

Fall 2016
ENGL 7/8802: Contemporary Composition Theorists
Voice and Writing

Wednesdays, 5:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Dr. Joseph Jones

What do we mean when we refer to a writer's voice?

What happens when we associate the writer's voice with the writer's self?

What does voice have to do with the teaching and learning of writing?

These questions will guide our exploration of a key concept that has intrigued many contemporary writing theorists. While considerations of voice can be traced to the classical concepts of *ethos* and *persona*, we will begin our exploration with those theoretical conceptions of voice that have arisen over the past fifty years. A common definition of voice—"the representation of the writer in discourse"—does not quite encompass the aural qualities we "hear" in written texts, nor does it account for the ways many associate voice with selfhood and authenticity. We will pay particular attention to the contentions between those often referred to as expressionists, for whom voice is a unique, discoverable characteristic (and virtue), and those referred to broadly as social constructionists, for whom voice is more accurately conceptualized as situated, appropriated, and provisional *voices*. Of course, such a dichotomy oversimplifies important theoretical analyses of subjectivity, agency, and representation, and leads to more questions:

What does it mean to claim one's voice?

What does it mean to silence another's voice?

What does it mean to listen to another's voice?

Because considerations of voice cut across the range of English studies, interested students from Creative Writing, Textual Studies, and ESL/Applied Linguists are also encouraged to enroll and contribute to our exploration. Assignments will include some short “voice lessons” and the major writing task for the seminar: a research and/or pedagogical project identified by the student and developed in conversation with the instructor.