Uncommon Writes

IDH3931

Who is the "I"?: AI and Personal Writing

General Information

Honors Course, 1 credit
Spring 2026
In person
W | Period 3 (9:35 AM - 10:25 AM)
Location: LIT 0119

Instructor Information

Prof. Liesel Hamilton
Hamiltonliesel@ufl.edu

Office Hours + Location:
T: 9:30am – 10:30am
W: 10:30am – 2:30pm
Th: 9:30am – 10:30am
in Turlington Hall Rm 2107--If you see a sign that says "College of Liberals Arts and Science Research Office," you are in the right place. Walk backwards until you find my desk.
Office hours can also be scheduled at a different time if you are unavailable during my standing office hours. They can also be scheduled virtually via zoom. Please email me to set up a time to chat.

Course Description

As large language models (LLMs) become increasingly capable of generating professional, and academic, and even creative prose, the questions this course engages with is: is personal writing more essential than ever?

In this course, students will be exposed to the genre of personal writing. Within this context, students will explore the evolving space of personal writing in an AI-saturated world, asking questions such as: How do we understand voice, identity, or authorship when machines can mimic them? Is personal writing the last bastion of human-authored text, or is it simply another genre LLMs with master? Can LLMs ever truly engage in personal writing since they are not "persons"? How have writers already been experimenting with LLMs in their personal

writing and what are the ethical implications of this? Ultimately, each student will answer the question: Do LLMs have a place in personal writing or not?

Students will read and write personal writing while experimenting with AI, considering how emerging technologies complicate, threaten, and perhaps even deepen our relationships to self and story.

Required Readings and Materials

All required reading materials will be provided on Canvas
Materials/Supply Fees: There is no supply fee for this course.

Attendance

Attendance is very important in this course as this is a discussion-based course. We only meet once a week, so every missed class means missing a significant portion of the semester. Students are granted 1 free absence to be used at their discretion. Absences will be recorded on Canvas so students can keep up with their attendance and see how attendance is calculated into their grade.

The policy of the University Writing Program is that if students accrue more than six periods of unexcused absences during the term, they will fail the entire course. Being tardy to class counts as 1/3 of an absence.

The UWP exempts from this policy only those absences that are considered excused by university standards. Students should discuss absences related to university-sponsored events with the instructor prior to the date that will be missed. UWP requirements for class attendance, make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this class are consistent with university policies that can be found at https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspxLinks to an external site..

For extended absences due to illness or other circumstances, students should consult with U Matter We Care: http://umatter.ufl.eduLinks to an external site., umatter@ufl.edu, 352-294-2273 (CARE), Dean of Students: https://dso.ufl.edu/Links to an external site., 202 Peabody Hall, (352) 392-1261

Please note: If students are absent, it is their responsibility to make themselves aware of all due dates. If absent due to a scheduled event, students are still responsible for turning assignments in on time.

Graded Work

Participation/Preparation/Misc. Classwork	20%
Workshop Drafts + Feedback	20%
Essay 1 Final	20%
Essay 2 Final	20%
Final Portfolio	20%
Total	**100%**

A minimum grade of B is required to earn Academic points towards your Honors Completion Requirements. (Exception: Honors Quest I and II sections require a C). Once you have earned your final grade in this course, please upload the course information and final grade from your Unofficial Transcript into your Honors Canvas Cohort: Honors Completion module to earn Honors Milestone / Completion credit.

Participation/Preparation/Classwork,

This is a discussion-based class, so your participation is key. I expect you to come to class having read and thought about the material. Engagement in class discussions is crucial, as we'll be building on each other's ideas and experiences. Be prepared to contribute thoughtfully, ask questions, and share your insights. Your active participation helps create a dynamic and collaborative learning environment for everyone. Participation points are available on Canvas. If it becomes evident that reading/preparation are an issue, reading quizzes will increase in number.

Essay 1: The Personal Essay without AI

600 words minimum
No LLM/AI Usage Allowed

For this assignment you will write a flash personal essay about any topic you choose. You may draw your material from writing exercises that we have done in class, take on a similar topic to one of the essays we have read, or explore an entirely new topic altogether. While you have freedom of choice in the content you write about, your essay must include strategies based on class discussions of craft and form, i.e., think about how to push back a simple retelling of an incident in your life and instead employ strategies to create a truly essayistic exploration that is grounded in your own personal experiences and understanding.

For this essay you will turn in 2 drafts. Your first draft you will turn into prior to workshop. Your peers and I will workshop your essay in class, and you will take copious notes. You will then make major revisions to your essay. When you turn in your final draft, you will turn in a final draft that contains major revisions. You will note via track changes, the changes that you have made to your draft. Major changes are more than finding synonyms for words, inserting or deleting only a couple sentences, etc. Major changes include reworking the beginning/ending/or major section of an essay, adding an element that complexifies an essay, reworking the language in major sections of your essay, etc.

Alongside the final essay, you will include a 200+ word reflection about what changes you made and why.

Essay 2: The Personal Essay with AI

600 words minimum
LLM/AI Usage Required

For this assignment you will write a flash personal essay about any topic you choose. You may draw your material from writing exercises that we have done in class, take on a similar

topic to one of the essays we have read, or explore an entirely new topic altogether. While you have freedom of choice in the content you write about, your essay must include strategies based on class discussions of craft and form, i.e., think about how to push back a simple retelling of an incident in your life and instead employ strategies to create a truly essayistic exploration that is grounded in your own personal experiences and understanding.

For this essay, you are expected to experiment with AI. How you do so is up to you. You can experiment the way Vahini Vara does and include AI in a deliberate way, or you can utilize AI as a brainstorming tool or editing tool where its usage isn't immediately transparent in your essay. Alongside the draft of your first essay, you will turn in a statement (200+ words) about your AI usage.

For this essay you will turn in 2 drafts. Your first draft you will turn into prior to workshop. Your peers will workshop your essay in class, and you will take copious notes. You will then make major revisions to your essay. When you turn in your final draft, you will turn in a final draft that contains major revisions. You will note via track changes, the changes that you have made to your draft. Major changes are more than finding synonyms for words, inserting or deleting only a couple sentences, etc. Major changes include reworking the beginning/ending/or major section of an essay, adding an element that complexifies an essay, reworking the language in major sections of your essay, etc.

Alongside the final essay, you will include a 200+ word reflection about what changes you made and why. You are also welcome to utilize AI for revision for this essay. Your AI usage is completely up to you as long as you do some writing yourself and are upfront about how much AI you used and why. You should revise your 200+ word AI statement as well and resubmit it with the final.

Workshop Feedback:

For each of the pieces you read, please mark up the work and include a 100+ write-up to each of your peers being workshopped on this day.

The purpose of endnotes is to provide your peers' some helpful feedback that they can utilize as they continue to revise their essays. We'll approach your peer's work in terms of craft. You can use bullet points in your endnotes, given the short word count.

Be analytical, not evaluative. Avoid statements like "This is bad" or "I don't know why this needed to be written." Your goal isn't to judge the work; you're trying to communicate your perspective on the writing as a reader so that your classmates can begin to see their own pieces from a more distant point of view. By telling them what you understand and what you're confused by, they'll gain a better sense of how their essay works in the eyes of their readers.

These are things you can focus on in your endnotes that will be helpful to your peers. Use these questions as a guide, but you don't have to answer them all. It is better to be specific and refer to specific moments in the draft, rather than to provide a general statement that tries to address everything:
- What images especially struck you? Why? Did you notice any themes or motifs among this imagery?
- Can you say something about setting, characters, the narrator's voice, and use of dialogue here?
- What do we need more of? Were there scenes or sections in which you needed more background or context?

- What could we use less of? In terms of work, were there parts that seemed to repeat what we already knew—that could perhaps be cut back?
- What is this essay arguing about the situation or subject it depicts? How is it addressing larger issues? Could you summarize its main theme (situation vs story)?

You must turn in workshop comments BEFORE class. These endnotes help prepare you to participate in workshop. Late endnotes will not be accepted.

Final Portfolio:

To complete this course, you will turn in a final portfolio of your work. The portfolio will include the following:
- An opening statement that outlines who you are and the purpose of your portfolio. You should also include statements throughout identifying the components of your portfolio, what they are, and why they are included.
- Your draft of Essay 1 with revisions marked on track changes + your revision statement.
- Your draft of Essay 2 with revisions marked on track changes, your revision statement, + your AI statement
- A final reflective essay of 400+ words that identifies your stance on AI in personal writing, analyzes your writing experience, etc. Keep this question—Do LLMs have a place in personal writing or not?—central in your mind as you craft your reflection. Draw on course readings, course discussions, and your experience writing with and without AI.

As Essay 1 and Essay 2 have been graded separately, for this portfolio you will primarily be graded on how well you put the materials together, include your opening statement and your final reflective essay.

Grading Scale

For information on how UF assigns grade points, visit: https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/Links to an external site.

A	94 – 100%		C	74 – 76.99%
A-	90 – 93.99%		C-	70 – 73.99%
B+	87 – 89.99%		D+	67 – 69.99%
B	84 – 86.99%		D	64 – 66.99%
B-	80 – 83.99%		D-	60 – 63.99%
C+	77 – 79.99%		E	<60

It is this class's policy NOT to round grades up or down. An 89.9 is a B+.

Weekly Schedule

**All readings should be completed before class. If not hyperlinked, you will find the readings under "Files" on Canvas.

Week	In Class Work	Homework (to be done before class)

1: 1/14	We will read and talk about https://www.cleaver magazine.com/listen-story-tell-not-always-tell-a-nonfiction-craft-essay-by-aileen-hunt/this essay in class. Because this is the first class you are not required to read this essay before class, but you are welcome to. Going forward, all readings in this column should be read before class.	This essay: https://www.cleavermagazine.com/listen-story-tell-not-always-tell-a-nonfiction-craft-essay-by-aileen-hunt/
2: 1/21	Introduction to the personal essay	The Situation and the Story("Introduction"), Vivian Gornick Volar, Coffer **Sign Up for Workshop Date Here by EOD 1/21:** **https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WEDxFBFeCwp9jQMg9dgv6FRafJ1LbZ1JNGqdMdNHH3w/edit?usp=sharing**
3: 1/28	Background on the. Personal essay	"Making the reader feel something. Please. Show and tell."Links to an external site. A Craft Essay, Shuly Xóchitl Cawood Flash Essay
4: 2/4	Workshop Day – We will workshop 2 drafts in class	Your Peer's Workshop Drafts
5: 2/11	Workshop Day – We will workshop 3 drafts in class	Your Peer's Workshop Drafts
6: 2/18	Workshop Day – We will workshop 3 drafts in class	Your Peer's Workshop Drafts
7: 2/25	Workshop Day – We will workshop 2 drafts in class	Your Peer's Workshop Drafts
8: 3/4	Topic: Beginning a discussion of AI in personal writing	Read about some of the historical uses of personal writing and consider what might be lost with the use of AI to tell all of our personal stories, or what this change might say about us and our generation(s): https://www.nypl.org/blog/2024/07/02/history-historical-researching-personal-narratives
9: 3/11	Topic: Incorporating AI into writing	Vahini Vara's "Ghosts"

		The excerpt from her interview ("An Excerpt from Viren + Vara)
		Final, revised version of Essay 1 Due 3/13
N/A	*No Class; Spring Break*	*No Class; Spring Break*
10: 3/25	Topic: The ethical implications of AI in personal writing	"Confessions Of A Viral Ai Writer" by Vara Vauhini You can read on canvas, or if you prefer, you can read or listen to the essay on proquest: https://login.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/confessions-viral-ai-writer/docview/2881368800/se-2?accountid=10920
11: 4/1	Topic: The ethical implications of AI in personal writing	"Why A.I. Isn't Going to Make Art" by Ted Chiang On Canvas or on this link: https://dmd-program.github.io/dmd-300-master/assets/Chiang-AI-NewYorker.pdf
12: 4/8	AI for Graphic Interpretations	Read: The Summer I Learned to Lie: https://www.thebeliever.net/the-summer-i-learned-to-lie/ This essay wasn't generated with AI, but we'll talk about using AI to add imagery to our writing. **Turn in Workshop Drafts on Canvas (4/11) + Sign up for your workshop group here by EOD 4/8: https://docs.google.com/document/d/18_d_tLe61UDOUOU84kOp2QALrUV2VSp87onSrkFUWUg/edit?usp=sharing**
13: 4/15	Workshop Day	Your Peers' Workshop Drafts (for your group)
14: 4/22	Course Wrap Up	**Portfolio Due on Canvas 4/26** **Essay 2 Final Draft Due on Canvas 4/26**

Required Policies
This course complies with all UF policies. For information on those policies and for a list of campus resources, please see this page: https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/Links to an external site.."

For Honors Specific Questions:
- Honors Program, 201 Walker Hall, 352-392-1519
- Quick questions for an Honors advisor? Email advisor@honors.ufl.edu
- Need an Honors advising appointment? Schedule via Microsoft Bookings: https://bit.ly/ufhonorsadvisingLinks to an external site.
- Honors Program Event Calendar: https://www.honors.ufl.edu/news--events/calendar-of-events/