

Louisiana State University – Baton Rouge  
English 2001-005  
Advanced Composition: Writing Memoir  
Allen 17  
T/Th 1:30-3:00

Instructor: Edith Babin  
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Required Texts And Materials: *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir* (Zinsser, ed)  
*If I Live to be 100: Lessons from the Centenarians* (Ellis)  
Six blank tapes (XLII)

Course Goals: You will

- Develop writing skills by writing personal memoirs, life stories, and reflective essays.
- Develop critical thinking skills as you discover and use the conventions of memoirs and critique each other's work.
- Integrate theory and practice by comparing theories of aging with personal experience gained from working with residents at St. James Retirement Community.
- Learn to interact successfully with classmates and seniors by recognizing and solving problems through reflection and discussion.

Residents of St. James Retirement Community will

- Enhance and preserve memory through telling the stories of their lives.
- Preserve stories of the past (and of their past) for their children and grandchildren.

Grading Procedures: Final class grade will be based on:

- 1/28 Assignment #1: Discovering the conventions of writing memoir 5%
- 2/11 Assignment #2: Writing a personal memoir 10%
- 2/25 Assignment #3: Attitudes toward aging 5%
- 3/18 Assignment #4: A brief life history of your client at St. James 10%
- 3/27 Assignment #5: Memoir #1 10%
- 4/8 Assignment #6: Memoir #2 10%
- 4/24 Assignment #7: Memoir #3 10%
- 5/6 Assignment #8: Memoir #4 10%
- Final Exam : Reflective Essay 10%
- 6 reflective journal entries 10%
- Participation: Participation in interviews\* and group work\*\* 10%

\*The service-learning component of this advanced writing course will require you to meet with and interview a resident of St. James Retirement Community at least five times during the semester. (You will be paired with another student for the interviews.) Assignment #5-8 will be based on the interviews. The first interview will be conducted at St. James during a regularly-scheduled class period; subsequent interviews will be

scheduled weekly at your and the resident's convenience. It is vital that you be on time for the interviews you schedule. Please note: LSU's Oral History Center will make copies of the tapes of your interviews for you and for your client. The Center will also supply a typed copy of the interviews to the client (and to you if you request a copy). While a service-learning grant will pay for the cost of copying and binding assignments 4-8 to give to the client you interviewed, you are responsible for submitting corrected final drafts of these assignments in a form that has been approved by the client and is copy-ready.

\*\* You will be placed in a writing group for each assignment. Since much of the success of the revision process depends on feedback from students in your writing group, you must attend all classes and have drafts ready on time. To receive a grade, all assignments must be on time, neatly typed (double-spaced), and should include pre-writing, all drafts, and copies of feedback from me and from your writing group.

### **Syllabus** (Note that this syllabus is subject to change.)

- 1/21 Introduction to course
- 1/23 "Lost Lives of Women" (Amy Tan), "In the Kitchen" (Henry Louis Gates, Jr.), "A Certain Shade of Rose" (Janice Evans). Uncovering Your Most Vivid Childhood Memories. **HOMEWORK:** Read the first Chapter of *Inventing the Truth* (Zinsser) Complete Assignment #1.
- 1/28 *Inventing the Truth* (Zinsser, pp. 3-22) Uncovering Your Most Vivid Childhood Memories. **Due:** Assignment #1
- 1/30 Uncovering Your Most Vivid Childhood Memories. **HOMEWORK:** Continue reading *Inventing the Truth*. Write a first-draft of your memoir, taking into account the response of your writing group and the pre-writing exercises you were given in class today.
- 2/4 Writing Groups (Bring two copies of your draft, one to read to your writing group and one to turn in to me.) **HOMEWORK:** Revise your draft, taking into account the feedback from your writing group and the revision strategies you were given in class today. Continue reading *Inventing the Truth*; we will begin discussing the essays next Thursday (2/13).
- 2/6 Writing Groups (Be ready to read a revised version of your memoir.) **HOMEWORK:** Revise again; taking into account feedback from your writing group and my comments. Make a clean copy of your finished draft to turn in on Tuesday. Use the handout you have been given to structure a journal entry reflecting on your experience with this assignment. (Continue reading *Inventing the Truth*.)
- 2/11 Establishing a "timeline" for the lives of the people you will interview and deciding on appropriate interview questions. **Due: Assignment #2** (Be sure to turn in all drafts of your memoir, the responses of your writing

- group, my comments, and the pre-writing you have done.)  
 HOMEWORK: Complete *Inventing the Truth*.
- 2/13 Grammar/Mechanics Review; begin discussion of *Inventing the Truth*
- 2/18 *Inventing the Truth*, Approaches to Writing about People  
 2/20 Quiz on attitudes toward aging (Professor Katie Cherry, Department of Psychology) How to Conduct an Oral Interview (T. Harry Williams Oral History Center) HOMEWORK: Write a 1 ½ to 2-page exploration of the origins of your attitudes toward aging. (This assignment could take the form of a memoir.)
- 2/25 Practice conducting oral interviews (Prof. Cherry will facilitate.) **Due: Assignment 3**, “Attitudes toward Aging.”
- 2/27 Oral Interview #1 (Class will meet at St. James Place Retirement Community.) HOMEWORK: **Before you leave the interview, schedule a 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting with your client before March 18.** Turn the date and time in to me before you leave St. James. Use the handout you have been given to structure a journal entry (2) reflecting on problems you encountered in your first interview and possible solutions. Begin reading *If I Live to Be 100* (Ellis)
- 3/4 Mardi Gras Holiday  
 3/6 Ellis, pp. 3-45 HOMEWORK: With your writing partner, complete and make two copies of a draft of a brief (5-6 pp.) “life history” of the person you interviewed last week. (Use today’s handout for suggestions.)
- 3/11 Writing Groups. Bring two copies of your draft, one to read to your writing group and one to turn in to me. HOMEWORK: Revise your draft.  
 3/13 Writing Groups. Bring your 2<sup>nd</sup> draft to class. Be prepared to read it to your group. **DON’T FORGET TO GO TO YOUR INTERVIEW THIS WEEK AND TO SCHEDULE ANOTHER INTERVIEW SOMETIME BEFORE MARCH 27.** At this week’s interview, show the draft of the “life history,” to your “client” and make any necessary deletions, corrections, additions. Tape the first “stories” you will turn into memoirs. Use the handout you have been given to write a journal entry (3) reflecting on any problems you encountered with this assignment and how you solved them.
- 3/18 Ellis, pp. 49-100. Due: Final Draft of the “life history” and the schedule for your next interview. HOMEWORK: Using your notes and the taped interview with your client at St. James, draft memoir #1 (be sure to discuss what story you will tell with your partner) and make 2 copies.  
 3/20 Writing Groups. Bring two copies of the draft of your memoir, one to read to your writing group and one to turn in to me. HOMEWORK: Revise your draft. **DON’T FORGET TO GO TO YOUR INTERVIEW**

to check for the accuracy of your memoir and to gather material for your next memoir. **If you have not already done so, schedule another interview sometime before April 8.**

- 3/25 Writing Groups. Bring your 2<sup>nd</sup> draft to class and be prepared to read it to your group. HOMEWORK: Final draft of Memoir #1. Read Ellis, pp. 103-43.
- 3/27 Ellis, pp. 103-43. **Due: Final Draft of Memoir #1.** HOMEWORK: Use the handout you have been given to write a journal entry (4) reflecting on ways your memoirs thus far do or do not follow the conventions of memoir writing. Write a draft of Memoir #2. Make two copies.
- 4/1 Writing Groups. Bring two copies of your first draft to class, one to read to your group and one to turn in to me. HOMEWORK: Revise your draft.
- 4/3 Writing Groups. Bring your revised draft to read to the group. **DON'T FORGET TO GO TO YOUR INTERVIEW THIS WEEK** to check for the accuracy of your memoir and to gather material for your next memoir. **Schedule another interview for sometime before April 24.**
- 4/8 Ellis, pp. 147-149. **Due: Memoir #2.** HOMEWORK: Draft memoir #3. Make two copies.
- 4/10 Writing Groups. Bring two copies of your first draft to class, one to read to your group and one to turn in to me. HOMEWORK: Revise your draft. Turn in your journal entries to me before you leave for the holiday.
- 4/15 SPRING BREAK
- 4/17 SPRING BREAK
- 4/22 Writing Groups. Bring your revised draft of Memoir #3 to read to the group. **DON'T FORGET TO GO TO YOUR INTERVIEW.** Check the accuracy of your memoir and **schedule another interview sometime before May 6.** HOMEWORK: Complete the final draft of your memoir. Read Ellis, pp. 183-253.
- 4/24 Ellis, pp. 183-253. **Due: Final Draft of Memoir #3.** HOMEWORK: Use the handout you have been given to make a journal entry (5) reflecting on the changes you made from your first drafts to your final drafts. Draft Memoir #4. Make two copies.
- 4/29 Writing Groups. Bring two copies of your draft, one to read to the group and one to turn in to me. HOMEWORK: Revise your draft
- 5/1 Writing Groups. Bring your revised draft to read to the group. HOMEWORK: Complete your final draft. **DON'T FORGET TO GO TO YOUR FINAL INTERVIEW** to check the accuracy of your final memoir. Use the handout you have been given to make a journal entry (6) reflecting on ways future classes could make interviews with seniors more productive. Select your favorite memoir to share with the class.

- 5/6 Favorite memoirs. **Due: Final draft of Memoir #4.** Turn in journal entries five and six. HOMEWORK: Prepare copy-ready drafts of the life history and memoirs you will present to your partner at St. James.
- 5/8 Reflection. **Due: Copy-ready material for binding.** Homework: Take-home final
- 5/15 Presentation of Memoirs to residents, 3-5 at St. James Place. **Due: Final Exam.**