ENGL 481: Senior Seminar, Fall 2025

## Course Information

**Course Number:** ENGL 481  
**Course Title:** Senior SeminarCyberpunk, Fact and Fiction  
**Section:** **Time:** MWF 10:20-11:10  
**Location:** LAAH 372  
**Credit Hours:** 4

## Instructor Details

**Instructor:** Andrew Pilsch  
**Office:** LAAH 417  
**Office Hours:** MWF 9:30-11:30

## Course Description

Capstone seminar on significant figures, movements or issues with special attention to methods and materials of scholarship.

## Course Learning Outcomes

In this course, students can expect

* Formulate questions for generating and sustaining analytical conversations about literature
* Take a position on an issue in a particular text
* Articulate positions in persuasive essays, utilizing evidence and rhetoric
* Identify recurring themes across a variety of texts
* Synthesize evidence to establish how themes change between authors and why this matters

# Books to Buy

*Books are available at the campus bookstore.*

* William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (ISBN: 9780441569595)
* Ellen Ullman, *Close to the Machine* (ISBN: 9781250002488)

# Assignments

| Assignment | Due Date | Percent Value |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Discussion Questions | 2-3 per week | 15% |
| Writing Exercises | Fridays | 15% |
| Position Paper #1 | 2023-10-10 | 20% |
| Position Paper #2 | 2023-10-31 | 20% |
| Research Paper | 2023-12-15 | 30% |

## Discussion Questions

Each day we have new assigned reading, (mostly Mondays and Wednesdays this semester; check [the schedule](#schedule) to see if a discussion question is due), you will need to post a discussion question to that week’s Discussion Question board by the time you have arrived in class. These questions will help start our conversation and will help to structure our knowledge of the course topic as we move forward.

Each question needs to be generative but can be specific. If you don’t understand a particular scene or wonder why the writer chose to portray a particular detail in a particular way, ask. If you notice a theme developing across several readings and find it reflected in this story, ask.

If a day has multiple assigned readings/viewings, you only need to post a question on one reading/viewing for that day.

During the first 10 minutes of class, I will split you off into groups and discuss your questions amongst yourselves. Read and try to start on an answer to each question. Before the end of the 10 minutes, your group will select the best question to share with the class. The remainder of class will be generated from these questions.

Additionally, if you are not present on the day a discussion question is due, it will not count for your grade. See the attendance policy below for more information on excused absences and allowed unexcused absences.

## Writing Exercises

Each Friday (unless otherwise noted on the syllabus) you will have a weekly writing exercise due by 11:59PM. I will offer a short introduction to the exercise on Monday and ask for any questions on Friday, but you are responsible for completing these exercise on your own.

The list of [writing exercises](#list-of-writing-exercises) is at the bottom of this document.

### Grading for Writing Exercises

I will be marking your writing exercises as “satisfactory” (awarded 100 points) and “unsatisfactory” (awarded 0 points). A mark of “unsatisfactory” will be accompanied by comments on how to improve the exercise. If you wish to change an “unsatisfactory” to a “satisfactory,” you may revise your document along the lines of my comments and email me the updated exercise. Assuming the changes are now “satisfactory,” the mark will be changed.

## Position Papers (2)

Twice (in weeks 7 and 10), you will produce a short paper (2-3 pages, double-spaced) that takes a position on a particular selection from one of the texts we have read so far in class.

This assignment asks you to pick one key point in the text, ideally a single sentence or paragraph, and trace why that claim is controversial or challenging or interesting. The best papers will also articulate your opinion about the issue or explain why the issue is controversial or what is interesting. This can be a commentary on the content, the style, or a mix of both.

This paper is not intended as a summary of the reading or an overview of the author’s life. I am looking for focused, detailed engagement with specific aspects of the text. You do not need to write an introduction situating the text or anything of that nature. I want to see your quote and your reading of that quote.

You may relate that quote to contemporary events, but, again, the quote from the text *must* be driving your discussion. I want to see you working with material.

These papers will cover material that has already been discussed in class but has not been covered by a position paper. The first paper, due at the start of week 5, will cover material from the first four weeks of class. The second paper will cover texts from week 5 through week 8; third covers weeks 10 through the end.

These position papers ask you to show insights and raise questions in response to the reading and course discussions. Papers that merely summarize an argument or restate the selected passage will receive a failing grade. You need to explain why the passage in question is thought-provoking, or unsettling, or unclear and suggest how you respond to this challenge.

## Research Project

For a final project, you will be asked to create an artifact that documents the research you have been doing this semester. As a baseline, the artifact should be an 8-10 page research paper that is well-cited and thoroughly-documented. You can treat the paper as a report-style document, often called a literature review in the business, which is a document reporting on the state of research into a particular topic. This is still a composed essay, so you will need to work out a thesis and draw conclusions.

If, however, you would like to write something more argumentative, you may also complete a thesis-driven essay that argues for a particular point. Is anime more important to the cyberpunk aesthetic than *Neuromancer*? Does cyberpunk

Finally, if you would like to explore argumentation outside of academic prose, that is fine. Would you like to write a short story about a medieval initiate monk learning rhetoric for the first time? Cool! Do you want to make a video explaining a Cicero speech that seems relevant to contemporary topics? Do it! If you take the creative route, I would ask you submit a two page paper detailing your thinking in creating the artifact and citing some sources you based your project on.

There is a list of possible topics below, but feel free to propose via email some other topic you would like to explore in your paper.

### Possible Topics

* Japanese Cyberpunk
  + Cyberpunk Anime (or write on a particular series or film)
  + Cyberpunk Manga
  + Virtual Idols
  + Cyberpunk and Body Horror
* Art and Culture
  + Burning Man
  + The Survival Research Lab
  + Stellarc
  + Nam June Paik
* Other -punks
  + Solarpunk
  + Steampunk
  + Mycopunk
  + Hopepunk
  + Rybofunk
  + Postcyberpunk
* Other Novels
  + Gibson’s Bridge Trilogy
  + Gibson’s Blueant Trilogy
  + Lewis Shiner, *Frontera*
* Cyberpunk Culture
  + Hackers
  + Crackers
  + Phreakers
  + Industrial Music
  + Rave Culture
* Cyberspaces
  + America Online
  + The Whole Earth ’Lectronic Link (The WELL)
  + Silicon Valley
* Topics
  + Cyberpunk in Video Games
  + Cyberpunk in TTRPGs
  + Cyberpunk on Film
    - *Strange Days*
    - *Johnny Mnemonic*
    - *The Animatrix*
    - *Tetsuo the Iron Man*
    - *Blade Runner 2049*
  + African Cyberpunk

# Schedule

* Readings are to be completed *before* the start of class on the day indicated.

Each week, you will produce:

1. Two [Discussion Questions](#discussion-questions) (except days we have readings on Friday)
2. One [Writing Exercise](#list-of-writing-exercises)

## Week 1: Origins & Destinations

**Mon Aug 25 2025**

* First Class

**Wed Aug 27 2025**

* Vincent Omniveritas, [“The New Science Fiction”](https://web.archive.org/web/20081021104919/http://cyberculture.hu/the-new-science-fiction-by-vincent-omniaveritas/)
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Fri Aug 29 2025**

* Vincent Omniveritas, [*Cheap Truth* 1](https://fanac.org/fanzines/Cheap_Truth/Cheap_Truth01-01.html)
* Vincent Omniveritas, [*Cheap Truth* 2](https://fanac.org/fanzines/Cheap_Truth/Cheap_Truth02-01.html)
* Vincent Omniveritas, [*Cheap Truth* 3](https://fanac.org/fanzines/Cheap_Truth/Cheap_Truth03-01.html)
* **Discussion Question Due**
* **Writing Exercise #1 Due by 11:59PM**

## Week 2: Rumblings

**Mon Sep 01 2025**

**No class:** Labor Day

**Wed Sep 03 2025**

* Bruce Sterling, [“Preface to *Mirrorshades*”](http://project.cyberpunk.ru/idb/mirrorshades_preface.html)
* [“R U a Cyberpunk?”](https://i.imgur.com/8il6T.jpg) from *Mondo 2000* (1993)
* Watch [“Cyberpunk 2077 - Official Launch Trailer”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnA7tepsc7s)
* [“Cyberpunk”](https://aesthetics.fandom.com/wiki/Cyberpunk) from *Aesthetics Wiki*
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Fri Sep 05 2025**

* Writing a Position Paper
* **Writing Exercise #3 Due by 11:59PM**

## Week 3: First

**Mon Sep 08 2025**

* William Gibson, “Burning Chrome” from *Burning Chrome*
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Wed Sep 10 2025**

* Finish “Burning Chrome”
* William Gibson, “Johnny Mnemonic” from *Burning Chrome*
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Fri Sep 12 2025**

* Finish “Johnny Mnemonic”
* **Writing Exercise #2 Due by 11:59PM**

## Week 4: First Verse

**Mon Sep 15 2025**

* Tom Maddox, “Snake Eyes” from *Mirrorshades*
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Wed Sep 17 2025**

* Pat Cadigan, “Rock On” from *Storming the Reality Studio*
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Fri Sep 19 2025**

* Lewis Shiner, “Till Human Voices Wake Us” from *Mirrorshades*
* **Discussion Question Due**
* **Writing Exercise #4 Due by 11:59PM**

## Week 5: Second Verse, Stranger Than the First

**Mon Sep 22 2025**

* John Shirley, [“Wolves of the Plateau”](https://www-jstor-org.srv-proxy1.library.tamu.edu/stable/20134167)
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Wed Sep 24 2025**

* Bruce Sterling and Lewis Shiner, “Mozart in Mirrorshades” from *Mirrorshades*
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Fri Sep 26 2025**

* Rudy Rucker, [“Christmas in Louisville December 24, 2030”](https://www-jstor-org.srv-proxy1.library.tamu.edu/stable/20134164)
* **Discussion Question Due**
* **Writing Exercise #5 Due by 11:59PM**

## Week 6: Crises

**Mon Sep 29 2025**

* Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, [“Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism”](https://www-jstor-org.srv-proxy1.library.tamu.edu/stable/20134180)
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Wed Oct 01 2025**

* Finish Csicsery-Ronay
* Gilles Deleuze, [“Postscript on the Society of Control”](https://www-jstor-org.srv-proxy2.library.tamu.edu/stable/778828)
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Fri Oct 03 2025**

* Finish Deleuze
* **Writing Exercise #6 Due by 11:59PM**

## Week 7: Cyber Noir

**Mon Oct 06 2025**

* Watch [*Blade Runner*](http://proxy.library.tamu.edu/login?url=https://coral.library.tamu.edu/resourcelink.php?resource=16899)
* Watch [“Defining Film Noir”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K77aPil7btM)
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Wed Oct 08 2025**

* Finish [*Blade Runner*](http://proxy.library.tamu.edu/login?url=https://coral.library.tamu.edu/resourcelink.php?resource=16899)

**Fri Oct 10 2025**

* Rough Draft Day
* **Position Paper #1 Due by 11:59PM**
* **Writing Exercise #7 Due by 11:59PM**

## Week 8: The Straylight Run

**Mon Oct 13 2025**

**No class:** Fall Break

**Wed Oct 15 2025**

* William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (1984), Ch. 1-4
* [“Julia Styles in Ghostwriter”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLlj_GeKniA)
* **Discussion Question Due**
* **Writing Exercise #8 Due by 11:59PM**

**Fri Oct 17 2025**

* William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (1984), Ch. 5-9
* **Discussion Question Due**

## Week 9: “Things Are things”

**Mon Oct 20 2025**

* William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (1984), Ch. 10-15
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Wed Oct 22 2025**

* William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (1984), Rest
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Fri Oct 24 2025**

* Bruce Sterling, [“Cyberpunk in the Nineties”](https://www.streettech.com/bcp/BCPtext/Manifestos/CPInThe90s.html)
* Lewis Shiner, [“Confessions of an Ex-Cyberpunk”](https://www.fictionliberationfront.net/cyberpunk.html)
* **Discussion Question Due**
* **Writing Exercise #9 Due by 11:59PM**

## Week 10: Neotokyo is About to Explode

**Mon Oct 27 2025**

* [*Akira*](https://www.crunchyroll.com/watch/G6W4D40ER/akira)
  + TW: Gore
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Wed Oct 29 2025**

* Finish [*Akira*](https://www.crunchyroll.com/watch/G6W4D40ER/akira)
* Takayuki Tatsumi, “The Japanese Reflection of Mirrorshades”
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Fri Oct 31 2025**

* Rough Draft Day
* **Position Paper #2 Due by 11:59PM**
* **Writing Exercise #10 Due by 11:59PM**

## Week 11: Computer Liberation

**Mon Nov 03 2025**

* Ron Rosenbaum, [“Secrets of the Little Blue Box”](http://www.lospadres.info/thorg/lbb.html)
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Wed Nov 05 2025**

* Finish Rosenbaum
* Timothy Leary, [“The Cyber-punk: The Individual as reality Pilot”](https://www-jstor-org.srv-proxy1.library.tamu.edu/stable/20134179)
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Fri Nov 07 2025**

* Finish Leary
* **Writing Exercise #11 Due by 11:59PM**

## Week 12: The New Intimacy

**Mon Nov 10 2025**

* Ellen Ullman, *Close to the Machine*, ch. 1-2
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Wed Nov 12 2025**

* Ellen Ullman, *Close to the Machine*, ch. 3-4
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Fri Nov 14 2025**

* Ellen Ullman, *Close to the Machine*, ch. 5-6
* **Discussion Question Due**
* **Writing Exercise #12 Due by 11:59PM**

## Week 13: Women in the Matrix

**Mon Nov 17 2025**

* Ellen Ullman, *Close to the Machine*, rest
* Creating the Research Project
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Wed Nov 19 2025**

* Sadie Plant, [“The Future Looms: Weaving Women and Cybernetics”](https://monoskop.org/images/1/13/Plant_Sadie_1995_The_Future_Looms_Weaving_Women_and_Cybernetics.pdf)
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Fri Nov 21 2025**

* Finish Plant
* VNS Matrix, [“Bitch Mutant Manifesto”](https://vnsmatrix.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/bitch-mutant-manifesto-11-Seiten.pdf)
* **Discussion Question Due**

## Week 14

**Mon Nov 24 2025**

* Catch-up Day

**Wed Nov 26 2025**

**No class:** Reading Day

**Fri Nov 28 2025**

**No class:** Thanksgiving Day

## Week 15: Legacies

**Mon Dec 01 2025**

* Jeanne Gomoll, [“An Open Letter to Joanna Russ”](https://geocities.restorativland.org/Athens/8720/letter.htm)
* Bruce Sterling, [“Letter to the Editor” in *Aurora* 10:2](https://fanac.org/fanzines/Aurora/Aurora26.pdf) (scroll to page 7)
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Wed Dec 03 2025**

* Malka Older, [“Optimism and Access: The Line Between Cyberpunk and Post-Cyberpunk”](https://www.tor.com/2016/06/08/optimism-and-access-the-line-between-cyberpunk-and-post-cyberpunk/)
* Metaverse Readings:
  + Keza MacDonald, [“I’ve Seen the Metaverse - And I Don’t Want It”](https://www.theguardian.com/games/2022/jan/25/ive-seen-the-metaverse-and-i-dont-want-it)
  + Ryan Zickgraf, [“Mark Zuckerberg’s ‘Metaverse’ Is a Dystopian Nightmare”](https://jacobin.com/2021/09/facebook-zuckerberg-metaverse-stephenson-big-tech)
  + Ian Bogost, [“The Metaverse is Bad”](https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2021/10/facebook-metaverse-name-change/620449/)
* **Discussion Question Due**

**Fri Dec 05 2025**

* [“She Wanted to Save the World From A.I. Then the Killings Started.” from *The New York Times*](https://archive.ph/ZllyP)
* [“They Asked an A.I. Chatbot Questions. The Answers Sent Them Spiraling” from *The New York Times*](https://archive.ph/Gm79v)
* **Discussion Question Due**

## Week 16: The Last Cyberpunk

**Mon Dec 08 2025**

* Watch [*The Matrix*](http://proxy.library.tamu.edu/login?url=https://coral.library.tamu.edu/resourcelink.php?resource=16692)
* **Final Project Due 12/15 by 11:59PM**
* **Discussion Question Due**

# Policies

## University Policies

### Attendance Policy

The university views class attendance and participation as an individual student responsibility. Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](https://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07/) in its entirety for information about excused absences, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

### Makeup Work Policy

Students will be excused from attending class on the day of a graded activity or when attendance contributes to a student’s grade, for the reasons stated in Student Rule 7, or other reason deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Please refer to [Student Rule 7](https://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07/) in its entirety for information about makeup work, including definitions, and related documentation and timelines.

Absences related to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 may necessitate a period of more than 30 days for make-up work, and the timeframe for make-up work should be agreed upon by the student and instructor” ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.1](https://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07)).

“The instructor is under no obligation to provide an opportunity for the student to make up work missed because of an unexcused absence” ([Student Rule 7, Section 7.4.2](https://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07)).

Students who request an excused absence are expected to uphold the Aggie Honor Code and Student Conduct Code. (See [Student Rule 24](https://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule24/).)

### Academic Integrity Statement and Policy

“An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do.”

“Texas A&M University students are responsible for authenticating all work submitted to an instructor. If asked, students must be able to produce proof that the item submitted is indeed the work of that student. Students must keep appropriate records at all times. The inability to authenticate one’s work, should the instructor request it, may be sufficient grounds to initiate an academic misconduct case” ([Section 20.1.2.3, Student Rule 20](https://aggiehonor.tamu.edu/Rules-and-Procedures/Rules/Honor-System-Rules)).

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*You can learn more about the Aggie Honor System Office Rules and Procedures, academic integrity, and your rights and responsibilities at* [*aggiehonor.tamu.edu*](https://aggiehonor.tamu.edu/)*.*

### Notice of Nondiscrimination

Texas A&M University is committed to providing safe and non-discriminatory learning, living, and work environments for all members of the University community. The University provides equal opportunity to all employees, students, applicants for employment or admission, and the public regardless of race, color, sex (including pregnancy and related conditions), religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, or veteran status. Texas A&M University will promptly, thoroughly, and fairly investigate and resolve all complaints of discrimination, harassment (including sexual harassment), complicity and related retaliation based on a protected class in accordance with System Regulation 08.01.01, University Rule 08.01.01.M1, Standard Administrative Procedure (SAP) 08.01.01.M1.01, and applicable federal and state laws. In accordance with Title IX and its implementing regulations, Texas A&M does not discriminate on the basis of sex in any educational program or activity, including admissions and employment. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries and complaints regarding the non-discrimination policies: Jennifer M. Smith, TAMU Associate VP & Title IX Coordinator at YMCA Ste 108, College Station, TX 77843, 979-458-8407, or email [civilrights@tamu.edu](_includes/mailto:civilrights@tamu.edu). For other reporting options, visit <https://ocrcas.ed.gov/contact-ocr> to locate the address and phone number of the office that serves your area, or call 1-800-421-3481.

### Civil Rights, Free Speech, and Title IX Policies

Texas A&M University is committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws prohibit discrimination and harassment based on an individual’s race, color, sex, (including pregnancy and related conditions), religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other legally protected characteristic. This includes forms of sex-based violence, such as sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, dating/domestic violence, and stalking.

Students can report discrimination/harassment, access supportive resources, or learn more about their options for resolving complaints on the [University’s Civil Rights & Title IX webpage](https://titleix.tamu.edu/).

Students should be aware that all university employees (except medical or mental health providers) are mandatory reporters, which means that if they observe, experience or become aware of an incident that they reasonably believe to be discrimination/harassment alleged to have been committed by or against a person who was a student or employee at the time of the incident, the employee must report the incident to the university.

### Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy

Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Resources office on your campus (resources listed below) Disabilities may include, but are not limited to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible.

To request academic accommodations, contact the designated ADA office based on your location:

* Texas A&M University, College of Nursing, College of Dentistry, Irma Lerma Rangel College of Pharmacy College Station, College of Medicine, School of Public Health, Institute of Biosciences and Technology, EnMed Program, Bush School in Washington DC, Mays Business School – CityCentre, TAMU Engineering Academies, Texas A&M University Higher Education Center at McAllen  and Texas A&M University at Galveston should contact [Disability Resources](https://disability.tamu.edu/) at (979) 845-1637 or [disability@tamu.edu](_includes/mailto:disability@tamu.edu).
* Texas A&M University School of Law should contact the Office of Student Affairs at (817) 212-4111 or [law-disability@law.tamu.edu](_includes/mailto:law-disability@law.tamu.edu) to request accommodations.
* Irma Lerma Rangel College of Pharmacy in Kingsville should contact the Disability Resource Center at Texas A&M University - Kingsville at (361) 593-3024 or [drc.center@tamuk.edu](_includes/mailto:drc.center@tamuk.edu) to request accommodations.
* Texas A&M University College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences in Canyon should contact the Office of Student Accessibility at West Texas A&M University – Canyon at (806) 651-2335 or [osa@wtamu.edu](_includes/mailto:osa@wtamu.edu).
* Texas A&M University at Qatar (TAMUQ) should contact the campus psychologist, Dr. Steve Wilson +974-4423-0047 or [stephen.wilson@qatar.tamu.edu](_includes/mailto:stephen.wilson@qatar.tamu.edu).

If you are experiencing difficulties with your approved accommodations, contact the office responsible for approving your accommodations or the Texas A&M ADA Coordinator Julie Kuder at [ADA.Coordinator@tamu.edu](_includes/mailto:ADA.Coordinator@tamu.edu) or (979) 458-8407.

### Pregnancy Accommodations

Texas A&M provides reasonable accommodations to students due to pregnancy and/or related conditions, such as childbirth, recovery and lactation.  Students should contact the University’s [Pregnancy Coordinator](https://titleix.tamu.edu/title-ix-and-pregnancy-students/) as soon as they become aware of the need for accommodation. Depending on the circumstances, accommodations could include extended time to complete assignments or exams, changes in course sequence, or modifications to the physical classroom environment.  Texas A&M will also allow a voluntary leave of absence, ensure the availability of lactation space, and maintain grievance procedures to provide for the prompt and equitable resolution of complaints of sex discrimination.   For information regarding pregnancy accommodations, email [TIX.Pregnancy@tamu.edu](_includes/mailto:TIX.Pregnancy@tamu.edu).

### Statement on Mental Health and Wellness

Texas A&M University recognizes that mental health and wellness are critical factors influencing a student’s academic success and overall wellbeing. Students are encouraged to engage in healthy self-care practices by utilizing the resources and services available through [University Health Services](https://uhs.tamu.edu/) on its [mental health webpage](https://uhs.tamu.edu/mental-health/index.html). The [TELUS Health Student Support app](https://uhs.tamu.edu/mental-health/student-support.html) provides access to professional counseling in multiple languages anytime, anywhere by phone or chat, and the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline offers 24-hour emergency support at 988 or [988lifeline.org](http://988lifeline.org/).

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Students needing a listening ear can contact University Health Services (979.458.4584) 24-hour emergency help is also available through the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (988) or at [988lifeline.org](http://988lifeline.org/).

### Statement on the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

FERPA is a federal law designed to protect the privacy of educational records by limiting access to these records, to establish the right of students to inspect and review their educational records and to provide guidelines for the correction of inaccurate and misleading data through informal and formal hearings. Currently enrolled students wishing to withhold any or all directory information items can do so within [howdy.tamu.edu](_includes/../../../G:/My%20Drive/Obligations/Faculty%20Senate/Speaker_2025-2026/MSR/howdy.tamu.edu) using the Directory Information Withholding Form. The complete [FERPA Notice to Students](https://aggie.tamu.edu/registration-and-records/transcripts-and-diplomas/student-records-policy#0-StatementofRights) and the student records policy is available on the Office of the Registrar webpage.

Items that can never be identified as public information are a student’s social security number, citizenship, gender, grades, GPR or class schedule. All efforts will be made in this class to protect your privacy and to ensure confidential treatment of information associated with or generated by your participation in the class.

Directory items include name, UIN, local address, permanent address, email address, local telephone number, permanent telephone number, dates of attendance, program of study (college, major, campus), classification, previous institutions attended, degrees honors and awards received, participation in officially recognized activities and sports, medical residence location and medical residence specialization.

## Department Policies

### Generative AI Usage Statement

We in the Department of English believe that writing is central to the production of knowledge. The written word is how ideas circulate but, more importantly, the act of crafting words, sentences, paragraphs, and essays refines thoughts into ideas that matter. As such, we strongly stand against the usage of generative artificial intelligence—applications such as ChatGPT or Grammarly—as a replacement for the act of writing that has been the bedrock of human knowledge for thousands of years. Given the concerns delineated below and the importance I place on writing as your thought process, the use of GenAI in this class will be treated as plagiarism. As such, any usage of GenAI will be subject to the university’s academic integrity policy, which may include, but is not limited to, failing the assignment and/or disciplinary action.

### University Writing Center Statement

The University Writing Center (UWC) has trained peer consultants available to work with you on any kind of writing or speaking project, including research papers, lab reports, application essays, or creative writing, and at any stage of your process, whether you’re deciding on a topic or reviewing your final draft. You can also get help with public speaking, presentations, and group projects. We can work with you in person at our Evans or BLCC locations or via Zoom or email. To schedule an appointment or to view our handouts, videos, or interactive learning modules, visit [writingcenter.tamu.edu](https://writingcenter.tamu.edu). If you have questions, need help making an appointment, or encounter difficulty accessing our services, call 979-458-1455 or email [uwc@tamu.edu](mailto:uwc@tamu.edu).

## Course Policies

### Email Hours

I am available to answer email from 9:00am until 5:00pm Monday through Friday. Emails arriving outside of that time will be answered at my earliest convenience, but do not count on a quick answer to emails sent late at night or on the weekends.

### Office Door

If my door is closed and it is not during office hours, please do not knock. I open my door when I’m available to chat outside of office hours, but close my door if I am working and cannot be disturbed.

### Absences

Attendance in class is mandatory and is necessary for you to get what you need out of this course. You may have **2 unexcused absences**. Every absence after 2 will result in a **5 point deduction from your attendance grade**. I must have documentation (doctor’s notes, schedule for sports, etc) for excused absences. Please talk to me in advance if you have any extenuating circumstances.

Regardless of kind (excused or unexcused), missing more than 10 classes in the semester will result in your failing the course.

### Late Work

Under Student Rule 7.4, I am under “under no obligation to provide an opportunity for the student to make up work missed because of an unexcused absence.” However, I do accept late work and will take off 5 points for every day late. A paper that would have received an 85% that was 3 days late will receive a 70%.

#### Extension Policy

Additionally, if you are falling behind on a project and feel that you are not going to finish on time, email me 24 hours before the assignment is due to request an extension. In this email, propose how many additional days you will need to finish the assignment. Requests for extension that do not contain this information will not be honored.

# List of Writing Exercises

## Exercise 1 - Introductions

Introduce yourself! For this first writing exercise, please provide the following information:

1. Your name
2. Your pronouns
3. Your major and year
4. Your favorite book and briefly why
5. Your interest in science fiction or why you took the course
6. Your previous experiences with science fiction, either at Texas A&M or elsewhere

When you have answered these questions, submit your document on the dropbox on Canvas.

## Exercise 2 - Definitions of Science Fiction

We talked last week about the origins and history of the term “science fiction.” This course will consider how the cyberpunks sought to grapple with this history and ultimately offer their own. Defining science fiction is a long-running operation that can tell us much about the history of the genre. There have been many definitions of science fiction, offered throughout history, but here are a couple of my favorite:

1. “Realistic speculation about possible future events, based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on a thorough understanding of the nature and significance of the scientific method. To make this definition cover all science fiction (instead of ‘almost all’) it is necessary only to strike out the word ‘future’.” (Robert A. Heinlein)
2. “A science fiction story is a story built around human beings, with a human problem, and a human solution, which would not have happened at all without its scientific content.” (Theodore Sturgeon)
3. “Someone once said that a good science-fiction story should be able to predict not the automobile but the traffic jam.” (Frederik Pohl)
4. “Science fiction is anything published as science fiction.” (Norman Spinrad)

For today’s exercise:

1. Having read the above definitions, pick the one you find most compelling (“compelling” here can be good or bad).
   * Write a few paragraphs explaining in detail what it is about this definition that compels you. **Be specific**
   * Use Google to find out a bit about the speaker.
   * Note some sources you used in a paragraph, commenting on what was good or bad about the source (you don’t have to use proper citations at this point).
   * Write a paragraph or two explaining if the time period or biographical information clarifies your understanding of the definition. If so, how? If not, why not?

You should have around one to two pages of double-spaced writing at this point. If not, make sure you have explained your position and your research with enough thoroughness. Then submit to the Dropbox on Canvas.

## Exercise 3

Read “Science Fiction and Cyberpunk” by Dani Cavallaro, which concerns the relationship between science fiction history and cyberpunk. What, to your reading, is the most controversial claim made in the text?

Quote the claim in the text (again, not worrying yet about citing it properly). Use a [block quote](https://writingcenter.uagc.edu/block-quotations) if the selection is longer than four lines, otherwise quote your selection using quotation marks.

After the quote, explain why you chose it as controversial? Do you agree with the claim? Do you disagree? What criteria helped you decide what was controversial? Did the author signal that this claim was controversial or are you basing your selection off of your personal interests?

Write up your answer to these questions in a 1-2 page set of notes (don’t worry about it being a formal essay) and submit to the dropbox on Canvas.

## Exercise 4

Read [“Discovering a Topic, Preparing for Discussion.”](https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writinghandbook/chapter/2-discovering-a-topic-preparing-for-discussion/)

Think about three topics you could use for the first position paper and analyze them given the rubric described in the above chapter. Which do you think is most effective? Why?

Write up your answer, including the three possible topics, as a 1-2 page collection of notes and submit to the dropbox on Canvas.

## Exercise 5

Read [“Ordering Evidence, Building an Argument”](https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/writinghandbook/chapter/ordering-evidence-building-an-argument/)

Given the three topics you outlined in last week’s assignments, what kind of evidence would you need to argue for the controversial nature of each? Using the methods described in this chapter, create three rough outlines of the position paper you would write based on each claim.

Now, which one seems like the most compelling? Which will make the strongest first paper? Why?

Along with the three outlines, include some thoughts on the above list of questions and submit the whole thing to the dropbox on Canvas.

*This will be the final writing exercise in preparation for the first position paper.* [*Writing Exercise 7*](#exercise-7) *will be peer review for this paper.*

## Exercise 6

With this exercise, we will be shifting to the research paper, to be completed at the end of the semester.

One of the first tasks of a scholar is positioning their work within the conversation. And to do that, a scholar must have some understand of the state of the field. There are many ways to do this, but a quick one is to use various reference works designed to help situate new researchers within a topic.

For this exercise, I have provided”Cyberpunk as Cultural Formation,” the introduction to *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, and “The *Mirrorshades* Collective” a chapter from that volume. The book, a scholarly companion, summarizes work done on cyberpunk and a variety of topics. Read over this document and write up some notes on two topics:

1. What was it like reading this kind of document? Have you read something like this before? Did you find it helpful? Or confusing? What jargon did the document use?
2. What topics interested you? What would you like to know more about? Why?

Submit your notes on these two topics to the dropbox on Canvas.

Should you need to consult the full book (**hint** for your research paper **hint**), [it is online](https://www-taylorfrancis-com.srv-proxy1.library.tamu.edu/books/edit/10.4324/9781351139885/routledge-companion-cyberpunk-culture-lars-schmeink-graham-murphy-anna-mcfarlane).

## Exercise 7

Conducting peer review is an important part of the writing process, even though it often feels like a chore. The reason being that, as we write, we often do not see the parts of our paper that don’t make sense or have grammatical errors and so forth because we are so familiar with what we are trying to say that it blocks us from seeing what we did say. Thus, getting someone else to look over our paper can greatly help clarify and improve our argumentation.

For this week’s exercise, arrange with two classmates to exchange drafts (you can do this virtually or in person) and read each others’ documents over. You will have time in class on Friday to complete this, if you’d prefer. There is a peer review checklist posted to Canvas. You will complete this document for each of your two peers, provide copies to your two peers, and turn in the checklists you completed to the dropbox on Canvas for credit on this lab.

## Exercise 8

You have been provided a list of [topics](#possible-topics) for the research paper. How are you going to choose which to write about? Becoming familiar with unfamiliar topics is key to starting the research process. Perhaps something I’ve said in class sparked your interest? Perhaps you encountered something reading from *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture* about which you’d like to know more?

In any case, for this writing exercise, spend some time researching the list of provided topics. *Wikipedia* is an excellent source for starting research.

If you have another topic in mind, spend some time with the list nonetheless, but also do some more background work on your proposed topic.

Write up, in the form of notes, an account of your research. What sources did you consult? What else do you want to know?

Conclude by picking a topic (I won’t hold you to it at this point) and discussing why you chose what you chose.

## Exercise 9

Now that you have a topic in mind, it’s time to start doing some research. Finding sources can be baffling at first, especially for a paper such as our research assignment.

There are a few things to remember and some tools that can help:

### Kinds of Sources

When we talk about citing sources in a research paper, we mean two things: **primary sources** and **secondary sources**. Primary sources refer to texts from the period in question. So, for instance, in our course, William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* would be a primary source, as it was from ancient Greece and about rhetoric. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, “Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism” is a secondary source, as it is a work of criticism *about* a primary source.

We also have to evaluate the scholarly nature of our secondary sources. As a rule, we want scholarly sources that have been peer-reviewed, so books published by university presses (they mostly have “university” in the name of the publisher, though Routledge, Bloomsbury Academic, and Palgrave Macmillan are considered scholarly as well) or journals that have peer-reviewed their articles. Articles published in national news magazines (such as *Time* or *The Atlantic*) can usually be used as a secondary source. The big questions to ask when evaluating the scholarly nature of a secondary source include “who published this?,” “who wrote this (and what is their job)?,” “does this seem like an authoritative publication?,” “is the article advocating a particularly biased opinion or using a neutral tone to convey knowledge?” (the latter is preferable).

We treat our sources differently depending on their character. Primary sources are examples: they show cultural or philosophical or other attitudes at a time and a place. For instance, I could cite a science fiction novel about alien invasion as an example of Cold War paranoia but I could not cite it as an example that pod people walk among us. Secondary sources are treated as authoritative voices in our text, they support our arguments by adding the ethos of their authors, they provide a starting point (by providing our argument an entry point into the conversation), or they provide us negative examples to bounce off of (by showing how existent scholarship is wrong or incomplete).

#### A Note on *Wikipedia*

*Wikipedia* is often, but not always, a well-researched compendium of human knowledge. As a rule, using it as a starting place, especially in topics like the history of rhetoric and philosophy which tend to be pretty robust on the site, is advisable, but verify with a scholarly source anything you find on *Wikipedia*. Don’t cite *Wikipedia* as an authority.

### Finding Sources

The best way to find scholarly sources for your research is [Google Scholar](https://scholar.google.com). It is a search engine for scholarly sources and indexes most academic journals and scholarly books. Use it as you would Google, though the indexing on Google Scholar does tend toward STEM fields, so sometimes you have to be creative in your terms. As this research paper draws from fairly specific classical terminology, you shouldn’t have that problem, but you will most likely want to include “rhetoric” in your search terms, so that you have some scope of the problem.

You may also want to think about related searches as you conduct research. Are their particular people associated with your topic who you could also search for? Are their concepts related to your topic that you could also search for? Can you find general information about the period in a more broadly scoped textbook to include? Get creative with the searches you are conducting!

Sources indexed by Google Scholar may not necessarily be open access, so the task falls to you to acquire the pieces you have found. Thankfully, Texas A&M Libraries makes this fairly easy.

### Getting Sources

As an example, I’m going to search for [phaedrus rhetoric](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C44&q=phaedrus+rhetoric&btnG=) in Google Scholar. It produces several results, which you can see below:

|  |
| --- |
| Results for searching “phaedrus rhetoric” in Google Scholar |

Results for searching “phaedrus rhetoric” in Google Scholar

The four results are:

1. *The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy: Plato’s Gorgias and Phaedrus* by S. Bernadete
2. “Plato’s Denunciation of Rhetoric in the Phaedrus” by B. McAdon
3. *Rhetoric and Reality in Plato’s “Phaedrus”* by D.A. White
4. “Disputation, Deception, and Dialectic: Plato on the True Rhetoric (‘Phaedrus’ 261-266)” by J.S. Murray

Results 1 and 3 are tagged [BOOK] by the results, so we can assume they are printed books. Results 2 and 4 are not tagged at all, so we know they are journal articles. Below the titles, the publication information is listed. Result 2 was published in *Rhetoric Review* in 2004 and Result 4 was published in *Philosophy & Rhetoric* in 1988.

So, how to get those?

We are in luck, as Result 2 (the McAdon article) has “Full View” as a link option to the right of the main result column. That means Google Scholar has found a copy of the article on the web. We can click it and read about denunciation (though, being a journal article, the piece will likely have an abstract, which we should read first to determine its relevance to our research).

However, Result 4 (the Murray article) does not have a “Full View” option. To access it, we must turn to the library’s page, specifically [the list of electronic journal](https://library.tamu.edu/search/eJournals.html). We can search for “Philosophy and Rhetoric,” which produces the following results:

|  |
| --- |
| Search results for philosophy and rhetoric on Texas A&M’s Library Website |

Search results for philosophy and rhetoric on Texas A&M’s Library Website

The first result reads:

JSTOR Arts and Sciences VIII open\_in\_new  
Available from 1968/01/01 volume: 1 issue: 1  
Most recent 4 year(s) not available

And the second reads:

Project Muse Premium Collection open\_in\_new  
Available from 1999 volume: 32 issue: 2

Both results list the restrictions on that particular collection. JSTOR does not have recent articles, which does not matter to us because our article was published in 1988. Project MUSE has recent articles but does not have anything before 1999. So, it looks like we should click on the JSTOR result.

On the JSTOR page for *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, we find the list of all issues, expanding on “1980s” and finding four issues for 1988. If we click on all of them, we eventually find the Murray article in Vol. 21, No. 4. We can download the PDF of the article or read it online, as we prefer (though the PDFs let you highlight and copy text, so they can be useful for transcribing quotes).

**Note:** If you cannot find access to a journal through the A&M library, you can use ILL ([discussed below](#accessing-ill) to get a copy of the journal article from another library).

#### Finding a Book

Now that we found a journal article in one of Texas A&M’s library databases, how to find the book? We have two options:

1. Go to the library
2. Use ILL to access the book

##### Finding Books in the Library

To find out if A&M owns the book in question and if the book is not checked out, [search in the catalog](https://library.tamu.edu/) using the search box provided on the front page.

If I search for our third search result from Google Scholar (*Rhetoric and Reality in Plato’s “Phaedrus”* by D.A. White), I get the following:

|  |
| --- |
| Catalog results searching for Rhetoric and Reality in Plato’s” Phaedrus” |

Catalog results searching for Rhetoric and Reality in Plato’s” Phaedrus”

I get two results. The first is listed as an eBook and the second is a book.

So it looks like, if I want, I can avoid going outside today and just get the eBook. But, say I really want to smell old paper and feel the rough pages of the book as I read. The second result indicates the book is available (Green status with “Available”) and that the call number is B380 .W48 1993 in Evans Library.

When I get to Evans, I would consult the guide by the elevators to know which floor I need to go to (I believe B is on Floor Six) and head out for my book.

You may check out books at the circulation desk on the ground floor of Evans library or at any of the self-checkout kiosks throughout the library. If you decide you don’t want a book, find the re-shelving areas around the library and a library worker will re-shelve the book for you. **Never re-shelve a book yourself**, that’s how books get lost.

There are also scanners and photocopiers available around Evans, if you would like to make a digital or paper copy of part of the book.

##### Accessing ILL

We used the third result, because the first result from Google Scholar (*The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy: Plato’s Gorgias and Phaedrus* by S. Bernadete) produces the following results:

|  |
| --- |
| Catalog results searching for The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy |

Catalog results searching for The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy

The first two results are listed as “Academic Journal Articles.” These are book reviews, which are other scholars discussing the merits of a work. Results like this mean A&M does not own the book in question.

To access it, we would need to use the Interlibrary Loan (or ILL) service. A&M can get most anything through ILL, if you are willing to wait for it. To access ILL, [click here](https://getitforme.library.tamu.edu/illiadlocal/) and log in. Once you are connected, in the left sidebar, you will see a number of options under “New Requests.”

ILL has many options for getting text. If you would like another library to send you a print book, click on “Book.” If you have access to the table of contents and know which section you would like (say one chapter or one article in an edited collection), click on “Book Chapter.” If you need a journal article, click on “Article.”

You will be taken to a form that will ask you some minimal information about the book. When you have completed it, the ILL office (who are amazing) will get on finding your text.

A couple of things to note:

1. **ILL is totally free for you to use**
2. You can access anything via ILL, not just stuff at other libraries
   1. They can pull books from the stacks and store them for you at the front circulation desk
   2. They can also scan chapters from books owned by A&M
3. Electronic copies of articles or book chapters are always much faster than getting the physical book
   1. I have received requested chapters within 4 hours when the book is in A&M’s collection

### Your Task

Now that you know a bit about finding resources at A&M, begin to do some research for your paper. Identify four potential sources you would use based on the topic you have already selected. Write up how you can access them (if you need to go to the library or use ILL, you may want to start the process), so that you have them on-hand, as we will be working with these sources in Exercises 11 & 12.

Submit a 1-2 page document covering your sources, how you found them, and a paragraph or two about additional research you need to conduct for the research paper.

## Exercise 10

We will be conducting peer review for the second position paper this week. Once again, work with two other classmates to evaluate and improve one another’s work.

You will have the same peer review checklist as in Writing Exercise 7 on Canvas.

**In addition to the two reports, you will also submit a document—one or two short paragraphs—, detailing what strategies you adopted this time, if any, to improve your peer review experience, either in soliciting feedback or giving better feedback. What else would you like to try?**

Submit this reflection along with the two checklists you completed for your peers to the dropbox on Canvas.

## Exercise 11

Now that we have identified a number of sources, we need to focus on summarizing our sources. Summarizing is the process of condensing an argument into a focused set of sentences. These sentences need to be our own words, but can use light quoting, especially for key concepts introduced by the author of the text. Summarization serves a number of purposes, but the main one is reminding us of our own reading, answering “what was this article about, again?” Additionally, we can use these summaries we write in our own writing.

### Writing Summaries

A summary needs to have two parts: an overview of the entire argument and an account of that argument’s use for our current research project. So, for instance, imagine you were reading an encyclopedia entry by a Dr. Joseph Palpatine on the topic of ancient rhetoric. The article has some particularly good stuff on the second sophistic, which is the topic of your research paper. You might write the following summary:

Palpatine offers a rich and detailed account of rhetoric in ancient Greece and Rome, paying special attention to Rome and both the republic and imperial periods. Palpatine places particular interest on rhetorical education and the ways in which young orators attained their training.

The entry offers a particularly good discussion of this period and it’s educational methods. Palpatine has a particularly striking defense of Philostratus, which will help in the section on the veracity of *Lives of the Sophists*. He suggests that while the lives may be based on heresay, they are our only source for information on the period and ignoring the accounts offered there will do more damage.

The first paragraph in my summary gives an overview of the article. The second focuses on what I’m interested in it for (the defense of *Lives of the Sophists*).

We write summaries in the way I described above because we need two things from them: to introduce a general summary of the work and to highlight what we are specifically interested in.

When I went to talk about *Lives of the Sophists*, I might add the following: “Palpatine, in an encyclopedia article on ancient rhetoric, defends Philostratus on the grounds that *Lives of the Sophists* is often our only source for information from the period.” So, I used my introductory paragraph to remind my readers what the overall argument of the piece was and to provide my particular interest in it.

If I had a source I wanted to discuss at more length, say some of the entries in *Lives of the Sophists* itself, I might need a longer summary, but I would still want to rely on my overall summary to frame the text when I first talk about it. This helps establish *ethos* by explaining to our readers what the text is and why they can trust what it says.

### Your Task

Taking the sources you find in the previous exercise, write short summaries for each. Try to give an account of what the article is about, including its most important claims. Remember that the summary needs to brief (4-5 sentences at most). Try to also include a second paragraph explaining your own interest in each source.

Submit these summaries to Canvas.

## Exercise 12

The final step to incorporating research material is citation. Citation practices are often discussed as a means of preventing plagiarism, which they are, of course, but, more importantly, citations allow later scholars to trace source material, verify our claims, and to extend the scholarly conversation we are participating in.

Purdue University’s OWL is one of the best resources on academic research writing. Review the following pages on the OWL covering MLA 9 citations:

* [In-text Citation](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_in_text_citations_the_basics.html)
* [Formatting Quotations](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_quotations.html)
  + Pay special attention to the differences between block and inline quotes
* [Endnotes and Footnotes](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_endnotes_and_footnotes.html)
  + Footnotes are often useful to quickly summarize a lot of research, especially when it isn’t directly relevant to your writing
* [Works Cited Pages: Basics](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_works_cited_page_basic_format.html)
  + [Works Cited Pages: Books](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_works_cited_page_books.html)
  + [Works Cited Pages: Periodicals](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_works_cited_periodicals.html)

After you have finished that reading, produce a works cited page for the sources you have been working with in the last few exercises. Submit this to Canvas.