

Music 207r: **Creative Ethnographic Writing** (Fall 2014)
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An Anti-Syllabus

This is a course with a schedule but not a trajectory. The goal is for you to produce new creative work based on musical research you've already conducted, to experiment with new modes of thinking through and communicating your ideas—what you know or think you know and what you want your readers to reflect upon themselves. We will all experiment with different genres of writing and some of you may wish to explore your ideas with visual or sonic materials. Each week you'll produce something new and discuss it with the class. Some weeks we'll also explore other ethnographically informed models, but the focus is on new creation and not on reading.

Ground yourself in your lived presence, in the field or the archive, and in the activity of your imagination. Reap as much as you can and create each week. I will not specify a number of pages or minutes, or a size (depending on the medium in which you wish to work). You ought to work toward a temporary sense of closure each week, a complete thought, chapter, or story—even a complete “fragment” if that makes sense in your work—with the idea that you can hook your weekly pieces into something larger at the end of the semester. A portfolio, a set of stories, a longer tale, a hybrid beast, the choice is yours, with the caveat that I'll ask you each to reflect on the whole as well as the parts. The choice of audience for your work is yours alone, and you may have different audiences in mind from week to week. An audience may be the class, an imagined subset of your field, perhaps a literary or art world, but it is decidedly not only the world of your professor!

For the coming week, plan out the media you'd like to use for the semester: prose, poetry, sound collage, photographs, moving images—whatever you like. Propose a breakdown for the semester (weeks x-y writing, weeks a-b, sound collage, etc) in terms of the media you wish to explore. If you prefer all your work to remain within the realm of writing or any other single form, that is perfectly acceptable. Second, consider for yourself and consult your classmates about the most effective format for receiving constructive criticism. Your responsibility is as much to your own work as it is to energizing the work of your colleagues. In the case of (verbal) writing, would you prefer to circulate your creation a day or two before or would you like to read it/play it aloud in class? You need not each have the same solution, and each week need not be the same as the previous, but remain aware of the time required if the class is to review your writing or piece in advance. I will expect to receive something concrete each week, in hard copy if a verbal piece, or in manageable digital form if not, and you can expect a written response from me the following week.

For reading, we begin with the opening chapter of my forthcoming book, *The Voice in the Drum: Music, language and emotion in Islamicate South Asia*. As a first writing experiment for next week, sketch out the plot of a short story that immerses you in the world of your field or archival work. You needn't complete the plan for the whole story in one week. Play with large scale ideas, but get to writing as quickly as possible. Don't worry about where you are going just yet. Just write. Enjoy the sounds of the words. Carry yourself emotionally, viscerally, into the places and times, the visions and smells, the tastes, the pains, of your work. Be ready to talk about how you generate your sensory language, how you transform your inspirations from memories, photographs faded or vivid, archival snippets, and notes or even single words. You can be sure you'll have at least one more week to work on this project, and we will continue to read from *The Voice in the Drum*. Beyond that, we will assess our projects and directions from week to week.