

Science Fiction and Science Fact: The Writings of Isaac Asimov

Writing 100H
Fall 2006
Zinzendorf room 100 2nd Period MWF

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Content and approach

This is the college's required freshman course on writing. Our focus will be on the development of "writerly" attitudes for summaries, essays, and academic writing. I hope you will learn to approach writing like writers, not like students. To help you focus on the development of your writing and the development of your writing process, this course will emphasize portfolios as semester-long projects and contract grading (see below).

We will read samples of writing by Isaac Asimov, including two of his "robot" novels. We will also read several of his essays on science. The content of your own writing in this course should focus on science fiction and science fact—by seeing how a "master" did it, I hope you will be able to improve your own writing about science.

You will develop, in multiple-draft style, **four major writing projects**. These writing projects will be developed both through your individual work in and out of class and through small group workshops in class. In workshops, you will be both giver and receiver of advice about writing. Through these workshops, you should learn greater awareness and control over your own writing, greater sensitivity to writing problems and their solutions, and a heightened sense of the power of the writing process.

For each project you will create a **folder**. The folder will contain prewriting, research notes, and **multiple drafts** of the writing assignment. It will also include a **reflection on the writing assignment** that you write after the project is finished in which you describe how you feel about the paper and what you learned about writing through the project.

Each draft should must have a **typed date** on the first page and must contain a **word count** of the document. Each page of a draft must have a **header** containing the page number, your name, and the title of the project. Drafts must be stapled when they are turned in. Clean-for-editing drafts and final drafts must be printed out by an electronic word-processing program on a laser printer. All documents must follow the MLA convention for documenting sources. See the examples on pages 500 and 609 of the *Bedford Handbook*.

You will also compile a **portfolio** of your writing projects. Due in final form during final exam week, your portfolio will be a semester-long project. Of the four projects that you will complete at various times in the semester, you should select **two for further revision** and inclusion in your final portfolio.

Grades and requirements

In all your formal writing—essays and final portfolio—the most important qualities you are to learn and demonstrate are *completeness*, *commitment* to your writing, and *attention to the writing process*. This section of Writing 100 will use **contract grading**, whereby much of the suspense and anxiety students commonly feel about grades will be reduced, if not eliminated. By meeting certain requirements and consistently exhibiting certain behaviors, you will earn a **B** for the semester. Lower grades will result from marked deficiencies in either of those areas or in attendance. Higher grades will result from special excellence in attention to the writing process, excellent quality of final written products and special attention to the revisions that your two selected essays receive in the final portfolio. The terms of the grade contract for a **B** for the semester are listed below:

1. Complete, on time, all exercises from assigned sections of *The Bedford Handbook*, 7th ed.
2. Complete, on time, all special writing exercises that are handed out over the semester.
3. Complete, on time, all (4) **writing projects**—formal essays that will develop from Practices, other written exercises, reading, question sets, and class discussion. Each of these projects will include, at a minimum
 - some prewriting committed to paper
 - a first or rough draft of the project
 - at least two significantly and substantively (or deeply or globally) revised drafts, one of which is to be prepared “clean” for editing
 - a neat and correctly formatted final draft
 - a piece of reflective writing

The preliminary drafts in each project will normally be accompanied by notes and reviewers’ comments. All components of each project must be ready at the beginning of class as assigned.

4. Participate actively and constructively in small-group workshop sessions in class.
5. Have at least one reviewing session with a Writing Center tutor.
6. Satisfactorily complete, on time, a research exercise.
7. Miss no more than 2 class meetings, unexcused, and no more than 5 total, excused and unexcused. (“Excused” means your absence from class is accounted for **in writing** by a responsible authority.) **Each unexcused absence beyond 2 will cost your semester grade 1/3 letter.**

Responsibility and attendance

For the workshops to benefit you, your regular and prompt attendance is crucial. Please be in your seat with your day's work in front of you ready to start at 9:10 a.m. each day. You are responsible for all material assigned or covered in any class you miss, whether the absence is excused or not.

Classes on Fridays are particularly important, because your groups will meet for revision sessions. In addition, Friday will be “vocabulary day and grammar day”. On Friday **every student** will present a vocabulary word to the class. **Two students** will present advice from at least four style books on a point of English word usage.

The Four Projects

Opinion/Argument: Develop an opinion piece based on the essays *Pure and Impure: The Interplay of Science and Technology* and *Facing the Giant*. **1500 words.** What are Asimov's main ideas (theses) in these two essays? What do the essays say about Asimov's view of science? Are the two essays consistent, or are they contradictory? Do their ideas overlap at all? Develop evidence from the two essays to support your claim. Do you agree with Asimov's view of science? Have these two essays changed your view of science and scientists? If so, how?

Research Paper: Develop an idea about science or science fiction based on ideas in Asimov's writing. **2500 words.** You can develop your idea from either one of the two novels, or *World of Carbon*, or an essay by Asimov other than *The Relativity of Wrong* and *Pure and Impure: The Interplay of Science and Technology*. In addition to the reference to Asimov, your paper should have at least six sources: at least one book, at least two web sites, and at least three articles from peer-reviewed journals; that is, a primary source.

Literary Criticism: Develop a literary critique of some aspect of Asimov's fiction, based on either a chapter from *Caves of Steel* or a story from *I, Robot*. **1500 words.** Form your own interpretation of an aspect of Asimov's fiction and defend it in your essay. See the advice in section 59 of *Bedford*.

Creative Writing: Develop a piece of fiction. **1500 words.** This is your chance to try your hand at writing a science fiction story (or part of one)! You can also choose to write a poem or a description of something that doesn't exist, like a new type of robot.

Textbook

Hacker, Diana. *The Bedford Handbook for Writers*, 7th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006.
(*Bedford* in assignment schedule)

Books

The Caves of Steel, Isaac Asimov

I, Robot, Isaac Asimov

The World of Carbon, Isaac Asimov, chapters 1 and 2

Essays

Pure and Impure: The Interplay of Science and Technology

Facing the Giant

Other materials

You should have a notebook dedicated solely to Writing 100 work. It can be spiral-bound or ring binder, as you wish. *Do your assignments from Bedford in the notebook. As you read the Asimov writing assignments, take notes in the notebook.* Keep whatever writing you do by hand in this notebook. Always bring it to class.

At the same time, I strongly encourage you to do all your written work on a computer; the campuswide network has word processing applications that you may access from various sites on campus, and anyone who wishes a short demonstration session may arrange one with me. If you do work in the electronic environment, of course, store your work on a diskette or thumb drive or in your own folder on the X drive on the campus network.

A copy of *World of Carbon* is on reserve in our library. In addition, a series of essays about science and science fiction from *The Tyrannosaurus Prescription* is also on reserve. You may

use any of Asimov's writing, either from our library or any other library, as a source to inspire your projects.

Other web pages that you will need:

How to hold group discussion of writing assignments

http://www.cs.moravian.edu/~csalter/group_discussion_guide.htm

Worksheets for group discussions

http://www.cs.moravian.edu/~csalter/diss_worksheet.htm

Instructions for Vocabulary assignments

<http://www.cs.moravian.edu/~csalter/Instructions%20for%20Vocabulary.htm>

Instructions for Grammar Assignments

<http://www.cs.moravian.edu/~csalter/Instructions%20for%20Usage%20Notes.htm>

Tentative Assignment Schedule

Week 1 M 8/28 – F 9/1	Course introduction: essay projects, rules of writing, handbooks. <i>Bedford</i> “How to Use This Book and Its Web Site,” Tutorials 1, 2, 4 & 5 (pp. xxxi-xxxiv) Discuss Asimov’s science essays
Week 2 M 9/4 – F 9/8	First draft of opinion essay 9/8 <i>Bedford</i> Sections 52, 55, 56 <u>avoiding plagiarism</u>
Week 3 M 9/11 – F 9/15	Library research tutorial, Monday (9/11) and Friday (9/13) <i>Bedford</i> Sections 50, 51 <u>research</u>
Week 4 M 9/18 – F 9/22	FIRST ESSAY Opinion PROJECT FOLDER DUE 9/22 Bibliography for research paper 9/22 <i>Bedford</i> Section 3, 4 <u>revising</u>
Week 5 M 9/25 – F 9/29	First draft research paper 9/29 <i>Bedford</i> Section 22, 23 <u>pronouns</u>
Week 6 M 10/2 – F 10/6	Second draft of research paper 10/6 <i>Bedford</i> Section 10, 11 <u>words, construction</u>
Fall break M 10/9 and T 10/10	
Week 7 W 10/11 – F 10/13	SECOND ESSAY Research paper PROJECT FOLDER DUE 10/13 <i>Bedford</i> Section 58 <u>writing about literature</u>
Week 8 M 10/16 – F 10/20	First draft of literary criticism 10/20 <i>Bedford</i> Section 12, 15 <u>dangling modifiers, variety</u>
Week 9	Prewriting for creative writing assignment 10/27

M 10/23 – F 10/27 *Bedford* Section 32, 33 commas, other punctuation

Week 10
M 10/30 – F 11/3 **Second draft of literary criticism 11/3**

Week 11
M 11/6 – F 11/10 **First draft of creative writing 11/10**
Bedford Section 8, 9 active verbs, parallelism

Week 12
M 11/13 – F 11/17 **THIRD ESSAY Literary Crit PROJECT FOLDER DUE 11/17**
Bedford Section 16, 18 words and wordiness
Sign-up for portfolio conferences

Week 13
M 11/20 **Second draft of creative writing**
Bedford Section 19 sentence fragments

W 11/22 -F 11/24 Thanksgiving Break

Week 14
M 11/27– F 12/1 **FOURTH ESSAY Creative Writing PROJECT FOLDER DUE 12/1**
Conferences
Course evaluation

Week 15
M 12/4 – F 12/8
(final exam week) **Portfolios due**

* Each writing project will be evaluated quantitatively in terms of the following point system:

"Practices": each	5 points each	Workshop participation:	10 points
Prewriting each (outlines, clusters, each freewriting, "zero" drafts, etc.):	10 points each	Writing Center visits:	5 points
First draft: points/day	10 points	Absence from any workshop:	-5 points
Revised draft: points/day	10 points for first, 5 points for each successive	Lateness with any assigned writing prior to final drafts:	-2
Clean-for-editing draft:	10 points each copy	Lateness with any final draft:	-3
Final draft:	10 points		

* Half the class will have their essays read by a tutor in the Writing Center.