

Writing the Essay

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*I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means.
What I want and what I fear.*

Joan Didion

Though this is a writing course, it is really about the development and exploration of ideas – skills that are vital to your work in a lab, or with numbers, or in making sense of the world around you. Through a series of writing assignments, workshops and in-class discussions, we'll explore questions of significance to you and your world, and employ evidence to develop insights into those questions. While the work you do in this course will draw on your experiences and existing knowledge, it will also challenge you to make sense of things in new ways. You will learn to read more deeply, and to write clear, well-structured, persuasive essays that show your mind at work as it reflects, and as it surprises itself in the process of writing.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- All assigned readings are in the Readings section of our Classroom site.
- [Tandon Digital Reader](#)

ASSIGNMENTS:

This course is divided into two progressions, Reckoning with Ideas and Seeing and Knowing, which are described below. A progression is a series of interconnected reading and writing exercises and drafts, which culminates in a final essay. In other words, there are no assigned topics, and you'll build your own essays, piece by piece.

Prompts, as well as the due dates for all writing assignments, will be posted on Classroom, and you'll submit your work there as well. Keep all of your work over the course of the term – including every writing exercise and draft – with my comments.

PREPARATION AND PARTICIPATION:

What we discuss and learn in class will be driven by your analysis of – and ideas and questions about – what you are reading and writing. Class participation means thoughtful, informed, respectful contributions to class discussions, enthusiastic collaboration and general good citizenship: being prompt, prepared, and constructive. Please bring the readings to class and come ready to discuss them. Chronic lack of preparation will affect your grade. If you need help with a text, I encourage you to come by my office hours, or visit the [Writing Center](#).

In an effort to make the classroom a space in which we interact with one another, and not with screens, we will not, with some exceptions, use laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc. in class; please silence your

phone and keep it out of sight during class. I'll post notes of our class discussions on Classroom; if you have a particular need for a device in class, please let me know.

We will often have peer workshops in class, during which you will read your classmates' work and provide thoughtful comments. Keep in mind that all of your written work is potentially public; if you want to write about something you'd prefer not to make public, let me know.

ATTENDANCE:

A writing seminar is a collaborative effort that requires your consistent, on-time attendance and your voice. Also, because this class proceeds by sequential reading, writing, and thinking work, students who miss class have difficulty completing essay progressions successfully. To ensure that you get the support you need, I will contact you and your advisor if you miss two classes in a row, or any three out of a possible eight classes.

Regardless of your performance on the progressions, if you are absent without excuse five times, your final grade will be lowered a full letter grade (e.g., from a B+ to a C+); if you are absent without excuse seven times, you will not be able to pass the course. In order to be marked present for a Zoom class, you must have your camera turned on and sufficient light for us to see your face.

Medical conditions, family emergencies, and the observance of religious holidays are legitimate excuses for an absence. Please let me know if you must miss class—in advance, when possible. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to check with your classmates about what you missed in class, and to contact me to arrange a schedule for completing any missed work.

Covid addendum: If you're feeling at all sick, please stay home and take care of yourself. If you miss class because you're not feeling well, I won't require a doctor's note; to have your absence excused, you can submit an asynchronous (done outside of the class period) version of the exercise we did in class that day.

CONFERENCES & OFFICE HOURS

Each of you will have two required drafting conferences with me during the semester. In addition, I will make time to meet with you whenever you need to see me...my door (or my Zoom meeting room!) is open.

GRADING:

Final Grade

You must complete all progressions (essays and all assignments/drafts, submitted in order, and revised in response to my feedback) to pass the course. Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

- 5%: Ex. 2: Texts in Conversation
- 30%: Essay 1: Reckoning with Ideas
- 35%: Essay 2: Seeing & Knowing
- 20%: Multimodal Presentation: Op-Doc
- 10%: Class participation and preparation, writing exercises, quizzes, etc.

Essay Grades

All final essays must:

- explore a substantial, intriguing question;
- develop an original, complex idea in a coherent, compelling way;
- represent and thoroughly analyze relevant evidence;
- have a thoughtful, well-defined beginning, middle, and end;
- use [correct grammar, punctuation, syntax, and citation](#);
- adhere to [MLA style](#);
- thoroughly satisfy the requirements of the essay progression; and
- be submitted on the due date.

You will lose one step of a letter grade (e.g., from B to B-) a day for each day that an essay is late. I will not accept your essay until the full progression (all writing exercises and drafts) has been submitted, in order, and I have commented on your work.

A work is excellent in every way. There is a consistent line of inquiry linking complex, original ideas. Instead of restating what was already known, or repeating the ideas of other authors, it reveals the writer's ethos and perception, and leaves the reader surprised and enlightened. The evidence is well-chosen and incorporated, and the analysis and reflection enhance the reader's understanding of it via key terms. The language, grammar, and syntax are pristine and elegant.

B work is ambitious and achieves many of its aims, or reaches less high and thoroughly achieves its aims. The ideas are substantial and coherent, though the connections between them may not always clear. The evidence is relevant and well-chosen, though perhaps insufficient in representation or analysis; the reader may have to infer what the writer should have made explicit. It is a solid essay, but not as rigorous or profound in its inquiry.

C work is problematic in its aims and execution. Its structure and line of inquiry are not clear, and its presentation and reflection on evidence are insufficient. It may simply restate the evidence without exploring it in enough depth. Problems with syntax, word choice, grammar, and text incorporation may also be apparent. Typically, it lacks a substantial question to explore, repeats a "point" instead of evolving an idea, or contains ideas that are simplistic or not well-connected.

D or *F* work is seriously deficient in ambition and execution. It fails to grapple with substantial ideas, or is seriously problematic in several of the areas described above: structure; complexity and originality; clarity of inquiry; presentation of and reflection on evidence; syntax, grammar, and word choice.

Writing Exercises

The writing exercises are, essentially, draft fragments of your essay. They are not meant to be perfect, finished pieces of writing in and of themselves; thus, I will not – with the exception of the Texts in Conversation exercise – give them letter grades. However, since the exercises are what you'll build your essay from (instead of an assigned topic), it's vital that you give them your time and attention and hand them in on time.

Starting with the second late exercise or draft, the grade on the final essay for that progression will be lowered by one step of a letter grade (e.g., from an A to an A-). If you neglect to do all the exercises in a

timely fashion or attempt to hand in all the exercises at once during the drafting period, you may receive an F for the essay progression.

Rewrites

You will have the option to rewrite your Reckoning with Ideas essay. The rewrite will be due approximately two weeks before the end of the semester, and your final essay grade will be determined by averaging the first grade and the rewrite grade.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

In this course, we'll engage with the language, evidence, and ideas of other authors, and it is vital that you keep track of which of those you've developed, and which have come to you from others.

Plagiarism is presenting as your own:

- a phrase, sentence, or passage from another writer's work;
- a paraphrased passage from another writer's work;
- facts, ideas, or written text found on the internet;
- another student's paper, or a purchased paper or research

Please review the [NYU](#) and [EWP](#) statements on Academic Integrity for further detail. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, or about citation and attribution, see me at any time; there will be no penalty for discussing this with me before you submit your essay.

THE WRITING CENTER:

[The Writing Center](#), located in Dibner 104, offers one-on-one conferences with EWP professors who are deeply familiar with the reading and writing this course requires. I strongly encourage you to take advantage of this valuable resource at any stage of the progression (to work on reading more deeply, brainstorm about a writing exercise, revise a draft, etc). It gets very busy during the essay-drafting season, so [book appointments](#) in advance.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

The Wellness Center

College life can be stressful and overwhelming for everyone. The [NYU Wellness Exchange](#) offers free, confidential counseling services. You can reach them 24/7 at the hotline 212.443.9999, or during walk in hours at 6 Metrotech Center: 646.997.3456.

The Moses Center

The [Moses Center](#) assists students with hearing and visual impairments, mobility impairments, learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders, chronic illnesses, and psychological impairments. The Center is located at 6 Metrotech Center: 646.997.3451.

[LGBTQ Student Center](#)
[Reporting Sexual Misconduct](#)

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRESSIONS

Reckoning with Ideas: In this progression, you'll conduct a rigorous reading of a primary essay, consider the broader implications of its ideas, and complicate or question the integrity of those ideas by putting the primary essay into conversation with conceptually-related ancillary sources. You'll develop your own idea, grounded in, but transcending, the ideas of your primary essay.

Skills Practiced:

- Close, critical reading and text representation
- Analyzing the ideas, evidence, rhetoric, and structure of complex texts
- Synthesizing evidence from and creating a conversation among conceptually-related texts
- Developing related research topics and search terms
- Practicing the art of reflection to generate and complicate ideas
- Crafting transitions to shape an argument and direct the reader
- Introducing and incorporating text in a clear, fluid way
- Cultivating an awareness of audience
- Writing a clearly organized essay that assesses the ideas of a primary text, and moves beyond that assessment to develop an original, compelling idea

Ex. 1: Engaged Reading

- Close, critical reading of a complex text; representation of the entire idea of that text

Ex. 2: Texts in Conversation (5%)

- Creating the foundation of your essay by orchestrating a complex, conceptual conversation between two texts, using an ancillary source as a lens to re-see a problem or question raised in the primary essay

Ex. 3: The Third Thing

- Bringing your own evidence to the essay; drawing on your existing knowledge and interests to define the inquiry; defining a question to explore

Final Essay (30%)

- 6-7 pages
- Primary essay and at least 1 ancillary essay, both from the assigned readings/course readers
- At least 2 other ancillary sources (from your research/reading/viewing)
- MLA format for parenthetical cites and Works Cited page

Seeing & Knowing: Via your close reading of a visual text (in the form of a documentary film), you'll consider a tension between vision (what can be seen with the eyes) and understanding (what can be seen with the mind), and develop an idea about the relationship between these two states of perception and discernment. In the simplest terms, this progression is about why we see how we see, what we try not to see and why.

Skills Practiced:

- Close, critical reading and analysis of visual and written texts
- Clear, accurate, and creative representation of a text and its ideas
- Identifying ways in which our sight is directed, enhanced, obstructed
- Using lens texts to define and re-see a visual text
- Using evidence to develop and complicate an idea of your own

- Developing an awareness of how your own work influences the reader's vision and understanding
- Developing literacy in a variety of modes

Ex. 1: Directed Sight

- Close, critical reading of a visual text; vivid, engaging representation of that text; discerning elements that direct what and how we see.

Ex. 2: A New Lens

- Putting texts into conceptual conversation; using one text to illuminate an idea or argument in another

Ex. 3: In Context

- Defining a larger context in which to examine your film; developing a research strategy for building that context

Final Essay (35%)

- 7-8 pages
- Documentary; 1-2 ancillary essays; 1-2 other ancillary sources; all necessary background sources for facts, historical context, etc.
- MLA format for parenthetical cites and Works Cited page.

Multimodal Presentation (20%)

- In a four to five minute presentation, you'll create an "Op Doc" - a video editorial or commentary on a current, public issue related to the seeing and knowing problem explored in your essay.

ON PREPARATION & PARTICIPATION

This course is as much about thinking as it is about writing, and it is about *your* thinking, not mine. Our class discussions will, to a large extent, be determined by the ideas and questions you have about what you are reading and writing. My goal is to have an environment in which all of you feel free to ask questions, respond to one another's opinions, raise ideas that seem off-the-wall, return to a previous discussion, etc., and in which your expression of all of the above is as clear as it can possibly be. Some guidelines and requirements to help get us there:

- **Come to class on time and prepared.** Bring hard copies of assigned readings to class. Have your writing exercises completed on time, in a thorough, coherent way. They will often be the focus of at least part of each class period; if your work isn't done, you'll fall behind.
- If you are not yet **annotating text as you read**, now is the time to get into that habit. Mark passages that enlighten or confuse you, note words, names, phrases, allusions that are unfamiliar to you (and look them up). This will help you to read more deeply, and access information for class discussions and, later, for your essay writing. If a writing assignment requires you to take specific notes, they *will* be the subject of our discussion and/or a quiz.
- **Do the writing assignment I've written.** In other words, focus on the specific thing the assignment asks of you, rather than on something else, or something more general) such as a summary or overview of a text). If you have a question about an assignment, ask me.
- **The written expression of your ideas is as important as the ideas themselves.** Though grammar, punctuation, and syntax are not technically a part of this course, I will, in the first progression, note problems on your writing assignments. It is your responsibility to review and correct them. For example, if I am repeatedly adding commas or circling semicolons, you need to **read the applicable rules** and get it right going forward. This kind of thing will affect your final essay grade, so you want to get a handle on it before that point. If you're unable to figure something out after checking the rules, see me any time.
- An essential aspect of being part of a community, which is what our class is, is **developing self-awareness and respect for others**. Every individual contribution to the class is valuable, and I ask that we all make those contributions in a thoughtful, respectful way, and with an understanding of the different perspectives and experiences in the room. Let's listen to one another, and to ourselves. If a reading or conversation causes you discomfort, please do not hesitate to raise it in class, or discuss it with me privately.
- Finally: very few of the questions you'll consider in this course have right answers. There is a right way to use a semicolon, and a right way to do a Works Cited page, but the complex, significant ideas we will explore here cannot be stated after one reading, or in one sentence, and will not be reducible to right or wrong. **Don't worry about being right.** Focus on doing work that's meaningful and interesting to you, and on opening yourself to new ideas and perspectives.