

ARCH 679
Writing in Architecture
Prof. A. Adams
Thursdays, 10:30-12:30, Room 207

Writing in Architecture

This new course surveys the range of texts architects are expected to write: letters, reports, abstracts, reviews, building evaluations, theses and dissertations, newspaper and magazine articles, lectures, introductions to lectures, and even architects' autobiographies and obituaries. Our focus this semester, however, is on architectural criticism and academic writing. Together we will read the work of architectural critics and researchers considered to be masterful and determine why. During the first month we will work on critical reviews of a new building in Montreal. The second part of the course will emphasize academic writing where the major assignment will offer the opportunity to write a research paper or a critical review of an architectural writer's *oeuvre*. Throughout the course, we will work together to become better writers for both popular and academic audiences.

The format of the course will simulate a writers' group, a structure that underlines writing as a recursive and process-driven activity. Be prepared for other students to read and comment on your work. Group discussions of readings will emphasize the effective formulae and strategies of accomplished architectural writers, with the intention of honing our own rhetorical finesse.

Our class schedule vacillates between discussions of readings, peer-review sessions, and general discussion of writing strategies. Special topics include: facing the blank page; constructing an outline; descriptive, persuasive, and academic writing styles; structuring an argument; how to write about your own design work; finding your voice as a writer; the peer-review process outside the classroom.

ARCH 679 will also allow us to meet with several accomplished writers who have dedicated their careers to producing and/or editing texts about architecture.

Note the McGill Writing Centre has generously provided support, advice, and teaching materials for this course. McGill students are eligible for five 1-hour tutorial sessions with staff at the writing centre: <http://www.mcgill.ca/mwc/>.

Course texts by Forty, Lange, and Spector and Damron (*) are available at The Word bookstore, 469 rue Milton, Montreal. The most important book to purchase is Lange's *Writing about Architecture*, used intensively in the first half of the course. You will need this book immediately.

Recommended books:

Howard S. Becker, *Writing for Social Scientists*

Roy Peter Clark, *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer*

*Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*

Matthew Frederick, *101 Things I Learned in Architecture School*

*Alexandra Lange, *Writing About Architecture*

*Tom Spector and Rebecca Damron, *How Architects Write*

William Zinsser, *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*

Assignments

1. Write a publishable critique of a new building in Montreal (suggestions on page 4). The audience for this article is educated professionals, such as the readers of *Canadian Architect*. The assignment is done in three parts: draft (Jan 31), peer review, and final submission (Feb 14).
2. Write a research paper, a statement of design philosophy, or a critical analysis of one architectural writer's *oeuvre* (suggestions on pages 5-6), 3000 words. We will analyze model research papers in class; for samples of design philosophies, see Spector and Damron, chapter 7. As a sample analysis of a writer's achievements, see Alexandra Lange's "Why Nicolai Ouroussoff is not good enough," *Design Observer*, 18 Feb 2010 (<http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=12708>).

Evaluation

In-class letter, 0

Draft of Assignment 1, 500 words, 10

Peer-review of Assignment 1, 5

Final submission of assignment 1, 1200 words, 20

Outline of Assignment 2, 10

Draft of Assignment 2, 15

Peer-review of Assignment 2, 10

Final submission of assignment 2, 30

Schedule:

Jan 10 Introduction to course

Assignment in class: Write a letter about why you want to take this course (post to myCourses within 12 hours)

Jan 17 Discussion of Lewis Mumford, "House of Glass," *New Yorker*, 8 August 1952 and Herbert Muschamp, "The Miracle in Bilbao," *New York Times Magazine*, 7 September 1997, plus the analyses of both pieces in Lange; introduction of Assignment 1.

Jan [21] 24 Witold Rybczynski, *My Two Polish Grandfathers*, "Architecture" (pp 101-15) and also,
[http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/architecture/2011/12/christmas creche a young architect s experiments .html](http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/architecture/2011/12/christmas_creche_a_young_architect_s_experiments.html)
<http://www.advicetowriters.com/interviews/>

Jan 31 Collect and discuss 500-word drafts of skyscraper/museum pieces; start peer reviews of Assignment 1 in class.

Feb 7 Hans Ibelings (<http://users.cuci.nl/ibelings/>), we will read a selection of pieces from his site: architectureobserver.eu, with special attention to statements such as "Architectural criticism in North America bears little resemblance to that in Europe." Please note Hans Ibelings is giving a talk in our Brown Bag series on Jan 15.

Feb 14 Michael Sorkin, "Save the Whitney," *Village Voice*, 25 June 1985 and Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, chapter 1, plus the analyses of both pieces in Lange. Assignment 1 is due.

Feb 21 Introduce Assignment 2 Explain differences between writing for the public and academic writing. See: <http://video.mit.edu/watch/communicating-science-and-technology-in-the-21st-century-steven-pinker-12644/>

Feb 28 Bring a model research paper to this class and dissect it. Writing a proposal; an outline; an abstract. Finding your models. Bring three proposed paper topics to class for discussion.

[Mar 7] Study break, no class

Mar 14 Lucas Crawford, writing poetry about architecture
 In-class writing assignment.

Mar 28 Peer review of 1500-word drafts of Assignment 2.

Apr 4 Word choices; reading from Adrian Forty *Words and Buildings*; Discussion of progress; continued peer review of Assignment 2.

Apr 11 Assignment 2 is due; be prepared to speak about your paper for five minutes.

Suggestion buildings to analyze for minor paper:

Maison du Maroc:

<http://www.archdaily.com/247739/maison-du-maroc-acdf-architecture/>

Conversion of the Mies van der Rohe gas station:

http://www.archdaily.com/214540/conversion-of-mies-van-der-rohe-gas-station-les-architectes-fabg/567-07_09_sc_v2com/

New science building at John Abbott:

<http://www.canada.com/Photos+Architectural+John+Abbott+College/7409626/story.html>

Atelier TAG's library in St. Hubert

New pavilion, MMFA

OSM

Francesco Bellini Life Sciences Building/Goodman Cancer Research Building

CHUM or MUHC under construction

Quartier des Spectacles master plan

U de M Outremont campus plan

Suggested writers to analyze for major paper:

Reyner Banham

Peter Collins

Mike Davis

Adrian Forty

Kenneth Frampton

Adele Freedman

Paul Goldberger

Jonathan Glancey

Henry Glassie

Christopher Hawthorne

Ada Louise Huxtable

JB Jackson

Charles Jencks

Blair Kamin

Spiro Kostof

John Bentley Mays

Lewis Mumford

Herbert Muschamp

Martin Pawley

John Ruskin

Witold Rybczynski

Vincent Scully

Michael Sorkin

John Summerson

Allan Temko

Yi-Fu Tuan

Dell Upton

Robert Venturi

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).