

EXPOSITORY WRITING 20: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Spring 2019

Course Information

Course Time: Mondays and Wednesdays 9-10:15 am and 10:30-11:45 am

Course Location: Sever Hall 104

Course Website: <https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/47134>

Preceptor Information

Preceptor: Dr. Julia Hayden Galindo

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

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Office hours: Wednesdays 1-2 pm (*Please note that regular 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 or personal characteristics, can we predict if she will become successful? How do we account for the influence of various complex factors, including personality, family, and community? 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 by examining individual-level, person-centered theories of success with readings on grit and multipotentiality. Next, we will read Malcolm Gladwell's *Outliers: The Story of Success* alongside a longitudinal, ethnographic study of 12 American children and a seminal treatise on the role of race in the American classroom. As part of our broader inquiry into the environmental factors that impact success, we will explore how race, class, and familial wealth and resources affect children's lived experiences of childhood and, later, their chances of successfully getting into college. In the final unit of the course, students will answer the question, "What does it take to be successful at Harvard?" Students will select their own pop-science book on a self-help topic like willpower, motivation, happiness, or creativity, research the relevant academic literature, and create a literature review with an accompanying short presentation to disseminate their findings. 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 examining 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 and verbal presentation skills

Please note that this course includes an emphasis on developing your public speaking skills.

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, in-class exercises, 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 Due Dates

Unit 1: “What makes people successful? Individual-level, person-centered explanations of success.” We begin with an exploration of two prominent but controversial theories of success: grit and multipotentiality. We will read excerpts from psychologist Angela Duckworth’s 2016 book, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. To complicate her perspective, we’ll read a chapter by Alfie Kohn that critiques American culture’s fascination with “gritty” self-discipline and watch a TEDx Talk on multipotentiality by Emilie Wapnick (founder and creative director of the *Puttylike* online community). To write the unit 1 essay, you will first practice asking your own analytical question of the material. (A great analytical question is one that is both interesting to you and arguable; that is, it doesn’t have an obvious answer!) 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 the goals of an argumentative essay, how to craft questions that matter, and how to use readings and other scholarly materials to enter an academic conversation while at the same time saying something new.

Unit 2: “What makes people successful?” Environmental-level, context-driven explanations of success.” In Unit 2, we complicate individual-focused explanations of success by adding environmental-level factors to our study. To begin, we’ll read parts of Annette Lareau’s *Unequal Childhoods*, a longitudinal study of how parenting practices differ across class lines. To analyze Lareau’s case studies, we’ll bring in sections from popular science writer Malcolm Gladwell’s *Outliers: The Story of Success*, a seminal essay by Lisa Delpit on the role of race and culture in the American classroom, and psychologist Carol Dweck’s research on mindset theory. A special focus of unit 2 will be on crafting compelling essay introductions and conclusions. We’ll also work on developing complex arguments that deepen over the course of the essay and we’ll take an in-depth look at paragraph structure.

Unit 3: “How to be Successful at Harvard.” The course culminates with an individualized, in-depth study of what it takes to be a successful student at Harvard. In the third and final unit of the course, you will have more choice than ever before, as you select a construct from psychology (like willpower, happiness, or motivation), choose a related book (see list on the following page), and decide how to best disseminate what you’ve learned. After reading your selected book, you’ll learn how to search the academic literature to find related research. For the final paper in the course, you will write a literature review that synthesizes what is currently known about your topic and offers “best practice” recommendations for how to succeed at Harvard. Via a collaboration with Harvard’s Learning Lab, you’ll make a brief on-camera presentation to share your findings. The goal of unit 3 is to learn how to manage a multi-source research paper and proposal.

Students may choose a book on the following list or secure the approval of the instructor to use another title

- Achor, S. (2010). The happiness advantage: The seven principles of positive psychology that fuel success and performance at work.
- Cain, S. (2012). Quiet: The power of introverts in a world that can't stop talking.
- Chua, A. (2011). Battle hymn of the tiger mother.
- Deresiewicz, W. (2014). Excellent sheep: The miseducation of the American elite.
- Duhigg, C. (2012). The power of habit: Why we do what we do in life and business.
- Dweck, C. (2006). Mindset: The new psychology of success.
- Gilbert, E. (2015). Big magic: Creative living beyond fear.
- Harris, D. (2014). 10% Happier: How I tamed the voice in my head, reduced stress without losing my edge, and found self-help that actually works—a true story.
- Rubin, G. (2009). The happiness project: Or, why I spent a year trying to sing in the morning, clean my closets, fight right, read Aristotle, and generally have more fun.
- 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.

Important Due Dates

You will submit two versions of each essay—a draft and a final. In between these two versions, you will receive written comments from me on your draft and you will attend either an individual (units 1 & 2) or a group (unit 3) writing conference—a 20-minute meeting to discuss your work.

Essay drafts and finals are due on the dates listed below by 11:59 pm EST. You submit your essays by uploading a file (it must be in Microsoft Word, file extension .doc or .docx) to the appropriate dropbox on our Canvas course site. If there is ever a discrepancy between the Canvas site and this syllabus, go by the due date listed in the syllabus.

Essay 1 Draft Due: February 22

Essay 1 Final Due: March 8

Essay 2 Draft Due: March 29

Essay 2 Final Due: April 12

Essay 3 Draft Due: May 3

Essay 3 Final Due: May 14

Only the final version of the essay will be graded (that is, you will receive my feedback on your drafts, but they are ungraded). Throughout the semester, I will ask you to turn in occasional writing exercises and response papers—these are ungraded. **To receive full credit on your final, graded draft, you must turn in all response papers, drafts, and revisions on time and you must follow all formatting directions (including the cover letters on your drafts and revisions).** You are always welcome to turn in drafts and revisions prior to the posted deadline.

Required Texts and Materials

In some classes, the texts we turn to will be your own writing: your in-class exercises, 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 are strongly opposed to sharing with the class, please email me with the title of the assignment in the subject line when you submit the work.

Texts to Purchase

Graff, G. & Birkenstein, C. (2017). *They say I say: Moves that matter in academic Writing*, 4th ed. New York and London: W. W. Norton and company.

Gladwell, M. (2008). *Outliers: The story of success*. New York, Boston and London: Back Bay Books. [Reading assignment: Ch 1, 2, 5, 7-9]

Lareau, A. (2011). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life, 2nd edition*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press. [Reading assignment: Ch 1-3, 6, 7 & 13; plus choose *one* of the children's chapters from Part 3 – Stacey, Melanie, Wendy or Billy]

Book of your choice for unit 3 paper

Other Readings

These readings will be available on the Canvas course site or are accessible online

Unit 1

Grit, Angela Duckworth (Preface & Chapters 1-4)

Why Self-Discipline is Overrated, Alfie Kohn

Multipotentialites: Slackers or Innovators?, Emilie Wapnick

Why Some of Us Don't Have One True Calling (TED Talk), Emilie Wapnick:

https://www.ted.com/talks/emilie_wapnick_why_some_of_us_don_t_have_one_true_calling

Unit 2

The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children, Lisa Delpit

The Truth About Ability and Accomplishment, Carol Dweck

Being Perfect (lecture), Carol Dweck,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XgUF5WalyDk&t=836s>

Unit 3

5-7 academic articles of your choice on your unit 3 topic

For all units, additional reading assignments on the art and practice of writing will be posted on Canvas.

Class Materials

Please bring to class with you every day:

- **laptop** and/or **notebook** for in-class writing exercises. (I may occasionally ask you to submit these exercises on Canvas. If you haven't typed yours, you can scan and upload your written work.)
- **Class folder and handouts** (either printed or displayed on your laptop)
- **pens**
- **reading assignments** under discussion for the day
- **writing assignments** (your own and/or your responses to peers' work), as noted

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 the course or your writing. Office hours are on Wednesdays from 1-2 pm. Due to tight scheduling, office hours cannot be held on days when there are also writing conferences.

- **Announcements**: Rather than take up our class time with many announcements, I often use Canvas to communicate much of that information. As part of your participation in the course, I ask that you check Canvas for announcements daily; you are responsible for the information I post there. Likewise, I will make sure to check my e-mail account once every weekday for questions from you. Under most circumstances, I will be able to get back to you within 48 business hours.

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. You are responsible for being in class, prepared (having done the readings and assignments) and on time, each time we meet.

- **Laptop use policy**: You may use laptops during class to access your readings or complete writing assignments. During class discussion, please do not hide behind your laptop! If laptops seem to be getting in the way of quality class discussions, or are creating distractions, we will revisit this policy (in other words, please don't check email or use social media during class time).
- **Cellphone use policy**: Please note that this class is a cell phone-free zone. Please silence your phones and put them away at the beginning of class. Students who violate

this policy will receive a deduction to their course grades (I am not responsible for warning you that you may receive a grade deduction if you use your phone in class—please consider this your warning.)

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.

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: otherwise you will be required to 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; but again, you are expected to contact me beforehand if you will miss a class, or at least within 24 hours. 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 the hour. Three latenesses will be counted as an absence.

WRITTEN WORK

Submitting Response Papers, Essay Drafts, and Writing Exercises

For every written assignment in this class, you should submit an electronic copy to Canvas. I will occasionally ask you to bring a printed (hard) copy to class (in addition to submitting on Canvas).

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 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 automatically subjected to a late penalty.**

Deadlines

All deadlines in the course are firm. Except in the case of medical or family emergency, I cannot grant further extensions. **You must turn in every assignment in each unit to receive full credit toward your class participation grade. If an essay draft or revision is submitted after the deadline, the final grade is penalized by a third of a letter grade for each 24-hour period the essay is late.** (For example, if both the draft and the revision of an essay were turned

in one day late, the highest grade the essay could earn would be a B+.) If you cannot meet a deadline due to a medical or family emergency, you must contact me right away. The Writing Program requires that you produce documentation under these circumstances. If an emergency should occur, please contact me as soon as possible so we can work out an alternative schedule.

Revision

This course places a lot of emphasis on revision—I think you’ll be amazed at how your writing can improve. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the draft is a “throwaway” assignment. **The drafts that you turn in for this class should be the equivalent of what you would turn in for a final assignment in another class.** Otherwise, you miss your biggest opportunity to get my feedback and to grow as a writer. I cannot respond to additional drafts or read over further sections of your work following your writing conference for each unit.

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 offers hour-

long appointments with trained tutors. I can't stress strongly enough the benefits 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 website 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 Accomodations

If you need academic adjustments or accommodations, please contact me by Friday, February 8, 2019. 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 staff 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 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 class participation and preparation including the completion of response papers (in and outside of class), constructive participation in class discussions and workshops, the care with which you respond to fellow students' work, and following all formatting directions and submitting work on time. 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.*

Letters of Recommendation

I am happy to write you a letter of recommendation if the following conditions are met: I must have known you (and your work) for at least one full semester (that is, please don't request a letter until after the completion of this semester); there is a minimum of four (4) weeks before the letter is due; you have participated in class and at writing conferences and turned in high quality writing assignments in a timely fashion.