EXPOSITORY WRITING S-20E: THE ESSAY

Expo S-20E, Section 2 (31288)      Tom Akbari
Summer 2005                        8 Prescott Street, Room 32
MW 1:00-3:30                       Office hours by appointment
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DESCRIPTION AND GOALS
What makes an excellent essay, and how do you write one? The essay, brief but penetrating, can shape itself into a persuasive argument on art, science, history, religion, philosophy, politics or culture and can address nearly any sort of audience. In this course, you’ll consider argument and audience through wide reading and focused writing of this flexible literary genre. Our explicit objective is a sequence of study to introduce and develop academic writing and interpretive reading skills applicable to the variety of subjects encountered across the college curricula. All along we’ll push our thinking and hone our intellectual curiosity, which is perhaps a disciplined form of childlike wonder and morbid fascination, something absolutely required for a good argument and a good essay. You will enter an analytical discourse by reading thoughtful essays, recognizing terms and modes of debate, taking tremendous risks with your thinking and writing arguments of your own. You’ll employ the essential practices of preliminary writing, drafting and revising in order to analyze and connect texts that differ widely in form and content; use primary and secondary sources and your own experiences as evidence; engage complexity in terms, concepts and outcomes; exercise self-critique; and write with concision and flair. In your writing you’ll develop new knowledge and an authoritative voice that speaks with other writers and your audience.

EXPECTATIONS
Expository Writing S-20E will guide you through the preparation of three original and compelling essays. The first (3-5 pages) entails close, analytical reading of an assigned essay; the second (5-7 pages) uses one text as a frame (or lens) for connections among several assigned sources; the third (6-9 pages) expands these practices and approaches to an intellectual problem by drawing on assigned essays, an essay of your choosing, your own experience and some library research.

Preparation of these essays entails rough drafts and exercises in revision and peer review. Before beginning a draft, you’ll complete short preliminary exercises to build specific writing skills and address specific problems in the reading. These exercises will be posted online so that we can all exchange our written ideas, something rarely done, even in writing classes. After submitting a rough draft, you’ll meet with the instructor to talk pointedly about your writing and revision in preparing a final draft. You’ll make a brief oral presentation at the end of the semester to experiment with alternatives in presenting your argument to an audience.

Our course will function as a seminar. In a seminar, lectures, if any, are infrequent and you must come to each class prepared to discuss and write on the day's reading. You are also expected to offer thoughtful comments on the work of your peers.

All work should be carefully proofread. Grammar and punctuation will be addressed as an integral part of the writing process, not separately. If you have special concerns with grammar and punctuation, please seek personal help from me and tutors at the Harvard Writing Center.

Please feel free to talk to me about any difficulties or concerns you may have. And let me know what you think is going well. Remember, your teachers are here to help.

TEXTS
AT THE HARVARD COOP, 499-2000
Gordon Harvey, Writing with Sources

AT GNOMON COPY, 1304 Massachusetts Avenue, 491-1111
Course Reader
EVALUATION
The evaluation of papers rests on key criteria outlined below and discussed consistently in each class during the term. With each draft of a paper you submit, you will receive a detailed letter of evaluation. And you will evaluate fellow students as well during “revision club.” During the course of the term, then, you will become increasingly adept at formulating the kind of writing we aim to achieve. Note that much greater value is placed on the last essay so that improvement is a significant factor.

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<tr>
<th>Essay 1</th>
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<tr>
<td>Essay 2</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>Essay 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online writing, class participation, peer review</td>
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ONLINE WRITING
Among the course assignments will be online, preliminary exercises that aim to extend in-class discussions, build on specific writing skills and propel students into their writing. You’ll share your writing with everyone in class by emailing your ideas to a mailing list that distributes them to your classmates. Post your online assignments by 5 PM on the days they're due (schedule below). The list can and should also serve as a forum for issues of all sorts, especially those, of whatever nature, pertinent to the class. If you have concerns about this technology, please discuss them with me and, if you desire, the class.

Please subscribe and send your first message to the class email list by **12:00 PM, Tuesday, 28 June**. To subscribe, go to this website: <https://lists.dce.harvard.edu/mailman/listinfo/expos20e2>. Follow the instructions on the page and the instructions you’ll receive in a following email. To post your messages to the list after you’ve subscribed, send a message to <expos20e2@lists.dce.harvard.edu>. In your brief first message tell us where you are from and who is your favorite author and why. Or tell us whatever you think we should know or would like to know about you or anything else.

You can always see what's been posted to the list throughout the term by going to the list archive on the web at <https://lists.dce.harvard.edu/pipermail/expos20e2/>.

POLICIES
- Students must submit rough and final drafts of all three essays to pass the course.
- Students will receive comments on both rough and final drafts; only final drafts will be graded.
- Student should submit each final essay in a folder with pockets that contains all previous final drafts, rough drafts, peer and instructor evaluations.
- Drafts are due at the beginning of class on their due date, or precisely at the time specified on non-class days. Online writing is due at 5 PM on specified dates. Late work cannot be accepted.
- Good attendance is crucial to our work in the course. Students who miss more than two classes without excuse of religious holiday or documented illness may be excluded from class. Tardiness on two occasions by more than ten minutes constitutes an absence.

WRITING CENTER
The Writing Center, Barker Center Room 019 (ph. 495-1655), is a good resource for writing help of any kind (though not simple proofreading and editing). Tutors are available free-of-charge by appointment on weekdays and by drop-in on Monday-Thursday evenings, 7-9 PM. Appointments can be made online <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/>. The Writing Center opens Tuesday, 5 July and begins taking online appointments a few days prior. Students are also encouraged to consult the various guides to writing available at the Writing Center website.
SCHEDULE (may change)
Readings are listed on the day they are first to be discussed. Unless otherwise noted, all readings
are found in *Best American Essays*. Conferences will be held by appointment. Due dates and times
are listed in bold type.

Unit 1. Perspective in the Essay: Close Reading

**Week 1**
Monday, 27 June. Introduction. What is an essay? What makes good writing? On writing in
college, critical thinking, argument, complexity, personal experience. Writing exercise. First
reading, unit assignments issued.

Tuesday, 28 June. **Online exercise 1.1 due, 8 PM.** Please post to class email list.

Wednesday, 29 June. Variety of essay. Reading: Addams, Dillard (*Best American Essays*);
Sacks (handout); Harvey, Introduction, Chapter 1. Workshop: close reading, thesis, motive,
analytical problem, types of the essay. Conference sign-up.

Thursday, 30 June. **Online exercise 1.2 due, 5 PM.**

**Week 2**
Monday, 4 July. No class!

Tuesday, 5 July. **Rough Draft, Essay 1, due in my mailbox, 9 AM (three copies).**
Conferences.

Wednesday, 6 July. Workshop on student drafts: close reading, use of quotations, evidence.
Reading: Harvey, Chapter 2, Chapter 4.1b (37-39). Conferences.

Thursday, 7 July. Conferences.

Unit 2. Multiple Sources: Framing an Approach

**Week 3**
Monday, 11 July. **Final draft, Essay 1 due (in folder with rough draft and revision club
evaluations).** Workshop on sources. Introduction of Unit 2, excerpts of Unit 2 reading,
assignments issued.

Wednesday, 13 July. Reading: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, McCarthy, Baldwin, Rodriguez, Early.
Workshop on Essay 1 samples; placing sources into dialogue, keyterms.

Friday, 15 July. **Online exercise 2.1 due, 5 PM.**

**Week 4**
Monday, 18 July. Workshop on keyterms, placing sources into dialogue, framing a text.


Thursday, 21 July. Conferences.

**Week 5**
Monday, 25 July. Workshop on rough drafts.
Summer School Writing Program Featured Speaker: Gregg Hurwitz, Harvard College AB ’95,
will discuss his recent novel *The Program* at 6:00 P.M. in the Thompson Room, Barker Center.
Unit 3. Engaging an Intellectual Problem and Synthesizing Your Voice


Week 6
Monday, 1 August. Reading: Twain, Adams, Sontag, Thomas, Gould, Bellow.

Tuesday, 2 August. Online exercise 3.1 due, 5 PM.

Wednesday, 3 August. Workshop on research.

Week 7
Monday, 8 August. Rough draft, Essay 3 due (three copies). Conferences.

Tuesday, 9 August. Conferences.

Wednesday, 10 August. Last class. PARTY. Oral presentations. Workshop on rough drafts. Conferences.

Week 8
Monday, 11 August. Final draft, Essay 3 due, 1 PM, my box at 8 Prescott Street. For final review, please place in folder containing all drafts, revised essays, peer and instructor evaluations.

Wednesday, 13 August. Return of folders and grades, 1-3 PM, my office at 8 Prescott Street.

GRADING CRITERIA
A: Excellent. Elocuently constructs new knowledge about a clearly stated topic.
• Thesis: ambitious, incisive and provocative; sufficiently limited in scope; stems from reading but makes its own argument; appears early and reappears in some form throughout
• Motive: clearly stated, surprising and interesting
• Structure: coherent, logical, progressive (not merely a list); supple (engages complications, counter-arguments); topic/thesis statements clearly guide reader and highlight key terms; paragraphs internally coherent; no repetition
• Evidence: sufficient and well-chosen, presented in comprehensible and grammatical fashion
• Analysis: insightful and without cliché; profound connections between texts; beyond summary and paraphrase; may dwell in depth on one or two key examples
• Sources: well-chosen; deployed in several ways (to motivate argument, provide key terms, to help “frame” argument); quoted and cited correctly
• Style: smooth, clear; without fuss or stiffness yet sophisticated; diction appropriate to audience and occasion

B: Good. An ambitious essay that achieves most of its aims.
• Thesis: arguable but vague, overly broad, implied, predictable. May disappear from the paper at times
• Motive: vague
• Structure: generally logical but confusing in places; overly predictable or underdeveloped; some listing of points and repetition of points; limited engagement with complexity and counter-argument; topic/transition sentences unclear at times, though analytical; some paragraphs disorganized
• Evidence: generally solid, but scanty; portions left unnoticed; out of context
• Analysis: at times insightful, but sometimes missing or simply summary or paraphrase; connections between texts left unclear; connections between evidence and thesis inconsistent
• Sources: deployed in limited ways: easy foe, easy ally; quoted and cited correctly
• Style: generally clear but stiff or fancy; may display certain errors of punctuation, grammar, spelling

C: Passing. An essay that engages with texts with little originality. Or a more original essay that displays significant conceptual or structural problems.
• Thesis: vague, descriptive (rather than analytical), or confusing; unrelated components; disappears from essay
• Motive: vague or absent
• Structure: confusing (leaps, missing links); predictable; few complications or counter-arguments; disorganized paragraphs; descriptive (summary), and not analytical, topic sentences
• Evidence: missing or quotations left bereft of analysis; out of context
• Analysis: some insight and connection between texts, but mostly summary; some misinterpretation
• Sources: present in name only or only as affirmation of author’s viewpoint; errors in quotation and citation
• Style: unclear and difficult to read; technical errors

ACADEMIC HONESTY
Below is Harvard College's policy on academic honesty, stated in its Handbook for Students, page 305. It applies to our work.

All homework assignments, projects, lab reports, papers and examinations submitted to a course are expected to be the student's own work. Students should always take great care to distinguish their own ideas and knowledge from information derived from sources. The term "sources" includes not only published primary and secondary material, but also information and opinions gained directly from other people.

The responsibility for learning the proper forms of citation lies with the individual student. Quotations must be placed properly within quotation marks and must be cited fully. In addition, all paraphrased material must be acknowledged completely. Whenever ideas or facts are derived from a student's reading and research or from a student's own writings, the sources must be indicated.

Students are also expected to be familiar with Chapter 3, “Misuse of Sources,” of Writing with Sources.