

COMPARATIVE MEDIA STUDIES / WRITING (COURSE 21W)

First-Year Writing Subjects

First-year writing subjects provide a foundation for future communication-intensive subjects, and also function as a starting point for concentrating, minoring, or majoring in Writing. While the topical focus of writing assignments varies across these subjects, all first-year writing subjects develop students' understanding of genre, audience, argument, discourse, source use, and writing process. All written work goes through stages of drafting, peer review, and revision. Because these subjects are limited to 15 students per section, students receive detailed feedback at all stages of the writing process, and have many opportunities for individual conferences with instructors. Active class participation and short oral presentations are required. Please note: Students can take no more than one subject in each category (e.g., 21W. 01x, 21W. 02x, 21W. 03x) for credit.

21W.011 Writing and Rhetoric: Rhetoric and Contemporary Issues

Prereq: None

U (Fall, Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-HW

Credit cannot also be received for 21W.012, 21W.013, 21W.014, 21W.015, 21W.016

Provides the opportunity for students - as readers, viewers, writers, and speakers - to engage with social and ethical issues they care deeply about. Explores perspectives on a range of social issues, such as the responsibilities of citizens, freedom of expression, poverty and homelessness, mental illness, the challenges of an aging society, the politics of food, and racial and gender inequality. Discusses rhetorical strategies that aim to increase awareness of social problems; to educate the public about different perspectives on contemporary issues; and to persuade readers of the value of particular positions on, or solutions to, social problems. Students analyze selected texts and photographs, as well as documentary and feature films, that represent or dramatize social problems or issues. Students also write essays about social and ethical issues of their own choice. Limited to 15.

A. Walsh

21W.012 Writing and Rhetoric: Food for Thought

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-HW

Credit cannot also be received for 21W.011, 21W.013, 21W.014, 21W.015, 21W.016

Explores many of the issues that surround food as both material fact and personal and cultural symbol. Includes non-fiction works on topics such as family meals, food's ability to awaken us to "our own powers of enjoyment" (M.F.K. Fisher), and eating as an "agricultural act" (W. Berry). Students read Michael Pollan's best-selling book *In Defense of Food* and discuss the issues it raises about America's food supply and eating habits, as well as the rhetorical strategies it employs. Assignments include narratives, analytical essays, and research-based essays. Limited to 15.

Staff

21W.013 Writing and Rhetoric: Introduction to Contemporary Rhetoric

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-HW

Credit cannot also be received for 21W.011, 21W.012, 21W.014, 21W.015, 21W.016

Considers how rhetoric shapes current events in politics, science, and society. Students study rhetoric as a theoretical framework for developing persuasive arguments, as a method of analyzing written, oral, and visual texts, and as a mode of human inquiry. Assignments include analytical, persuasive, and research-based essays, as well as oral presentations, group discussions, and debates. Readings drawn from political speeches, scientific arguments, and popular media. Limited to 15.

L. Harrison-Lepera

21W.014 Writing and Rhetoric: Exploring Visual Media

Prereq: None

U (Spring)

Not offered regularly; consult department

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-HW

Credit cannot also be received for 21W.011, 21W.012, 21W.013, 21W.015, 21W.016

Explores the rhetoric of visual media and the meaning of the digital revolution. Students analyze readings and films and discuss the power of media in defining social issues and shaping ideas of self, family, and community. They also write essays that sharpen skills in analyzing visual rhetoric, developing and supporting arguments, and using sources. Limited to 18.

A. Walsh

21W.015 Writing and Rhetoric: Writing about Sports

Prereq: None

U (Fall, Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-HW

Credit cannot also be received for 21W.011, 21W.012, 21W.013, 21W.014, 21W.016

Examines the role of sports in our individual lives and American culture at large. Considers a broad range of issues, such as heroism and ethical conundrums, gender equality, steroids, and the proper role of sports in college life. Examples of high-quality, descriptive and analytic sports writing serve as the focus for class discussion and as models for student essays. Limited to 15.

A. Karatsolis

21W.016 Writing and Rhetoric: Making Change

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

Not offered regularly; consult department

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-HW

Credit cannot also be received for 21W.011, 21W.012, 21W.013, 21W.014, 21W.015

Explores how we use rhetoric in text, visuals, and other modes to make meaning. Uses analysis, composition, and debate about rhetorical strategies to develop theoretical and empirical knowledge of how design choices shape our texts and our understanding of the world. Limited to 15.

J. Stickgold-Sarah

21W.021 Writing and Experience: MIT Inside, Live

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-HW

Credit cannot also be received for 21W.022

Acting as participant-observers, students investigate MIT's history and culture through visits to the Institute's archives and museums, relevant readings, and depictions of MIT in popular culture. Students chronicle their experiences and insights through a variety of writing projects, culminating in the completion of a portfolio. Limited to 15.

J. Graziano

21W.022 Writing and Experience: Reading and Writing Autobiography

Prereq: None

U (Fall, Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-HW

Credit cannot also be received for 21W.021

Draws on a range of autobiographical writing as examples for students to analyze. Students write essays that focus on their own experience, exploring topics such as intellectual growth and development, the childhood and high school years, life at MIT, the influence of place upon one's personality and character, and the role politics and religion play in one's life. Emphasizes clarity, specificity, and structure; investigates various modes of writing (narrative, analytical, expository) and their suitability for different purposes. Limited to 15.

Staff

21W.031 Science Writing and New Media: Explorations in Communicating about Science and Technology

Prereq: None

U (Fall, Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-HW

Credit cannot also be received for 21W.034, 21W.035, 21W.036

Examines principles of good writing, focusing on those associated with scientific and technical writing. Considers the effects of new media as an avenue for communicating about science. Students discuss scientific articles and essays and work in small groups to critique each other's writing. Assignments include a critical review, a science essay for the general public, and a research or service project proposal. Students choose topics that reflect their background and interests. Formal and informal presentations and group discussions develop oral communication skills. Limited to 15.

J. Melvold

21W.034 Science Writing and New Media: Perspectives on Public Health

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: U (Spring)

Acad Year 2026-2027: Not offered

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-HW

Credit cannot also be received for 21W.031, 21W.035, 21W.036

Instruction provided in effective communication about public health and in conveying specialized knowledge to a general audience. Through writing and revision, students explore concepts of genre, audience, and purpose and how to structure their arguments. Students discuss alternative viewpoints, analyze written texts, give talks, and peer review each other's work. By communicating in class and in assignments, students are encouraged to envision creative solutions to some of the most pressing issues in public health. Topics for discussion include climate change, urban housing, agricultural practices, and emerging infectious disease. Limited to 18.

*K. Pepper***21W.035 Science Writing and New Media: Elements of Science Writing for the Public**

Prereq: None

U (Fall, Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-HW

Credit cannot also be received for 21W.031, 21W.034, 21W.036

Introduces ways of communicating scientific information meaningfully to public audiences, and teaches features that distinguish science writing for the public from scientific writing aimed at experts. Discussions analyze various forms of popular science communication to identify rhetorical strategies that engage and educate readers of varying backgrounds and identities. Students write about topics they are genuinely interested in related to science, medicine, technology, and/or engineering. Assignments incorporate primary and secondary background research, drafting, presentations, peer review, and revision. Limited to 15.

*Staff***21W.036 Science Writing and New Media: Writing and the Environment**

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-HW

Credit cannot also be received for 21W.031, 21W.034, 21W.035

Develops written and oral communication skills through the study and practice of environmental science writing. Covers a wide range of genres, including such standard forms as the scientific literature review. Students adapt the content of their papers and oral presentations to the distinctive needs of specific audiences. Assignments provide thematic coherence and a basis for independent student research. Limited to 15.

*C. Taft***21W.041[J] Writing About Literature**

Same subject as 21L.000[J]

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Fall, Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-HW

See description under subject 21L.000[J]. Enrollment limited.

*W. Kelley, I. Lipkowitz***21W.042[J] Writing with Shakespeare**

Same subject as 21L.010[J]

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-HW

See description under subject 21L.010[J].

*D. Henderson***21W.051 Emotional Intelligence and Team Communication**

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-HW

Examines the role of emotional intelligence in both our individual lives and our collaborations. Considers a broad range of topics and communication strategies, including self-awareness, listening, trust, habit formation, conflict, negotiation, and constructive dialogue. High-quality writing and video presentations serve as the focus for the class discussion and as models for student essays and presentations. Students produce both individual and collaborative work. Limited to 15.

J. Abbott

English Language Studies (ELS)

21W.217 Workshop in Strategies for Effective Teaching (ELS)

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: G (IAP; partial term)

1-0-2 units

Credit cannot also be received for 21W.218

A mini-module for international teaching assistants. Covers special problems in teaching when English is a second language and the US a second culture. Videotaping of practice sessions for feedback. Individualized programs to meet different needs. Graduate TAs have priority. Limited to 18.

A. C. Kemp

21W.218 Workshop in Strategies for Effective Teaching (ELS)

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (IAP; partial term)

1-0-2 units

Credit cannot also be received for 21W.217

A mini-module for international teaching assistants. Covers special problems in teaching when English is a second language and the US a second culture. Videotaping of practice sessions for feedback. Individualized programs to meet different needs. Limited to 18.

A. C. Kemp

21W.219 Foundations of Academic and Professional Writing (ELS)

Prereq: None

G (Fall, Spring)

3-0-9 units

Can be repeated for credit. Credit cannot also be received for 21W.220

Writing module for high-intermediate ELS students who wish to review and practice accurate grammar, effective sentence and paragraph structure, punctuation, and word choice. Short weekly writing assignments with extensive editing required. Meets with 21W.220 when offered concurrently. Limited to 18.

E. Grunwald

21W.220 Foundations of Academic and Professional Writing (ELS)

Prereq: None

U (Fall, Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H

Can be repeated for credit. Credit cannot also be received for 21W.219

Writing module for high intermediate ELS students who wish to review and practice accurate grammar, effective sentence and paragraph structure, punctuation, and word choice. Short weekly writing assignments with extensive editing required. Meets with 21W.219 when offered concurrently. Limited to 18.

E. Grunwald

21W.221 Communicating in American Culture (ELS)

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

Not offered regularly; consult department

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-H

Designed for international students who wish to refine their academic communication skills through the study of mainstream American culture. Using a variety of materials in different media, students explore how the country's history, geography, institutions, traditions and values have shaped contemporary communication styles and responses to critical events in the world. Students examine and practice principles of effective communication in genres common to the humanities and social sciences. Explores how discourse practices vary within and across cultures. Assignments include an educational memoir, project proposal, annotated bibliography, research-based cultural analysis of a current event of choice, and presentation. Limited to 18.

E. Grunwald

21W.222 Expository Writing for Bilingual Students

Prereq: None

U (Fall, Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-HW

Can be repeated for credit.

Formulating, organizing, and presenting ideas clearly in writing. Reviews basic principles of rhetoric. Focuses on development of a topic, thesis, choice of appropriate vocabulary, and sentence structure to achieve purpose. Develops idiomatic prose style. Gives attention to grammar and vocabulary usage. Special focus on strengthening skills of bilingual students. Intended to be taken during the student's first year at MIT. Priority given to students recommended for 21W.222 based on summer FEE results. Limited to 15; undergraduates only.

E. Grunwald, A. C. Kemp

21W.223 Listening, Speaking, and Pronunciation (ELS)

Prereq: None

U (Fall, Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H

Can be repeated for credit. Credit cannot also be received for 21W.224

Designed for high intermediate ELS students who need to develop better listening comprehension and oral skills. Involves short speaking and listening assignments with extensive exercises in accurate comprehension, pronunciation, stress and intonation, and expression of ideas. Includes frequent video- and audio-recording for analysis and feedback. Meets with 21W.224 when offered concurrently. Limited to 18 per section.

A. Kemp, E. Grunwald

21W.224 Listening, Speaking, and Pronunciation (ELS)

Prereq: None

G (Fall, Spring)

3-0-9 units

Can be repeated for credit. Credit cannot also be received for 21W.223

Designed for high-intermediate ELS students who need to develop better listening comprehension and oral skills. Involves short speaking and listening assignments with extensive exercises in accurate comprehension, pronunciation, stress and intonation, and expression of ideas. Includes frequent video- and audio-recording for analysis and feedback. Meets with 21W.223 when offered concurrently. Limited to 18 per section.

E. Grunwald

21W.225 Advanced Workshop in Writing for Science and Engineering (ELS)

Subject meets with 21W.226

Prereq: None

G (Fall, Spring)

3-0-9 units

Can be repeated for credit.

Designed for advanced bilingual students who wish to build confidence and skills in writing in a variety of academic and professional contexts in the sciences and engineering (including mathematics and computer science). Writing contexts covered include personal statements and cover letters, texts for general audiences, proposals, emails, theses, and journal articles. Intended primarily for students in their second year at MIT or beyond, the class encourages students to use their research as material for their assignments. May be repeated for credit with permission of instructor. Students taking graduate version complete additional assignments. Limited to 15 per section. Listeners not permitted.

E. Grunwald

21W.226 Advanced Workshop in Writing for Science and Engineering (ELS)

Subject meets with 21W.225

Prereq: None

U (Fall, Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H

Can be repeated for credit.

Designed for advanced bilingual students who wish to build confidence and skills in writing in a variety of academic and professional contexts in the sciences and engineering (including mathematics and computer science). Writing contexts covered include personal statements and cover letters, texts for general audiences, proposals, emails, theses, and journal articles. Intended primarily for students in their second year at MIT or beyond, the class encourages students to use their research as material for their assignments. May be repeated for credit with permission of instructor. Students taking graduate version complete additional assignments. Limited to 15 per section. Listeners not permitted.

E. Grunwald, A. C. Kemp

21W.227 Advanced Workshop in Writing for Social Sciences and Architecture (ELS)

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: G (Fall)

3-0-9 units

Can be repeated for credit. Credit cannot also be received for 21W.228

Focuses on techniques, format, and prose used in academic and professional life. Emphasis on writing required in fields such as economics, political science, and architecture. Short assignments include business letters, memos, and proposals that lead toward a written term project. Methods designed to accommodate those whose first language is not English. Develops effective writing skills for academic and professional contexts. Models, materials, topics, and assignments vary from term to term. May be repeated for credit with permission of instructor. Limited to 18 per section.

A. C. Kemp

21W.228 Advanced Workshop in Writing for Social Sciences and Architecture (ELS)

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H

Can be repeated for credit. Credit cannot also be received for 21W.227

Focuses on techniques, format, and prose used in academic and professional life. Emphasis on writing required in fields such as economics, political science, and architecture. Short assignments include business letters, memos, and proposals that lead toward a written term project. Methods designed to accommodate those whose first language is not English. Develops effective writing skills for academic and professional contexts. Models, materials, topics and assignments vary from term to term. May be repeated for credit with permission of instructor. Limited to 18.

A. C. Kemp

21W.232 Advanced Speaking and Critical Listening Skills (ELS)

Prereq: None

G (Fall, Spring)

3-3-6 units

Can be repeated for credit. Credit cannot also be received for 21W.233

For advanced students who wish to build confidence and skills in spoken English. Focuses on the appropriate oral presentation of material in a variety of professional contexts: group discussions, classroom explanations and interactions, and theses/research proposals. Valuable for those who intend to teach or lecture in English. Includes frequent video- and audio-recording for analysis and feedback. Develops effective speaking and listening skills for academic and professional contexts. Models, materials, topics and assignments vary from term to term. May be repeated for credit with permission of the instructor. Meets with 21W.233 when offered concurrently. Limited to 15 per section.

A. C. Kemp

21W.233 Advanced Speaking and Critical Listening Skills (ELS)

Prereq: None

U (Fall, Spring)

3-3-6 units. HASS-H

Can be repeated for credit. Credit cannot also be received for 21W.232

For advanced students who wish to build confidence and skills in spoken English. Focuses on the appropriate oral presentation of material in a variety of professional contexts: group discussions, classroom explanations and interactions, and theses/research proposals. Valuable for those who intend to teach or lecture in English. Includes frequent video- and audio-recording for analysis and feedback. Develops effective speaking and listening skills for academic and professional contexts. Models, materials, topics and assignments vary from term to term. May be repeated for credit with permission of the instructor. Meets with 21W.232 when offered concurrently. Limited to 15 per section.

A. C. Kemp

21W.237 MIT Out Loud: Public Speaking for Bilingual Students

Prereq: None

U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H

Can be repeated for credit.

Develops oral communication skills for bilingual students through the lens of the MIT experience. Speaking assignments in informative and persuasive speech forms draw on examples of popular culture and MIT touchstones, such as "alternative" campus tours, interviews, MIT 100K pitches, and TED talks. Explores the role of voice and body language through improvisation and impromptus. Focuses on spoken accuracy and vocabulary through oral exercises designed for bilingual students. Frequent video-recording will be used for self-evaluation. Limited to 15.

A. C. Kemp

21W.238 Professional Communication in the Digital Realm: Social Media and Artificial Intelligence for Bilingual Students (ELS)

Subject meets with 21W.239

Prereq: None

G (Spring)

3-0-9 units

Explores the opportunities and risks of social media and generative AI, especially for those communicating in a second language. Provides opportunities for advanced bilingual students to build confidence and skills in using social media in English-speaking contexts and in using generative AI effectively and ethically. Assignments include written analyses of social media across disciplines and cultures, tests of chatbots' abilities and limitations, comparisons of their output with students' own writing, and short in-class presentations. Culminates in the creation of a long-term social media plan for students' careers. No listeners. Limited to 15 total for versions meeting together.

E. Grunwald

21W.239 Professional Communication in the Digital Realm: Social Media and Artificial Intelligence for Bilingual Students (ELS)

Subject meets with 21W.238

Prereq: None

U (Spring)

3-0-9 units

Explores the opportunities and risks of social media and generative AI, especially for those communicating in a second language. Provides opportunities for advanced bilingual students to build confidence and skills in using social media in English-speaking contexts and in using generative AI effectively and ethically. Assignments include written analyses of social media across disciplines and cultures, tests of chatbots' abilities and limitations, comparisons of their output with students' own writing, and short in-class presentations. Culminates in the creation of a long-term social media plan for students' careers. No listeners. Limited to 15 total for versions meeting together.

E. Grunwald

21W.240 Imagining English: Creative Writing for Bilingual Students (ELS)

Prereq: 21W.222 or other CI-H/CI-HW subject

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-A

Guides advanced bilingual students in the art of writing short stories (fiction) and poetry in English as well as refining advanced grammar and vocabulary. Discusses published examples from classic and well-known American, British, and non-native writers. Reviews the basic elements of craft and technique such as (for fiction) plot, character, and setting and (for poetry) form, meter, and sonic instruments as well as figurative language and meaning for both. Discusses differences between academic and non-academic tone and style and the role of generative AI in the creative process. Also includes one small translation project from students' native language. Limited to 15; undergraduates only.

E. Grunwald

Undergraduate Subjects

21W.725[J] Gender, Myth, and Magic

Same subject as WGS.255[J]

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-A

See description under subject WGS.255[J].

K. Ragusa

21W.729[J] Engineering Communication in Context

Same subject as ES.729[J]

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

Not offered regularly; consult department

3-1-8 units. HASS-E; CI-H

See description under subject ES.729[J]. Limited to 18; preference to ESG students.

D. Custer

21W.733[J] Debating About Society and Engineering

Same subject as 10.07[J]

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: U (Spring)

Acad Year 2026-2027: Not offered

3-0-6 units. HASS-H

See description under subject 10.07[J]. Limited to 18.

E. Schiappa, B. L. Trout

21W.735 Writing and Reading the Essay

Prereq: Writing sample and permission of instructor
 U (Fall, Spring)
 3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-H

Exploration of formal and informal modes of writing nonfiction prose. Extensive practice in composition, revision, and editing. Reading in the literature of the essay from the Renaissance to the present, with an emphasis on modern writers. Classes alternate between discussion of published readings and workshops on student work. Individual conferences. Limited to 18.

Staff

21W.738[] Intersectional Feminist Memoir

Same subject as 21L.438[], WGS.238[]
 Prereq: None
 Acad Year 2025-2026: U (Fall, Spring)
 Acad Year 2026-2027: Not offered
 3-0-9 units. HASS-H

See description under subject WGS.238[].
K. Ragusa

21W.740 Writing Autobiography and Biography

Prereq: None
 U (Fall)
 3-0-9 units. HASS-A

Writing an autobiography is a vehicle for improving one's style while studying the nuances of the language. Literary works are read with an emphasis on different forms of autobiography. Students examine various stages of life, significant transitions, personal struggles, and memories translated into narrative prose, and discuss: what it means for autobiographer and biographer to develop a personal voice; and the problems of reality and fiction in autobiography and biography.

K. Manning

21W.741[] Black Matters: Introduction to Black Studies

Same subject as 24.912[], 21H.106[], 21L.008[], CMS.150[], WGS.190[]
 Prereq: None
 U (Spring)
 3-0-9 units. HASS-A, HASS-H; CI-H

See description under subject 24.912[].
D. Wood, D. Harrell, M. DeGraff

21W.742[] Writing about Race

Same subject as WGS.231[]
 Prereq: None
 U (Fall, Spring)
 3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-H

The issue of race and racial identity have preoccupied many writers throughout the history of the US. Students read Jessica Abel, Diana Abu-Jaber, Lynda Barry, Felicia Luna Lemus, James McBride, Sigrid Nunez, Ruth Ozeki, Danzy Senna, Gloria Anzaldua, Judith Ortiz Cofer, Carmit Delman, Stefanie Dunning, Cherrie Moraga, Hiram Perez and others, and consider the story of race in its peculiarly American dimensions. The reading, along with the writing of members of the class, is the focus of class discussions. Oral presentations on subjects of individual interest are also part of the class activities. Students explore race and ethnicity in personal essays, pieces of cultural criticism or analysis, or (with permission of instructor) fiction. All written work is read and responded to in class workshops and subsequently revised. Enrollment limited.

Staff

21W.743 Voice and Meaning: Speaking to Readers through Memoir

Prereq: None
 U (Fall, Spring)
 3-0-9 units. HASS-E

Explores the memoir genre with particular attention to the relationships between form and content, fact and truth, self and community, art and "healing," coming to voice and breaking silence. Readings include works by Nick Flynn, Meena Alexander, Art Spiegelman, James McBride, Ruth Ozeki, and Cheryl Strayed, with a focus on the ways in which these writers make meaning out of specific events or moments in their own lives as a way of engaging with larger questions of family, race, history, loss, and survivorship. Drawing on lessons taken from these works, students write a short memoir of their own. Limited to 18.

Staff

21W.744 The Art of Comic Book Writing

Prereq: None
 U (Fall)
 3-0-9 units. HASS-A

Students create short scripts and full-length comic book narratives across a variety of genres, while analyzing a wide range of comics (corporate and independent, print and web). Focuses on scripts; drawing skills not required, but illustrations or storyboards are welcome. Special attention to questions of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality in both critical and creative work. Limited to 13.

M. Liu

21W.745 Advanced Essay Workshop

Prereq: Permission of instructor
 Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered
 Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Fall, Spring)
 3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-H
 Can be repeated for credit.

For students with experience in writing essays and nonfiction prose. Focuses on negotiating and representing identities grounded in gender, race, class, nationality, and sexuality in prose that is expository, exploratory, investigative, persuasive, lyrical, or incantatory. Authors include James Baldwin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Audre Lorde, Richard Rodriguez, Alice Walker, John Edgar Wideman, Diana Hume George, bell hooks, Margaret Atwood, Patricia J. Williams, and others. Designed to help students build upon their strengths as writers and to expand their repertoire of styles and approaches in essay writing. Approved for credit in Women's and Gender Studies when content meets the requirements for subjects in that program. Limited to 18.

Staff

21W.747 Rhetoric

Prereq: None
 U (Fall, Spring)
 3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-H

For students with a special interest in learning how to make forceful arguments in oral and written form. Studies the forms and structures of argumentation, including organization of ideas, awareness of audience, methods of persuasion, evidence, factual vs. emotional argument, figures of speech, and historical forms and uses of arguments. Limited to 18 per section.

Staff

21W.748 Apocalyptic Storytelling

Subject meets with CMS.848
 Prereq: Permission of instructor
 U (Fall)
 3-0-9 units. HASS-A

Focuses on the critical making of apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic and dystopian stories across various narrative media. Considers the long history of Western apocalypticism as well as the uses and abuses of apocalypticism across time. Examines a wide variety of influential texts in order to enhance students' creative and theoretical repertoires. Students create their own apocalyptic stories and present on selected texts. Investigates conventions such as plague, zombies, nuclear destruction, robot uprising, alien invasion, environmental collapse, and supernatural calamities. Considers questions of race, gender, sexuality, colonialism, trauma, memory, witness, and genocide. Intended for students with prior creative writing experience. Students taking graduate version complete additional assignments. Limited to 15.

J. Diaz

21W.752 Making Documentary: Audio, Video, and More

Prereq: 21A.550[J], 21W.786[J], or permission of instructor
 Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered
 Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Fall)
 3-6-3 units. HASS-A
 Credit cannot also be received for 21W.824

Focuses on the technical demands of long-form storytelling in sound and picture. Students build practical writing and production skills through a series of assignments: still photo-text works, audio-only documentaries, short video projects (4-6 minutes), and a semester-long, team-produced video science documentary (12-15 minutes). Readings, screenings and written work hone students' analytical capacity. Students taking the graduate version complete additional assignments. Students from the Graduate Program in Science Writing center their work on topics in science, technology, engineering, and/or medicine.

T. Levenson

21W.754[J] Playwriting Fundamentals

Same subject as 21T.150[J]
 Prereq: None
 U (Spring)
 3-0-9 units. HASS-A

See description under subject 21T.150[J].

K. Urban

21W.755 Writing and Reading Short Stories

Prereq: None
U (Fall, Spring)
3-0-9 units. HASS-A

An introduction to writing fiction. Students write their own stories and study essays and short stories by contemporary authors from around the world. Discussion focuses on students' writing and on assigned works in their historical and social contexts. Limited to 15 per section.

Staff

21W.756 Writing and Reading Poems

Prereq: None
Acad Year 2025-2026: U (Spring)
Acad Year 2026-2027: Not offered
3-0-9 units. HASS-A

Examination of the formal structural and textual variety in poetry. Extensive practice in the making of poems and the analysis of both students' manuscripts and texts from 16th- through 20th-century literature. Attempts to make relevant the traditional elements of poetry and their contemporary alternatives. Weekly writing assignments, including some exercises in prosody.

Staff

21W.757 Fiction Workshop

Prereq: 21W.755
U (Fall, Spring)
3-0-9 units. HASS-A
Can be repeated for credit.

Intermediate class for students with some experience in writing fiction. Students write short stories and complete other writing exercises. Readings include short story collections by contemporary writers such as Sandra Cisneros, Benjamin Percy, Leila Lalami, Laura Pritchett, Bret Anthony Johnston, and Edward P. Jones. Discussions focus on sources of story material, characterization, setting, architecture, point of view, narrative voice, and concrete detail.

Staff

21W.758 Genre Fiction Workshop

Prereq: Permission of instructor
U (Spring)
3-0-9 units. HASS-A

Students read texts in genres such as fantasy, science fiction, historical fiction, noir, and horror, typically focusing on one genre exclusively in a given semester. Formats may include short stories, novels, films, TV shows and other narrative media. Considers genre protocols and how to write within the restrictions and freedoms associated with each genre. Students write fiction within a genre (or "between" genres) for roundtable workshopping. Intended for students with prior creative writing experience. Limited to 15.

S. Lewitt

21W.759 Writing Science Fiction

Prereq: None
U (Fall)
3-0-9 units. HASS-A

Students write and read science fiction and analyze and discuss stories written for the class. For the first eight weeks, readings in contemporary science fiction accompany lectures and formal writing assignments intended to illuminate various aspects of writing craft as well as the particular problems of writing science fiction. The rest of the term is given to roundtable workshops on students' stories.

S. Lewitt

21W.762 Poetry Workshop

Prereq: None
U (Fall, Spring)
3-0-9 units. HASS-A
Can be repeated for credit.

For students with some previous experience in poetry writing. Frequent assignments stress use of language, diction, word choice, line breaks, imagery, mood, and tone. Considers the functions of memory, imagination, dreams, poetic impulses. Throughout the term, students examine the work of published poets. Revision stressed.

E. Barrett

21W.763[] Transmedia Storytelling: Modern Science Fiction

Same subject as CMS.309[]
 Subject meets with CMS.809
 Prereq: None
 Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered
 Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Spring)
 3-2-7 units. HASS-A

Explores transmedia storytelling by investigating how science fiction stories are told across different media, such as the short story, the novel, the screenplay, moving image, and games. Students consider issues of aesthetics, authorship, and genre, while also contextualizing discussion within the broader framework of the political issues raised by film, TV, and other kinds of science fiction texts. Students taking graduate version complete additional assignments.

S. Lewitt

21W.764[] Computational and Experimental Writing Workshop

Same subject as CMS.609[]
 Subject meets with CMS.846
 Prereq: None
 U (Spring)
 3-0-9 units. HASS-A
 Can be repeated for credit.

Students study and use innovative compositional techniques, focusing on new writing methods. Using approaches ranging from poetics to computer science, students undertake critical and creative writing, with writing experiments culminating in print or digital projects. Students read, listen to, and create different types of work, including sound poetry, cut-ups, constrained and Oulipian writing, uncreative writing, false translations, artists' books, and digital projects ranging from video games to computer-generated books. Digital art and literature, analyzed and discussed in the contexts of history, culture, and computing platforms, are covered, as well as avant-garde writing methods, situated in their historical contexts. Topics vary by year; may be repeated for credit with permission of the instructor. Students taking graduate version complete additional assignments. Limited to 18.

N. Montfort

21W.765[] Interactive Narrative

Same subject as 21L.489[], CMS.618[]
 Subject meets with CMS.845
 Prereq: None
 U (Fall)
 3-0-9 units. HASS-A

Provides a workshop environment for understanding interactive narrative (print and digital) through critical writing, narrative theory, and creative practice. Covers important multisequential books, hypertexts, and interactive fictions. Students write critically, and give presentations, about specific works; write a short multisequential fiction; and develop a digital narrative system, which involves significant writing and either programming or the structuring of text. Programming ability helpful.

N. Montfort

21W.766 Writing Fantasy

Prereq: One subject in Writing or permission of instructor
 U (Spring)
 3-0-9 units. HASS-A

Explores the popularity and structure of Fantasy as a genre in films, games, and literature. Students read articles and novels and write exercises and stories in the genre. Intended for students with prior creative writing experience. Limited to 10.

S. Lewitt

21W.768[] Games and Culture

Same subject as CMS.616[], WGS.125[]
 Subject meets with CMS.868
 Prereq: None
 Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered
 Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Spring)
 3-0-9 units. HASS-S

See description under subject CMS.616[].

T. L. Taylor

21W.770 Advanced Fiction Workshop

Prereq: Permission of instructor

U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-A

Can be repeated for credit.

For students with some experience in writing fiction. Write longer works of fiction and short stories which are related or interconnected. Read short story collections by individual writers, such as Sandra Cisneros, Raymond Carver, Edward P. Jones, and Tillie Olsen, and discuss them critically and analytically, with attention to the ways in which the writers' choices about component parts contribute to meaning. In-class exercises and weekly workshops of student work focus on sources of story material, characterization, structure, narrative voice, point of view and concrete detail. Concentration on revision. Limited to 15.

Staff

21W.771 Advanced Poetry Workshop

Prereq: Permission of instructor

U (Fall, Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-A

Can be repeated for credit.

For students experienced in writing poems. Regular reading of published contemporary poets and weekly submission of manuscripts for class review and criticism. Students expected to do a substantial amount of rewriting and revision. Classwork supplemented with individual conferences.

Staff

21W.773 Writing Longer Fiction

Prereq: A fiction workshop or permission of instructor

U (Fall, Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-A

Designed for students who have some experience in writing fiction and want to try longer forms like the novella and novel. Students interested in writing a novel are expected to produce at least two chapters and an outline of the complete work. Readings include several novels from Fitzgerald to the present, and novellas from Gogol's *The Overcoat* to current examples. Students discuss one another's writing in a roundtable workshop, with a strong emphasis on revision. Limited to 15.

Staff

21W.774[*J*] Playwriting Methods

Same subject as 21T.250[*J*]

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-A

See description under subject 21T.250[*J*]. Enrollment limited.

K. Urban

21W.775 Writing about Nature and Environmental Issues

Prereq: None

U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-H

Focuses on traditional nature writing and the environmentalist essay. Students keep a web log as a journal. Writings are drawn from the tradition of nature writing and from contemporary forms of the environmentalist essay. Authors include Henry Thoreau, Loren Eiseley, Annie Dillard, Chet Raymo, Sue Hubbel, Rachel Carson, Bill McKibben, and Terry Tempest Williams. Limited to 18.

K. Ragusa

21W.776[*J*] Screenwriting

Same subject as 21T.251[*J*]

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-A

See description under subject 21T.251[*J*]. Enrollment limited.

K. Urban

21W.777 Science Writing in Contemporary Society

Prereq: None

U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H

Drawing in part from their own interests and ideas, students write about science within various cultural contexts using an array of literary and reportorial tools. Studies the work of contemporary science writers, such as David Quammen and Atul Gawande, and examines the ways in which science and technology are treated in media and popular culture. Discussions focus on students' writing and address topics such as false equivalency, covering controversy, and the attenuation of initial observations. Emphasizes long-form narratives; also looks at blogs, social media, and other modes of communication. Not a technical writing class.

Staff

21W.778 Science Journalism

Prereq: None

U (Fall, Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-H

An introduction to print daily journalism and news writing, focusing on science news writing in general, and medical writing in particular. Emphasis is on writing clearly and accurately under deadline pressure. Class discussions involve the realities of modern journalism, how newsrooms function, and the science news coverage in daily publications. Discussions of, and practice in, interviewing and various modes of reporting. In class, students write numerous science news stories on deadline. There are additional longer writing assignments outside of class. Enrollment limited.

*B. D. Colen***21W.780[J] Writing the Full-Length Play**

Same subject as 21T.350[J]

Subject meets with 21T.550

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-A

Can be repeated for credit.

See description under subject 21T.350[J]. Limited to 10.

*K. Urban***21W.781[J] Race, Place, and Modernity in the Americas**

Same subject as 11.047[J], 21L.592[J], WGS.247[J]

Prereq: None

U (IAP)

3-3-3 units. HASS-E

See description under subject WGS.247[J]. Enrollment limited to 20. Application required.

*J. Terrones***21W.786[J] Social Justice and The Documentary Film**

Same subject as CMS.336[J], WGS.287[J]

Subject meets with CMS.836

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-A

Explores the history and current state of social-issue documentary. Examines how cultural and political upheaval and technological change have converged at different moments to bring about new waves of activist documentary film production. Particular focus on films and other non-fiction media of the present and recent past. Students screen and analyze a series of key films and work in groups to produce their own short documentary using digital video and computer-based editing. Students taking graduate version complete additional assignments. Limited to 18.

*V. Bald***21W.787 Film, Music, and Social Change: Intersections of Media and Society**

Subject meets with CMS.837

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

Not offered regularly; consult department

3-0-9 units. HASS-H

Examines films from the 1950s onward that document music subcultures and moments of social upheaval. Combines screening films about free jazz, glam rock, punk, reggae, hip-hop, and other genres with an examination of critical/scholarly writings to illuminate the connections between film, popular music, and processes of social change. Students critique each film in terms of the social, political, and cultural world it documents, and the historical context and effects of the film's reception. Students taking graduate version complete additional assignments. Limited to 18.

V. Bald

21W.788[J] South Asian America: Transnational Media, Culture, and History

Same subject as CMS.334[J]

Prereq: None

U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H

Examines the history of South Asian immigration, sojourning, and settlement from the 1880s to the present. Focuses on the US as one node in the global circulation, not only of people, but of media, culture and ideas, through a broader South Asian diaspora. Considers the concept of "global media" historically; emphasis on how ideas about, and self-representations of, South Asians have circulated via books, political pamphlets, performance, film, video/cassette tapes, and the internet. Students analyze and discuss scholarly writings, archival documents, memoirs, fiction, blogs and films, and write papers drawing on course materials, lectures, and discussions. Limited to 18.

V. Bald

21W.790[J] Short Attention Span Documentary

Same subject as CMS.335[J]

Subject meets with 21W.890

Prereq: None

U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-A

Focuses on the production of short (1- to 5-minute) digital video documentaries: a form of non-fiction filmmaking that has proliferated in recent years due to the ubiquity of palm-sized and mobile phone cameras and the rise of web-based platforms, such as YouTube. Students shoot, edit, workshop and revise a series of short videos meant to engage audiences in a topic, introduce them to new ideas, and/or persuade them. Screenings and discussions cover key principles of documentary film - narrative, style, pace, point of view, argument, character development - examining how they function and change in short format. Students taking graduate version complete additional assignments. Limited to 16.

V. Bald

21W.791[J] Critical Internet Studies

Same subject as CMS.614[J], WGS.280[J]

Subject meets with IDS.405

Prereq: None

U (Fall, Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

See description under subject CMS.614[J].

T. L. Taylor

21W.792 Science Writing Internship

Prereq: None

U (Fall, Spring, Summer)

0-12-0 units

Can be repeated for credit.

Students developing professional writing and publishing skills in part-time internships with Boston area media companies can apply to receive credit. Students planning to take this subject must contact the instructor by the end of November (if they are applying for spring semester) or the end of May (if they are applying for the fall semester).

Staff

21W.794 Graduate Technical Writing Workshop

Prereq: Permission of instructor

G (IAP)

1-0-2 units

Designed to improve the student's ability to communicate technical information. Covers central communication concepts and techniques, including audience, discourse, and genre analysis; strategies for effectively managing, integrating, and documenting information from sources; and methods of structuring information for coherence and credibility. Assignments include an abstract, a literature review, and an oral presentation; students provide feedback to each other. Limited to graduate engineering students based on results of the Graduate Writing Exam.

Staff

21W.798, 21W.799 Independent Study in Writing

Prereq: None

U (Fall, IAP, Spring, Summer)

Units arranged

Can be repeated for credit.

Primarily for students pursuing advanced writing projects with the assistance of a member of the Writing Program. Students electing this subject must secure the approval of the director of the Writing Program and its Committee on Curriculum. Normal maximum is 6 units; exceptional 9-unit projects occasionally approved. 21W.798 is P/D/F.

Staff

Graduate Subjects

21W.820[J] Writing: Science, Technology, and Society

Same subject as STS.477[J]

Prereq: 21H.991

Acad Year 2025-2026: G (Spring)

Acad Year 2026-2027: Not offered

3-0-9 units

Examination of different "voices" used to consider issues of scientific, technological, and social concern. Students write frequently and choose among a variety of non-fiction forms: historical writing, social analysis, political criticism, and policy reports. Instruction in expressing ideas clearly and in organizing a thesis-length work. Reading and writing on three case studies drawn from the history of science; the cultural study of technology and science; and policy issues.

K. Manning

21W.822 Science Writing Thesis Development and Workshop

Prereq: None. Coreq: 21W.THG

G (Fall)

3-0-9 units

Develops abilities to produce long-form pieces of science-based journalism, with a focus on constructing multiple narratives, source building and interview techniques, rewriting and working with editors. Students also hone their ability to shape their classmates' work.

S. Mnookin

21W.823 Lab Experience for Science Writers

Prereq: 21W.825

G (Fall, IAP, Spring)

0-2-1 units

During the fall or IAP, students conduct 20 hours of observation in a lab of their choosing that is outside their previous scientific experience. Participation in the work of the lab encouraged. In the spring, students make an in-class presentation and submit a written report of publication quality. Preference to students in the Graduate Program in Science Writing.

C. Couch

21W.824 Making Documentary: Audio, Video, and More

Prereq: Permission of instructor

G (Spring)

3-6-3 units

Credit cannot also be received for 21W.752

Focuses on the technical demands of long-form storytelling in sound and picture. Students build practical writing and production skills through a series of assignments: still photo-text works, audio-only documentaries, short video projects (4-6 minutes), and a semester-long, team-produced video science documentary (12-15 minutes). Readings, screenings and written work hone students' analytical capacity. Students taking the graduate version complete additional assignments. Students from the Graduate Program in Science Writing center their work on topics in science, technology, engineering, and/or medicine. Limited to 7.

T. Levenson

21W.825 Advanced Science Writing Seminar I

Prereq: Permission of instructor

G (Fall)

6-0-18 units

First term of year-long graduate sequence in science writing offers students intensive workshops and critiques of their own writing, and that of published books, articles, and essays; discussions of ethical and professional issues; study of science and scientists in historical and social context; analysis of recent events in science and technology. Emphasis throughout on developing skills and habits of mind that enable the science writer to tackle scientifically formidable material and write about it for ordinary readers. Topics include the tools of research, conceived in its broadest sense—including interviewing, websites, archives, scientific journal articles; science journalism, including culture of the newsroom and magazine-style journalism; science essays. Considerable attention to science writing's audiences, markets, and publics and the special requirements of each.

Staff

21W.826 Advanced Science Writing Seminar II

Prereq: 21W.825 or permission of instructor

G (Spring)

3-0-9 units

Topics include research for writers, science journalism, and essays; literary science writing, and the social and historical context of science and technology. Includes seminars, lectures, and student writing workshops. Special emphasis on the science essay and on literary and imaginative science writing that employs traditionally fictive devices in nonfiction, including scene-setting and storytelling. Assignments cover science essays, writing on particular disciplines, and investigative and critical science journalism.

Staff

21W.890 Short Attention Span Documentary

Subject meets with 21W.790[J], CMS.335[J]

Prereq: None

G (Spring)

3-0-9 units

Focuses on the production of short (1- to 5-minute) digital video documentaries: a form of non-fiction filmmaking that has proliferated in recent years due to the ubiquity of palm-sized and mobile phone cameras and the rise of web-based platforms, such as YouTube. Students shoot, edit, workshop and revise a series of short videos meant to engage audiences in a topic, introduce them to new ideas, and/or persuade them. Screenings and discussions cover key principles of documentary film - narrative, style, pace, point of view, argument, character development - examining how they function and change in short format. Students taking graduate version complete additional assignments. Limited to 16.

R. Adams

21W.892 Science Writing Internship

Prereq: Permission of instructor

G (Fall, IAP, Spring, Summer)

0-12-0 units

Can be repeated for credit.

Field placements tailored to the individual backgrounds of the students enrolled, involving varying degrees of faculty participation and supervision.

C. Couch

21W.898 Graduate Independent Study in Writing

Prereq: Permission of instructor

G (Fall, IAP, Spring)

Units arranged

Can be repeated for credit.

Opportunity for advanced independent study of writing under regular supervision by a faculty member. Projects require prior approval, as well as a written proposal and a final report.

Consult Staff

21W.899 Graduate Independent Study in Writing

Prereq: Permission of instructor

G (Fall, IAP, Spring)

Units arranged [P/D/F]

Can be repeated for credit.

Opportunity for advanced independent study of writing under regular supervision by a faculty member. Projects require prior approval, as well as a written proposal and a final report.

Consult Staff

21W.S60 Special Subject: Writing

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Spring)

Units arranged

Can be repeated for credit.

Seminar or lecture on a topic that is not covered in the regular curriculum.

Staff

21W.S61 Special Subject: Writing

Prereq: None

U (Spring)

Not offered regularly; consult department

Units arranged

Can be repeated for credit.

Seminar or lecture on a topic that is not covered in the regular curriculum.

Staff

21W.S62 Special Subject: Writing

Prereq: None

U (Spring)

Not offered regularly; consult department

Units arranged

Can be repeated for credit.

Seminar or lecture on a topic that is not covered in the regular curriculum.

Staff

21W.S63 Special Subject: Writing

Prereq: None

U (Spring)

Not offered regularly; consult department

Units arranged

Can be repeated for credit.

Seminar or lecture on a topic that is not covered in the regular curriculum.

Staff

21W.S96 Special Subject: Writing

Prereq: None

G (Spring; partial term)

Not offered regularly; consult department

Units arranged

Can be repeated for credit.

Seminar or lecture on a topic that is not covered in the regular curriculum.

Staff

21W.S97 Special Subject: Writing

Prereq: None

G (Spring)

Not offered regularly; consult department

Units arranged

Can be repeated for credit.

Seminar or lecture on a topic that is not covered in the regular curriculum.

*Staff***21W.S98 Special Subject: Writing**

Prereq: None

G (Spring)

Not offered regularly; consult department

Units arranged

Can be repeated for credit.

Seminar or lecture on a topic that is not covered in the regular curriculum.

*Staff***21W.THT Writing Pre-Thesis Tutorial**

Prereq: None

U (Fall, IAP, Spring, Summer)

Units arranged

Can be repeated for credit.

Definition of and early stage work on a thesis project leading to 21W.THU. Taken during the first term of a student's two-term commitment to the thesis project. Student works closely with an individual faculty tutor. Required of all students pursuing a full major in Course 21W. Joint majors register for 21.THT.

*Staff***21W.THU Writing Program Thesis**

Prereq: 21W.THT

U (Fall, IAP, Spring, Summer)

Units arranged

Can be repeated for credit.

Completion of work on the senior major thesis under the supervision of a faculty tutor. Includes oral presentation of the thesis progress early in the term, assembling and revising the final text, and a final meeting with a committee of faculty evaluators to discuss the successes and limitations of the project. Required of students pursuing a full major in Course 21W. Joint majors register for 21.THU.

*Staff***21W.THG Graduate Thesis**

Prereq: Permission of instructor

G (Fall, IAP, Spring, Summer)

3-0-9 units

Can be repeated for credit.

Research and writing of thesis in consultation with faculty, including individual meetings and group seminars, undertaken over the course of one year.

*S. Mnookin***21W.UR Research in Writing**

Prereq: None

U (Fall, IAP, Spring, Summer)

Units arranged [P/D/F]

Can be repeated for credit.

Individual participation in an ongoing research project. For students in the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program.

*Staff***21W.URG Research in Writing**

U (Fall, IAP, Spring, Summer)

Units arranged

Can be repeated for credit.

Individual participation in an ongoing research project. For students in the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program.

Staff