnection, and food, part 2

journalism

Tues 5/10: Pollan, “Power Steer” (a.k.a. “This Steer’s Life”)

Thur 5/12: go to Michael Pollan’s website: <http://michaelpollan.com/tag/meat/>
read **at least one other** animal-related article you find there that interests you,
and be prepared to tell us about it.

Week 8: Academic animals

fiction

Tues 5/17: Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, part 1: “The Philosophers and the Animals”

optional: Kafka, “Red Peter”

Thur 5/19: Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, part 2: “The Poets and the Animals”

Weeks 9 and 10

5/24, 5/26, 5/31, 6/1: **In-class presentations of term projects.** Sign up for a presentation day in the second week of class.

The **written version of your term project** is due via CollectIt the day of your presentation.

Finals week

Mon 6/6: **paper #3 (final reflections) due via CollectIt**



(Corey Arnold)