

Politics Writing-Intensive Seminar

Politics 100 • Class Number 30252 • Winter 2026
University of California, Santa Cruz
Prof. Benjamin L. Read

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In person in Merrill Faculty Annex 157: Thursdays, 4:00–5:00pm
Please sign up at <https://tinyurl.com/benreadofficehours>
You may also email me to make an appointment outside this time slot.
Date of this syllabus: Version 2, February 9, 2026. Subject to change; websites will have latest version

Overview:

This is a **skill-building** seminar. Its purpose is to help you develop basic and advanced skills in writing, as well as in argumentation, analysis, and critical engagement with readings. We consider a range of different methods and approaches to writing effective and persuasive argumentative essays. We aim to build habits and capacities that will serve you well both in your university classes and also in your future career, whatever direction that may take. The class will provide rigorous training in ways that are nonetheless fun and, in certain respects, relaxed (no exams, no long reading lists). Students will become more capable and confident as writers and editors, and also more discerning and critical as readers. Specific learning outcomes are listed below.

Acknowledgements: The Politics 100 seminar is the creation of several people. I thank my Politics colleagues Professors Eva Bertram, Kent Eaton, Dean Mathiowetz, Vanita Seth, and Megan Thomas, who worked on the overall template for Politics 100, helped oversee its development in our department's curriculum, and/or shared their syllabi and teaching experiences. I have borrowed from these materials in making my version of this course.

Course Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the term, students will be able to:

1. Summarize another person's argument.
2. Compare two (or more) arguments.
3. Understand the difference between analysis and description, and demonstrate the ability to analyze something (a text, an argument, a situation, a conflict, a process).
4. State an argument, in the form of a refutable and worthwhile claim or set of claims.
5. Judge what kind of evidence (type) and how much evidence (quantity) is appropriate to support an argument's claim or claims.
6. Cite sources appropriately; understand plagiarism and how to avoid it.
7. Organize and sequence evidence and analysis to make an effective argument in a logically structured essay.
8. Compose effective paragraphs, with attention to the structure and sequence of information conveyed.

Course Outline:

The course is roughly organized around these units — although many topics will appear in multiple parts of the course.

Unit I: What Is an Argument? (Sessions 1–6)

- Summarizing; comparing; describing vs. analyzing; understanding an argument as a set of claims

Unit II: Working with Evidence (Sessions 7–10)

- Understanding how much and what kind of evidence is needed to defend or demonstrate an argument's claims; gathering evidence; citing evidence.

Unit III: Composing an Essay (Sessions 11–16)

- Organizing evidence and analysis into a logically developed essay; understanding how and why sequence matters; developing effective paragraphs; understanding the function of introductions and conclusions.

Unit IV: Revising an Essay (Sessions 17–20)

- Revising to strengthen the argument; revising to incorporate new insights or material; giving and getting feedback; editing and proofreading.

Readings:

Almost all readings will be available on the course Canvas site (<https://canvas.ucsc.edu>), under Files.

You may be interested in purchasing a copy of Gordon Harvey, *Writing with Sources: A Guide for Students*, 3rd edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2017) — but this is optional, it is also available online at library.ucsc.edu.

Assignments and Ground Rules:

Please read the following carefully before deciding to stay enrolled in this course.

Attendance:

Attending class, on time, is firmly required. Seminars, even more than other classes, depend on everyone's presence. Your being there helps you learn and makes the class work. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. Good attendance is rewarded with a modest bonus. Unexcused absences will lower your quarter grade. Three percentage points will be deducted from your course grade for every unexcused absence. To put that in perspective, the difference between a B+ and a C+ is ten percentage points. It is entirely possible to fail the course through non-attendance. I am quite understanding about family emergencies, illness or other serious exigencies, and will treat them as excused absences. If you miss class, explain the circumstances via email (in advance if possible).

Classroom participation and etiquette:

- Come prepared for class, and contribute actively to class discussion. Participation in class counts for part of your class grade.
- It will be appropriate to use computers in the classroom for much of this class, but please use them only for class-related purposes (not texting, social media, and so forth).

Reading and preparation for class:

This course involves less reading than a typical Politics course, but there is some reading and it is required. Readings and other pre-class assignments must be completed before the class meeting for which they are assigned (except the first day). Note that although I have strived to make it easy for you to find the readings, it is your responsibility to obtain and read these items. In particular, download the electronic readings ahead of time.

Originality of work and prohibition on artificial intelligence:

Everything you write and submit for this class must be your own original work, except for quotations and other material properly attributed to the sources (in the ways we will discuss). You may not use artificial intelligence software or services. It is cheating to present the work of another person or a computer as your own, and defeats the fundamental skill-building purpose of this class.

Email:

You must use and regularly check your official UCSC email account, i.e., the one that AIS sends mail to. Make sure Canvas sends announcements to this account.

Grading:

Most assignments are scored on a 0-100 scale, where 90-100 is an A, 80-89 is a B, etc. Grades of A minus or higher are reserved for work of exceptionally high quality. The grade of B is for work that is truly good although not great. The grade of C is for minimally acceptable work.

Assignments and Grade Weighting:

Your final grade for the quarter will be calculated per the following, though the exact percentages are subject to adjustment.

- Short Summary: **5 percent**
- Longer Summary: **1 percent** [to be adjusted in the future]
- Debate Summary & Analysis: **5 percent**
- Use of Sources
 - Quiz on Gordon Harvey readings: **3 percent**
 - Citation Practice: **3 percent**
- Short Argumentative Essay (SAE)
 - Draft of Body Paragraphs for SAE: **5 percent**
 - Complete SAE, with Introduction and Conclusion: **10 percent**
 - Peer Edits on Another Student's SAE: **5 percent**
- Short Research Paper (SRP)
 - Topic and Research Question for SRP: **5 percent**
 - Formatted Reference List for SRP: **5 percent**
 - Draft of Body Paragraphs for SRP: **5 percent**
 - Complete SRP, with Introduction and Conclusion: **15 percent**
 - Peer Edits on Another Student's SRP: **5 percent**
- Revision of Short Research Paper: **15 percent**
- Class Participation: **13 percent**

Time commitment:

The UCSC Academic Senate reminds us: "Systemwide Senate Regulation 760 specifies that one academic credit corresponds to three hours of work per week for students during a 10-week quarter. This means that the average workload for a 5-credit course is 150 hours or 15 hours per week." With this in mind, expect to spend each week, on average:

- Class: 3 hours and 10 minutes
- Reading and other preparation for class, as well as the writing assignments: 11 hours and 50 minutes, i.e., something like 5 hours for each class session.

Accommodations:

UC Santa Cruz is committed to creating an academic environment that supports its diverse student body. If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodations to achieve equal access in this course, please submit your Accommodation Authorization Letter from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me privately during my office hours or by appointment, preferably within the first two weeks of the quarter. We would also like to discuss ways we can ensure your full participation in the course. We encourage all students who may benefit from learning more about DRC services to contact DRC by phone at 831-459-2089 or by email at drc@ucsc.edu.

Unit I: What Is an Argument?

Tuesday, January 6, 2026: [Day 1: Orientation, Introductions, and Initial Exercises]

- Pre-class assignment: *None for today*

- In-class activities:
 - Introductions and getting to know one another
 - Orientation to the class
 - Self-introductory writing assignment that is also a diagnostic

Thursday, January 8, 2026: [Day 2: The Basics of Summarizing]

- Pre-class assignment:
 - Reading 1: Elizabeth Economy, “China’s Inconvenient Truth,” *Foreign Affairs* (May 28, 2021)
 - **Short summary assignment:** Write a one-paragraph summary of Elizabeth Economy’s article. Submit via Canvas.
- In-class activities:
 - Instructor’s short comments: Reasons why we summarize; things that summaries might contain
 - Summarize arguments in small groups
 - Large-group discussion of these arguments
 - Instructor presents material from in-progress work that engages in summary

Tuesday, January 13, 2026: [Day 3: More on Summarizing]

- Pre-class assignment:
 - Reading 2: Kevin Rudd, “Understanding China’s Rise under Xi Jinping” (2018)
 - **Longer summary assignment:** Write a one-page summary of Rudd’s article. Submit via Canvas.
- In-class activities:
 - Discussion of Rudd’s article

Thursday, January 15, 2026: [Day 4: Summary and Analysis]

- Pre-class assignment:
 - *None*
- In-class activities:
 - Further discussion of Rudd’s position and editing students’ summaries

Tuesday, January 20, 2026: [Day 5: Summary and Analysis]

- Pre-class assignment:
 - Read the following two essays and come prepared to discuss the arguments that each makes:
 - Andrew J. Nathan, “Beijing Bull: The Bogus China Model,” *The National Interest* (October 22, 2015)
 - Daniel A. Bell, “Facts and Values: On China’s Political System” *The National Interest* (November 17, 2015)
- In-class activities:
 - Discussion and workshopping of the analyses

Thursday, January 22, 2026: [Day 6: Comparing Analyses]

- Pre-class assignment:
 - Prepare for debate summary and analysis writing
- In-class activities:
 - **Pen and paper:** Drafting the debate summary and analysis
 - Orientation to the Short Argumentative Essay
- Post-class assignment:
 - Students will transcribe the summary and analysis paragraphs word-for-word after class, and submit that as a Word file, then separately submit a second Word file with an edited version of them.

Unit II: Working with Evidence

Tuesday, January 27, 2026: [Day 7: Using Sources]

- Pre-class assignment:
 - Read the first chapter of Gordon Harvey, *Writing with Sources: A Guide for Students*, 3rd edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2017). It is called “The Role of Sources.”
- In-class activities:
 - We’ll have a short quiz on this reading
 - Discuss this chapter and consider examples. The examples will consider ways in which different articles present and incorporate various kinds of source materials, and how those sources are used to advance the author’s argument.

Thursday, January 29, 2026: [Day 8: Avoiding Plagiarism and Citing Precisely]

- Pre-class assignment:
 - Read the 2nd and 3rd chapters of Gordon Harvey, *Writing with Sources: A Guide for Students*, 3rd edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2017). These chapters are titled “Integrating Sources” and “Misuse of Sources.”
- In-class activities:
 - We’ll have a short quiz on this reading
 - Discuss these two chapters
 - Consider examples of plagiarism
 - Work through specific examples of citing, quoting, and paraphrasing

Tuesday, February 3, 2026: [Day 9: Examining the Use of Evidence in Texts]

- Pre-class assignment:
 - Take a look at the Batto & Read 2024 article, and the Chandra 2016 chapter. You don’t need to read every word; you should skim. Think about 1) what are some reasons why dynastic politics might be, or might not be, a problem for democracy? 2) Especially in Batto & Read, consider the use of sources — as we are thinking in this unit about how to incorporate sources. Additionally: I recommend that you also download and browse in the other potential sources so that you're getting ready to use material from them in your paper.
 - Citation practice exercise: showing how you would create in-text citations and reference list items for each of those two readings.
- In-class activities:
 - Citation practice
 - Preview of coming Short Research Paper assignment
 - Discussion of the two articles we read for the Short Argumentative Essay

Thursday, February 5, 2026: [Day 10: Short Argumentative Essay]

- Pre-class assignment:
- In-class activities:
 - Discussing / brainstorming core ideas concerning dynastic politics
 - **Pen and paper:** Drafting body paragraphs of the SAE.
- Post-class assignment:
 - Students will transcribe these paragraphs word-for-word after class, and submit that as a Word file, then separately submit a second Word file with an edited version of them.

Unit III: Composing an Essay

Tuesday, February 10, 2026: [Day 11: Introductions and Conclusions]

- Pre-class assignment:
 - *No assignment*
- In-class activities:
 - Further discussion of Short Research Paper (SRP)
 - Discuss how to write introductions
 - Discuss how to write conclusions
 - **Pen and paper:** draft introduction, concluding paragraphs for the Short Argumentative Essay.
- Post-class assignment:
 - Students will transcribe these paragraphs word-for-word after class, and submit that as a Word file, then separately submit a second Word file with an edited version of them together with the body paragraphs. That will complete the SAE assignment.

Thursday, February 12, 2026: [Day 12: Evaluating and Peer-Editing SAEs]

- Pre-class assignment:
- In-class activities:
 - Discussion of examples of paragraphs from students' SAE
 - Prepare for peer-editing of SAE
- Post-class assignment:
 - Students do peer edits of SAE
 - Students submit SRP topics, research questions

Tuesday, February 17, 2026: [Day 13: Discussion of Peer Edits, Finding Sources]

- Pre-class assignment:
- In-class activities:
 - Discuss peer edits of SAE
 - Talk about finding sources for SRP

Thursday, February 19, 2026: [Day 14: Building Source Material into Arguments]

- Pre-class assignment:
 - Bring at least one source that you have found for your SRP, digitally or as a print-out
- In-class activities:
 - Discuss further about sources and how to build compelling arguments from them

Tuesday, February 24, 2026: [Day 15: Starting to Draft the SRP]

- Pre-class assignment:
 - Students submit formatted reference list for SRP
 - Using pen and paper, students take notes from their sources. Bring these notes to class.
- In-class activities:
 - **Pen and paper:** Draft at least two body paragraphs of SRP, from notes
- Post-class assignment:
 - Students transcribe into a Word document the body paragraphs of SRP that they have drafted, word-for-word, then separately submit a second Word file with an edited version of them.

Thursday, February 26, 2026: [Day 16: Drafting Introduction and Conclusion to the SRP]

- Pre-class assignment:
- In-class activities:
 - Review and further discussion of ideas about writing introductions and conclusions
 - **Pen and paper:** Draft introduction, conclusion of SRP
- Post-class assignment:
 - Students transcribe into a Word document the introduction and conclusion of the SRP that they have

drafted, word-for-word, then separately submit a second Word file with an edited version of them, along with the earlier body paragraphs. This completes the initial draft of the SRP.

Unit IV: Revising an Essay

Tuesday, March 3, 2026: [Day 17: Editing and Revision 1]

- Pre-class assignment:
- In-class activities:
 - Exercises in editing and revision
 - Discussion of what kind of editing and revisions the papers need

Thursday, March 5, 2026: [Day 18: Editing and Revision 2]

- Pre-class assignment:
 - Read: Mary Norris, “Holy Writ” (Confessions of a Comma Queen), *The New Yorker*, February 16, 2015
- In-class activities:
 - Short discussion of the piece by Mary Norris. Discussion of the culture and organization of copy editing in academia and the professional publishing world
 - Explain peer editing of SRP, which students will do this weekend

Tuesday, March 10, 2026: [Day 19: Peer Editing]

- Pre-class assignment:
 - Edit the SRP by one of your fellow students that you have been assigned
 - Work on revising your own SRP
- In-class activities:
 - Each student presents those edits, and the author responds

Thursday, March 12, 2026: [Day 20: Course Review and Wrap-Up]

- Pre-class assignment:
 - By today’s class, you should be well on your way to completing your final paper (the revised SRP)
- In-class activities:
 - Discussion of revisions
 - Exercises in tightening and sharpening
 - Review of all the components of this class
 - Discussion of the class itself

Wednesday, March 18, 2026: **Final paper due at 7:30pm** (feel free to turn it in earlier than this)

Reminder: There is no final exam in this class.