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Expo E25, Section 134 Office hours: By appointment

Wednesdays, 7:40-9:40pm Eastern Time

**Course Canvas Site:**

https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/8115

**Expo E-25, section 13:**

**Academic Writing and Critical Reading**

**Course Goals:**

Writing is a crucial skill that nearly every scholar considers central to his or her work in academia. Writing is not, however, simply the mastery of a particular technique or genre of expression; the writing process mirrors the scholarly process itself. In order to know what to write, we must first learn to analyze, criticize, and question. In order to know what is important to write, we must learn to develop, refine, and reconsider our questions and arguments. In order to write clearly, we must learn to organize, structure, and articulate our ideas and arguments. In this course, we will be working on each of these skills (and more). We will be practicing them extensively, but that is not all: we will also be thinking about why these skills are important, how they are crucial to the thinking and writing process, and, further, how these skills can be transported into other writing assignments you will be working on in the future throughout your academic career.

However, as you will see from the many essays that we read throughout the semester, there is no single formula for what constitutes “good” writing, either across the different academic fields or, even, within any one of them. Instead, writing – like the act of thinking itself – can be done effectively in a variety of ways to a variety of ends, and we will therefore be considering writing as a *process that takes place over time* and that crucially involves responding to readings, developing ideas, testing arguments in drafts, and reconsidering and refining those arguments through revision.

**Required Texts and Reading:**

You only need to purchase one text for this class:

Johnson, James Weldon. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man.* ISBN 9780140184020

This text is available at the Harvard COOP (for local students), but is also widely available at local bookstores and through online sellers. There are many different versions of this book (including e-texts); if you choose to purchase a different version than the one listed, you are responsible for cross-referencing all page numbers and citations.

Additionally, there are several other texts that you will be required to read. These readings will be posted to the course’s Canvas site and available for download. Failure to read these texts will not only affect your participation grade but will seriously impair your ability to write successful essays.

I recommend but do not require that you print out copies of the texts; research shows that printing out texts and physically marking them up is one of the most effective ways to be an “active” reader (and thus a successful writer about the readings).

**The Process:**

At the beginning of each unit, we will read and discuss a variety of texts. All reading must be completed by the assigned class session.

Reading:

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***Please note: For Essays 1 and 2, you are not to consult any sources other than those provided by me.*** Consulting outside sources – even just a quick Google search to “generate” ideas – could potentially constitute plagiarism (see the policy on Academic Honesty, below).

Response papers, discussion posts, and short writing:

For each unit, you will produce one or more short writings that respond to a particular question about the reading, that focus on a particular writing skill, or that help jumpstart your thinking for the unit essay. These writings are not graded, but failure to complete *any* of them will lower your grade for participation (see the section on Grades, below).

Drafts:

After reading and responding to the materials, you will submit a draft of the unit essay. The draft must be substantial – that is, it need not be full-length, but it must show engagement and effort. Drafts are not graded, but I will provide extensive commentary, questions, and suggestions before returning them to you. Though at an early stage of the writing process, your drafts nonetheless should be polished technically: i.e., grammar, format, and citation should all be correct. You will attach to your draft a “cover letter” in which you discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your draft, as well as answer certain specific questions I will provide you.

Draft workshop:

For each unit, we will spend at least one class period “workshopping” your drafts. In addition to receiving commentary and suggestion from your classmates on your own work, you will be expected to provide helpful and thorough commentary and suggestion on your classmates’ work. Procedural details for each workshop will be provided at the appropriate times. We do workshops because one of the best ways to learn to analyze your own writing is through articulating (and hearing articulated) analysis of another’s.

Revision:

After analyzing your work in workshops and in conference, you will revise your draft before submitting it for a grade. Revisions are usually extensive – that is, you should expect (and plan) to rethink and rewrite much of your essay between the draft and revision, and not just fix a few typos or proofreading errors. Revisions are fundamental and should be approached as such!

**Deadlines**:

As a writing-intensive class, this course runs on an especially tight schedule. You will have substantial writing assignments to complete each week, and so falling behind can be particularly dangerous. Nonetheless, in the interest of fairness, late work will be penalized (typically at the rate of one-third of a letter grade per day late – *not per class meeting late*). If you see that you will be unable to meet a deadline, notify me in advance.

**Submitting Essays:**

For this course, we will be using MLA style for citations and format, so be sure to familiarize yourself with it. Start by spending time here: «http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do» (We’ll talk about the Guide more in class.) In addition, you must adhere to the following guidelines:

* Use only 12 point Times New Roman font, double spaced.
* Use 1” right, left, top, and bottom margins. Left justify only. Do not add extra spaces between paragraphs.
* On the first page only, write the following information in the upper left hand corner:

Your name

Essay #, Draft/Revision

Date

* Number each page (including the first) in the upper right hand corner

**Grades:**

Final grades will be determined according to the scale below. Please note that as the semester progresses, assignments increase in length, are a larger proportion of your final grade, and are graded with increasing rigor. This last means that as we learn more about writing and develop as writers, I will be holding you to higher standards: what may be forgiven in the first essay will not be forgiven in the third (this applies especially to the technical matters of citation). Note also that you will get grades on *revisions only* (i.e., drafts are required but not graded). Grades on revisions are final; you may not revise a revision for another grade.

We will discuss grades and the grading process in class, but please note that grades for this class should not be thought of in the same way that they might be in other classes. Writing is a process of thoughtful articulation and revision – there is never a single “correct” essay against which your essay will be graded. Instead, essays will be better or worse in how they accomplish particular goals and purposes; essay grades will reflect this rather than a pre-established standard.

In addition to attendance and timely completion of Response Papers, the “participation” component includes meticulous preparation for class (i.e., completing all assigned reading), and consistent, thoughtful contribution to classroom discussion.

Essay 1: 25%

Essay 2: 30%

Essay 3: 35%

Participation: 10%

**Expository Writing Policy on Completion of Work:**

Because this course is a planned sequence of writing, it is an official program-wide policy that you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course *in order* (i.e., not all at once in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind). If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the end of that essay’s unit (unless you have documented a medical problem), you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and failed.

**Expository Writing Policy on Attendance:**

Because instruction in E25 proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. It is an official program-wide policy that if you are absent without medical or religious excuse more than twice, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and failed. On your second unexcused absence, you will receive a warning of your status in regard to that policy. Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. Absences because of special events, such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts are not excusable absences.

**Academic Honesty:**

From the Extension School (http://www.extension.harvard.edu/2009-10/policies/responsible.jsp):

Plagiarism is the theft of someone else’s ideas and work. Whether a student copies verbatim or simply rephrases the ideas of another without properly acknowledging the source, the theft is the same. A computer program written as part of the student’s academic work is, like a paper, expected to be the student’s original work and subject to the same standards of representation. In the preparation of work submitted to meet course requirements, whether a draft or final version of a paper, project, assignment, computer program, or take-home examination, students must take great care to distinguish their own ideas and language from information derived from sources. Sources include published primary and secondary materials, the Internet, and information and opinions gained directly from other people. Whenever ideas or facts are derived from a student’s reading or research, the sources must be properly cited.

You are responsible for understanding Harvard Extension School policies on academic integrity ([www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/student-conduct/academic-integrity](https://fasmail.harvard.edu/OWA/redir.aspx?C=N8K4vnMWDkqDSdLRax09ahanCye5FtMIKq-9efMeedTQuj1IqrSmgObw8qfQx1_RtYbS_9lrzPs.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.extension.harvard.edu%2fresources-policies%2fstudent-conduct%2facademic-integrity)) and how to use sources responsibly. Not knowing the rules, misunderstanding the rules, running out of time, submitting the wrong draft, or being overwhelmed with multiple demands are not acceptable excuses. There are no excuses for failure to uphold academic integrity. To support your learning about academic citation rules, please visit the Harvard Extension School Tips to Avoid Plagiarism ([www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/tips-avoid-plagiarism](https://fasmail.harvard.edu/OWA/redir.aspx?C=N8K4vnMWDkqDSdLRax09ahanCye5FtMIKq-9efMeedTQuj1IqrSmgObw8qfQx1_RtYbS_9lrzPs.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.extension.harvard.edu%2fresources-policies%2fresources%2ftips-avoid-plagiarism)), where you'll find links to the Harvard Guide to Using Sources and two free online 15-minute tutorials to test your knowledge of academic citation policy. The tutorials are anonymous open-learning tools.

**Disability Services:**

The Extension School is committed to providing an accessible academic community. The Accessibility Office offers a variety of accommodations and services to students with documented disabilities. Please visit [www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/disability-services-accessibility](https://fasmail.harvard.edu/OWA/redir.aspx?C=N8K4vnMWDkqDSdLRax09ahanCye5FtMIKq-9efMeedTQuj1IqrSmgObw8qfQx1_RtYbS_9lrzPs.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.extension.harvard.edu%2fresources-policies%2fresources%2fdisability-services-accessibility) for more information.

**Contacting Me:**

Email is the best way to contact me, but please note that I cannot guarantee that I will be able to respond the same night to emails received after 8pm, though I will always try my best to respond within 24 hours. In the interest of fairness, however, I cannot respond to or comment on whole “intermediate” drafts (i.e., a second or third draft of a unit essay). I am always happy to answer *specific questions*. “Is this a good thesis?” or “How can I improve my introductory paragraph?” are *not* specific questions; “Would it be clearer if I said *x* instead of *y*?” or “I am worried about the connections between paragraphs 4 and 5” *are* specific questions. Emailers who include an attempt to answer their own questions are most commendable.

# Writing Center

# Be sure to take advantage of the resources available to you through the Extension School’s Writing Center in Grossman Library. Students who are enrolled in online courses may schedule appointments up to one week in advance, but are limited to two tutorials per week totaling no more than 7 tutorials per semester. To request a tutorial, send an email detailing the course you are enrolled in, an explanation of the assignment and due date to [writing\_center@dcemail.harvard.edu](mailto:writing_center@dcemail.harvard.edu). Be sure to attach your assignment as a Word (.doc) or Google Docs (.docx) file and, as always when seeking detailed feedback, ask specific questions and explain your concerns about your writing. You should receive a response within 72 hours. Please note: if you are a local student, the Writing Center asks that you come for an in-person tutorial. For more information on the Writing Center, visit their webpage at <http://www.extension.harvard.edu/resources/writing-center>.