

Writing Nonfiction:

Workshop in Multimodal & Sound Writing

A&HE 4156 | Professor: Emery Petchauer



Photo by Andrea De Santis

On names and naming

Names are important to who we are. This includes the pronunciation of names; our pronouns; the relationships our names have to family, heritage, ancestors, land, experiences; and more. We show consideration and care for each other by learning and speaking one another's names. In this course, please feel free to specify how you should be addressed by other members of the class. This includes name, pronunciation, pronouns, etc.

Taking care of yourself and each other

Personal events may happen this semester that take priority over class. That's okay! We can work things out together if we are proactive. In that spirit, please let me know in advance if a serious situation will cause you to miss class, if you are falling behind on work, or if something about class isn't working for you. I can best support you or direct you to the right resources if we are open and proactive with one another.

Course focus: Multimodal and sound writing

This course is about writing that is multimodal and based in aurality, or sound writing. **Sound writing** is an action and object created by drafting, revising, and delivering compositions in the aural mode (Faris et al., 2022). Class will focus **less on visual and printed text** and more on compositions that **you hear and feel**. In terms of academic fields, the course draws from rhetoric, writing studies, sound studies, and the aural humanities.

There will be technical learning in a digital audio workstation; conceptual learning about multimodal, sensory, and sound writing; and applications putting all of this into practice through playing, tinkering, and composing.

Despite this technical side, it's important to keep in mind **why all of this matters**. Here is one answer: humans across time have used their full sensory, modal, and technological capabilities to express themselves with dignity and power, and to help create the world they wish to experience. With sound, this includes not only music with lyrics but future-facing creations like Jamaican dub

and Detroit techno. So this class works to develop your full sensory and modal capacities as a communicator/writer, especially through sound.

Although this is the intended focus, if you have a nonfiction writing practice you want to advance through the class (maybe you are a songwriter, make zines, or write creative nonfiction...), let me know and we can look for ways to integrate it.

Modes of learning

This class is organized as a series of experiments, applications, and workshops. There will be some foundational reading and discussions early on to give us concepts and language to ground what we are doing, but more often than not, you will learn by doing. That means following a process, tinkering, playing, and experimenting will be more learningful than trying to create a perfect product.

Course objectives

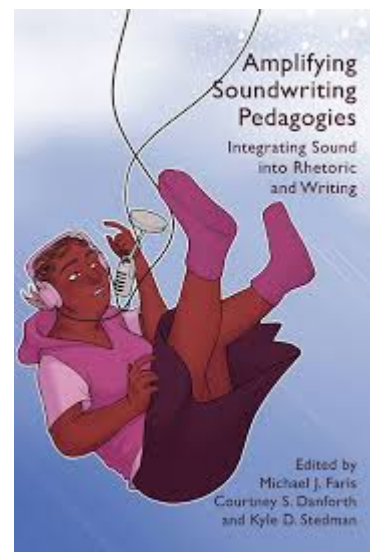
- Understand and apply foundational concepts in sound writing.
- Develop technical skills in sound writing (editing, layering, importing, generating audio effects, etc.).
- Expand comfort and efficacy in learning new digital platforms.
- Understand and apply ideas about multimodality and aurality to composition.
- Compose work that elicits desired sensory effects and affects for audiences.

Essential questions

1. What are the roles of sound and aurality within multimodality?
2. What do sound and aurality have to do with writing, rhetoric, and composition?
3. How do sound and aurality work as a composing resource?

Required texts & materials

- Ableton Live Lite (a digital audio workstation). Cost is \$5. [See instructions on Canvas for how to get it.](#)
- Headphones or earbuds.
- Readings provided by the professor.
- *Amplifying Soundwriting Pedagogies: Integrating Sound into Rhetoric and Writing*, Faris, et al. (2022). [Open access here.](#)



Main Assignments

See assignment sheets for full details	Percentage of Final Grade
<p>Composition 1: Hear my home</p> <p>In this assignment you will compose a 2-3 minute sound writing composition under the topic of “home.” Of course, home doesn’t have to be just where you sleep. It can be any place where you find comfort, rest, and more – like a park, the gym, or something else. This low-stakes composition will give you a chance to master a set of basic skills in sound writing like importing and editing audio, adjusting levels and panning, and exploring. [Adopted from Cassie Brownell and Jon Wargo]</p>	15%
<p>Composition 2: Audio story</p> <p>In this assignment, you will tell an interesting story (2-3 min) with a purpose, meaning, emotion, and moment of change. You’ll use at least three different kinds of sound to tell this story: music, sound effects, your voice, other people’s voice, ambient sounds, or silence. This puts to use the basic skills you learned in composition 1 but prioritizes the spoken, narrative story with sound playing a secondary role to help tell the story. [Adopted from Crystal VanKooten]</p>	20%
<p>Composition 3: Experimental effects and dirt</p> <p>In this assignment, you will take a vocal loop from your audio paper and make it dirty. You will learn about effects like distortion, delay, and reverb in order to take this experimental approach to composition. The point here is to take natural aural phenomena and push them to a level that makes them sound unnatural.</p>	25%
<p>Composition 4: Audio paper</p> <p>An audio paper is a scholarly genre and situated practice. Audio papers address a research topic or question through performance, sonic aesthetics, technological mediation, and awareness of affect and materiality. The genre was first conceptualized by Sanne Krogh Groth and Kristine Samson in 2015. An audio paper is the most sophisticated genre of the ones we are writing in this semester, and it brings together many of the basic and intermediate skills from the other compositions. We will read about this genre and listen to many examples in class to give you a fuller understanding.</p>	30%

<p>Weekly exercises and maker's log</p> <p>Most weeks will have an exercise that is due Sunday night. Each exercise is connected to the skills and concepts of the main composition you are working on in a given part of the semester. Think of the exercises like the steps forward toward the composition.</p> <p>Designers and creators often keep a “log” alongside their work. An entry might cover what they tried, how it went, what they figured out, and ideas about what to try next. It's more of a log than a reflective journal. You will keep one of these (google doc) alongside your making and complete/turn in one entry with each exercise and assignment.</p>	<p>20%</p>
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Grading Scale

93-100% A	77-79% C+
90-92% A-	73-76% C
87-89% B+	70-72% C-
83-86% B	60-69% D
80-82% B-	Below 60% F

COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change)			
Date	Topics & Focus	Readings, Viewings, and Listening due before Wednesday's class	Due (Sunday before midnight)

09/04	<p>Course introduction</p> <p>What is sound writing? How do people do it?</p>	<p>Read “Introduction: Why we teach sound writing” in <i>Amplifying Soundwriting Pedagogies</i> (read after class)</p>	<p>Class survey</p> <p>Ableton Live set up (instructions on Canvas)</p> <p>Your relationship with sound discussion post on Canvas.</p>
09/11	<p>What is multi modality?</p> <p>Begin “hear my home” composition</p>	<p>Read “Space”</p> <p>Read “Hear my home”</p> <p>Read “Sounding the future of English Language Arts” by Jon Wargo.</p> <p>Listen: Missing sounds of New York</p>	<p>Exercise: First draft of “Hear my home” composition & entry in your maker’s log (see instructions on Canvas discussion)</p>
09/18	<p>What are listening modes? What is a soundscape?</p>	<p>Read “Three listening modes”</p> <p>Read “Soundscape”</p> <p>Play around with Faint signals (desktop only, headphone required)</p>	<p>Exercise: Revision of “Hear my home” composition & entry in your maker’s log (see instructions on Canvas discussion)</p>
09/25	<p>Soundwalks</p>	<p>Read “What is a sound walk?”</p> <p>Read “in search of a decolonial soundwalk praxis” by ameia camielle smith</p>	<p>Composition 1: “Hear my home” second and final revision & entry in your maker’s log</p>

10/02	<p>Begin audio storytelling composition</p> <p>Working with freely available sounds</p>	<p>Listen “Tinkering with sound design” (21 min)</p> <p>Listen <i>Serial E1S1</i></p> <p>See instructions, questions, and links on Canvas.</p>	<p>Exercise: Turn in audio story pitch</p>
10/09	<p>Writing a script for an audio story</p> <p>Voice</p>	<p>Read “Toward a resonant vocal materiality...” by Erin Anderson</p> <p>Read “Voice”</p>	<p>Exercise: Written transcript with audio annotations</p> <p>Self evaluation 1 (by Sunday evening)</p>
10/16	<p>Multimodal listening</p>	<p>Read “(Re)educating the Senses: Multimodal Listening, Bodily Learning, and the Composition of Sonic Experiences” by Steph Ceraso</p>	<p>Exercise: First draft of audio story & entry in your maker’s log</p>
10/23	<p>Workshopping and feedback loops on audio stories</p>	<p>Optional Read “Audio papers - a manifesto”</p>	<p>Composition 2: Revised and final audio story</p>

10/30	<p>Noise and the more-than-human as a compositional tool</p> <p>Compositional audio effects (reverb, delay, glitch, distortions, drones)</p>	<p>Watch “Noise and experimental music is for everybody”</p> <p>Read “Noise” Read “Silence”</p> <p>Watch/listen “Writing dirt/teaching noise” by Steven R. Hammer</p>	<p>Exercise: One sound, three versions experiment</p> <p>Entry in your maker’s log</p> <p>Composition 2: Revised and final audio story</p>
11/06	<p>Loops as a compositional and experimental tool</p> <p>“If you repeat the same thing, it becomes music” - Pierre Schaeffer</p>	<p>Listen “Come Out” by Steve Reich (13 min)</p> <p>Listen “You’re No Good” by Terry Riley (20 min)</p> <p>Listen “Integrity (Tune-In)” (2 min) by Emery Petchauer</p> <p>Listen “Take on it” (3 min) by lovenloops</p> <p>Play with “The infinite drum machine” (desktop only)</p>	<p>Exercise: Loop a sound into music experiment, with effects</p> <p>Entry in your maker’s log</p> <p>No sound writing exercise this week</p>
11/13	<p>Making technological mediation audible</p>	<p>Watch/Listen “Singer, Writer: A Choric Exploration of Sound and Writing” by Crystal VanKooten</p>	<p>Composition 3: Make your audio story sound dirty (effects and experiments)</p> <p>Entry in your maker’s log</p>

11/20	Composing in the genre of audio papers	<p>Read “Audio paper manifesto”</p> <p>Listen to “The Second Sound of Integrity: Us Whole” audio paper by Ruth Nicole Brown and Emery Petchauer</p> <p>Listen to “Fear of Weakness: Songs to Agitate the Man” by Mourton Poulsen</p> <p>Listen to any other audio paper you think is interesting from Seismograf Peer</p>	<p>Exercise: Audio paper plan due: question, anchor idea, mentor texts.</p> <p>Entry in your maker’s log</p>
11/27		No Class	
12/04	Audio papers	Work session - TBD	<p>Exercise: Rough cut of audio paper</p> <p>Entry in your maker’s log</p>

12/11	Audio papers	Work and feedback session - TBD	Composition 4: Audio paper due Entry in your maker's log
12/18	Showcase	Showcase event - Location TBD	

