



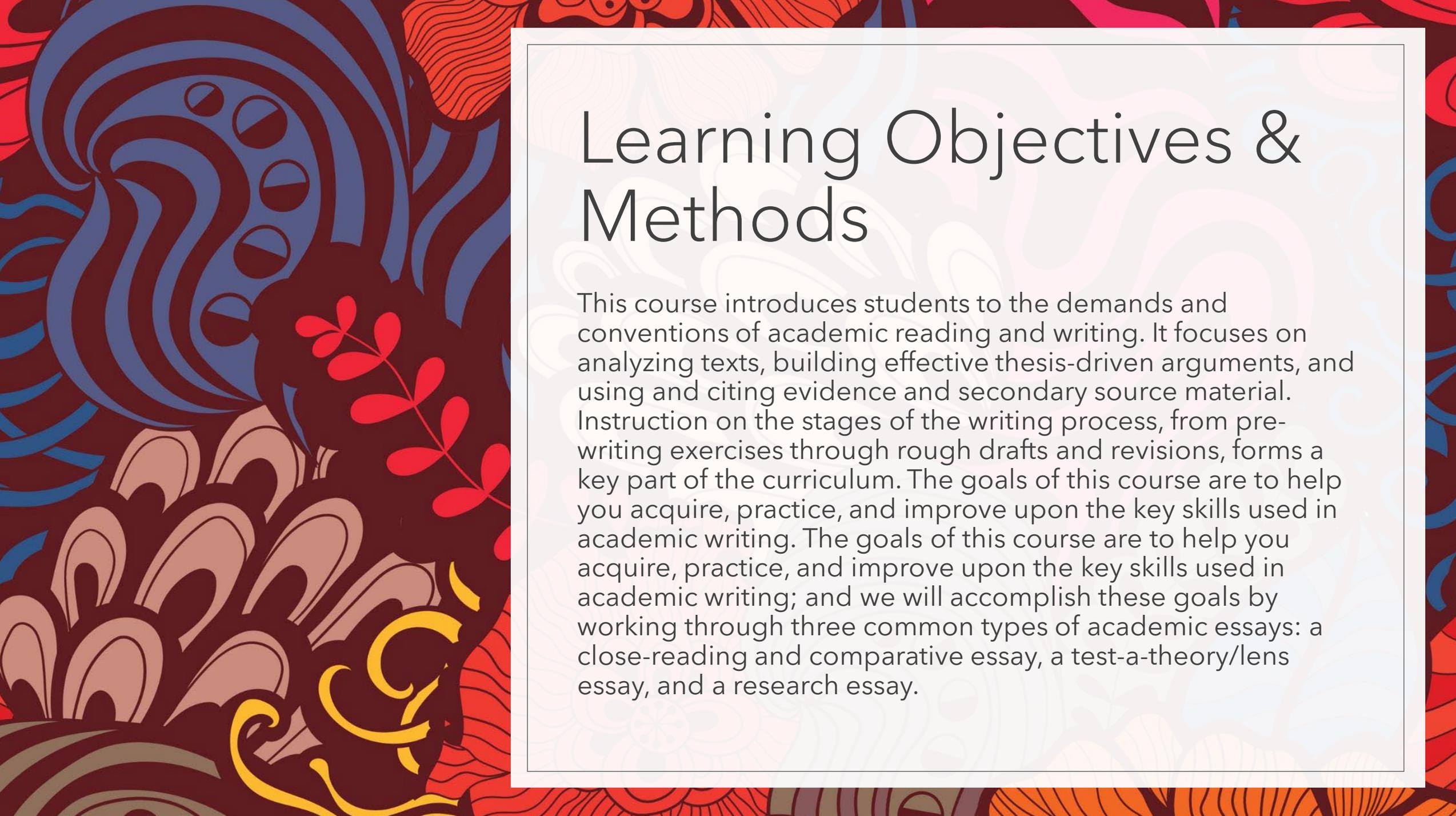
EXPOS 20

From Homer to Jay-Z: Craft & Complexity
in Verbal Art & Oral Tradition

Instructor: Sheza Alqera
Sever 105 | TR 10:30 am & 1:30 pm | Fall 2021

Course Description

From ancient Greece to modern rap battles, we have gathered to hear and create stories that reflect the way we define ourselves and our communities. What accounts for the persistence - and complexity - of the oral tradition? How are the performances of artists such as Homer and Jay-Z uniquely characterized through the verbal art form? In this course we will attempt to answer these questions by studying oral storytelling in ancient and modern contexts. In Unit I, we will look at historically oral traditions and delve into the paradox of studying verbal art that has been passed down to us through written texts and material effects? We will study one of the oldest and most famous of oral epics - Homer's Iliad - along with ancient Greek artifacts at the Harvard Art Museum and Boston Museum of Fine Arts. In Unit II, we shall ask what correctly categorizes something as verbal art. We will apply theories of oral epic to more recent verbal traditions by listening to the freestyle rap of Eminem, and watching performances of TikTok artist, Ayanna Albertson. Finally, in our third unit, we will take a step back to consider how oral tradition functions in opposition or subversion to dominant culture by researching different contemporary sources. We will consider the modern podcast as exemplified by 'The Joe Rogan Experience,' multimedia exhibits in museums such as Harvard's Peabody, and BiPOC rap artists such as Tupac and Nicki Minaj, among other subjects. Throughout the course, we will consider together what orality and verbal art communicate that writing cannot, what we mean by "literacy," and if we can ever even clearly distinguish the "oral" from the "written."



Learning Objectives & Methods

This course introduces students to the demands and conventions of academic reading and writing. It focuses on analyzing texts, building effective thesis-driven arguments, and using and citing evidence and secondary source material. Instruction on the stages of the writing process, from pre-writing exercises through rough drafts and revisions, forms a key part of the curriculum. The goals of this course are to help you acquire, practice, and improve upon the key skills used in academic writing. The goals of this course are to help you acquire, practice, and improve upon the key skills used in academic writing; and we will accomplish these goals by working through three common types of academic essays: a close-reading and comparative essay, a test-a-theory/lens essay, and a research essay.

Writing Process

In each unit, we will explore the questions and issues of our course materials through response exercises, essay drafts, in-class workshops, and a finished essay built upon all of the previous activities. Through these assignments, you will become familiar with the messy yet rewarding process of reading, questioning, writing, rethinking, and rewriting.

- **Grading Breakdown**

- Unit One (Comparative & Close Reading) Essay: 25%
- Unit Two (Lens/Test-the-Theory) Essay: 25%
- Unit Three Essay Proposal and Bibliography: 10%
- Unit Three (Research) Essay: 30%
- Engagement & Participation: 10%

Links to Readings

Unit 1, Week 1:

[Opinion | The Whistle-Blower Knows How to Write - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)

Week 2:

[Foley,
http://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990090086940203941/catalog](#)

[Homeric Iliad - The Center for Hellenic Studies \(harvard.edu\)](#)

Week: 3:

[Foley,
http://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990090086940203941/catalog](#)

Course Meetings & Readings

Unit I - Week 1

➤ Sep 2 (Th)- Introduction

Readings: Syllabus & NY Times Op-Ed Piece by Jane Rosenzweig

Week 2

➤ Sep 7 (T)- Performance & Storytelling

Readings: "How to Read an Oral Poem," by John Foley: Prologue & Four Scenarios.

The Iliad: Book V: 297- 351; Book XXIV: 1-54

➤ Sep 9 (Th)- Material Objects & Comparative Study

Foley, "How to Read an Oral Poem," : What the Oral Poets Say (In Their Own "Words")

➤ Sep 10 (Fr) - **RP 1.1 Due, 5 pm**

Week 3

➤ Sep 14 (T)- Compare & Contrast

➤ Sep 15 (W) - **RP 1.2 Due, 2 pm**

➤ Sep 16 (Th)- Thesis Statements & From Close Reading → Analysis

Readings: Foley, "How to Read an Oral Poem," : First Word & Second Word

Links to Readings

Week 4:

Foley,
<http://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990090086940203941/catalog>

Unit II, Week 5:

[Lord, Singer of Tales: The Center for Hellenic Studies \(harvard.edu\)](#)

Foley, Singer of Tales in Performance:
[Catalog Search Results | HathiTrust Digital Library](#)

[Eminem \(freestyle\) || :Eminem biggest ever freestyle in the world! Westwood](#)

[Ayanna Albertson \(@untouchableyann\) TikTok | Watch Ayanna Albertson's Newest TikTok Videos](#)

Week 6:

Foley,
<http://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990090086940203941/catalog>

Course Meetings & Readings

Sep 19 (Sun) - **Draft of Assignment I Due, 5 pm**

Week 4

- Sep 21 (T) - Draft Week
- Sep 23 (Th)- Workshop

Readings: Foley, "How to Read an Oral Poem," : Third Word

Unit 2 - Week 5 (Revisions of Assignment I Due This Week)

- Sep 28 (T)- Rap, Spoken Word, & Tik Tok
- Sep 30 (Th)- Using Secondary Sources

*Readings: Albert Lord, Singer of Tales: Excerpts from Introduction & Chapter III
John Foley,*

Watch: Eminem freestyle & Tik Tok artist, Ayanna Albertson, "Mourning People"

Week 6

- Oct 5 (T)- Text vs. Lens
- Oct 6 (W) - **RP 2.1 Due, 2 pm**
- Oct 7 (Th) - The Artist's Process

Readings: Foley, "How to Read an Oral Poem," : Fourth Word

Links to Readings

Week 7:

Foley,

<http://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990090086940203941/catalog>

Week 8:

Foley,

<http://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990090086940203941/catalog>

Week 9:

Foley,

<http://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990090086940203941/catalog>

Week 10:

Foley,

<http://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990090086940203941/catalog>

Course Meetings & Readings

Week 7

- Oct 12 (T)- Introductions: Why Do They Matter?
- Oct 13 (W) - **RP 2.2 Due**
- Oct 14 (Th)- Orienting the Reader/Audience: Markers in Writing & in Performance

Readings: Foley, "How to Read an Oral Poem," : Fifth Word

Oct 17 (Sun) - **Draft of Assignment II Due, 5 pm**

Week 8

- Oct 19 (T)- Subversions
- Oct 21 (Th)- Workshops

Readings: Foley, "How to Read an Oral Poem," : Sixth Word

Unit 3 - Week 9

- Oct 26 (T) - Library Resource Guide
- Oct 28 (Th) - BIPOC & Female Artists

Readings: Foley, "How to Read an Oral Poem," : Seventh Word

Watch: Interview with Niki Minaj, Tyga, and Lizzo

[Links to Readings](#)

Course Meetings & Readings

Week 13

➤ Nov 23 (T) - Syntactical Structures

Thanksgiving Recess

Week 14

➤ Nov 30 (T)- Research Paper

➤ Dec 2 (Th)- Research Paper (Last Day of Classes)

Reading Period: Dec 3 to Dec 8

Dec 9: Final Revision Deadline for Essays

What's In A Grade?

We'll have plenty of conversations over the semester about what your grades do (and don't) mean. But you should start with the Harvard College Handbook page on Grades and Honors, which explains the basics of the College grading scale. You'll get specific rubrics for each major assignment, but if you want some general insight into how you should interpret your grades, consider the following: Broadly speaking, your essays are graded by how well they implement the Elements of Academic Argument taught in Expos. The most important criteria have to do with thesis and argument, structure, evidence and analysis, sources, and style (clarity). We will discuss each of these in depth throughout the semester, as well as the elements that support them. With that in mind, you can think of grades along the following general lines:

- An 'A' grade (A/A-) means that the essay is excellent (not perfect) and complete (it has a fully realized beginning, middle and end; it addresses the questions/issues that it raises). An "A" essay skillfully expresses an argumentative thesis and adeptly handles all of the core Elements of Academic Writing central to the given assignment. An "A-" essay will do this to a slightly less successful degree, typically having one important Element of Academic (i.e. thesis, evidence, structure) argument that needs significant improvement.

What's In A Grade? (contd.)

- A 'B' grade (B-/B/B+) means that the essay is strong and succeeds in many ways but presents two or more key Elements of Academic argument that still need significant work. This means that while a "B"-range essay offers an engaging and intelligent discussion, certain aspects don't yet live up to the rest of the essay or to the promise the essay offers. A "B+" paper might, for instance, offer a partial thesis and some good work with evidence, but could use substantial development in both areas and/or presents some shortcomings in other areas. A "B" paper might need substantial further revision in these areas and others.
- A 'C' grade (C-/C/C+) means that the essay possesses potential, but in its current form is flawed, holding the essay back in a substantial way. "C"-range essays require significant further revision in all or most pertinent Elements.

GRADING

IS

ISN'T

A specific metric

A measure of how successfully you've accomplished a specific writing & thinking task and met its particular criteria (Elements of Academic Writing). Paying careful attention to in-class discussions, feedback, response papers, and the drafting process will set you up for greater success.

The rule

A measure of your self-worth, value, full intellectual ability or potential, or a determinant of your future. It is also not a direct measure of effort *per se* (how many hours you spent on an assignment, how many times you came to office hours— though all of that can help!)

Additive

You *earn* points based on how well you've mastered the core skills (Elements) of each assignment through the writing, feedback, and revision processes.

Deductive

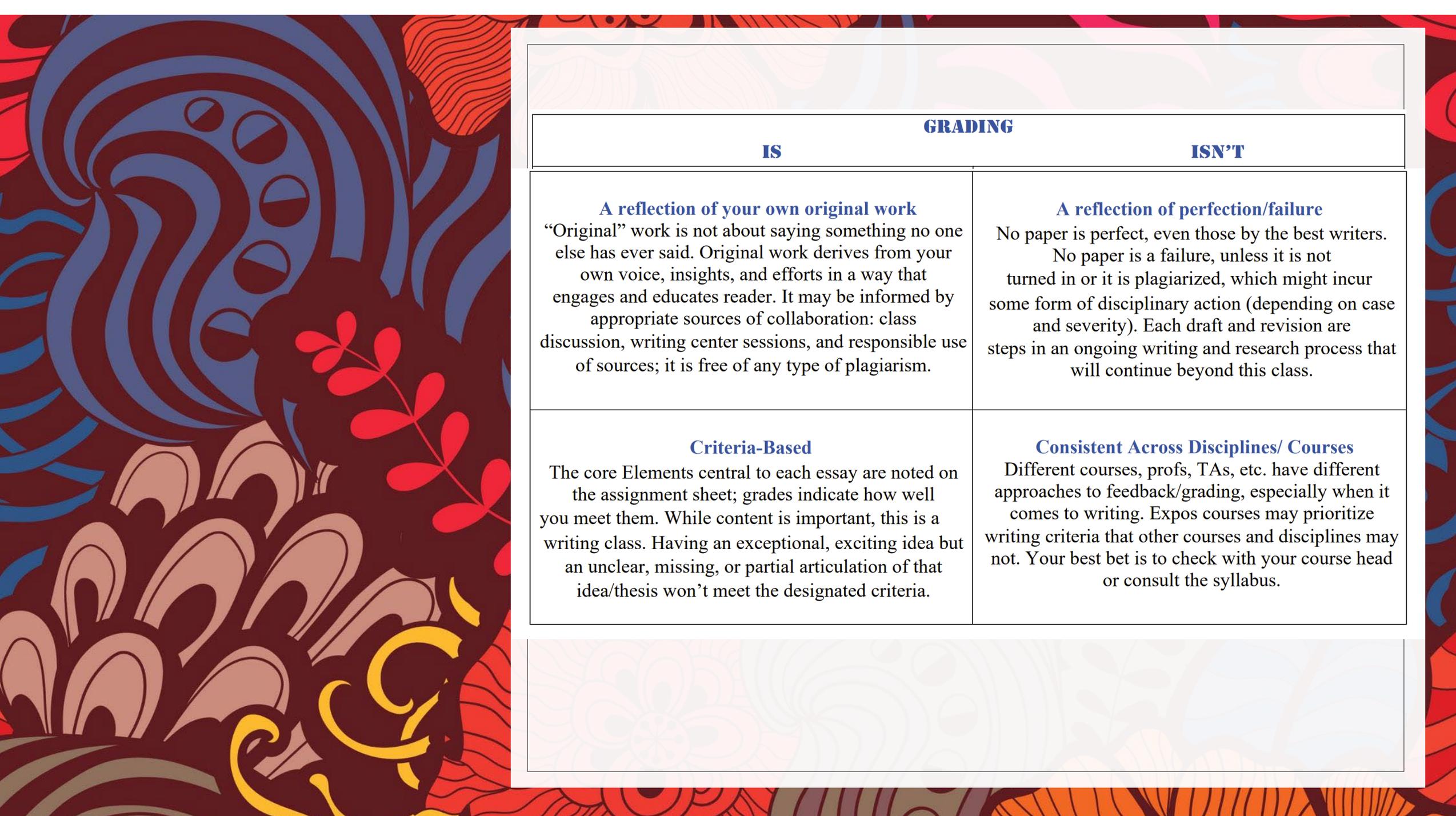
You don't *lose* points from a singular, idealized paper. Each student is striving toward their own "ideal" paper based on their strengths & weaknesses and drafting/revision processes.

More stringent with each assignment

The skills you learn in Unit 1 should be implemented and improved upon in Unit 2, etc.
Assignments are designed to increase in complexity and thus difficulty, both to introduce you to a variety of writing genres/assignments types you might encounter at Harvard and to challenge you.

Always linear

Writing is a (often hard) process and not necessarily an even one. Some people may excel at certain assignments and vice versa; some types of assignments may be more familiar to you than others. Some units may be more challenging personally or academically than others.



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GRADING

IS

ISN'T

A reflection of your own original work
“Original” work is not about saying something no one else has ever said. Original work derives from your own voice, insights, and efforts in a way that engages and educates reader. It may be informed by appropriate sources of collaboration: class discussion, writing center sessions, and responsible use of sources; it is free of any type of plagiarism.

A reflection of perfection/failure
No paper is perfect, even those by the best writers. No paper is a failure, unless it is not turned in or it is plagiarized, which might incur some form of disciplinary action (depending on case and severity). Each draft and revision are steps in an ongoing writing and research process that will continue beyond this class.

Criteria-Based
The core Elements central to each essay are noted on the assignment sheet; grades indicate how well you meet them. While content is important, this is a writing class. Having an exceptional, exciting idea but an unclear, missing, or partial articulation of that idea/thesis won't meet the designated criteria.

Consistent Across Disciplines/ Courses
Different courses, profs, TAs, etc. have different approaches to feedback/grading, especially when it comes to writing. Expos courses may prioritize writing criteria that other courses and disciplines may not. Your best bet is to check with your course head or consult the syllabus.

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Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Attendance

The Writing Program attendance policy is intended to make sure that you get everything you can out of your Expos course. Because Expos has fewer class hours than some other courses; because the course is largely discussion-based; and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential to your learning in the course. While I of course encourage you to be present every day in class, you are allowed two unexcused absences for the semester with no consequence. Some absences (religious holidays and medical situations) are automatically considered excused; some family circumstances may also be counted as excused absences. If you miss two unexcused classes, I will ask you to meet with me to discuss any issues that may be keeping you from attending, and to advise you on your plan for catching up on the missed work. If you miss a third class, you will be required to meet with your Resident Dean about those absences, so that your Dean can give you any support you may need to help you get back on track in the class. Missing four classes--the equivalent of two full weeks of the semester--puts you at risk for missing crucial material necessary to complete your work. Unless there is a medical or other emergency issue preventing consistent engagement with the class, students who miss four classes will receive a formal warning that they are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade. In the case of a medical problem, you should contact me before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours. In the case of a medical absence, you may be required to provide a note from UHS or another medical official to confirm that absence as excused; protracted or repeated illness will require such documentation. Absences because of special events or extracurricular involvement are not excused absences. If such circumstances lead you to want to miss more than two unexcused absences, you must petition the Associate Director of the Writing Program for permission.

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). If you are unable to complete your work on time due to medical or family issues, please contact me before the deadline to discuss both the support you might need as well as a possible new arrangement for your deadline. Communication about your situation is essential so that we can determine how best to help you move forward. If we have not already discussed your situation and you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit, you will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements and asking you to meet with me and/or your Resident Dean to make a plan for catching up on your work. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work. If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date, and if you have not documented a medical problem or been in touch with your Dean about other circumstances, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you think you will require some flexibility in deadlines or participation in the course for reasons of a documented disability, please schedule a meeting with me early in the semester so we can discuss appropriate accommodations. (To be eligible for such accommodations, you need to have provided documentation to the Accessible Education Office ahead of time. Please let me know if you are unfamiliar with that process.) The Accessible Education Office works closely with Expos courses, and we will develop a plan that is appropriate for your needs. Please note that it is always your responsibility to consult with me as the need for those accommodations arises.

Policy on Electronic Submissions

You will submit your work electronically this semester through our Canvas site. As you send or upload each document, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have saved the document in a form compatible with .doc or pdf (please do not use Pages as I do not have the necessary software). 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.

Policy on Collaboration

As in many academic situations, our Expos class will be a setting that involves frequent collaboration--we will develop ideas together through class discussion, peer review, and draft workshops. The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). It is a form of academic integrity to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay; you can 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.

Policy on Academic Integrity

One of the essential elements of the Expos curriculum is the work we do on effective source use, appropriate acknowledgement of sources, and expectations for citing sources in academic writing. In each unit, we will work on strategies for working with the ideas of other authors and sources, and how to develop your own ideas in response to them. Most forms of academic writing involve building on the ideas of others, contributing ideas of your own, and signaling clearly for readers where each idea comes from. This complex relationship with sources is part of our work through the whole semester, and you should always feel free to ask me questions about this material.

As we become familiar with the expectations of an academic audience, we will also work on strategies to avoid errors in citation and unintentional plagiarism. As with all your courses, the expectation in Expos is that all the work that you submit for this course must be your own. That work should not make use of outside sources unless such sources are explicitly part of the assignment. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to review by the Honor Council, including potential disciplinary action.