

**City University of Hong Kong**  
**Course Syllabus**

**offered by Department of English**  
**with effect from Semester A 2017/18**

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**Part I Course Overview**

**Course Title:** Reading Lives, Writing Selves: Autobiography and Culture

**Course Code:** GE2407

**Course Duration:** One semester

**Credit Units:** 3

**Level:** B2

- Arts and Humanities
- Study of Societies, Social and Business Organisations
- Science and Technology
- GE English

**Proposed Area:**  
*(for GE courses only)*

**Medium of Instruction:** English

**Medium of Assessment:** English

Grade D in HKAL Use of English or Grade 4 in HKDSE or;  
successful completion of English Academic Proficiency Courses  
(EL0220, EL0222, EL0223 and EL0225 – 6 credits) or;  
English for Academic Purposes (EL0200 – 6 credits) or;  
English for Academic Purposes 2 (EL0200B – 3 credits) or;

**Prerequisites:**  
*(Course Code and Title)*

Grade B or above in English for Academic Purposes 1 (EL0200A – 3 credits)

**Precursors:**  
*(Course Code and Title)*

None

**Equivalent Courses:**  
*(Course Code and Title)*

None

**Exclusive Courses:**  
*(Course Code and Title)*

None

## Part II Course Details

### 1. Abstract

“Reading Lives, Writing Selves: Autobiography and Culture” is an English course that will introduce students to the theory and practice of contemporary life writing. Beginning with a theoretical introduction to the genre, the students will discover the ways people have articulated their lives in a global context in the 20th and 21st centuries. Combining a thematic focus (questions of identity, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, history, language) with discussions of forms (traditional written autobiographies, graphic narratives, films and documentaries, digital and media genres), the course will engage multiple texts, leading students to think and write critically about the texts and thematic issues. They will also learn how to produce their own versions of non-fiction, based on reflections on their own lives and experiences. By reading a variety of texts and producing critiques and creative writing, the students will actively engage the material given; group work will promote meaningful learning through peer interaction.

### 2. Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

(*CILOs state what the student is expected to be able to do at the end of the course according to a given standard of performance.*)

No.	CILOs <sup>#</sup>	Weighting* (if applicable)	Discovery-enriched curriculum related learning outcomes (please tick where appropriate)		
			A1	A2	A3
1.	<b>Recognize</b> formal elements—structures, narrative perspectives, style, rhetorical strategies, etc.—in autobiography and explore how they may represent issues of contemporary interest.			✓	
2.	<b>Analyze</b> the theoretical, aesthetic, and creative aspects of life writing evidenced by the particular structures, styles, and thematic elements in each text.		✓	✓	✓
3.	<b>Apply</b> critical thinking and reading skills in the interpretation of diverse autobiographical texts (narrative, graphics, film, digital and other media), highlighting their local and global significance, and identifying connections between different traditions.		✓	✓	✓
4.	<b>Explain</b> how culture and identity develop from the interrelation of diverse factors—history, geography, race, class, gender and religion, among others—and identify the ways these factors individually mark self-representation. Apply this new knowledge to their own experience of cultural paradigms.		✓	✓	✓
5.	<b>Reflect</b> on the diversity of personal, cultural, and social human experiences and make intelligent connections between texts and cultures.		✓	✓	✓

\* If weighting is assigned to CILOs, they should add up to 100%.

100%

# Please specify the alignment of CILOs to the Gateway Education Programme Intended Learning outcomes (PILOs) in Section A of Annex.

A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing

*critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to self-life problems.*

A3: **Accomplishments**

*Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.*

### 3. Teaching and Learning Activities (TLAs)

*(TLAs designed to facilitate students' achievement of the CILOs.)*

TLA	Brief Description	CILO No.					Hours/week (if applicable)
		1	2	3	4	5	
1.	<b>Lectures</b> Critical introductions to essential concepts and theories open the discussions of specific texts. Students will also be asked to contribute to the discussion.	√	√			√	
2.	<b>Group Presentation</b> Students will be formed into small groups to give a presentation on a set text of the course. They will be asked to decide on their own topic upon consultation with the instructor and explore the relevant theme or narrative strategy and communicate them to the class.	√	√	√	√	√	
3.	<b>Critical essays</b> Students will demonstrate their understanding and application of their theoretical readings by writing reasoned discussion of particular texts or issues, which may require some research. They will also critique and revise their own writing.	√	√	√	√		
4.	<b>Creative Writing</b> Students will be required to engage their own lives creatively and produce short autobiographical accounts and a longer creative work in a format of their choice		√		√	√	
5.	<b>In-Class Discussion</b> Students are required to participate actively in class discussion and activities and make regular contribution to online discussion forum.	√	√	√	√	√	

#### 4. Assessment Tasks/Activities (ATs)

(ATs are designed to assess how well the students achieve the CILOs.)

Assessment Tasks/Activities	CILO No.					Weighting*	Remarks
	1	2	3	4	5		
<b>Continuous Assessment: 100%</b>							
<b>Critical Essays</b> Students will be asked to write a short response paper (600-800 words) and a critical essay (1000-1200 words) on the issues and topics germane to the genre of autobiography, and life writing in general. They will demonstrate their understanding and application of their theoretical readings by critically analysing particular texts or issues, which will require some research. Feedback on the essays will be given to the students individually.	√	√	√	√		40% (15% for short response paper and 25% for critical essay)	
<b>Group Presentation</b> Students will be formed into small groups to give a presentation on one of the set texts of the course. The presentation will develop students' ability to communicate the cultural and theoretical issues relating to autobiographical writing and their critical faculty on analyzing the text. The presentation can be conducted in any format of their choice. Feedback will be given by both instructor and their peers.	√	√	√	√	√	20%	
<b>Creative Writing</b> Students will keep a creative journal for this course. They will make six in-class short creative and reflexive journal entries throughout the course, and one final, longer autobiographical work in a format of their choice (written, graphic, audio-visual, etc) and share it in class. The maximum length of the final autobiographical work is 1000 words.		√		√	√	30%	
<b>Class Participation</b> Students are required to participate actively in class discussion and prepare weekly readings before class.	√	√	√	√	√	10%	
<b>Examination: 0%</b>							

\* The weightings should add up to 100%.

100%

## 5. Assessment Rubrics

(Grading of student achievements is based on student performance in assessment tasks/activities with the following rubrics.)

Assessment Task	Criterion	Excellent (A+, A, A-)	Good (B+, B, B-)	Fair (C+, C, C-)	Marginal (D)	Failure (F)
1.Critical Essay	Content and Interpretation; organisation; language	Demonstrates creative and original thought; shows thorough understanding of the text; a very effective structure and focus of discussion is very clear; excellent language	Demonstrates some thoughtful ideas; shows good understanding of the text; an effective structure and a clear focus; show good language skills	Shows fairly good understanding of the text, but ideas may not be original; structure is evident and focus of discussion can be identified; shows adequate language skills	Shows some misinterpretation of the text; some problems with structure but focus of discussion is weak; shows rather weak language skills	Shows minimal understanding of the text; structure is confusing and focus of discussion cannot be identified; shows very weak language skills
2. Creative Writing	Creativity; Self-reflexivity Organisation Content	Demonstrates creative and original thought; shows a deep self-reflexivity and engagement with one's self; a very effective structure and the language is clear, and expressive	Demonstrates some creative and thoughtful ideas; gives a sense of self-reflexivity; an effective structure; show good language skills	Show some attempt to engage with one's life but a deeper sense of self-reflexivity is needed. Shows adequate language skills and structure	Little attempt to engage with one's life; a lack of self-reflexivity; shows rather weak language skills	Failed to demonstrate any attempt to engage with one's life; shows very weak language skills
3. Group Presentation	Content and Interpretation; Presentation Skills; Organisation; Language	Demonstrates creative and original thought; shows thorough understanding of the text; very effective communication of key ideas to the audience; a very effective structure and focus of discussion is very clear; excellent language	Demonstrates some thoughtful ideas; shows good understanding of the text; effective communication of key ideas to the audience, an effective structure and a clear focus; show good language skills	Shows fairly good understanding of the text, but ideas may not be original; structure is evident and focus of discussion can be identified; communication skills need to be enhanced; shows adequate language skills	Shows some misinterpretation of the text; some problems with structure; focus of discussion is weak; weak communication and language skills	Shows minimal understanding of the text; structure is confusing and focus of discussion cannot be identified; shows very weak communication and language skills

4. Participation	Participation in in-class activities (such as group discussion and writing tasks)	Makes significant contribution to in-class discussion and completes writing tasks satisfactorily.	Makes occasional contribution to in-class group discussion and completes the writing tasks satisfactorily.	Seldom makes contribution to in-class group discussion; completes most of the in-class writing tasks	Little evidence of participation in class; completes very few in-class writing tasks	Fails to sufficiently participate in in-class activities (including discussion and writing)
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## General Criteria for Assessment of Language Proficiency

<b>Proficient User</b>	<p>Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise and analyze information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations. Can create new and creative insights and texts by reflecting and thinking critically from reading and comprehending texts.</p> <p>Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.</p>
<b>Independent User</b>	<p>Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. Can create new insights and texts by reflecting and thinking critically from reading and comprehending texts.</p> <p>Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes &amp; ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.</p>
<b>Basic User</b>	<p>Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need. Can create insights and texts by reflecting and thinking critically from reading and comprehending texts.</p> <p>Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.</p>

## **Part III Other Information** (more details can be provided separately in the teaching plan)

### **1. Keyword Syllabus**

(An indication of the key topics of the course.)

Autobiography, life writing, narrative, documentary, identity, culture, history, language, memory, experience, place

### **2. Reading List**

#### **2.1 Compulsory Readings**

(Compulsory readings can include books, book chapters, or journal/magazine articles. There are also collections of e-books, e-journals available from the CityU Library.)

1.	Franke, Anne, <i>Diary of Anne Frank</i> (selections)
2.	Hoffman, Eva, <i>Lost in Translation</i> (selections)
3.	Pamuk, Orhan, <i>Istanbul: Memories of a City</i> (selections)
4.	Mandela, Nelson, <i>Long Walk to Freedom</i> (selections)
5.	Ondaatjie, Michael <i>Running in the Family</i>
6.	Spiegelman, Art, <i>MAUS I</i>
7.	Woolf, Virginia, <i>Moments of Being: Autobiographical Writings</i>

#### **2.2 Additional Readings**

(Additional references for students to learn to expand their knowledge about the subject.)

1.	Anderson, Linda. <i>Autobiography</i> . London: Routledge, 2001.
2.	Eakin, Paul John. <i>How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves</i> . Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.
4.	Olney, James, ed. <i>Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical</i> . Princeton: Princeton University, 1980.
5.	Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson. <i>Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives (Second Edition)</i> . Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.
6.	Zinsser, William. <i>On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction</i> . New York: HarperCollins, 2006.

- A. Please specify the Gateway Education Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs) that the course is aligned to and relate them to the CILOs stated in Part II, Section 2 of this form:

GE PILO	Please indicate which CILO(s) is/are related to this PILO, if any <i>(can be more than one CILOs in each PILO)</i>
PILO 1: Demonstrate the capacity for self-directed learning	Students will be asked to write short essays that require some research. CILO 2, 3, 4, 5.
PILO 2: Explain the basic methodologies and techniques of inquiry of the arts and humanities, social sciences, business, and science and technology	The students will be introduced to literary theories and texts as a form of entry into an analysis of identity and culture. The interdisciplinary nature of the course, which also draws from history, geography, linguistics and social sciences, will broaden their perspectives on the ways different methodologies allow us to understand reality. CILO 1, 2, 3, 4.
PILO 3: Demonstrate critical thinking skills	Students will be required to analyze literary and cultural texts and write essays that critique specific questions related to the course material. CILO 2, 3, 4.
PILO 4: Interpret information and numerical data	
PILO 5: Produce structured, well-organised and fluent text	Students will be required to write critical essays on the topics studied in class. CILO 3, 4, 5.
PILO 6: Demonstrate effective oral communication skills	Participation in class is central to the course. Students will also be required to write creatively. CILO 3, 4, 5.
PILO 7: Demonstrate an ability to work effectively in a team	Students will work in groups in class to make short presentations and peer critiques of essays. CILO 3, 4.
PILO 8: Recognise important characteristics of their own culture(s) and at least one other culture, and their impact on global issues	The course's emphasis on the English-language writing from the United States, Britain, and postcolonial countries will allow the students to think about the life writing in a world context. CILO 1, 3, 4, 5.
PILO 9: Value ethical and socially responsible actions	Many of the issues engaged in the discussion of self, identity, and culture directly connect with ethical and socially responsible actions. CILO 4, 5.
PILO 10: Demonstrate the attitude and/or ability to accomplish discovery and/or innovation	Students will discover ways of writing the self and re-examine their own perspectives on life and writing. CILO 3, 4, 5.

*GE course leaders should cover the mandatory PILOs for the GE area (Area 1: Arts and Humanities; Area 2: Study of Societies, Social and Business Organisations; Area 3: Science and Technology) for which they have classified their course; for quality assurance purposes, they are advised to carefully consider if it is beneficial to claim any coverage of additional PILOs. General advice would be to restrict PILOs to only the essential ones. (Please refer to the curricular mapping of GE programme: [http://www.cityu.edu.hk/edge/ge/faculty/curricular\\_mapping.htm](http://www.cityu.edu.hk/edge/ge/faculty/curricular_mapping.htm).)*

- B. Please select an assessment task for collecting evidence of student achievement for quality assurance purposes. Please retain at least one sample of student achievement across a period of three years.

Selected Assessment Task
Critical essays