

*The Literacy of Performance*

What do the athlete, the entertainer, the artist, the professional worker and the writer all have in common? They each engage in a form of performance to fulfill the demands of their respective areas of expertise. Despite the obvious surface differences, all performances combine a variety of skills and processes – physical, cognitive, social, aesthetic. We could view these skills as a kind of literacy – a mastery of insider knowledge required in order to succeed in a particular field. We usually associate “literacy” with basic knowledge learned in school, such as reading and writing. But in performing their tasks, the football player, the musician, the electrician or stock broker all go through a process of becoming “literate” in their field and then demonstrating that literacy. As first-year college students, you are really no different from performers in other fields. You, too, will be engaged in acquiring a set of skills, a literacy that will help you to perform in an academic environment. How might studying the literacies of athletes and pilots and musicians, for example, prepare you to become a better reader and writer? That is the central question of this course. You will develop your own expertise as readers and writers by learning to summarize, compare and analyze what others have written about performance in different fields. This process will help you develop a vocabulary of “performance,” a working theory that you will then apply to other examples of performers of your choice and to your own experience. Each of these individual writing performances will contribute to a portfolio of roughly 20 revised and polished pages that demonstrate your level of expertise acquired after 15 weeks. Throughout the semester, we will focus on the process of writing performance – developing and organizing drafts, using feedback from classmates and me to help you revise drafts, proofreading for grammatical errors and developing a style that is both individual and appropriate for academic work.