

Lecture 1

1.1 Contact Information

Good morning and welcome to English Essay Composition. My name is Patrick. 😊 I only recognize one student in the class, so I will introduce myself first, and then I'll introduce the course. Today, we will go over the syllabus, so there might be a lot of me talking — maybe a bit dry, a bit of useless stuff — but usually, in this course, I like to get students to discuss things and to give their opinions. So I'll try and do that today as well, as much as possible.

If you have any questions, do ask. I encourage it. 😊 I might forget to mention something, or something might not be clear. Please just let me know at any point if you're not sure about something. And yeah, like I say, I'll try and get you to do some talking today as well.

So my name is Patrick, and if you'd like to call me Patrick, that's totally fine. It doesn't have to be formal. Don't call me Mr. Patrick — that definitely sounds a bit weird in English — but many students do call me Mr. Patrick. 🙄 If you prefer to keep it formal, you can call me Mr. Thame. That's my name, and it's pronounced *Tame*, like the river in London, the Thames River, but without the S. Usually, when students send me emails, they call me Mr. Thames, like the river. Maybe that's autocorrect, I'm not sure, but it isn't Thames — it's Thame, without the S in the river. 🙄



A lot of students just call me "Teacher." I think "Teacher" sounds a bit strange in English — we don't normally say that. 🙄 "Professor" is fine, although I'm not technically a professor yet. Some students call me "Sir Patrick," which is definitely wrong. I'm not a knight — I haven't been knighted. So yeah, however you'd like to call me though, don't worry, anything is fine.

People ask, "Where do you come from?" I say there's a long answer and a short answer. 😊 The short answer is I come from the UK — Britain. The long answer is I'm half English, half Irish, but I grew up most of my life in Scotland. So, if I was a football player, I could play for the England team, the Scotland team, or the Ireland team. Unfortunately though, I do not have that talent. 🙄

I'll get your personal information next week, so if you do take the class — I know in week one a lot of students come here and decide the class is too difficult or too boring or whatever — and I never see them again. So, if you come next week, then I'll get your name, hometown, major, all that information from you, and I'll make a seating chart. I'll use that to identify which student is sitting

in which seat, so I can tell your name by where you're sitting. So, you have another chance — if you don't like sitting in the back, you have a chance next week to sit at the front instead, and that's much better, I think. All right. Let me just introduce the course quickly.

If you want to contact me about anything, there's my email, and there's my WeChat ID, and there's my office. If you email me, double check that you've put the right email address in. My advice is to copy and paste the email address. If you don't hear back from me within about 24 hours, that probably means I didn't get your email. So try again. I will check the junk folder for the first couple of weeks. For some reason, Fudan emails always go into my junk folder. 🙄 If you haven't emailed me before, about 90% seem to go into my junk folder, so I might be a bit slower at the start of the semester.

If you email me through eLearning, I usually don't check that every day. So if you send me an email on eLearning, I might get it, you know, five days later. I really only check eLearning like once a week. So it's better to email me on my personal email — that will go straight to my phone.

WeChat's fine. I don't mind using WeChat at all. But please don't send me a WeChat message at 1 AM. 🙄 I don't know why so many students do that — I wake up in the morning and I've got five messages from students in the middle of the night. It doesn't bother me, but I'm definitely not awake at 1 AM replying to students' WeChat messages. 🙄

And if you'd like to see me, then come to my office. That will be Tuesday mornings. I'll always be available on Tuesday morning — just let me know when you want to see me on Tuesday morning. Don't just show up. If nobody contacts me about coming to the office, I won't go to the office, okay? But I will always be available on Tuesday morning unless I give an announcement and say, you know, "No office hours this week." Sometimes there's some other reason. So email me the day before and say, "Hello, Professor Thame, I would like to come to your office tomorrow, Tuesday morning, at 10 AM."

If you want to talk about a plan for an essay, then I'll be happy to look at your plan. If you want me to explain your grade in more detail, I'll be happy to explain your grades. For example, if you think I gave you an unfair grade — if you got a B but you think you deserved an A, if I said 'not enough evidence' or 'poorly written' or something like that and you think you had lots of evidence and your writing was good — I will hear your appeal, and I will consider your grade, okay? 😊

Please don't come to the office and say, "Here is my essay that's due next week. Will it get an A?" I cannot pre-grade your homework. 🙄 I cannot say, "You have this problem, this problem, and this problem." You have to submit the essay to find out the grade. Please don't come to the office and say, "Please, please, please, I really want an A, will you give me an A?" Okay? You have to have a reason for why you think the grade was unfair — not just, "I really wanted an A." All right?

Anyway, that's all my contact information (pointing at the syllabus).

1.2 Syllabus

1.2.1 Course Goals

Course goals — here we're learning to write a persuasive argument. So in this class, we focus on persuasive essays. Essays that are trying to convince the reader of some action, or feeling, or prediction in the future — that's what I mean when I say "persuasive essays."

And my first question to you is: what other kinds of writing, what other kinds of reading, do you do as a college student? Don't say emails. Syllabus — I know you read the syllabus, I know you write emails — but I mean as part of your coursework. What other types of reading would you do as a college student? Nobody knows?

By the way, my students are very shy — they usually don't put up their hand when I ask questions. 🙄 So my policy is, if you make eye contact, then that is my signal that you want to answer the question. 🙄 Anyway, talk to whoever you're sitting with and see if you can give some examples of other types of writing that you read or write at college. I'll give you a couple of minutes to talk.

(TWO MINUTES LATER...)

All right, any thoughts? What kinds of writing do you guys do?

- Historical books? Yeah. I think it's hard to say a clear distinction between books and essays, because books could also be many different types. I guess, obviously, the big distinction there is that books are much longer than essays, but in other ways, they could be the same as essays. 😊
- Papers and journals? Good. I think you undergraduate students are not writing these yet, but definitely you'll be reading those. Once you're a graduate student, you'll be writing those as well.
- Reports? 🙄 Well, what's the difference then, do you think, between papers and journals, reports, and essays — or persuasive essays?

Papers are trying to tell us what is true, to establish facts, right? And as well, I think papers are usually intended for an audience who are educated in that field, right? If you're a medical student and you read medical journals — I think I couldn't read and understand them myself. I couldn't fully understand papers about it. But they're trying to tell us what is true, right? Does exposure to this environment cause this disease? Is that a factor or not? Is there this cold fact — like, does this medication lead to this condition, for example?

Essays are not trying to do that. Even reports — like in the news — they're telling us what happened. "Yesterday in the United States, that Charlie Kirk was killed." Did you see this in the news? Right. So they'll tell us what happened and why it's significant.

Essays tend to say, "What should we do about those things?" So they draw on papers, they draw on reports, and they say, right — the paper would say, "Environmental pollution is causing climate change," right? Essays would say, "What should we do about that? How should we feel about that? Should we care about that? Or what should our policy think about that?"

So I know that sounds kind of obvious, but I do see this problem a lot at the start of the class. Students think essays are writing reports, and I always get at least one essay — at least one — that is basically a piece of journalism, a news report. Something happened last week in America, and the essay just says, "This is what happened." That is absolutely not what essays are about. Essays are about: What should we do? How should we feel? What will come next?

And one more big one that nobody mentioned — I'd call it literature — that you would read or write: literature like poetry, short stories, novels. Not all of you will read or write literature — some majors do it a lot more than others — but I think, yeah, most undergraduate students will read some literature while they're at college, I hope. 😊

And again, I think it's important to understand the difference between essays and literature. My saying, what I always say, is this: If two people read a poem and they both think the author had different ideas — I think the poem was about adventure, you think the poem was about death — that's fine. We say, good, the author has done a good job. People interpret their work in different

ways, right? But if two people read the same essay and they have different opinions about what the author is trying to say, that's a very bad thing, right? You want your essay to clearly give your opinions to the reader. There shouldn't be much doubt about what you're trying to say. So literature tends to be about feelings, and essays tend to be about ideas much more.

Another question about our essays now: writing clearly, writing concisely, writing coherently. That seems pretty obvious. I will say this: when you are in high school, I think your teachers — and maybe here at Fudan too — your teachers would say, "Write English sentences that are longer, use bigger words, try and make it more beautiful to read." Is that true?

It is okay, I guess. Some students say no, my teacher didn't do that, but generally I think that's what students are taught. Like I just said, essays are just trying to convey information, so don't worry about writing beautiful English for this class. Better to write short sentences with simple, common words that people can understand. That's my goal for this class.

So that's good news for your writing. If your English isn't very advanced, that shouldn't be a problem for this class. 😊 If you cannot understand me now, if you're struggling to follow this class already — maybe it's too much, it's too difficult — it's only going to get much worse in the coming weeks. This is the easy class. Don't be careless with that.

And if you do write English beautifully, if you can write long, beautiful sentences in English with no grammatical problems, that's great. You can keep doing that in this class, but I'm not going to grade you for that. I'm not going to say, "Wow, an A+ because you wrote such a beautiful essay," right? I'm only going to say A because you wrote a creative, clear essay — because you're both learning to think critically and creatively. I think that's the really important thing: the creative part. 😊

Especially now with AI, I think you can easily get AI to write you a pretty good essay, right? It's very easy to do now — AI can handle basic essays quite well. We can talk more about that later. But being creative means standing out and making a contribution with new, original ideas that might actually change or shake up a debate. 🧐

So, if I don't teach this to students — if I just say to a class of students, "Go ahead, write me a persuasive essay" — 90% of students will give me a standard position. They will take side A or side B in an existing debate. They will say, "I think this position," which many, many, many, many other people also think, "and this is why." Or, "I take the opposite side from these people," which many people also think, "and this is why." So my rule for this class is: **never take a standard position in an existing debate**. The goal should be to try and think of position C — try to pull the rope sideways.

When you have Sports Day, you know the event — the tug of war — you have five people on this side pulling the rope, and you have five people on this side pulling the rope. Whoever can pull the rope over the line is the winning team. We call this a tug of war, right? If you think of it like a tug of war, but with millions of people here and millions of people there, one extra person here or one extra person there is going to make very, very, very little difference to the debate. 🙄 If you are the ten-millionth person to say, "I support euthanasia," — you know, euthanasia, the right to die — will that change people's minds? I don't think so. Or other ideas like gay marriage, the death penalty, or electric cars. If you just join one side in a standard position in an existing debate, nobody will care. They've heard it so many times before.

But if you take position C and think creatively, you might actually change people's minds. Can you guys give me some examples of standard positions in existing debates? What do we hear debated again and again and again — millions of people are for it, millions of people are against it — and if I said, "Write me an essay about this," all of you could do it now because you already know the

arguments in your head. Just talk to your partner and see if you can give me one or two examples of these kinds of debates.

(TWO MINUTES LATER...)

- Yeah, technology in the classroom — this is something I think you probably get as a topic in your high school textbooks, don't you? Like, "Should teachers allow cell phones in class?" Or, "Should high school or middle school students date?" Should they? And again, if you argue for or against that thing, it's probably going to be something we've all heard before.
- A few other examples — should AI be applied to grading or education? Yeah, absolutely. That's my example, actually. So, should we have AI in the classroom and make it available? Should students or teachers prohibit AI and say, "No computers, no phones in the classroom — just blank paper and a pencil, and you have to do all the work yourself"? Do you think that's right, or is it okay to let AI help? I think teachers and students aren't always on opposite sides. Surprisingly, I don't see that debated very often, but yeah, it's definitely something people think about, isn't it? 😊 I actually don't get that essay very often in this class — you know, "Should we have a 50% A limit?" — grade inflation topics like that.
- Anyone else? Yeah, prostitution and drug abuse — good examples. Generally speaking, prohibition. We will actually discuss that later in this class. Prohibition meaning: should we ban something that only harms yourself? Right — smoking, drinking, gambling — those types of things. Should I be allowed to do something where I might hurt myself but not harm other people?

I guess no one mentioned it, but probably the oldest example would be taxes. I think for thousands of years, people have argued for and against higher or lower taxes. Since countries and governments have existed, people have debated taxes.

Why is it that in the humanities we have these kinds of debates, but in STEM — science, technology, engineering, and mathematics — we usually don't? Again, I'm a humanities major myself, but in STEM subjects, you don't tend to get people arguing for or against something very fundamental in the science, right?

For example, the Earth is round — 100% of geography professors agree the Earth is round, right? If a geography professor said, "The Earth is not round," they probably wouldn't be a geography professor for very long. 🙄 Or biology professors — they all think evolution explains why we see diversity in species, right? If you disagree with the theory of evolution, I think you probably won't be a biology professor for very long. But economics professors, history professors, sociology professors, and psychology professors — they will disagree on basic aspects of their subjects. 😊

If the government says, "We are going to spend 100 billion dollars on this project," some Nobel Prize-winning economists will say, "This will help the economy," and some other Nobel Prize-winning economists will say, "No, this is bad for the economy." The only thing we can know for sure is that some Nobel Prize-winning economists are wrong. 🙄

But that would be weird if it happened in physics, right? If someone said, "When we launch this rocket, it will go into space," and some Nobel Prize-winning physics professors said, "No, it won't," while others said, "Yes, it will," you don't tend to have that kind of disagreement in physics. You can just run the experiment and find out.

So why is it that in the humanities we have this kind of problem, but in STEM subjects we usually don't? What's the difference? Think about it for a minute. Give your best shot. Talk to your partner.

(TWO MINUTES LATER...)

All right. Any ideas here? There's no wrong answer, but what are the fundamental differences between the humanities and STEM?

Yes, we can have different values in the humanities. So, if I say that the most important thing for any country is the economy, and you say, "No, I think the most important thing for any country is the environment," am I wrong and are you right? Absolutely not. We just have different values. No one could say one is right and one is wrong.

If I say that universities or colleges should produce students who are good citizens with a universal understanding of different subjects, and you say, "No, I think colleges should produce students who are experts in their field or able to work in certain jobs," well, are you right and am I wrong? No. We just have different values about what college should be for.

If I say the government should protect me, the government should keep me safe, and that we should maybe take away some freedom so that people feel safe when they're walking down the street, and you say, "No, I think that all people should be free, and the price to pay for freedom is losing some safety," that's just a question of values — a debate about what's right and wrong. But we try to persuade other people to agree with our position or object the other side.

And I think you're right as well — variables in an experiment in physics can be controlled. You can keep all variables the same and just change the one you're trying to measure. That's very hard to do when you're talking about people, and sometimes it's unethical when you're experimenting on people.

For example, in medicine, if I have a new vaccine and I want to see if it works, and I give you the new vaccine but I give someone else just water — is that ethical? And if some of you die from the disease while the others live, and I say, "Good, the vaccine works!" — that's clearly unethical, right? You can't just let people die to show that a vaccine works. So there are ethical questions involved as well.

But if I say, "I think Shanghai should cut taxes — this will boost the economy of Shanghai," how can I test that to see if I'm right? How can I do it? I really don't know the result until I actually do it. I can present models, but models usually don't scale up perfectly. You can test it on a small group of Shanghai residents and see what they say, but when you apply it to ten million or twenty million people, you just don't know if the results will be the same. So it's very, very tricky to do these kinds of things, because the humanities are about humans — and it's very difficult to treat humans as variables. Different people have different cultures, backgrounds, and lifestyles, and all of these differences influence outcomes. That's why we have essays. 😊

Anyway, we'll return to this in week three. Some of you will still be here, and there will be new students joining the class, but keep this metaphor in mind. I like it very much; I think it's very useful for this course.

1.2.2 Class Work

Now, about **class discussion and class work** — every week I will write up here what to do next week. I will not make a WeChat group. There will be no WeChat group for this class. So please pay attention to what I write on the board. It will either be a reading assignment or a class activity that we will do together.

Previously, I used to give students homework assignments. But now, I don't do that anymore — thanks to AI. I think it's too easy now to just upload the assignment to DeepSeek and say, "Please complete this assignment," — bang, bang, bang — and no thinking. So, to make sure you actually do the thinking, this semester we will complete these tasks in class. There will only be two of them, but they'll be done during class time.

The main thing, really, is the **class discussion**. Okay, I'm not grading this. I'm not saying A, B, or C, or anything like that. All I'm saying is: did you try, right? If you come to class and you give me your opinion, and I say, "That's totally wrong, I totally disagree," that's a good thing. Okay? Don't be upset that I disagree with you. I want to disagree with you. I think that's what this should be about. Okay? Just trying, having an opinion—you will get credit on the chart for that. So try and have an opinion.

Next week, we will talk about an essay called *The Case for Getting Rid of Borders*. I'll show you the essay soon. Try and have an opinion. Do you agree with the author? Do you disagree with the author? And why? And if I say, you know, "What do you think about this essay?" and you say, "hummm," then I know you didn't read the essay. Okay? Try and read the essay. Don't just say, "Please summarize the essay for me, DeepSeek," and then read the summary. I mean, that's fine—I encourage you to do that as well—but we're not just talking about what the author says. We're talking about *how* the author says it. That's the important part of the course.

Okay. Participating—I don't expect every student to say a lot every week. Don't come to class with a speech prepared and give us a long, long, long opinion like that. Okay? Just saying, "I disagree with the author. I think his economic arguments are wrong because X, Y, and Z"—that's great. You'll get full credit just for saying something like that.

If you never speak—if you sit at the back of class and I never hear your voice for the whole semester—you will not get a high score for your class participation. And even if your essays are good, you'll probably only get a B for the course. Try to participate sometimes and I will encourage participation. I'll have the seating chart and I'll call your name sometimes. So try to have an opinion ready for each class.

You'll write three essays, and the first one is a short, five-paragraph essay. Think of this as learning to ride a bicycle with training wheels. You know, when you're a kid and you learn to ride a bicycle, your parents put those little wheels on the back so it doesn't fall over. In this essay, I will say: you must do A, you must do B, you must do C. It's really just a checklist for grading. If you did those things, you get full credit.

The second essay is your longer essay, and you have a chance to be more creative. So for the second essay, I take off the training wheels and I just say, write an essay—1,200 to 1,700 words. How you write the essay is totally up to you. Try to learn from the class readings and apply those lessons in the longer essay.

The third essay—you have to choose an essay and then write an argument against it. So you are disagreeing with a different essay and saying why that author is wrong. Each one of those counts for 10% of your final grade.

There's also a final exam, and this is set by the department. So there are hundreds of students, maybe thousands of students, here at Fudan all taking English Essay Composition. And along with them, you will all take this final exam in week 17. Usually, it's on Monday of week 17. You will have no computer, no phone—you just have your pen and paper, and you have to write an essay in one hour. Students often get freaked out about that. They say, "That's very difficult, to write an essay from your head in one hour." That's true, but difficulty is relative, right? If it's difficult for you, it's difficult for everybody. And I am grading on a curve, right? So if everybody does badly, I just move

up the curve; if everybody does really well, I just move down the curve. So, don't worry too much about it. It just reveals your relative position in the class.

If you have been using DeepSeek to write all of your other essays in class, it will probably be much harder to do the final exam, okay? Because this is not like your high school writing exam—this is a bit more difficult. So my advice is: write these essays yourself, and then the final exam will be easier, or you'll know what to do in the final exam. Yeah, it counts for a massive 40% of your final overall grade. So this is the big decider—it decides who gets the A's and who gets the A-minuses.

I won't go over everything in the plan for the class, but you can look at this if you're wondering: when will I hand in the first essay? When will I hand in the second essay? And the third essay? You can find that information here—no need to email me and ask about that.

1.2.3 Content

I'll just say it's kind of a two-part syllabus. So, in the first part of the syllabus, we go over the basic building blocks of an essay—simple arguments, different types of arguments, evidence, logic, how to use those things—stuff that you would do in any persuasive essay.

In the second part of the semester, we go into more advanced essay techniques, things that you don't necessarily see in every essay. And you can choose to use them or not, depending on the kind of argument that you're trying to make. So you learn those basic building blocks, and then you hand in the first essay. Then you learn the more advanced stuff, and you hand in the second essay. So that's the kind of two parts of it.

I think this semester we lose one week, don't we, thanks to the 国庆 holiday? We lose a week in week 5, I think it is. So what that probably means is that you will hand in the first essay in week 9 on the calendar, not week 8, because we're pushed a week back. However, the second essay will still be in week 12. So you only get three weeks to do the second essay instead of four weeks, thanks to the holiday. Just be aware of that too.

At the end of the syllabus, we practice the final exam, just so that you can try doing it before the real final exam. And like I said, week 17—that's the real final exam. Any questions, all about the syllabus, generally about the class?

You can see the grade brackets here if you're wondering what the numbers mean. If I give you 95, that means you got an A. If I give you 84, that means you got a B+. Remember that. Only 30% of students—as one of you mentioned already—only 30% of students can get an A grade for this class. So sometimes a student whose average score is like 90, but they're not in the top 30% of the class, will get pulled down to an A- instead of an A.

That doesn't happen much anymore. If you're first years or even second years, you maybe don't remember that it used to be 30% of A and A- grades, and so some students who got an A—would be brought down to a B+. In those days, I would always get emails from students saying, "You ruined my life," right? That doesn't happen much anymore, because we can get unlimited A- grades now. But yeah, just be aware it does sometimes still happen.

All right, another thing on e-learning you can find is this course handbook. I wrote this a few years ago. It's really just my lecture notes from this class written down. The point here is that instead of me standing here talking like I am today, I can tell the students, "Read part one of the handbook," and then in the class we can practice doing stuff. And so I don't have to stand here explaining things. 😊 I'm always happy to answer questions. I just don't want to spend a lot of time lecturing. I think you can easily find that out by reading the handbook.

For next week, you can just read the very, very first piece, which is *Essay as a Form of Writing*. It just explains what our essays are and where they came from. It's just one page—that's all I'm asking you to read.

If you go to E-learning, you can download all this stuff, and probably you'll never need to go back to E-learning again. You can go there once, download everything, and you're done. Okay? You don't need to go back to E-learning at all. You can see some example essays if you want to look at some examples of nice, simple—sometimes difficult, but mostly simple—essays. You can find many examples from here. For the third essay, you must pick one of these to disagree with. So if you want to find one that you like or that you don't like—that you disagree with—you can do that now.

There are also class readings. There are seven of these. These are essays that we will look at in lots of detail. Next week's essay, *The Case for Getting Rid of Borders*, you can find there. It's a good first essay. It's only two pages—right? If you take out that picture, it's only two pages. The topic is immigration.

I think immigration in China is not a big, hot topic. Most people in China don't really talk about or care very much about immigration. In America and in the UK, immigration is probably the number-one most important topic to most voters. That's the thing people care about more than anything, and it's becoming a bigger and bigger issue. Many people vote for Donald Trump for immigration. They want him to close the border and kick out immigrants. I guess Chinese people maybe talk about it because a lot of students want to go to America to further study, and because of this they can't.

But, you know, give us your opinion on it. Also, most people have heard the argument for more immigration; most people have heard the argument for less immigration. But I think most people haven't heard the argument that we should have no borders. It's not a very common argument, so it's a good example of a creative idea.

Other essays you will read are called *In Defense of Torture*, which is written by a philosopher. Any philosophy majors here? I don't usually see many philosophy majors. This guy argues from a utilitarian perspective why we should allow torture. We'll do this one last. Usually, I make this the last essay we read. It's probably one of the more complicated ones. It's a great example of what we call logical progression. So you establish something, then you build on that, then you build on that again, right? So it's logical progression. Any of these essays, if you find the topic interesting, I encourage you to read ahead.

Anyone heard of John Maynard Keynes? Any economists here? Any economics majors? Fine. John Maynard Keynes—probably the most famous economist of the 20th century. This is kind of a long essay, one of the more difficult essays we read. He wrote the essay in 1930, and he argued that in 2030, humans won't go to work; machines will replace us at work. So this argument—I think you've all heard it before: "Will AI take our jobs?" People have been arguing this for, you know, 100 years since Keynes argued it. This essay is a very good example of how to make a prediction—how to say, "I think something will happen in the future." That's a common kind of persuasive essay.

Kill the Language Requirement—this essay was written by a college freshman at Yale in the United States. He argues that Yale students should not be forced to learn a foreign language. I think students here at Fudan usually like this essay just because you also have a language requirement. You may be in this class because of the language requirement.

He argues that from an English speaker's perspective, we should not have to learn a foreign language. I think a Chinese speaker's perspective is very different from his perspective. One of his main arguments is that if you do speak English, you don't need any other language; English is enough.

Some people criticize that point—*Teaching Kids to Kill*. I think if you want to read one essay from this list now, right, if you want to understand essays, this is the best essay to read: *Teaching Kids to Kill*. I strongly disagree with him. He is a psychology professor, a professor of psychology. He argues that video games should be banned because they are making children violent. So again, I think most of you would disagree with this essay. Personally, I think he is wrong. I don't think he's right about this topic. However, he has written a very, very good essay. Remember, the question for this class is not: is he right or wrong? The question is: **is he very persuasive?**

I also think it's a good example because in this one essay, he does everything that I want to teach you in this class, right? So in just four pages, he does all of the things I want you guys to understand. So if you can understand this essay, you can kind of understand essay writing from this essay. It's a really, really good example.

The Case for Getting Rid of Borders—that's next week. This was written by another philosophy professor called Nick Bostrom. He was a philosophy professor at Oxford, a very smart guy. However, this is the first time I'm teaching this course where I'm saying he was a philosophy professor. He got fired this year from Oxford. Oxford University fired him for some unfortunate things he said online.

So, you know, don't worry about that stuff. Just think about this essay, *Where Are They?* Can anyone guess who "they" is? Who are we always looking for? Yeah, aliens. He's talking about aliens from space. Very interesting essay. We'll probably do this in week six because it's about logic, right? We don't have evidence for aliens or against aliens, but he uses logic. He's kind of like Sherlock Holmes. Sherlock Holmes said, "You didn't do it, you didn't do it, you didn't do it... so it must be you." How do I know it was you? Because it's not them. He's kind of using that logic, but Sherlock Holmes logic here: could it be this, could it be this, could it be this? No. So it must be this, right?

Finally, *Why Economists Should Like Booze*, drinking alcohol—I like this topic—we mentioned it earlier, prohibition. Is it a good thing to do something harmful if it has other benefits? So generally you're talking about prohibition. Again, a nice, short, simple essay. We'll probably do this essay first and then the borders essay second, just because these are good, simple examples of essays.

1.3 Class Discussion

Every semester, usually there is some hot topic—something that blows up in the news and becomes a big topic that everyone's talking about. When I was first teaching this course, there was a scientist in 深圳. He genetically modified some human embryos to create children who are immune from HIV. Do you guys remember this?

Suddenly, I think maybe 25% of my students wanted to write essays about: should we ban genetic engineering, right? This was a hot topic. And now I always say, don't do hot topics, because when there's a hot topic, everybody wants to do the hot topic. And I get the same essay about the same thing from all the students, right? So don't do hot topics. But it's fine—we can talk about hot topics here in week 1.

The last class told me—I didn't know this until today. Last class told me the hot topic in China just now is something that happened in 武汉. But have you all heard about this? Some problem between male students and female students in the library. I still don't know the details. They wouldn't tell me. They said it's very terrible and they didn't want to say it in class. But they said that, you know, because of that, the hot topic now is gender. And I guess about, you know, sexual harassment. It's the whole topic just now, isn't it? You know, should we believe someone if someone says, "He touched me in the wrong way"? Should that boy's picture go online, right? And should everyone be able to know about this before it goes to a court, for example? So that's a hot topic.

Another hot topic, I think, is always coming up, is AI in education. Like some of you said earlier, you know: should the teacher say, "No phones, no computers, just pen and paper, and you have to do everything in class using your brain," or is it okay to say, "Yeah, I can ask AI to summarize everything, do the work, and help me do the work"? And in this way, AI can do the boring stuff, and then humans can focus on the advanced, creative stuff.

As a teacher, I do sometimes think students use AI too much. I get emails from students saying, "Dear [teacher's name], I am [my name]. I would like to request a leave of absence. I know how important it is to attend classes. However, I sincerely must miss this class for the following reasons." And I think, okay, students don't even read the thing the AI has written for them—they just get the AI to write it and send it. Please don't do that, because I say, "Hello, dear [student's name]." You know, that's GPT as all.

Is it good when students are writing their homework with AI, the teachers are grading the homework with AI, and no one's actually gaining from this at all? The same thing is happening with jobs, isn't it? Everyone's CV, everyone's resume is written by AI. The companies use AI to check the resumes, and nobody gets hired, right? Until it's a big disaster. What do you guys think? Like I said earlier, you could be for it, you could be against it, or you could be kind of somewhere in the middle. How should teachers deal with AI? Should we try and prevent it?

Many teachers—most teachers I have read online who write essays about this topic—there are many teachers, if you look online, college professors writing essays arguing that AI is killing critical thinking. There was even a student last week who wrote an essay, an American student, and she argued that all her classmates don't think anymore. They just use ChatGPT. The teacher will say, "What did you think about this short story?" The students will say, "Summarize this short story." Boom. "I think the story contains elements of A, B, and C." And that no one's actually reading it or thinking anymore. What do you guys think, as students?

So, the only thing we should do about it—should teachers simply try and remove it from the classroom? No more homework? You know, my little nephew doesn't have to worry too much about his math homework. He just gets out his phone, ChatGPT looks at the math question, tells him the answer. It also tells him how to get to the answer, right? The teacher will never know.

I saw a lecture recently on YouTube, and the professor was saying that he taught the course for many, many, many years and the average grade was, you know, 65 in that course. And since ChatGPT came out, the average grade is 95, right? Have you seen this lecture? And so it's becoming very obvious. I can't say "you definitely use AI" or "you definitely don't use AI," but the statistics show me that students are using AI, right? And so, what should a teacher do?

Anyway, that is one hot topic. What I'd like you guys to try and think of are other hot topics—what is trending if you go online these days? Besides gender and AI, what other topics are people talking about a lot just now that you could take a position on? Again, just talk to your partner for a minute or two and see if you can think of some more examples. Go ahead.

(TWO MINUTES LATER...)

- Yeah, unemployment. So what's the controversy? Something happened recently, or has something changed recently? Why is it controversial? Do you mean like AI taking jobs? Recently, like in the spring, there were many essays about how college graduate employment rates had dropped. And one argument was that the reason for this is that AI can do the jobs that college graduates used to do. You know, entry-level jobs when you just start in a company or your first year, and your job is to make PPTs and do basic programming. AI can do those jobs, and so companies aren't hiring as many graduates because they have AI. So that was one controversy—is that what you meant? Yeah, fine.

Do you personally fear losing your job—your future job—to artificial intelligence? It probably depends very much on your major. If you're an English major and you're planning to be an interpreter, I think you're probably in big trouble, right? But I don't know—if you're an AI specialist, that's probably great. Many more jobs for you; that's your major, perhaps.

- Yeah, military parade. What is controversial? So Donald Trump had a military parade—did anyone see it? Like in June, I think. And it was very silly, you know, kind of weird. And China had a military parade, and it's very big, showing strength, I suppose. Yeah, people compare these two military parades. Most countries don't have them. China does. Russia does. France does. In Britain, we usually don't have big military parades, I suppose. So yeah, should we have military parades like this? I guess not many students will pick this topic because it's maybe too controversial. I always say, I won't tell you "don't do a topic" or "do a topic," but do be careful. Don't get yourself in trouble, and most importantly, don't get me in trouble. 🙄
- Climate Change? Yeah, I guess that has kind of become a hot topic because we all notice it, don't we? This summer, when I was at home, it was over 20 degrees every day in my hometown. And you all probably think that sounds wonderful. But in my hometown, everyone was complaining—21 degrees, oh my God, how can it be 21 degrees? Normally that would happen twice a year. This summer, it seemed to be 20 degrees every day. Of course, in Shanghai, it's also hotter than usual most days in the summer, I remember. When I first came to Shanghai, September was kind of a cool month. Now September is a really hot month, isn't it? So we're all feeling the heat these days, and heat has become normal.

There was an essay in *The Economist* magazine recently arguing that England should accept that it is no longer a cold country. English people always think of themselves as a cold country. "We don't need air conditioning. We don't need days off in hot weather. We are a cold country." But the essay argued that England should accept: we are now a hot country. We should put in air conditioning and take days off in hot weather as well.

- Gun control? Yeah, it is a very hot topic. Yesterday, there was that famous debater in America, Charlie Kirk. Did anyone see the video? Definitely wouldn't be allowed in China, right? He was sitting there debating and suddenly he got shot in the neck. The political situation is very terrible. And, you know, everyone went crazy. But the irony was that he had said, "Some people must die to protect our freedom to own guns." And now he has died from a gun while he was debating. It just seems crazy and really weird. The really strange thing was, the question the person asked him in the debate was about guns, and he was answering a question about guns—and then he got shot. It's really crazy. So many people think it's suspicious.
- Too much reliance on technology? Yeah, a lot of people don't have basic skills anymore—technology does it. And if we needed those basic skills, that would mean we couldn't do it. A good example would be flying a plane. Most pilots nowadays know how to use the computer to set the coordinates to fly the plane. But if the computer breaks down, do they really know how to fly the plane on their own? Sometimes not—especially younger pilots. The people who

need to read maps are, you know, soldiers who might find themselves in a war where there's no phone signal, or there's GPS jamming, and all kinds of crazy stuff. But the average person is never going to need to read a map. And I suppose you could make historical comparisons, right? Like, I don't know how to hunt. I don't know how to make a weapon and catch a rabbit and cook it. If the farming system disappeared, I would starve, because I don't know how to catch my own food. That's probably never going to happen, so we don't need to worry about it. Do you guys agree with that? I think that's an interesting opinion.

Yes, very interesting points, guys. I think that's very thought-provoking, intellectually nurturing. AI and the use of AI should be in education. Like, if we created a tool but we don't use it, then why did we create it? I think it's the teacher's job to develop their teaching to keep up with technology, and not just simply ban the technology.

As teachers, you can teach students how to give prompts to AI to lead to the aspects and results that you want students to have. Like, if the student wants to develop their thinking, the student can develop it whether they use AI or not. Students can disagree with the AI. A student who doesn't want to develop their thinking skills—without AI, they would still just write some very plain ideas. So, students themselves can choose whether or not they want to develop that skill. It's just offering a better choice. But, like what he pointed out, it's very easy to predict what they're going to choose, right? Because we are naturally lazy.

Yeah, I heard this in the other class. Many students said, "Well, when I was in high school, I just used AI for summarizing or explaining what the teacher said." And I think that's kind of a selection effect, right? All of you here at Fudan are that kind of student, right? Otherwise, you wouldn't be here at Fudan. You are the top 1%. But those students who use AI for overcoming critical thinking—we won't talk to them, because they're not here at Fudan. They never developed their critical thinking skills, right?

Another thing I might say to you as well is—should we cancel PE class because we have cars? Like if I say, "I don't need to go running today because I can just drive," it's the same thing as saying, "I don't need to write the essay because I can just use AI." To walk, absolutely. Like PE class can make you healthier, and if we use our brains to, like, write the colors for a whole day—as for me, if I don't do sports regularly, I constantly feel exhausted. I think some regular sports can make people energetic.

You're making my argument for me! Your brain will be more energetic if you do more critical thinking. You know, I like to do a word puzzle—you know, Wordle or something like that. And, you know, I could take a screenshot and say, "ChatGPT, what's the answer?" And now I've got the answer, right? But I don't do that because I want to check if my brain is working by doing the puzzle. Isn't it the same thing with AI in the classroom? It's a huge debate, obviously, right?

If you want to practice your brain, you can find other ways. I did have a math student in the last class who argued that there are things in math that AI just can't do—that humans are still better at—and that AI helps us get rid of all the boring, useless stuff so we can focus on the useful, creative stuff.

A student talked about mom jobs...

I guess this kind of connects to the point about language, doesn't it? Some language might seem inherently sexist, implying that it's just for women or just for men. I can't think of any examples right now, but there definitely are others — where a bad word is related to something female, and a good word is related to something male. Even calling someone a woman, you know, or saying "don't be a girl," that's seen as a negative thing, while "be a man" seems like a positive thing — it's just inherent. There's one essay in the example essays folder about this — about using language

— it's called *In Defense of Prejudice*. Actually, you've read that in the Critical Thinking course as well. But, you know, it talks about whether banning words or deliberately changing language is a good thing or not. Because some people argue that if you try to change things, it just makes it worse — like, if you say, "you can't say that word," then that word becomes even more powerful.

Some opinions from that essay also relate to jobs. Definitely, AI will reshape industries. So we should improve ourselves and learn how to use the technology to keep up with the world. Take an example: when the steam engine came out in the past, people were amazed by it, right? But before workers went to work, they had to learn how to use the steam engine, right? And the steam engine definitely offered more jobs for people to work. And these days, the creativity of people cannot be replaced by AI, right? AI definitely reduces the difficulty of computing and calculating. So we should, and we could, spend more time improving our skills — to analyze and prove things — so we can create more creative work, right?

So, like in the Industrial Revolution, most jobs became machine operators. In the future, most jobs will be like AI operators — people who use AI to do certain tasks. I could imagine that in a world where, you know, if you're an accountant doing the accounts for a company, and AI can do 25% of that job, you would still be an accountant — with the AI helping you. But if AI can do 50% of your job, are you still an accountant? And when AI can do 90% of your job?

I can imagine a world where it just creeps a little bit more and more every year, and one day AI is doing 100% of your job, but you still call yourself an accountant. You still go to work, you still just turn on the AI and press "Go," and then you're just sitting there not doing anything. Would the whole world end up like that?

I knew a pilot once, and before he retired, he said that when he was a young man, he had to learn how to fly the helicopter using instruments — you know, the dials — and he had to use a map to know where he was going. It was really, really difficult. But just before he retired, he said it had completely changed — you get into the helicopter, you turn on the computer, you press where you want to go, you turn on the engine, you go up, and then you just press "Go" and sit there doing the radio the whole time. You know, that will go further and further and further, until people aren't really doing much work anymore.

I think we're out of time, so thanks for sharing your opinions and the story. You didn't get to share your opinion today, but that's okay. We're just practicing here, so try to do this next week. The topic next week is **immigration** — do you think immigration is a good thing or not? Should it be encouraged or not? The author we'll read argues that we should not have borders — that we should just let people go wherever they want, at any time, from whichever country they come from to whichever country they want.

Try to ask yourself: how does he make that argument? There are three key arguments you need to look at — which of them you agree with, which you disagree with, and why. Don't forget to check out the handbook and all the other stuff like the syllabus on *YouLearning*. And remember, if you're here next week, I'll make a seating chart at the beginning of class. So I'll ask you, you know, "What's your name?" Just tell me the name you want me to call you. You don't need to tell me your full name.

If you have an English name, of course I can remember it. If you want to use your Chinese name, that's totally fine too. But you don't need to tell me your whole name — you don't need to say, "My name is Wang Momo." You can just say, "Call me Wang," or "Call me Momo." You don't need to give me your full name. And if you want to have a Russian name, or a French name, or a German name, whatever — that's fine as well.

Alright, I will see some of you again next week.

The End