# ENGLISH 218R WRITING ASSIGNMENTS-

These are the formal writing assignments for the semester. There will be other, informal writing prompts almost every day. After all, can it really be called a writing class if we do not actually write?

## Poetry:

“Let [this] be the [literature] we search for: worn with the hand's obligations, as by acids, steeped in

sweat and in smoke, smelling of lilies and urine, spattered diversely by the trades that we love by, inside

the law or beyond it. A [literature] impure as the clothing we wear, or our bodies, soup-stained, soiled

with our shameful behavior, our wrinkles and vigils and dreams, observations and prophecies,

declarations of loathing and love, idylls and beasts, the shocks of encounter, political loyalties, denials

and doubts, affirmation and taxes.” (Pablo Neruda)

1. Repetitions. Write a poem of 20-30 lines that overtly utilizes repetition of one sort or another. Each sentence should be as concrete as you can make it. The poem ought to develop an emotional arc from beginning to end—leave you in a different place from where you begin—but not rely heavily on narrative. The repetition should help hold the poem together, while allowing you to experiment with language and poetic flights. Read the following examples: “Did I Miss Anything” by Tom Wayman (13), “Smoking” by Elton Glaser (71), “Hate Poem” by Julie Sheehan (127), “The Dead” by Susan Mitchell(140).

2. Question poem (at least 20 lines). Read several question poems, including Neruda’s “The Book of Questions, III,” “Carrying on Like a Crow,” “Some Questions You Might Ask,” “The Summer Day” (133),” and “A Wreath to the Fish” (102). Now write a poem that both observes the natural world and asks questions about those observations. These should be questions that rely on imagery and metaphor, questions that do more than elicit a simple yes or no answer. Let the questions gradually reveal something paradoxical or unexpected about the world that surrounds us.

3. Jim Simmerman’s “Twenty Little Poetry Projects.” See attachment.

4. In addition you will also complete a formal poem assignment. Some forms include the sonnet, the pantoum, the villanelle, the haiku, ect. We will be discussing these more in class.

## Creative NonFiction:

“It's not all bad. Heightened self-consciousness, apartness, an inability to join in, physical shame and self-loathing—they are not all bad. Those devils have been my angels. Without them I would never have disappeared into language, literature, the mind, laughter and all the mad intensities that made and unmade me.”

― [Stephen Fry](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/10917.Stephen_Fry), [*Moab Is My Washpot*](http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/2951429)

5. Autobiography, with Five Objects. I’ve borrowed this assignment from Steve Tuttle: “Select five disconnected (physical) objects from your life. Write a brief paragraph for each, making no (special) effort to draw relationships between the disparate parts. Use the names of the objects as headings, but do not name the objects in the body of each section (50-100 words per object).” Avoid all electronic devices, especially cell phones, I-pods, lap tops, etc. and any objects that are predictable or cutesy, including but not limited to stuffed animals. Favor objects with implied stories or emotional conflict of one sort or another.

6. Collage/Lyric: One of the most important developments in the essay in the last twenty years is the popularity of collage. Sometimes called a segmented or fragmented essay, this piece should be at least 1000 words long and consist of at least seven sections. While this piece should satisfy in the same way that a traditional essay does, it should rely more on juxtaposition and intuition than straight logic or narrative. I’d recommend that you read the following pieces before throwing yourself into the task: “The Weight of a Bird” by Nicole Walker, “Autopsy Report” by Lia Purpera,“Space Oddity” by Ellena Passarella, and “Son of Mr. Green Jeans” by Dinty Moore.

7. Travel Essay, or Place Essay: Write an essay about a place where you felt a certain dislocation—whether personal, spiritual, cultural or otherwise. It could be a foreign country, a place you visited as a child, an unfamiliar street, even a room in a house. Your main task is to evoke this place through particulars. Help us smell, see, touch, taste, and hear this place. Let particulars wash over us in such a way that we feel the narrator’s fear, curiosity, disorientation or ambivalence. The essay should leave us in a place very different from where we began. For inspiration, you might read the following essays: “Jump” by Lia Purpura, “Stairs” by Amy Leach, “The Future will Have to Wait” by Michael Chabon, “Once More to the Lake” by E.B. White.

8. Experiential Essay: During the first part of the semester participate in an activity outside of your comfort zone. Go to a monster truck rally, or ComicCon, or the State Fair. Go to a religious festival outside of your own religious traditions, or go square dancing. Shape an essay that addresses the emotional impact of your experience, connecting it to previous life experiences.

9. Defense of Idling

Jerome K. Jerome wrote, "It is impossible to enjoy idling thoroughly unless one has plenty of work to do. There is no fun in doing nothing when you have nothing to do. Wasting time is merely an occupation then, and a most exhausting one. Idleness, like kisses, to be sweet must be stolen." Your assignment is to spend a few hours this week engaged in idling instead of

working. Put off schoolwork or other obligations and do something that you love. Take a long walk, lie in a hammock, read a book not required for class, listen to your favorite podcast––it doesn't matter what you do, only that you are engaged in this activity while setting aside work. Then write a 1-2 page defense of your idleness, in which you will reflect on the experience while defending and celebrating idle behavior.

## Fiction:

“Fantasy is escapist, and that is its glory. If a soldier is imprisoned by the enemy, don't we consider it his duty to escape?. . .If we value the freedom of mind and soul, if we're partisans of liberty, then it's our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with us as we can!”

― [J.R.R. Tolkien](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/656983.J_R_R_Tolkien)

10. Write an object story (500-1000 words). Before tackling this one, read Michael Oppenheimer’s “The Paring Knife,” Tim O’Brien’s “Stockings,” and Lydia Davis’s “The Sock.” Note how all three stories use an everyday object to emblematize a relationship. Avoid sentimental objects such as jewelry, a bouquet, a stuffed animal, a baseball mitt, or a fishing rod inherited from Grandpa. Nor should the object be used as a nostalgia trigger for the protagonist to think about or recount a story in the past. Be sure that the significance of the object changes between the beginning of the story and the end.

11. Write a triangle story (at least 1500 words). Take the three-part movement of Leslie Norris’s “Blackberries” as a model. His story first focuses on the protagonist with his mother at a barbershop and haberdashery, then shifts to the young man and his father eating dinner then picking blackberries in the country, then ends with the mother and father back at home bickering, with the young boy silently watching. Let your story follow a similar pattern of three scenes: the narrator and A, the narrator and B, A & B with narrator observing but not playing a central role.

12. Fractured Fairy Tale

Your task, simply put, is to take a traditional fairy tale and rewrite it. As you rewrite your tale, however, you must "make it new." You have a few options: Write the tale from a different perspective, from the Prince's perspective instead of Cinderella's, for example; complicate the characters so they are not wholly good or evil; change the outcome; in short, your tale must be recognizable as a rewrite of a traditional tale, but you must approach it from a different angle. (2-3 p.)

13. Flash Fiction. Write a short, short story (750 words or less). Before you start you may want to read a selection of flash fiction pieces, including “Jumper Down” by Don Shea, “Barbie Birthday” by Alison Townsend, “The Kettle” by Eva Marie Ginsburg, and “Accident” by Dave Eggars.