

# Politics Writing-Intensive Seminar

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

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Instructor's email: bread (at) ucsc (dot) edu  
Course web site: <https://canvas.ucsc.edu/>  
Instructor's web site: <https://benread.net>  
Course meetings: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 5:20–6:55p, in Cowell Acad 223  
Office hours: On Zoom: Wednesdays, 9:00–10:00am  
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: January 6, 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](http://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.
- **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.
- **Grade weighting:** Your final grade for the quarter will be calculated per the following, though the exact percentages are subject to adjustment.
  - Class participation: **20 percent**

- Summary assignment: **6 percent**
- Summary + analysis assignment #2: **6 percent**
- First four-page paper: **20 percent**
- Second four-page paper: **20 percent**
- Final paper (revised and expanded from the 2nd four-page paper): **20 percent**
- Miscellaneous in-class writing assignments: **8 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](mailto: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)
  - **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)
  - **Summary assignment:** Write a one-page summary of Rudd’s article. Submit via Canvas. This assignment is 6% of your course grade.
- 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:
  - **Summary + Analysis Assignment:** This will involve summarizing and analyzing the differences between Nathan and Bell's positions. Submit via Canvas prior to class. This assignment is 6% of your course grade.
- In-class activities:
  - Discussion of students' assignments
  - Orientation to the first four-page paper, which is due in two and a half weeks

## Unit II: Working with Evidence

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

- Pre-class assignment:
  - Read the first two chapters of Gordon Harvey, *Writing with Sources: A Guide for Students*, 3rd edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2017). Specifically, "The Role of Sources" and "Integrating Sources."
- In-class activities:
  - We'll have a short quiz on this reading
  - Discuss these two chapters 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 3rd and 4th chapters of Gordon Harvey, *Writing with Sources: A Guide for Students*, 3rd edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2017). Specifically, "Misuse of Sources" and "Styles of Citation."
- In-class activities:
  - We'll have a short quiz on this reading
  - Discuss these two chapters
  - 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.

- In-class activities:
  - Go through the collecting of evidence within the text that we read.
  - Consider various ways of incorporating evidence, and documenting that evidence.

Thursday, February 5, 2026: [Day 10: Preparing for First Four-Page Paper]

- Pre-class assignment:
  - Complete preparatory form for first four-page paper (on Canvas)
- In-class activities:
  - Working through the outline of the four-page paper
  - Drafting certain bits
  - Discussing pieces of the four-page paper

Sunday, February 8, 2026: **First four-page paper is due at noon**

### Unit III: Composing an Essay

Tuesday, February 10, 2026: [Day 11: Three Ways of Reading Like an Editor]

- Pre-class assignment:
  - *No assignment*
- In-class activities:
  - Instructor explains three ways of reading like an editor: 1) Big picture: argument, organization, material that needs cutting or adding; 2) Flow of sentences, coherence, consistency, wording; 3) Copy-editor scrutiny of details, conformity to a style guide
  - Orientation to the 2nd four-page paper

Thursday, February 12, 2026: [Day 12: Effective Essay Structure]

- Pre-class assignment:
  - Skim the several short readings that have been assigned. The goal is to read them not for details but to understand the overall structure that the author has employed. Take notes on them. How has the author arranged the body of the essay; what major divisions are set up? Are there different ideas (or arguments, or “hypotheses”) in play? How are they arranged and brought in? Do the different components present different empirical cases, or aspects of the argument?
- In-class activities:
  - Discussion of those readings
  - Outlining exercise

Tuesday, February 17, 2026: [Day 13: Developing Paragraphs]

- Pre-class assignment:
  - Several examples of paragraphs have been assigned. Read them carefully, thinking about: 1) the main idea (argument) of the paragraph; 2) the structure of the paragraph; 3) the beginning and the end of the paragraph; 4) the varieties of sentences used within the paragraph.
- In-class activities:
  - Discussion of the assigned paragraphs
  - Paragraph-writing exercise
  - From the options given, select the essay / article / chapter that you will present next class session

Thursday, February 19, 2026: [Day 14: What Makes an Argument Strong?]

- Pre-class assignment:
  - Read the one essay / article / chapter that you previously selected. Consider the way that piece of writing advances its argument. What is noteworthy about the way it makes its argument?

- Prepare a short, 5-7 minute presentation on this
- In-class activities:
  - Students will give their presentations
  - We will discuss further about how to build compelling arguments

Tuesday, February 24, 2026: [Day 15: How to Write Introductions]

- Pre-class assignment:
  - Several examples of the introductory sections of articles and essays have been assigned. Read them carefully. How did the author use the crucial first lines? How does this engage the reader and set the stage for what will follow? Consider the use of: puzzles, questions, anecdotes, and other devices.
- In-class activities:
  - Discussion of the assigned examples of introductions
  - Things to do and things not to do in an introduction
  - What ideas and implications about introductions have you learned that you can apply in your 2nd four-page essay?

Thursday, February 26, 2026: [Day 16: How to Write Conclusions]

- Pre-class assignment:
  - Several examples of the conclusions of articles and essays have been assigned. Read them carefully. How did the author use this space?
- In-class activities:
  - Discussion of the assigned examples of conclusions
  - Things to do and things not to do in a conclusion
  - What ideas and implications about conclusions have you learned that you can apply in your 2nd four-page essay?

Sunday, March 1, 2026: **Second four-page paper is due at noon**

## Unit IV: Revising an Essay

Tuesday, March 3, 2026: [Day 17: Editing and Revision: Big-Picture Adjustments]

- Pre-class assignment:
  - Read assigned example materials
- In-class activities:
  - Students work in small groups on editing the material they have read, from a “big-picture” and “flow” perspective
  - We all gather and discuss the edits and suggestions that students have made in the small groups

Thursday, March 5, 2026: [Day 18: Editing and Revision: Sweating the Details]

- Pre-class assignment:
  - Read assigned example materials
  - Also 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
  - Students work in small groups on editing the material they have read, from a “flow” and “copy editing” perspective
  - We all gather and discuss the edits and suggestions that students have made in the small groups

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

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

Thursday, March 12, 2026: [Day 20: Course Review]

- Pre-class assignment:
  - By today's class, you should be well on your way to completing your final paper (the revision of the second four-page paper that you submitted.)
- In-class activities:
  - Discussion of revisions
  - 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.