

ENGLISH 5: THE RED PILL COURSE SRJC SPRING 2022

PROF. MARCO GIORDANO

Office: 1639 Emeritus; Office phone: 524-1572

E-mail: mgiordano@santarosa.edu

Office hours: Asynchronous as needed.

English 5 is a course in analytical and critical reading and written composition, an introduction to the hermeneutic, dialectical and rhetorical technique required in the many disciplines of higher education and by a commitment to the examined life. It will use the original and historically most successful pedagogy used to teach critical thinking and composition—Classical Rhetoric as available on the <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/> ([Links to an external site.](#)) website—the closest thing to a textbook this course has.

The first and fundamental concept of Classical Rhetoric—as mentioned in the top left-hand column of the rhetoric BYU site is *Kairos*—speech appropriate to the occasion one finds one’s self in. The course will address that occasion, the one we all find ourselves in, through a study of the concept and phenomena of propaganda and, optionally, its particular application to our current propaganda induced “health” crisis. In order to understand the order of magnitude of that crisis one must consider the remark of William Casey on his opening day briefing in his role as director of the CIA under then Pres. Jimmy Carter—“We will know that our disinformation campaign has succeeded when everything the American public believes is false.” CIA directors don’t have to resort to hyperbole. There is ample evidence over the last fifty years to establish the truth of that claim (from Operation Mockingbird which established the total spectrum dominance of the Media to this very day) and it lays a great challenge upon every single student in this course. You must be prepared to deal with the reality that everything you thought you knew, is false, on every issue of any importance whatsoever and especially about the latest global crisis. If you are not prepared to face that, and that means to deal with the four stages of facing that: Denial, Anger, Negotiation and Depression, neither this course nor the examined life is for you. (You must also be prepared for the possible estrangement of your friends and family. Most people are hostile to critical thinking.)

A PARTIAL LIST OF REQUIRED TEXTS AND VIDEOS

Books: Dumbing Us Down, J.T. Gatto; *Propaganda*, E. Bernays; *Conspiracy theory in America*, Lance deHaven-Smith; *The Declaration of Independence & Other Great Documents*, Jefferson et al, *Civil Disobedience*, Henry David Thoreau, 1984 by George Orwell; *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley; *Propaganda*; Jacques Ellul.

[*Silva Rhetoricae Website \(Links to an external site.\)*](#); a college dictionary; BBC documentary (available on YouTube) *The Century of the Self*: parts 1 & 2; Pres. Dwight D Eisenhower's farewell speech—the “military/industrial complex” speech available on Youtube and Archive.org, Martin Luther King's speech *Beyond Vietnam* –available on American Rhetoric website, the Youtube video *In Shadow* and other texts and videos as required and announced during the course of the course. Not all of every book will be required and the Gatto text under consideration –“The Seven Lesson Schoolteacher” is available online. I will be providing the links to all of the online videos and texts, however it is your responsibility to acquire the books.

These texts serve as a means of teaching reading and composition through the application of Classical Rhetoric to the situation which is demanded by the now century old domination of discourse by propaganda; they establish the reality, history and application of propaganda, embark on a highly critical assessment of its effects on the audience and discourse of our time and confront the dystopic literary treatments of its dominance. The hero of *1984* is employed as a propagandist in a society dominated by propaganda.

Formally, the course must confront the form literacy takes in our time in the country in which it is taught. The American educational system ranks at the bottom of the developed world in teaching literacy and critical thinking. In Europe and other developed Western countries people still read books while Americans watch TV and play computer games and there is no such thing as a college *composition* course there, much less a remedial English course *in college*. Composition and general education are handled quite well in high school. The literacy gap can be illustrated by an example. Twenty years ago, while on sabbatical, I was enrolled in an Italian course in Florence and my fellow students were adults from all over the world. The Scandinavian college students I encountered could write better papers *in English* (which they had been studying throughout grade school), than my community college students could. Our first module will look more deeply into this condition. But the design of this course must take this into account. It is a sort of contradiction to teach page and print literacy to a populace which lives in a time and culture in which it has little place and in which the kind of human being it produces, a critical thinker with a wide range of ideas and references gleaned from wide reading, and a habit of questioning and coming to judgments based on individual authority, has not only little place, but is stigmatized. The only reason to do it is because it is essential to being fully human, because, regardless of the dominant values of our culture and its marketplace, one's students need it—not to become more serviceable employees, but to become themselves. We shall have to start, not with the page, but with the screen, so the first part of this course will be video heavy and the last text heavy. It is only in the last part of the course that writing, composition, can be taught,

because writing is page not screen competence. However, my lectures will be written out from the beginning and it is not just because my SRJC issued computer and home computer cannot efficiently upload voice files, but because I want to engage page literacy from the very beginning. I believe my computer can handle Zoom sessions, but there are obvious legal problems with using Zoom. The first has to do with the legally mandated confidentiality of the classroom and office hour. You are attending this college as adults, regardless of your ages. I am legally prohibited from telling your parents or anyone else even whether you are attending class, much less what transpires there or in office hours. There is no way Zoom can be trusted to maintain that confidentiality. Conversely, what goes on in the classroom is protected by Academic Freedom; it has absolute freedom of speech and the Supreme Court decided, in *Sweezy vs. New Hampshire*, that not even the government nor any state representative has a right to know what a professor or student says in that classroom. Once again, there is no way that Zoom can reliably meet that legal demand. If we were in a classroom, what goes on in that room as academic discourse, enjoys a legally protected absolute confidentiality...and that must apply to what goes on in this roomless course. This applies to you as well as to me. ***No part of this course may be made public beyond the bounds of the course—doing so on your part is a violation of Academic Freedom and confidentiality and is grounds for being dropped or for being failed and may constitute grounds for disciplinary action and/or actionable legal grounds.*** And once again, Zoom cannot provide those legal protections. Which is why even though the first part of this course is video heavy for the reasons already stated, the lectures have to be *read*. Screen “literacy” is being mediated by the print and page literacy, which this course is dedicated to teaching, from the very beginning. In short, there are overwhelming practical, legal and pedagogical reasons for how this course is being taught. It is somewhat more work for you and far more work for me, but it is necessary. The pedagogical situation will be treated more at length in the first module. The argument for the inevitability of its subject matter and approach will be developed every week. There is a tremendous amount of freedom in this course, because in a setting in which you are not free, where you are always doing prompted tasks or responding to real time promptings by authority, like an employee, the only thing you can learn is that you are not free and to do what you are told.

Because the lectures are written, you have an opportunity to reread them and that lays a greater responsibility on you in the asking of questions—unlike a classroom setting where you cannot reread what is said and in which I must respond to questions in that context immediately, in this course I will expect you to apply greater deliberation to your questions—they must be precisely phrased and address matters that have not already been treated and which a rereading of the lecture could answer and I will respond to them in writing and not immediately---most often in the next module or by class-wide, not necessarily individual e-mail. That way I can treat similar questions with a definitive and

precise answer. In this way, a greater stress on your *writing* is being made immediately—a distinct advantage in a course designed to teach writing and not just word processing. With the greater freedom of this class comes greater responsibility. Without a real time classroom, you are being treated more as individuals and less as a group. As we will see in module 1, that constitutes another distinct advantage over a classroom. The absence of online discussion also avoids the atrocious behavior common to social network sites such as Facebook, Twitter etc. as well as avoiding the de facto legitimizing of the intellectual confusion common to the classroom culture you have been raised in. (More treatment of this in Module 1.) You may submit well-focused questions raised in your mind by the provocative videos and texts in each module. But this is not a forum for your feelings or opinions, but for your questions about judgments. Judgments are not opinions. Judgments are assertions with sufficient reasons for making them; opinions are simply assertions without reasons and essentially irrational and therefore not a part of this course. There is no worse enemy of reason than the commonplace which asserts that everyone is entitled to their opinions and that each person's opinion is equally valid. First of all, how do you know the opinion is yours? Opinions are marketed by the propaganda machine like products in the marketplace—except you don't have to do the work to pay for them, to earn them, to make them yours—all you have to do is repeat them. Being entitled to your opinions means only that no one is stopping you from having them, it does not entitle you to any respect for them if they are not respectable, if they do not meet the criteria of reason—which is to attempt to have a sufficient reason for making them which you can produce through logical inference from evidence and your own research. Your papers and your contribution to discussions are not about your *opinions* but about your *judgments*—which are assertions backed by reasons. And not everything counts as a reason. What does and what doesn't is what you are here to learn—*intellectual discipline*.

This course is not only intellectually and emotionally challenging; it is practically challenging. The rule of thumb for a college course is at least two hours of work outside of class hours for every hour of class and class hours amount to 68 (72 including finals for a 4 unit course) hours per semester—which means this class demands at least 204 hours of your time over the course of the semester—a minimum of 12 hours a week. You would be unwise not to hard schedule at least those hours every week, if not more. Not only does this course require dedicated time, it requires a dedicated space where a printer would be handy as reading is *rereading* and writing is *rewriting*. You will be closely questioned on the required texts and required to give reasoned and correctly inferred and precisely phrased answers. One of the psychological challenges of this course is that it is a course in reading comprehension, not reader response. These two parallel the distinction between opinions and judgments. The reading comprehension questions require that you use and cite the texts questioned about in your answers. You're not being asked a question about what

you *feel* about the texts, but about what you *comprehend* about them. Your job is to find the right answer, and not to think that just because an answer is what you think is yours, it is valid. The absence of discussion also avoids legitimizing this fallacy. And you will have to face your inadequacies in both reading and writing in order to be educable. This is not high school. You're required to take this class because you need it. This isn't a chat room. You cannot perform adequately in this course on your phone in your car.

This course will introduce you to a wide range of interrelated concepts essential to a knowledge of the world you live in every week--both your inner world and outer world. You are expected to understand them and to use them as a perspective optics for your papers. The word count for composition in this class is six to eight thousand words of reasoned prose. You will be given and shown how to use the tools of reason--something that will quite probably be new and challenging to you. You are being required to take this course because you need it, and that means facing the inadequacy it is meant to address. One of those is probably your vocabulary. I will not eliminate three quarters of my vocabulary in my lectures in order to dumb them down for you. And the texts you have to read are gradually more and more challenging. This course is to give you the reading and composition skills you need to read upper division college level texts and write coherent and clear prose about them. You will have to use your dictionary every week and reread those sentences with words you needed to look up until you fully comprehend them. This is college, not high school. Expect to have to substantially increase your vocabulary.

The Canvas platform comes with a common inadequacy as to grading because it assigns percentages of final grades to each assignment. Although this is less work for the teacher with a textbook syllabus, and pre-scripted assignments with percentages attached, (as Canvas does the grading at the end with the stroke of a key), it is completely inadequate as it grades learning curves, not performance. If you are doing A work at the end of the course, it shouldn't matter the same for everyone what they were doing the first week. In fact you won't be asked to write anything but answers to reading comprehension questions until the latter part of the semester, because your reading comprehension is probably still inadequate to evaluate your own writing. In order to make it adequate, you will be required to turn in an unbroken string of satisfactory performances on them, but will be allowed to redo them by a deadline if you get an unsatisfactory grade on any of them. All of them have to be satisfactorily answered. The satisfactory answers to them will often be found in the lectures on them and unsatisfactory answers will only be given an unsatisfactory grade, not individually corrected answers. You will have keep reading the lectures to find the satisfactory answers which will be embedded in them. Expect to have to redo quite a few. The midterm and final is whatever I think you have to do to make all the unsatisfactory performance satisfactory. On Canvas the reading comprehension assignments will appear as zero percentage point assignments given letter grades. They will proceed from rudimentary to sophisticated questioning of texts on a carefully graduated

scale. Your grade depends upon my judgment of your performance in this course, not Canvas's. As writing is rewriting, expect to have to turn in multiple drafts of your writing assignments in order to receive a passing grade. You will be given plenty of time at the end of the semester to do so, as well as mandatory topic areas instead of actual topics.

Communicate with me on Canvas, not through e-mail.

Note: Officially all course objectives are linked with the official SLO's for this course:

Write a comprehensive, well-developed and coherent essay with a focused thesis and appropriate support. Recognize and correct errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling. Identify and analyze argumentative, stylistic and narrative techniques in non-fiction and fiction. Obtain, summarize and synthesize research materials including correct use of MLA citations. This requirement will be satisfied by submitting an MLA works cited page listing all the required readings and viewings of the course,

Do not look for an exhaustive week by week list of lesson plans, readings and assignment deadlines. These will be announced in each module during the course of the course.

Please view the animated video [In Shadow, \(Links to an external site.\)](#) this week.

The assignment for the first week of class is to read Gatto's "The Seven Lesson Schoolteacher" and answer the following questions:

1. The speech is arranged around a list of seven "lessons", the large majority of which are similarly titled but a small minority of which are differently titled—even grammatically different from the majority. Try writing out the titles only and treat them as the list they are, Identify those few which are inconsistently titled with respect to the majority of consistently title ones. What do the majority of consistently titled sections refer to?
2. The opening identifies the list as a "curriculum." Look up the word. Do these comprise a curriculum?