



Master of the Female Half-Lengths (so-called), *Sainte Madeleine écrivain* (ca. 1550).  
Oil on wood panel. Private collection.

## 4.s24 – Advanced Workshop in Writing for Architecture

Department of Architecture, MIT, Spring 2022

**Instructor:** Aidan Flynn ([aflynn@mit.edu](mailto:aflynn@mit.edu))\*\*

**TA:** Mona VijayKumar ([monavjay@mit.edu](mailto:monavjay@mit.edu))

**Class Meeting:** M 4-6PM, rm. 5-134

**Credit Hours:** 2-0-4 (P/D/F)

**Prerequisites:** per recommendation of MIT's EET exam; allowed in place of 21G.227/232.

**\*\*Office Hours:** Fridays 3-5PM (book via [Calendly](#) or email & let me know if you'd prefer Zoom or in-person.

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This workshop provides architecture graduate students in the S.M. and M.Arch programs with tools, techniques, and practice for academic English language assessments, both oral and written. Students will learn effective ways to convey ideas and research through various exercises, including translating ideas from thought to thesis, practicing oral communication skills in academic environments, and peer-to-peer reviews (written and conversational).

Meetings will invite students to draw on their current research at any and all stages of the degree (coursework or thesis semester), allowing participants to use this space to further develop and improve upon previous and/or ongoing scholarly work. Ultimately, this course aims to provide students with formal lessons on effective communication while simultaneously providing an informal and supportive workshop space to improve upon one's academic skills with peers at various learning levels and degree matriculation. This course is meant to complement and enhance each individual student's work in other classes and as they prepare for the final thesis by building a solid foundation for scholarly success in and beyond the rigors of graduate school in MIT Architecture.

## **Readings & Required Materials**

All reading materials will be available on Canvas and can be printed, if you so choose. Students are *not* required to purchase any texts. Students must bring a pen or pencil and notebook to each class for handwritten writing assignments. If you need to use exclusively digital software (a computer or tablet), please let me know and we will accommodate you as needed.

## **Class Format & Grading**

This class will function as a workshop seminar, with *very short* introductory lectures to introduce students to various skills in generating effective oral and written presentations. All students will be graded as P/D/F (pass/D/fail). So long as you complete your assignments on time and to the best of your ability, while attending *all* classes (see also below for guidelines on missed assignments/meetings), you will receive a 'P' grade. Per MIT's definition of a P/D/F class, P grades are not used in calculating your term and cumulative GPAs, but D and F grades are. Overall, a 'P' grade is equivalent to a C- or above; a 'D' grade is exactly that: a 'D,' and is the result of missed work and meetings; the 'F' grade is given when students fail to show up to multiple meetings and for failing to complete multiple assignments without notice or explanation. Further information can be found here: <https://registrar.mit.edu/classes-grades-evaluations/grades/grading-policies/graduate-pdf-option>

## **GENERAL OVERVIEW OF ASSIGNMENTS**

Throughout the course, students will complete very short assignments with their own work from classes and ongoing thesis work (preparing proposals, writing, research, finalizing presentations, both oral and written). The class is meant to enhance your language, presentation, argument structure, and bibliographic skills by inviting folks to use their workshop previous, ongoing, and future work in their time at MIT. **There is NO final cumulative assignment (at least not in the traditional sense of the term), and we will NOT have a final exam.**

### **Attendance & Participation**

You are expected to attend and actively participate in each class. We're an intimate group from a variety of discipline programs across the Department. Asking questions, making comments in class, and engaging with your colleagues in conversation on Wednesdays will benefit your learning experience and contributes to your P/D/F grade.

### **Weekly Writing Exercises (REQUIRED: notebook & writing utensil brought to each class)**

Each class begins with a 15-minute writing prompt by hand to encourage folks to practice stream of consciousness writing. This opening activity is meant to provide everyone with a chance to jot down thoughts and ideas in full English prose in a notebook or on a loose-leaf sheet of paper in response to a theme or question, design provocation, object, quote, building, etc. to practice writing in an unedited stream of consciousness style.

### **Short Assignments**

Students will be asked to bring in current/ongoing excerpts of *written* thesis work or coursework to be workshopped, analyzed, reviewed, and revised throughout the semester. For students who do not have any classes with writing components, or for those who are not yet at the thesis stage, we will develop writing prompts for you to translate other media projects into writing. This can also be an opportunity to begin thinking about thesis topics. All assignments are short, 1–2 double spaced pages — not entire research papers. We will go over and discuss putting together paper proposals, structuring ideas and arguments, developing coherent writing flow, and attending to smaller details like grammar, syntax, bibliography, and text-image relationships. Some written assignments will include, but are not limited to:

- Writing an abstract
- Writing a proposal for classwork or thesis
- Evaluating effective versus ineffective essay structures/arguments (samples provided by instructor)

- Bibliography styles (footnotes, in-text citations, and learning about plagiarism)
- Communicating through oral & written presentations with the text-image components

### **Peer Reviews**

The writing process can be a challenging one, and having your peers and colleagues look over your work is always a beneficial way to see things you may have missed, left out, or forgotten. We will complete a small series of “swaps” for written assignments.

To help students understand the role of peer review in academic writing, and to help them engage more effectively in giving and receiving feedback with their classmates, MIT created “No One Writes Alone,” a video on peer review. The video shows MIT faculty and students discussing the role of peer review in professional settings and in the classroom:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tY8CX0J3ILc>.

### **Oral Presentations**

All MIT Architecture degrees have required oral components, be they “crits,” leading class discussions, presentations, including midterm and final reviews, or the thesis defense. Our class will go over how to effectively structure an oral presentation, especially with limited time. Students will present current coursework, thesis ideas, or an entirely new topic provided by a list of prompts in 10–15 minute presentations. Your colleagues, instructor, and TA will give feedback, ask questions, and make comments on the presentation structure and communication of content.

## **OTHER INFORMATION & GUIDELINES**

### **Absence Policy & Late/Missing Assignments**

We are all juggling a lot and extenuating circumstances may arise during your time in this class. If you need to miss a class or are having issues with handing in assignments on time, we ask that you maintain communication with your instructor and TA. You will be excused within reason. Attendance and timely submissions are otherwise always required, and is pertinent to your final grade. Failure to hand in assignments and without explanation may result in an unsuccessful completion of that particular grade and, potentially, the final class grade itself, depending on your consistency in absence or failing to submit assignments.

## **Academic Integrity**

Massachusetts Institute of Technology students are here because of their demonstrated intellectual ability and because of their potential to make a significant contribution to human thought and knowledge. At MIT, students are given wonderful but often challenging opportunities to do research and undertake scholarship that will advance knowledge in different fields of study. It is important for MIT students to become familiar with the Institute's policies regarding academic integrity, which is available at [Academic Integrity at MIT: A Handbook for Students](#), and provides other links to resources on citations and writing. If you have questions or concerns, please reach out to your instructor and TA. This will also be a major topic of conversation and study in our class. Some important writing resources and Institute policies on plagiarism:

- MIT Writing Center: <https://cmsw.mit.edu/writing-and-communication-center>
- Excellent writing quizzes and explanations/examples of correct and incorrect grammar, syntax, spelling, writing structure: <https://owl.purdue.edu/>
- MIT Libraries Citation Guide: <https://libguides.mit.edu/citing/citestyle>
- Chicago Manual of Style Quick Reference Guide (great resource for footnote & in-text citations for academic & commercial print and digital media sources): [https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)

## **Community Agreements**

Below is a set of community agreements on respecting each other's space, identities, views, and opinions. Please email me if you are concerned or are having issues with any of the below:

- Please respect your colleagues' preferred names and pronouns.
- Openness: being open to and respectful of each other's opinions, perspectives, and ideas is of the utmost importance, especially as we undertake analyzing each other's work.
- Respecting opinions: we all come from a variety of backgrounds that have shaped our experiences and opinions. Our class on writing is also a class on academia in general, and the richness of the academy lies in its invitation of varied perspectives. Fruitful conversations can only happen when opinions are respectfully acknowledged and responded to in kind and mutually supportive ways. We ask all students to help create an atmosphere of mutual respect, acceptance, and sensitivity.

## SCHEDULE OF CLASSES & ASSIGNMENTS (*more TBD.*)

### Session 1: February 7 - Welcome!

- Introductions & syllabus overview.
- Short writing exercise (10-15 mins): what do you hope to gain from the course? What are *your* goals here?
  - Turn into instructor and TA.
- Vocabulary Assignment discussion & instructions (due **February 14 @ 6PM** via Canvas and please bring a physical copy for discussion on **February 28**).
  - The vocabulary prompt: Think of one or two words that you often use in your work within your specific section/group/program held under the great umbrella of "Department of Architecture." While a colleague who is well-versed in the *language* used in your particular sub-discipline, others probably aren't! So, how do we define and explain our unique lexicons to others? Without copying an online dictionary definition of a word that is specific to your study section or your own unique work (this would be plagiarism), write the word and *try* to limit yourself to 2 (MAXIMUM) 3 sentences that describe the word in laymen terms; that is, for someone who has never encountered your work, discipline, subject matter. The word doesn't need to be "classically architectural!" For instance, "Column: a soaring, vertical object with a typically square base and top that are connected by a cylindrical expanse. A column usually supports a larger structure above, such as a roof." **This is a long and almost flowery definition--yours can be much shorter!** The main idea is for us to begin our class in conversation with the ways in which our disciplines in architecture are united but so different, considering how challenging it can be to explain concepts that may come as second nature to *you* but not to *others*. We will build a compendium--our own dictionary--of these terms and your definitions! We will discuss on February 28. Have fun with it!
    - Another example other than "column" could be "theory." I hail from the History, *THEORY*, and Criticism group here, but how can you really explain what "architectural theory" means? Perhaps you need to provide an example to better illustrate your definition. Feel free to provide a tangible (material) or comparable (something similar) example from another area of study or the world in general to convey your definition(s).

### Session 2: February 14 - **\*\*NO CLASS, BUT ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE\*\***

- Please upload your vocabulary entries by **11:59PM on Monday, February 14**. Submit the file to: "[Assignment 1: Vocabulary Word Bank](#)." Prior to the February 28 class, your names will be redacted from your vocabulary entries and definitions, then compiled into one large running document that we will workshop on February 28 in-class.

**\*\*FEBRUARY 21: NO CLASS - PRESIDENT'S DAY\*\***

**Session 3: February 28 - Vocabularies in our Fields**

- Writing exercise (in-class, 15 mins) — don't forget your notebook/paper + pen/pencil!
- Discussion of vocabulary word bank:
  - What does our language tell us about the audience(s) we write to/for? Within our respective discipline groups, what jargon simultaneously amplifies and limits the arguments we try to convey? We will reflect on how challenging it might have been to complete this first assignment, and how difficult it can be to generate *our own* definitions of the terms we use without an memorizing or referencing an architectural dictionary or scholarly work.

**Session 4: March 7 - Conveying Knowledge, Crafting Arguments**

- Writing exercise (in-class, 15 mins).
- Discussions:
  - Today we are guided by the question: if I asked you to tell me about your research in 2 minutes, what would you say?
  - What is the difference between description and argument?
  - How can ideas be most effectively structured? And, for that matter, what are some examples of poorly written or spoken summaries of academic work?
  - We will go through some examples of general argumentative structure in abstracts in our fields, looking at excellent, satisfactory, and very poor samples for context. We will workshop these together in preparation for the next assignment.
- Preparation for "[Assignment 2: Argument Summary](#)" - 1-2 page double-spaced summary due on Canvas & in-person by the start of next class (**March 14 @ 12PM**).
  - - Pull from your ongoing work (from a class, from your thesis, from some research ideas you're mulling over). Condense it! Summarize your thoughts and arguments into 1-2 double-spaced pages. This is the first step in our preparation of an abstract. As you work on this, think of the conversations we had this week on effective versus ineffective demonstrations of knowledge, both written and oral, in a limited period of time. Think also about the vocabulary word bank from weeks earlier: what are the *very basics*? What is the *primary argument* that *cannot* be cut out? Submit your assignment to the "Arguments Assignment" submission folder on **March 14 by 12PM, and please bring a printed copy with you to class that afternoon**. We will discuss the experience of the exercise, but most importantly begin our oral components to practice

articulating written ideas. Students will get into groups and peer review each other's works. This will be the first mini-peer review, and we will go over that process at greater length next class but practice makes perfect! Please also watch this YouTube clip on peer review at MIT before **March 14**: [.youtube.com/watch?v=tY8CX0J3ILc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tY8CX0J3ILc).

### **Session 5: March 14 - Peer Reviews: Swapping Feedback in a Constructive Way**

- Writing exercise (in-class, 15 mins).
- Discussion: what is peer review? How is it used in professional circles? How will we use it today in practice?
- Peer pair-ups (someone from a different discipline group than your own).
  - 20 minutes to read your partner's paper, making notes on the efficacy of their arguments and structure. What works? What doesn't? Did you understand what they meant to say? What should be cut out and what do you crave more of to better understand your colleagues' research?
  - 40 minutes: connect with your partners and walk them through your ideas of their 1-2 page summary paper, providing constructive feedback, questions, and pleasures! (Aidan and Mona to circulate).

**\*\*MARCH 21: NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK\*\***

### **Session 6: March 28 - Plagiarism & Bibliographies**

- Writing exercise (in-class, 15 mins).
- Discussions:
  - Reflecting on the comments you received from your partner on Assignment 2 from last week.
  - Citations & bibliographies: different styles in architecture.
    - Avoiding Plagiarism.
    - Preparation for Assignment 3: building a bibliography (due **April 4** at **4PM** on Canvas & in class: assignment details *TBA*).

### **Session 7: April 4 - Plagiarism & Bibliographies (cont.) & Intro to Oral Presentations**

- Writing exercise (in-class, 15 mins).
- Blind peer review/swap of bibliographies with class discussions on correct vs. incorrect formatting.



**Session 8: April 11 - Oral Presentations (cont.)**

- Writing exercise (in-class, 15 mins).
- Assignment & discussions *TBA*.

**Session 9: April 18 - *CONTENT TBA*.**

- Writing exercise (in-class, 15 mins).

**Session 10: April 29 - *CONTENT TBA*.**

- Writing exercise (in-class, 15 mins).

**Session 11: May 2 - *CONTENT TBA*.**

- Writing exercise (in-class, 15 mins).

**Session 12: May 9 - *CONTENT TBA*.**

- Writing exercise (in-class, 15 mins).