

EXPOSITORY WRITING 20: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE Fall 2016

Course Information

Course Time: Mondays and Wednesdays 9am (20.216) and 10am (20.217)

Course Location: Sever Hall 104

Course Website: <https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/12857>

Preceptor Information

Preceptor: Dr. Julia Galindo

Office: One Bow St., Suite 250, Rm. 240

Email: juliagalindo@fas.harvard.edu

Office hours: By appointment (note: office hours are not held during conference weeks)

COURSE OVERVIEW: The Writing and the Reading

Who gets ahead in America? Why do some succeed while others fail? Given knowledge of someone's background, can we predict if she will become successful? Is it possible to change the course of an individual's trajectory? How do we account for the influence of various complex factors, including family, community, and society? In this course, we will examine questions of success, failure, achievement, and identity viewed through the lens of current theories in psychology. We will begin with *The Overachievers*, a best-selling journalistic account of the pressure for academic achievement felt by students at an elite public high school on the East Coast. We'll consider how passion, motivation, and competition all contribute to an individual's drive to succeed. Next, we will read Malcolm Gladwell's *Outliers: The story of success* and apply it as a lens to analyze a longitudinal, ethnographic study of 12 American children. We will explore how race, gender, and familial wealth and resources affected these children's lived experiences of childhood and, later, their chances of successfully getting into college. In the final unit of the course, we will use a popular psychology book on habits as a jumping off point to complete independent research papers that examine how factors like self-control, willpower, mindfulness, and creativity contribute to success. Throughout the course, we will use psychological theory to motivate questions and answers about human behavior in a society where the demand for success can be tantalizingly high and the fear of failure devastatingly relentless.

Expos 20 is a place for you to build your understanding of academic writing. As you proceed through your undergraduate years, writing will be a central part of your work. Becoming a scholar means learning to think in a discipline and participating in the discourse of that discipline. In this course, you will learn the elements of a scholarly argument that form the basis of an analytic essay while writing in the discipline of psychology. You will write three essays, each of which will focus on a different set of writing skills.

Some of our writing goals will change unit by unit, as you take on the distinct challenges of several important versions of the academic essay. Other goals will remain our focus throughout

the whole of the course: developing your sense of what you do well and challenging yourself to grow as a writer; expanding your repertoire and practice of revision techniques; and increasing the complexity and originality of your analysis as well as the effectiveness and elegance of your prose. One of the most exciting things to learn in a writing course is that the learning process never stops; one doesn't "arrive" at being a good writer, but rather continually becomes one.

Writing isn't about talent. It's about devotion, it's about practice.
– Naomi Shihab Nye

Course Goals

- Develop your ability to write analytically, which involves crafting a thesis, using evidence to build an argument, learning to use sources as evidence, critically examine sources and integrating those critical ideas to make a logical and coherent argument
- Develop a sense of your own writing process
- Develop your ability to critique your own and others' writing
- Practice your academic discussion skills
- Develop an awareness of how analytical writing varies across disciplines

With these goals in mind, we begin with these important premises:

- **Writing is a process.** You will take notes on your reading; write and revise response papers; write drafts of your essays; and fully revise those essays. This continued process of drafting and revision is the primary work of this class, and is the main way your writing grows stronger. It's worth noting that while inspiration is the moment we all hope for in our writing, it comes most readily when that inspiration is earned – in other words, when you have dedicated *sustained effort to that process* of reading, thinking, questioning, drafting and revising. This course will also ask you to be *reflective* about that process and about what you want to accomplish in each assignment: in your cover letters about each essay and in your Writer's Letter at the beginning of the term.
- **Writing is thinking.** That evolving writing process also allows you to develop your thinking with greater depth and meaning. Writing is one of the best ways to *figure out* your ideas. You should expect to write frequent short assignments (exercises and response papers) to help you develop the ideas you will use in your essays.
- **Writing is a conversation.** When you write, you are often in conversation with the sources you are writing about. You are likewise in conversation with your audience. You will express your ideas in your response papers, drafts and revisions, and your audience (your classmates and me) will respond to those ideas, telling you what their strengths are and where they can grow stronger. In addition to the feedback you get from your classmates, as a required part of the course, you will take part in individual and group conferences about your essays and you will receive written feedback from me throughout the semester.

Course Organization and Draft Due Dates

The course is structured in the following units:

Unit 1: “Pressure to Succeed.” We begin with *The Overachievers: The Secret Lives of Driven Kids*. In this engrossing, real-world account of the lives of high school students attending a competitive public high school near Bethesda, Maryland, journalist Alexandra Robbins offers up a critique of our present-day society. Are kids today under too much pressure to achieve? Have colleges and universities become too elite? What role do parents play in contributing to this competitive frenzy? These are just some of the questions Robbins examines in her narrative. To write the unit 1 essay, you will first practice the skill of posing your own analytical question of a text. Your thesis (the central claim that you argue in your essay) will provide the answer to this question. In class and through homework assignments, we will discuss how to ask interesting questions that matter and how to craft something unique and non-obvious to say in response (in other words, how to argue a true thesis). You won’t be parroting Robbins’ argument, but rather you will evaluate her claims and use her work as a jumping off point to argue your own claim. Thus, essay 1 gives you the opportunity to practice one of the most common essay genres—evaluating an author’s argument.

Unit 2: “Can Anyone Succeed on Their Own?” We can often learn more about a source by putting it into conversation, or contextualizing it, with another source. Thus, in Unit 2, we begin by reading Malcolm Gladwell’s *Outliers* so that we can use it as a lens through which to analyze the portraits of children described by Annette Lareau in *Unequal Childhoods*. The “lens essay” is another popular type of academic essay assignment. As this type of essay involves two sources, its structure is more complicated. Thus, a special focus of essay 2 is paper structure—structure both in terms of how the argument builds over the whole paper and the structure within each paragraph. Gladwell’s writing on the factors often overlooked in determining an individual’s success—the role of family, culture, and special opportunities, for example, will be used as the lens through which to examine the data presented by Annette Lareau. As in unit 1, you will read these sources looking for a place to enter the conversation by finding something unique to say about them.

Unit 3: “Want to Succeed? Here’s How.” The course culminates with an examination of key factors that have been identified as important ingredients to a successful life. For example, Rubin writes about the role of creativity, anxiety, self-control and more. You will have the opportunity to choose one of these factors, based on your own interests, to conduct an independent literature search, and to write the unit 3 essay on this factor and how it contributes to living a happy and productive life. We will begin by reading Gretchen Rubin’s *Better than Before*, a broad and accessible overview of recent research into the many factors thought to play a role in being successful. You will then explore the published literature in psychology to identify and collect articles on the factor you have chosen to investigate further. Your unit 3 essay is a multi-source research paper where your task is to synthesize the “state-of-the-field” on your chosen topic.

Important Due Dates for the Drafts

Essay 1 Draft Due: Friday, September 30, 11:59 pm

Essay 2 Draft Due: Friday, October 28, 11:59 pm

Essay 3 Draft Due: Friday, December 2, 11:59 pm

Final drafts are due on a rolling basis, one week from the date of your conference (for example, if your conference is on a Tuesday, your revision will be due the following Tuesday).

HOW THE COURSE WORKS

Required Texts and Materials

On many class days, some of the texts we turn to will be your own writing: your response papers, drafts and revised essays will be part of what we read and discuss. **All writing you do for this class is public** – in other words, it may be chosen as one of the examples for us to consider. If there is ever a particular piece you *don't* want others to see, please let me know when you submit it.

Required Texts

Graff, G. & Birkenstein, C. (2014). *They say I say: Moves that matter in academic Writing*, 3rd ed. New York and London: W. W. Norton and company.

Robbins, A. (2007). *The overachievers: The secret lives of driven kids*. New York: Hyperion.

Gladwell, M. (2008). *Outliers: The story of success*. New York, Boston and London: Back Bay Books.

Lareau, A. (2011). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life*, 2nd edition. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

Rubin, G. (2015). *Better than before: What I learned about making and breaking habits—to sleep more, quit sugar, procrastinate less, and generally build a happier life*. New York: Broadway Books.

Additional readings for Units 1-3 will be handed out in class or available on the Canvas course site.

Recommended Resources

You are not required to buy the following resources; however, if you think you would benefit from a style guide for writing or the manual that describes how to cite in APA format (the method we will use in this class), I encourage you to seek out these resources in the library.

Strunk, W. & White, E. B. ((2000). *The elements of style*, 4th ed. New York: Longman.

Publication manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th ed. Washington DC:

Communication

The course works best when we treat it as a semester-long conversation about your writing. To make that conversation possible, there are a few important things to remember:

- **Conferences:** We will have three conferences throughout the semester, in between the first draft and final version of each essay. These conferences are our chance to work closely on your writing and to focus your work in revision, and are most worthwhile when you are the one to guide them. Please come to each conference prepared – having reviewed your essay, considered your questions, and begun to think about revision possibilities and strategies. You should plan on taking notes during our discussions. **Since the schedule during conference days is so tight, missed conferences cannot be rescheduled.**

In addition to these formal conferences, please feel free to contact me to meet to discuss any aspect of the course or your writing. Office hours are held by appointment. Due to tight scheduling, office hours cannot be held on days when there are also writing conferences.

- **E-mail:** Rather than take up our class time with many announcements, I often use e-mail to communicate much of that information. As part of your participation in the course, I ask that you check your Harvard e-mail account daily; you are responsible for the information I post there. Likewise, I will make sure to check mine once every weekday for questions from you. Please note that I often do not check email during evenings and weekends. Under most circumstances, I will be able to get back to you within 24 hours of your question (or by Tuesday morning, if you've emailed over the weekend).

Class Participation

One of the benefits of Expos is its small class size. That benefit is best realized when every student participates fully in the class. As in any seminar, you will learn much more from formulating, articulating, and questioning your own thoughts than from *only* listening to what others have to say. If you tend to participate often, please be mindful of not dominating the conversation and look for opportunities to connect your comments to someone else's or to create space for someone else to speak. If you tend to hesitate to contribute your thoughts, I encourage you to take advantage of our small class size and friendly environment to push yourself to speak up. However, if you do not feel comfortable participating in large group discussions, please ensure that I see you actively participating in small groups so that I do not mistake your reticence for disengagement. You are responsible for being in class, prepared and on time, each time we meet. "Being prepared" means that you have given careful thought to the reading and writing assigned for the day, and that you are ready to offer ideas and questions to open our discussion.

- **Laptop and Cell phone use policy:** Please note that, unless you are otherwise notified, this class is a laptop- and cell phone-free zone. Please silence your phones and put away your computers at the beginning of class. In my experience, the quality of class discussion is significantly enhanced when we, and those around us, are not distracted by various electronic stimuli. For that reason, **you should come to class prepared to participate without consulting your devices—this may mean that you need to print out articles and your notes, that you should buy hard (rather than electronic) copies of the assigned books, or that you need a pen and notebook handy, so please plan ahead.** If you are experiencing an urgent crisis where you need to check or use your cell phone, please inform me that you are experiencing an emergency and leave the class to check or use your phone. Please exercise this privilege only when it is truly needed.
- An exception is that, on certain days, you will be asked to bring to a laptop to class to carry out certain activities. You will be given advance notice of this. Please let me know right away if you do not have a laptop that you can bring to class so that we can make other arrangements for your participation.

Attendance and Lateness

Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. *If you are absent without medical excuse **more than twice**, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.* On the occasion of your second unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you of your situation. This letter will also be sent to your Resident Dean, so the College can give you whatever supervision and support you need to complete the course.

You are expected to let me know promptly if you have missed or will miss a class; you remain responsible for the work due that day and for any new work assigned. Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In the case of a medical problem, you should contact me before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours. Please note that to count as an excused absence you must provide a note from UHS or another medical official, or your Resident Dean. ***Absences because of special events such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts are not excusable absences.*** If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you should contact your Resident Dean and you must directly petition the Expository Writing Senior Preceptor, who will grant such petitions only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

Class begins promptly at seven minutes past the hour. Three latenesses of more than ten minutes will be counted as an absence.

WRITTEN WORK

Submitting Essays

You will turn in drafts and revisions to the course website (Canvas). Please be sure to check the syllabus for details on assignment due dates and pay careful attention to the general guidelines

about format listed below. *Note: In the event that there is a conflict between the due date/time listed on the syllabus and the due date displayed on the course website, you should always use the due date/time as it is listed on the syllabus.*

When you are uploading documents to the dropbox, you are responsible for submitting versions that I can open. The document must be in Microsoft Word; your file should end in .doc or .docx. It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you are sending is not corrupted or damaged. **If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the essay will be subject to a late penalty.**

Following the guidelines below will ensure that I can focus on your ideas and your prose when I read your essays, rather than devoting time to issues of formatting, pagination, etc. The guidelines apply both to essay drafts and revisions. Forgetting to check your essays for these matters can result in a lower grade for the essay.

Format:

All essays should adhere to this format:

- double-space in Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins
- number all pages and paragraphs ****Essential*
- include a title page that lists your name, the course title, my name, the date, the unit number, and your essay title. (The title page does not count against your page count.)
- proofread thoroughly for typographical, grammatical, and punctuation errors. Consistent errors will lower the grades on your essays.
- use the APA in-text citation method to document your sources, and include a correctly formatted list of References. Consult the *Harvard Guide to Using Sources* for the appropriate citation information.

A word to the wise:

Keep an electronic copy of all your work. To be sure to avoid computer disaster, you should both regularly save your work and periodically print working drafts as you write (in other words, you should never be in the position of having "finished" an essay or revision with nothing to show for it if your computer crashes).

Deadlines

For many class meetings, you will have due a response paper or some other reading or writing exercise to help you develop the essay for that unit. Our work together in class will also often be based on those assignments. For those reasons, it is imperative that you turn your work in on time. Of course, even in the most carefully organized semesters, unexpected circumstances can arise – therefore **each student in this section is allowed ONE 24-hour extension on a response paper, draft, or revision during the semester.** To use that 24-hour extension without penalty, you must: contact me *before* that deadline; submit the late work to the course website; and be on

time with the other work due on that day as well. Otherwise, the work will be counted as late. If you use your extension for an assignment that is going to be reviewed by others (for example, if you use it on a response paper that we are planning to go over in class and you do not have a paper to trade with a peer in that class meeting), **be aware that you are forfeiting your opportunity to get feedback on that assignment.** Using the extension may also affect the timing with which I am able to get feedback to you.

Other than that “wild card” extension, all deadlines in the course are firm. Except in the case of medical or family emergency, I do not grant further extensions. Essay drafts or revisions turned in after the deadline will be penalized a third of a letter-grade on the final essay for each day they are late. If you cannot meet a deadline due to a medical emergency, you must contact me right away and you will be required to produce a note from UHS; in the event of a family emergency, you must contact me right away, and may be required to ask your dean to contact me by e-mail or phone. In addition, please contact me as soon as possible so we can work out an alternative schedule.

Revision

Because of the emphasis this course places on revision, the schedule is designed to allow you as much revision time per essay as possible—seven days following the date of your writing conference. Since you’ll have a significant span of days in which to revise, the expectations for this aspect of your work in the course are high.

Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Completion of Work

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course—not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind. You will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements, therefore, if you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work, and be copied to your Resident Dean. *If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date, and you have not documented a medical problem, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.*

Policy on Collaboration

The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students or through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the *Student Handbook*, “Students need not acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading.” However, all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts, or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.

Academic Integrity

Throughout the semester we'll work on the proper use of sources, including how to cite and how to avoid plagiarism. You should always feel free to ask me questions about this material. All the work that you submit for this course must be your own, and that work should not make use of outside sources unless that is explicitly part of the assignment. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to disciplinary action by the Honor Council.

Writing Center

At any stage of the writing process – brainstorming ideas, reviewing drafts, approaching revisions – you may want some extra attention on your essays. The Writing Center (located on the garden level of the Barker Center) offers hour-long appointments with trained tutors. I can't stress strongly enough the benefit of the service they provide; regardless of the strengths or weaknesses of an essay, any piece of writing benefits from further review and a fresh perspective. Visit the Writing Center's web site at <http://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/> to make an appointment. Tutors also hold drop-in office hours at other campus locations; see the Writing Center website for details.

Academic Accommodations

If you need academic adjustments or accommodations, please contact me by Friday, September 16, 2016. You will need to show me your letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO). Failure to do so may result in my inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although I may consult with the folks at AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.

Grades

The majority of your grade comes from your three essays, according to the following breakdown: Essay #1 = 25%; Essay #2 = 30%; Essay #3 = 35%. The standard for each essay also becomes more demanding as we progress (since you are building on certain fundamental skills and techniques with each essay). The remaining 10% of your grade represents a serious measure of your completion of response papers, your constructive participation in class discussion and conferences, and the care with which you respond to fellow students' work. I will grade only the revisions (that is, the last version) of your essays, not the drafts or response papers. However, punctual and thorough completion of your ungraded work will factor into your final course grade. Please be advised that grades on revised essays are final. I will not read or grade a further revision of a revised essay. *Keep in mind that a grade is a shorthand for the quality of your work at a specific moment in your college career. It does not reflect on you personally, nor does it indicate the quality of your work for the rest of the semester.*

What to Do Now

When you get to this point, **please email me to say that you have read the syllabus.** Feel free to ask any questions that you may have about Expos.