

EXPOSITORY WRITING 20: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Fall 2017

Course Information

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

Course Location: Sever Hall 101

Course Website: <https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/28356> (9 am section)

<https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/28357> (10 am section)

Preceptor Information

Preceptor: Dr. Julia H. 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 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, the growth mindset, 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 written proposal 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 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: “What makes people successful? Individual-level, person-centered explanations of success.” We begin with an exploration of several prominent person-centered theories of success: Mindset, grit, and multipotentiality. We will read excerpts from psychologist Angela Duckworth’s 2016 book, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, and watch a video lecture by Carol Dweck, founder of mindset theory. To complicate these views, we’ll read a chapter critiquing our culture’s fascination with self-discipline by educational expert Alfie Kohn and watch a TEDx Talk by Emilie Wapnick (blogger, founder, and creative director of the *Puttylike* online community) on the benefits of refusing to pigeonhole yourself to just one identity or career. 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. Other goals of unit 1 will be to incorporate counterarguments into your writing and work on basic paragraph structure.

Unit 2: “What makes people successful?” Environmental-level, context-driven explanations of success.” In Unit 2, we complicate the picture by adding environmental-level factors to our study of what makes people successful. We’ll rely on developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner’s *Ecological Systems Theory* to give us a framework for understanding how person-level and contextual variables interact. To begin, we’ll read parts of Annette Lareau’s *Unequal Childhoods*, a groundbreaking, 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 we’ll return in more depth to Carol Dweck’s work on mindset. 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 a more 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 below), 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 the original studies cited in it or related research. You will interpret the literature you’ve collected from the angle of how to be a successful student at Harvard and then generate “best practice” recommendations for your peers. For the final paper in the course, you will write a proposal that incorporates this literature and make a brief in-class presentation (or video, if you prefer) to disseminate your findings. A focus of unit 3 will be on

writing for different audiences—i.e., writing for a popular audience versus an academic one. An additional goal of unit 3 is to learn how to manage a multi-source research paper and proposal.

Students may choose a book on this 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.*

Baumeister, R.F. & Tierney, J. (2011). *Willpower: Rediscovering the greatest human strength.*

Duhigg, C. (2012). *The power of habit: Why we do what we do in life and business.*

Ericsson, A. & Pool, R. (2016). *Peak: Secrets from the new science of expertise.*

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.*

Lewis, S. (2014). *The rise: Creativity, the gift of failure, and the search for mastery.*

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.*

_____. (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.*

_____. (2017). *The four tendencies: The indispensable personality profiles that reveal how to make your life better (and other people's lives better too).*

Important Due Dates for the Drafts

Essay 1 Draft Due: Wednesday, September 27, 11:59 pm

Essay 2 Draft Due: Wednesday, October 25, 11:59 pm

Essay 3 Draft Due: Wednesday, November 15, 11:59 pm

Final essay revisions for units 1 and 2 are due on a rolling basis, one week from the date of your conference by 11:59 pm (for example, if your conference is on a Tuesday, your revision will be due the following Tuesday).

For everyone, the revision of the unit 3 essay is due Wednesday, December 13, by 11:59 pm.

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.

Texts to Purchase

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.

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.

Additional Readings

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

Unit 1

Grit, Angela Duckworth (excerpt)

Why Self-Discipline is Overrated, Alfie Kohn

Being Perfect, Carol Dweck, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XgUF5WalyDk&t=836s>

Why Some of Us Don't Have One True Calling, 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

Unit 3

"I Can, Therefore I Must: Fragility in the Upper-Middle Class," Suniya Luthar,

Development and Psychopathology

"The Problem with Rich Kids," Suniya Luthar, *Psychology Today*

Additional readings on the art and practice of academic writing will be posted on Canvas

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.

- **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 your Canvas /e-mail account 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. Please note that I do not check email during evenings and weekends. Under most circumstances, I will be able to get back to you within 24-48 hours of your question.

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 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 use policy:** I have a love-hate relationship with personal computers. They make our lives so much easier and yet they can distract us from focusing on one task at a time (say, a class discussion of the reading). As a rule, please bring your laptops to class so that you have them on hand to complete writing exercises as needed, but **be prepared to engage in discussion of the readings without your laptops.** This means that you

should print out copies of the readings and your notes so you can refer to them in class without needing to open your laptop.

- **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. The consequence for using your cell phone during class time (even the briefest of glances!) is a deduction from your participation grade.

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 seven minutes past 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 (except final drafts, which only need to be submitted electronically), you should both submit an electronic copy to the course website AND bring a printed, hard copy to class.

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.**

Submitting Final Essays

You will turn in essay revisions to the course website (no need to give me a hard copy). 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.*

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 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 should email me *before* the deadline informing me you plan to use your extension (no need to ask permission); submit the late work to the course website; and be on time with the other work due on that day (if any) 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 one “wild card” extension, all deadlines in the course are firm. Except in the case of medical or family emergency, I cannot 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 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 Accommodations

If you need academic adjustments or accommodations, please contact me by Friday, September 8, 2017. 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 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.*

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.

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 20.