

WRIT 2-3: Proposed Curriculum Changes

There have been two key priorities for the Writing Program

1. Preserve faculty autonomy
2. Create greater consistency across sections of first-year writing courses

There have been two key priorities for the Writing Program

1. Preserve faculty autonomy
2. Create greater consistency across sections of first-year writing courses

In AY2022-2023, WRIT 5 addressed these priorities by:

- a. Adopting two shared essay assignments
- b. Establishing a shared vocabulary through these assignments (close-reading, interpretive objects, interpretive difficulties or problems)
- c. Emphasizing the Writing Program's commitment to "Writing as Thinking"

Shared Essay 1

Essay 1 Assignment Sheet Template

Assignment Prompt: Take up a single interpretive object (text, image, film, art object, etc) and perform a close reading of this object to generate observations that lead to a difficulty or problematic in the interpretation of this object, making sure to ground your observations in an interpretive context. Develop and advance an idea or argument that originates from the identified interpretive difficulty or problematic.

Essay Requirements:

- 1,200 – 1,500 words in length
- Double-spaced using a standard font (Times New Roman, etc)
- Formatting according to (MLA/Chicago/etc) guidelines including headings, page numbers, citation style, works cited/bibliography.
- Titled
- Proofread and spellchecked

Shared Essay 2

Essay 2 Assignment Sheet Template

Assignment Prompt: Take up at least two interpretive objects (text, image, film, art object, etc). Perform a close reading of these objects to generate observations of unobvious differences or similarities that lead to a difficulty or problematic, making sure to ground these observations in an interpretive context. Develop and advance an idea or argument that originates from the identified interpretive difficulty or problematic.

Essay Requirements:

- 1,500 – 2,000 words in length
- Double-spaced using a standard font (Times New Roman, etc)
- Formatting according to (MLA/Chicago/etc) guidelines including headings, page numbers, citation style, works cited/bibliography.
- Titled
- Proofread and spellchecked

The shared assignments align with WRIT 5 goals

The assignments foreground writing as a critical practice of thinking and discovery.

Writing 5

ABOUT THE COURSE

WRIT 5 introduces Dartmouth students to critical writing and treats writing not primarily as an instrument for communication but as a practice, a practice of thinking, by means of which ideas are discovered, examined, compared, evaluated, refined, and promoted. To learn to write critically is to learn to think critically, and that is the core value of a liberal arts education. Each section of WRIT 5 organizes its writing assignments around challenging readings chosen by the instructor. The texts for the class also include student writing.

Which are also WRIT 2-3's goals

Writing 2-3

ABOUT THE COURSE

This course is designed to help Dartmouth's underprepared writers who feel that they might benefit from two-terms of instruction to achieve excellence in writing through serious intellectual engagement and intensive academic support. Writing 2-3 students receive this support from committed faculty and graduate student teaching assistants who have training in writing pedagogy. By committing themselves to the rigorous process of reading, writing, discussing, researching, conferring, and rewriting, students learn to craft clear and compelling academic arguments. Students meet weekly with their teaching assistant for a 45-minute, one-on-one conference to discuss their writing. Students meet with the same class, instructor and teaching assistant for both terms. Class size is limited to 15 students.

For each of the following categories, by the end of Writing 2-3 you should be able to demonstrate the ability described:

- **Inquiry:** Read actively, generate appropriate research questions and understand writing and speaking as a process of inquiry and discovery.
- **Interpretation:** Research, analyze, and synthesize the elements of an argument, and compose interpretations of texts.
- **Contextualization:** Understand that the elements of composition (reading, researching, writing, thinking) always occur within social/academic contexts and that the best authorial choices arise from an appreciation of these contexts.
- **Construction:** Construct arguments using a variety of media that are informed, persuasive, and engaging, and support those arguments with different types of evidence.
- **Revision:** Revise texts, showing understanding that good writing is a process of revision (of re-reading, re-researching, re-drafting, re-thinking), that it displays a knowledge of conventions, and that compositions can improve with suggestions from secondary readers.
- **Assessment:** Assess yourselves as thinkers and writers in order to assess the quality of your own work and to revise accordingly.
- **Collaboration:** Engage effectively in collaborative work, including research projects, presentations, conferences, and peer responses.
- Finally, you should be able to demonstrate **confidence** as productive, capable contributors to the academic community.

Proposed adoption of the shared essays

Because WRIT 2-3 and 5 have these common goals and shared approaches to writing as thinking, we propose to adopt these essays for all sections of WRIT 2-3.

Assignments that foreground close-reading in service of identifying worthwhile interpretive problems raised by our objects of inquiry/analysis in order to develop nuanced ideas and arguments about said objects will help us achieve our stated course goals and outcomes.

Proposed adoption of the shared essays

Assigning Essays 1 and 2 in sequence is also sound pedagogy:

Most college writing asks students to engage, to varying degrees, with texts (broadly construed; virtually anything can be a “text” or interpretive object). Students need to learn how to analyze and interpret texts on their own terms (Essay 1) before they can situate texts in relation to and in conversation with other texts (Essay 2). Students need to be able to handle both challenges in order to orchestrate the more complex components of projects involving research (WRIT 3).

Proposed adoption of the shared essays

Assigning Essays 1 and 2 in sequence is also sound pedagogy:

Most college writing asks students to engage, to varying degrees, with texts (broadly construed; virtually anything can be a “text” or interpretive object). Students need to learn how to analyze and interpret texts on their own terms (Essay 1) before they can situate texts in relation to and in conversation with other texts (Essay 2). Students need to be able to handle both challenges in order to orchestrate the more complex components of projects involving research (WRIT 3).

These shared essays, additionally, invite new opportunities for the scaffolding of both analytical strategies and the assignments designed to operationalize those strategies.

A brief note on close-reading

To echo Harvard Writing Center, close-reading provides a different name for inductive reasoning: we want students to become expert observers—noticing patterns of similarity and contrast, considering the significance of details both on their own and in relation to each other, identifying between texts unobvious similarities within difference (or differences within similarities)—in order to then draw conclusions from and form interpretations of those observations. In this way, close-reading provides the main method for articulating possible, plausible, responses to interpretive problems identifiable in our objects of analysis.

A brief note on close-reading

Close-reading, then, is essential to both the process and product of writing.

- Through close-reading strategies, students develop ideas/claims worth pursuing
- Through close-reading strategies, students support those ideas/claims and develop their arguments

A brief note on close-reading

And close-reading is a foundational skill for all forms of critical writing and thinking.

- To interpret a text on its own terms
- To interpret a text or texts in relation to other texts
- To understand a text's structure of thinking and reasoning
- To critique a text or challenge its assumptions and premises
- To make the implicit explicit
- To engage meaningfully with texts whether they're the primary object of analysis or playing a supporting role in some larger project or inquiry

A brief note on close-reading

Hopefully we can see that the language of close-reading is not intended to signal some commitment to the literary or privileging of literary analysis. All texts/objects can and should be close-read. It's how we practice writing as thinking.

We can discuss as a group what close-reading different kinds of texts/objects might look like or seek to achieve, such as the close-reading of scholarly or critical works.

What adopting these essays could look like

WRITING 2: Emphasis on Composition

Essay 1 and Essay 2 are intended to be assigned in sequence. That said, additional assignments and essays can, of course, come before or after or in supplementation of them.

WRITING 3: Emphasis on Research

There is no shared assignment in WRIT 3, but this is the term, more so than WRIT 2, in which students should learn about the research process and be tasked with a more complex essay assignment.

Goals to emphasize across both WRIT 2 and WRIT 3

- Prioritizing writing instruction rather than discussion of readings/topics as such. The readings/topics should be in service of developing and practicing analytical reading, writing, thinking, and reasoning skills
- Scaffolding both writing skills/strategies and assignments
- Focusing on analytical/expository essays over other compositional modalities

Sample Essay 1

Deus et Machina: Sport, Technology, & Ethics

Prof Obbard – Fall 2022

1st Essay: Millar (2011)

Assignment Prompt: Perform a close reading of David Millar’s life narrative *Racing Through the Dark* (2011). Make observations about the role of memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and/or agency (you decide which to focus on) in Millar’s narrative. Be sure to ground these in an interpretive context using the other readings we are doing for this module (see list below). In your essay, identify an interpretive problem or difficulty in *Racing Through the Dark* (2011), and develop and advance an idea or argument that originates from it.

Approach: Interpreting a prompt is a skill that you will develop, so here is some help with this one. You will be doing the work described in the first three sentences above in your daily assignments and in class this month. So, keeping up with that and giving it your fullest effort is key to being able to write this essay. You should be able to “identify an interpretive problem or difficulty in *Racing Through the Dark* (2011)” in the course of that work and our discussions. The problem you choose to focus on need not be unique, so don’t be afraid to discuss it with your peers. In fact, discussing it, why you think it is a problem and how you will “develop and advance an idea or argument that originates from it,” will make the actual writing easier. Start thinking about it as you read, bring each thing you read to bear on it, and give yourself time to craft and recraft your idea or argument. Writing is transformative.

Sample Essay 2

Deus et Machina: Sport, Technology, & Ethics

Prof Obbard – Fall 2022

2nd Essay: Testosterone and Women's Sport

Assignment Prompt: Perform a close reading of Loland (2020) and Schultz (2021), two recent peer-reviewed perspectives on the inclusion of women with hyperandrogenism in women's sports. Identify *unobvious* differences or similarities between the two main readings that lead to a difficulty or problem and in your essay develop an idea or argument that originates from it.

Schultz, J. (2021). Good enough? The 'wicked' use of testosterone for defining femaleness in women's sport. *Sport in Society*, 24(4): 607–627

Loland S. (2020) Caster Semenya, athlete classification, and fair equality of opportunity in sport. *J Med Ethics*; 46: 584–590.

You may use other scholarly texts, including but not limited to the ones below. There is a folder under Canvas/Files that holds many good papers on the subject.

Sample Essay 1

The Assignment

To get started on this assignment, perform close readings of specific evidence from specific scenes and throughout *Captain Fantastic* in order to generate observations that lead to a difficulty or problematic in the interpretation of this film. Make sure to ground your observations in an interpretive context -- for you, this will be the film's depictions of and positions on a particular social norm or convention. Then, in 1200-1500 words develop and advance an idea or argument that originates from the identified interpretive difficulty or problematic.

In other words, identify a rich, complex interpretive question; conduct all the pre-work we've been practicing and discussing; and develop a nuanced answer to that interpretive question. This answer will be your main claim. The essay should analyze and close-read specific scenes and details therein in order to illustrate the plausibility of this answer, evolving and complicating the claim/answer along the way.

Keep in mind all we've been discussing (and will discuss) about intros, body paragraphs, and conclusions; about topic sentences, evidence, and the close-reading thereof; and about finding rich evidence, engaging with complicating evidence, and providing the reasoning necessary to connect evidence to claims.

Sample Essay 2

The Assignment

Take up at least two readings from this unit; one must be Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. Perform close readings of these objects to generate observations of unobvious differences or similarities that lead to a difficulty or problematic, making sure to ground these observations in an interpretive context. For us, this context will be the authors' use of American Gothic conventions to convey ideas about a social convention. Then, develop and advance an interpretive argument that originates from the identified interpretive difficulty or problematic. What do the authors/texts seem to be suggesting about a shared social convention? Importantly, *how* do the authors wield American Gothic conventions to develop these positions?

To help make the comparative nature of our essays more analytical, this paper involves what we'll call a **weighted** pairing of fictions, one of which you should choose to be your **target** text—the primary object of your analysis/interpretation—and the other you should think of as a **secondary** text, which you will use to help develop your argument about the target. For us, Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* will be the **target text**. Either Gilman's "Yellow Wallpaper" or Erdrich's "Fleur" (or both) will then serve as your **secondary text(s)**.

Think of it this way: building off your SE3, how can Gilman or Erdrich (or both) help you resolve the problem or answer the question you've identified in *Castle*?

How can compelling differences within similarities (or similarities within differences) between the texts help us better understand something Jackson is doing with American Gothic conventions and her use of such to imply ideas about social conventions?