

ENG 106—Writing About Literature and Culture—FALL 2025
Animals & Technology in Speculative Fiction
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI
Tuesday & Thursday; 9:30 am - 10:45 am
Dooley Memorial 209

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Course Description:

The general proliferation of animal imagery (be they altered, natural, or just cute) suggests we are over-run by artificial nonhuman animals and animal imagery while paradoxically in a simultaneous battle to protect endangered species and reduce unethical treatment to animals. In this class you will be introduced to animal studies scholars who ask readers *What do we see when we look at the animal(s)?* We will read science fiction short stories that consider themes central to animal studies: animal, machines, wilderness, and domestication, as well as watching short sci-fi films. The course will begin with a section on animals in zoos and shift to questions of technology and home. We will also explore the Gifford Arboretum and Kislak Center to enrich your readings through connection to natural spaces and hands-on archival experience. Throughout, we will ask, *who* or *what* is domesticated *when?* And *why?*

The praxis of this course emphasizes improving and refining your writing processes. As such, over the course of the semester, we will write about literature through an animal study “lens,” develop familiarity with a digital tool to create a multi-modal project, and consider questions about animals in literature and culture. You will write journal entries in-class, discuss and annotate on shared documents, as well as various kinds of writing that go into the work of a formal academic paper, including marking and highlighting texts, taking notes, producing outlines and drafts, as well as composition of grammatically correct, rhetorically effective formal essays. Each of the formal pieces of writing you produce in this class will undergo revision, based on feedback from your instructor and your peers.

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester, students who successfully complete ENG 106 should be able to:

- Develop effective written communication skills in relation to specific rhetorical tasks.
- Construct original, well-reasoned arguments using a range of materials.
- Integrate and synthesize appropriate and relevant primary and secondary sources in their writing.

Assignments

Assignments fall into two categories: writing and praxis.

1. **Writing:** Students will write eight journal entries and complete two writing projects.
 - o Journal entries should be 100-250 words. I will provide feedback that improves your writing and thinking on the topics covered. My hope is that these journals serve as regular writing practice that engender in-class participation and out-of-class thought and engagement.
 - o First Project (1,000 words): Short personal narrative response to either a short story or one of the theoretical texts we will read early in the semester.
 - o Second Project: Research paper (1,750-2,000) essay may be delivered conference style OR digital essay OR slide deck visual essay as a final exam grade.
2. **Presentation:** Presentation of second paper in chosen medium.

Grade Evaluation:

14% Class Participation - 140 pts/5pts each class day
10% Journal Entries - 100 pts/ 12.5pts each entry
20% (Due 10/26) First Writing Project - 200 pts
40% (Due 12/2) Second Writing Project - 400 pts
16% (Due 12/10) Final Portfolio - 160 pts

Required Texts (Provided)

All texts and videos for this course will live in your Blackboard course shell as accessible PDF documents or live links. Projects one and two's assignment links will be posted in Blackboard. I will demonstrate the locations of both of these links upon our introduction. Journal entries will be completed on Blue Books, which I will provide you on the second day of class.

Attendance and Lateness

Students are expected to attend class. In class, we will engage with our readings and complete activities. Should you miss class it is up to you to complete an alternate writing assignment that I will share with you through email. Failing to complete this alternate assignment without extraordinary reasons will impact your final class participation percentage. I must start class on time or at the latest five minutes after official start time.

Participation

You may be wondering, "Twenty percent is a large percentage of my grade just for class participation." Let me explain how to earn the full 14%: engage in discussion and peer review.

- Discussion: Come to class with at least one inquiry on the reading passage. Our conversation will cover these first impressions and inquiries to engender class discussion.
- Peer Review: When working with student papers, you will develop competence in three kinds of commentary: directing revision, identifying and prioritizing writing issues, and evaluation. I will provide a handout and brief explanation of these requirements to assist the peer review process.

Tech in Classroom

No technology! Ever! Joking... I welcome luddites and digital gurus into the classroom without reservation. Use what you are most comfortable with. All I ask is that you do not use technology that will distract you from attending to the conversations we will have and the learning we will experience together. If you find it difficult to concentrate on our discussions and have technology a tap away, I encourage you to not bring it to class. In general, I trust you will make the choice that fosters the learning environment you expect to have at the University.

Academic Integrity

This course will observe the University of Miami Student **Honor Code and Academic Integrity Policy** as explained on the [Honor Council page](#). Plagiarism is a serious violation of the Student Honor Code and failure to credit ideas or words that are not your own (including computer-generated paraphrase) is a form of plagiarism and will be treated seriously. Students are expected to document, acknowledge, and cite appropriately even in drafts or partial assignments.

Position on AI (language partially from ([PETAL](#)))

This course requires that you spend significant time thinking with your own ideas, so I am interested in your thoughts and want to work with you to improve your critical thinking through writing about literature. If you use AI tools in any part of your work, you are responsible for the final product of that work, both academically and in the workforce. What this means is that for this course you must report any usage of A.I. just as you would cite any source. Early in the course, we will survey case studies of AI usage and inquire upon its limitations for this course as well as complete an in-class survey of current usage before we collectively establish acceptable usage for this class.

Virtual Class Meetings

Should we need to have class on Zoom, I will share a Zoom link with the class at least 24 hours before our scheduled meeting period. We will follow the schedule and policies in Zoom as if we were on campus with a few modifications. I will announce to the class and ask for verbal permission should we need to record the class meeting for students who cannot attend. There will be no unauthorized recording of our meetings. Do not jump on the zoom call without checking your surrounding area and ensuring it is clear of items you would not bring to class with you.

WORKING GUIDELINES

- All changes to the syllabus will be provided to the students in writing before the implementation of the change.

- **Students' Responsibility:** This syllabus contains information, policies, and procedures for a specific course. By enrolling, the student agrees to read, understand, and abide by the rules, policies, regulations, and ethical standards of The University of Miami as those contained in the current UM Catalog and schedule of classes.
- **Instructor's Responsibility:** In my pedagogy, I will be straightforward and honest with students, offering a legitimate reason for delays and alterations to the syllabus, assignment, or schedule. I will be professional and cordial in personal interactions; I will not embarrass or disparage you on discussion forums and in-person. I will be positive and encourage students, as I would like to commend you for what you know, not penalize you for what you do not.

Accessibility and Accommodations

Please let me know if you need any accommodations as documented by the Office of Disability Services (ODS): "The Office of Disability Services (ODS) provides academic accommodations and support to ensure that students with disabilities are able to access and participate in the opportunities available at the University of Miami" (<http://umarc.miami.edu/arc/ODS.html>). If you need accommodations but do not yet have them documented, please contact ODS at (305) 284-2374.

Well-Being Resources and Support

As you complete your coursework, consider how you can maintain your health and well-being as a top priority. To help you become familiar with the many programs and services available on campus, review the information collected on the Division of Student Affairs Student Well-Being and Resiliency website available at miami.edu/well-being. Please reach out to me or any of the resources listed on that site if you need assistance or support throughout the semester.

[Academic Resource Center \(language from University of Miami's site, Camner Center for Academic Resources\)](#)

The Camner Center for Academic Resources at the University of Miami offers a multitude of resources for every constituent of the University of Miami community: students, parents, faculty, staff, and administrators. Our goal is to provide resources to help manage success and advance potential. The Camner Center for Academic Resources hosts the services listed below. Click the underlined text to visit the respective service site(s) to learn more or make an appointment.

[Tutoring Services](#)

The Peer Tutoring Program at the Camner Center for Academic Resources offers University of Miami students support in achieving their academic goals. The Peer Tutoring Program currently has over 100 peer tutors knowledgeable in various subjects, both undergraduate and graduate, working to help fellow students reach their academic goals

[Learning Specialist](#)

The Learning Specialist works one-on-one with students to develop college study skills and time management to achieve academic success.

[Office of Disability Services](#)

The Office of Disability Services (ODS) is the primary university office responsible for the coordination of auxiliary aids and services for students with disabilities.

[Independent Learning Initiative](#)

The Independent Learning Initiative is an academic support program that provides structure, instruction, and monitoring for students who need additional guidance during the college experience.

[Counseling Center](#)

Along with excitement and new opportunities, college can bring on a new host of challenges and stressors that can interfere with academic success. Our mission is to provide high quality services for students from all backgrounds. From individual counseling to online resources, the Counseling Center is here for you. Click the underlined text above to visit their site to learn more or make an appointment.

[Title IX and Mandatory Reporting Status](#)

Click this link above to visit the University of Miami Title IX site to report sexual misconduct and child maltreatment. You may visit the Title IX site and learn more about Title IX Coordinators, Investigators, and Liaisons [here](#).

"Title IX is a federal civil rights law passed as part of the Education Amendments of 1972. This law protects people (students, employees, and others) from discrimination based on sex in educational programs or activities that receive

Federal financial assistance. Covered Persons at educational institutions are protected by Title IX — regardless of their sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, part- or full-time status, disability, race, or national origin — in all aspects of the institution’s educational programs and activities.”

Course Schedule

GREEN = Critical Themes / **YELLOW** = Fiction / **CYAN** = Critical Application / **BLUE** = Workshops / **PURPLE** = Rest / **RED** = Final Portfolio

Week 1 – The Environmental Humanities

8/19, Tuesday

- We will introduce ourselves to one another, and I will provide an overview of the tools needed to succeed in this course.

8/21, Thursday

- We will discuss environmental humanities and its connections to ecocriticism and animal studies. In class (last 15 minutes) you will start to write your first journal entry answering, “How do I connect with the environment?” I will ask you to read John Berger’s essay “Why look at Animals?” for next Tuesday’s meeting.

Week 2 – Zoos: Asking “Why Look at Animals?”

8/26, Tuesday

- We will discuss John Berger’s “Why Look at Animals?” as a class in a round robin way, focusing on your impressions of the text and questions you have about Berger’s argument.
 - o Activity: Pair and share initial impressions before class discussion. Post questions on the dry erase board.

8/28, Thursday

- We will discuss John Berger’s “Why Look at Animals” as a class.
 - o We will have a “fishbowl” discussion guided by the following questions: How does John Berger’s thinking impact how we see animals in nature documentaries? Zoos? At home? What parts of the chapter struck you? What parts confused you?
 - o Students “outside” the fishbowl will take notes on the conversation had “inside” the fishbowl.
- In the final 15 minutes of class, you will start to write your second journal entry answering, “Why look at animals?” I will ask you to read “A Report to an Academy” by Franz Kafka for next Tuesday’s meeting.

Week 3 – Zoos: “A Report of an Academy”

9/2, Tuesday

- We will discuss “A Report to an Academy” by Franz Kafka as a class.
 - o Activity: Discuss what happened in the text? Write a six-word short story that captures Kafka’s “point” for you. Share your six-word story with the class. We will then discuss the story through what you’ve all shared.

9/4, Thursday

- We will complete our discussion on Kafka’s short story guided by the following questions: At what point of the story does Red Peter embrace human language to his benefit? Do you think the humans are deceived or is Red Peter? How does this story challenge Berger’s position on actual animals in zoos?
 - o Activity: In the final 15 minutes of class, you will write your third journal entry, answering “What stood out to you about Franz Kafka’s short story?” I will ask you to read “Axolotl” by Julio Cortazar for next Tuesday’s meeting.

Week 4 – Zoos: “Axolotl”

9/9, Tuesday

- We will discuss “Axolotl” by Julio Cortazar and Berger’s chapter “Why Look at Animals” as a class.
 - o Activity: Discuss what happened in the text? Complete a close reading of selected passages with an emphasis on connecting Berger’s observations. I will assign passages to select groups during class for you to investigate.

- o Some guiding questions to consider may include: How might sections of “Axolotl” relate to Berger’s chapter? Where are these two texts in contention with one another? What might these two writers have to say about the other’s text?

9/11, Thursday

- We will complete discussion on Cortazar’s “Axolotl.” We will sum up the discussion by asking why an Axolotl? Does any other “animal” fit the mold or consideration Cortazar makes in his text?
- In the final 15 minutes of class, you will write your fourth journal entry, answering “What stood out to you about Julio Cortazar’s short story? I will ask you to read “The Cage” by Bertram Chandler for next Tuesday’s meeting.

Week 5 – Zoos: “The Cage” by Bertram Chandler

9/16, Tuesday

- We will discuss “The Cage” by Bertram Chandler as a class.
 - o Activity: Close reading of the text, thinking of initial impressions and similarities between this text and Kafka, Cortazar’s. You will pair and share your observations and questions/interpretations of text. We will wrap class discussion around the questions you pose.

9/18, Thursday

- I will return my feedback to your first four journal entries with an aim to improve your writing and thinking on this topic. We will review requirements for the first writing project due in week seven.
- I will close the “Zoo” themed half of the course with a synopsis and discussion over the SF Encyclopedia Entry on “Zoo” (<https://sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/zoo>), considering the last three texts we’ve read in close detail and marking their varied conceptions of “Zoo” through the SF encyclopedic entry. The general question we will leave off with is, *how do we now read the animal in literary texts?*
- I will ask you to read excerpts and familiarize yourself with Jacques Derrida’s *The Animal That Therefore I Am* for next Tuesday’s meeting.

Week 6 – *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (first writing project introduced)

9/23, Tuesday

- I will present a comprehensive summary of key sections from Jacques Derrida’s *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Students will parse into groups and focus on paragraph selections from the text before reporting findings to class.

9/25, Thursday

- You will write your fifth journal entry, answering “What role might technology play in mending the climate?” You are welcome to do secondary research for this question (or imagine alternate futures through SF tropes).
- I will share details on your first writing project due in three weeks.
- Activity: I will share a “broken” version of this next text (sentence level, paragraphs, pages etc.) and you will reconstruct it into some “order.” We will review the “correct” or most correct versions as a class.
- I will ask you to read “The Machine Stops” by E.M. Forster for next Tuesday’s meeting.

Week 7 – Technology: “The Machine Stops”

9/31, Tuesday

- We will discuss “The Machine Stops” as a class. What happened in the text?
 - o Activity: Pair and share questions and first impressions of the text. We might discuss the following questions: What is the machine? Is nature a machine in this story? What do you make of the narrator’s emergence from underground? Why might this be a significant event?
 - o I will review editing strategies for your revised journal entries one through three working toward the final product of your portfolio. You will edit and revise four journal entries on your own, following my feedback and your own judgement.

10/2, Thursday

- We will complete the discussion on “The Machine Stops.”
 - o Activity: Group into equal parts and discuss what you would title this story based on its major theme of domestication and “home.” Also consider its relationship to the natural environment. Are there natural elements? Can nature be a machine? How is this construction harmful/beneficial?
- In the final 15 minutes of class, you will start to write your sixth journal entry. Over the weekend, plant your own seed for your first paper; consider a text we’ve read in class or one of your own choosing that

may lend itself to an ecocritical/animal studies reading. I will make time to remind you of the first writing project due two weeks from today. I will introduce chapter one of Lois Tyson's book *Using Critical Theory*, "Critical Theory and You." I will ask you to read Roald Dahl's "The Sound Machine" for next Tuesday's meeting.

Week 8 – Technology: Listening to “The Sound Machine” & Gifford Arboretum Trip

10/7, Tuesday

- We will discuss “The Sound Machine” by Roald Dahl as a class.
 - o What happened in the text? How is this machine different from Forster's? What sounds would you want to amplify?

10/9, Thursday

- Activity: We will visit the Gifford Arboretum as a class and practice tuning our own sound machines.
 - o Use your phone or checked out sound recorder (i.e.: “sound machine”) to record what you hear in (or in route to).
 - o You will submit your sounds to a shared file and write a brief 100–200-word reflection on a selection of your own or your classmate's captured sounds.
 - In addition, you are welcome to bring questions as you draft your first papers. I am happy to discuss these with you.

Week 9 – Technology: Animals and Machines in SF Short Films

10/14, Tuesday (Fall Recess)

- (no class meeting)

10/16, Thursday (Mr. Martin's Conference Day/Zoom Class Meeting)

- We will watch and discuss three short films that complicate the theoretical framework we have explored in class so far.
 - o [Sci-Fi Short Film “PETS” by David Kuhn](#)
 - o [Sci-Fi Short Film “Strange Beasts by DUST](#)
 - o [Sci-Fi Short Film “The Spark” by DUST](#)
- A brief discussion on what happened in the films. How do these films' relationship to technology differ/compare to Forster and Dahl's? What might you now say about technology's relationship to SF tropes and other than human relationships? Is there a clear divide between treatment of animals and technology? What do you think about these films in relation to earlier stories about zoo animals?

Week 10 – Return to “Zoo” and Writing Debrief

10/21, Tuesday

- Activity: We will return to the “Zoo” key term from the first half of the semester and consider how technology (and human use/reliance on it) may intersect in our treatment of both animals and machines. This will open conversations that may inspire your final research papers.
- You will receive feedback on your fifth and sixth journal entry by today. We will have an open discussion on paper topics. In class writing and editing for your first writing project is welcome at this point. Paper is due by Sunday evening 8pm.

10/23, Thursday

- Writing debriefing. I will ask each of you to share your writing processes and what stood out to you as you wrote your first writing project for this course. We may consider the following lines of inquiry: what is the context of my argument? How do I expand on my topic? How may I connect this to other fields or disciplines?

Week 11 – Research Methods and Preparing for Second Writing Project

10/28, Tuesday

- We will review academic research methods in class through a brief presentation and question and answer period for what key terms or concepts you may consider researching in a way of discovering more about ecocriticism, animal studies, and/or speculative literature.
- In-class writing time is encouraged, and I will be available to assist you as you prepare your second writing project.

10/30, Thursday

- I will share threads of my own research that may foster some inroads to your own research for the second writing project. In-class writing time is encouraged, and I will be available to assist you as you prepare your second writing project.

- For your eighth and final journal entry, I will encourage you to select a novel or selection of short stories to read and cover throughout the last weeks of class that will become primary texts to your second writing project. These may be of any genre or length; I only ask that you apply the animal studies or ecocritical critical theories we've surveyed in this course.

Week 12 – Kislak Center Visit and Research Workshop

11/4, Tuesday

- We will meet at the Kislak Center and examine artifacts with the intent to use this visit to lead you to define or outline your research project. We will survey digital and physical items that consider both exploration and environmental disasters: Jay I. Kislak Collection of the Early Americas, Exploration and Navigation, the Hurricane Andrew Collection, Hurricane Katrina Photograph Album, and Hurricane Wilma Photograph Album. The Kislak Center also has several texts that depict naturalist drawings, which are of particular interest when we consider earlier conversation about zoos. I will ask you to write a brief reflection paper on this experience for your penultimate journal entry.

11/6, Thursday

- In class brainstorming and research is welcome. In class writing and multimodal workshops.
- Peer to peer review is encouraged but not required. Instructor feedback in person.

Week 13 – Focused Workshop

11/11 + 11/13, Tuesday + Thursday

- Simultaneous in class writing and multimodal workshop.
- Peer to peer review is encouraged but not required. Instructor feedback in person.

Week 14 – Present!

11/18 + 11/20, Tuesday + Thursday

- Present final writing project in your chosen modality (5-10 minutes per student).
- Peer to peer review is encouraged but not required. Instructor feedback in person.

Week 15 - Rest

HOLIDAY BREAK

Week 16 – Present!

12/2, Tuesday

- Present final writing project in your chosen modality (5-10 minutes per student).
- Peer to peer review is encouraged but not required. Instructor feedback in person.
- Second Writing Project due by 11:59pm

Exam Week: Portfolio Due in Blackboard

12/4-12/10, Thursday to Wednesday

- (no class meeting)
- Turn in combined document with the following via Blackboard by Dec. 10:
 - o 4 Edited and Typed Journal Entries
 - o Revised First Writing Project
 - o Final Second Writing Project
 - o Please, also attach or link any multi-media companion material to your second writing project.