

AUSTEN AND US

Expos 20: Spring 2022

Dr. Ryan Napier
Classroom: Memorial Hall 202

ryan_napier@fas.harvard.edu
Office hours: by appointment

Course Description

In this class, we'll look at the work of Jane Austen and its afterlives. Relatively obscure in her lifetime, Austen wrote about a narrow subject: marriage and manners in provincial England at the turn of the nineteenth century. However, two hundred years after her death, Austen's novels are read and discussed by millions across the globe, adapted for film and television, and obsessed over by fans.

Though much has changed since Austen's time, her work remains relevant: we reimagine her stories in present-day settings and debate whether she was a radical or a conservative, a champion of feminism or a defender of patriarchy, a critic of colonialism or an apologist for empire. Nearly everyone tries to claim Austen as their own: the Bank of England put her on its ten-pound notes as a symbol of national pride; the online "alt-right" has declared her a white supremacist; some fans and scholars assert the queerness of Austen's life and work; others see her as "a Marxist before Marx."



Why does Austen still speak to us? What makes her work endure, and what happens when we adapt it? What can her novels tell us about the issues—such as inequality and gender—that shape our world?

This spring, we'll explore these questions while reading and writing about literature, film, and criticism. In **Unit 1**, we'll read one of Austen's masterpieces, *Emma* (1815). Its heroine, Emma



Woodhouse, is "handsome, clever, and rich;" she loves to play matchmaker, but swears that she herself will never marry. A brilliant comedy of misunderstandings, *Emma* features some of Austen's most interesting uses of irony and perspective and asks fundamental questions about love, class, and women's roles. You'll write a short argumentative essay (4–6 pages) that poses an analytical question about the novel and answers that question through careful attention to the text.

In **Unit 2**, we'll turn to two contemporary film adaptations of *Emma*. *Clueless* (1995) transplants

Austen's novel to Beverly Hills in the 1990s, reshaping it into a brightly-colored teen comedy, while *Emma* (2020) offers a highly stylized version of the novel's Regency setting, emphasizing the characters' luxurious clothes and surroundings. These adaptations will allow us to explore how filmmakers transform literature into a visual medium and adjust their source material for a modern audience. You'll write an essay (5–7 pages) about two of the texts, making a persuasive argument that shows the reader how a comparison of the texts deepens our understanding of them.

In **Unit 3**, we'll wade into the larger debates on Austen and the meaning of her work. As a class, we'll read essays about Austen and issues such as sex and slavery; these critical essays will serve as a model for your own engagement with a primary text of your choosing: *Emma*, one of its adaptations, another Austen novel or adaptation, or something else related to Austen. For the final paper, you'll identify a topic that you find interesting—for instance, labor in *Emma*, food in *Pride and Prejudice*, race in the 2019 adaptation of *Sanditon*, the influence of Austen in Netflix's *Bridgerton*—and formulate a question about it. After conducting research and taking in the scholarly conversation, you'll write a longer argumentative essay (8–10 pages) that contributes something to the conversation.

Course Goals and Philosophy

Expos 20 is a writing course. Our main goal is to develop the skills needed to make persuasive academic arguments. We'll learn how to stake a claim, develop it over the course of an essay, support it with evidence, analyze primary and secondary texts, and write clear prose. Our work here will make you a better writer and thinker and give you the skills and confidence to communicate your ideas to others at Harvard—and beyond.

There are three main principles behind the work that we'll do this semester:

1. **Writing is thinking.** Writing isn't simply transcribing your thoughts. Instead, writing forces you to turn the abstract impulses that zing around in your head into something clear and concrete; as a result, you develop your thinking more deeply. Often, you don't truly understand something until you've written about it.
2. **Writing is a process.** Professional writers do multiple drafts and get comments from their peers and an editor because they know that good writing doesn't happen overnight; it is the result of a long process that includes reading, taking notes, planning, drafting, getting feedback, and revising. This class will model that process, giving you a set of steps that you can use on future Harvard assignments and other kinds of writing. (See "How the Course Works" for full details.)
3. **Writing is a conversation.** Writing may seem like a solitary activity, since you're often alone and silent when you do it. In fact, writing is an act of communication: there is always someone at the other end of the line. When you write, you are participating in a conversation with your immediate audience (represented by your classmates and me) and with a larger academic community. This is why feedback is essential to the writing process: it shows how well you're communicating your ideas to your audience. In addition to the feedback that you get from your peers, you will have two individual conferences with me

Grading

Most of your grade for the semester comes from your revisions of the three main essays:

Unit 1: a 4–6 page single-text essay in which you’ll make an argument about *Emma* (the novel): **20% of your final grade**

Unit 2: a 5–7 page comparative analysis essay about the novel and/or the film adaptations that we watch: **30% of your final grade**

Unit 3: an 8–10 page research essay on an Austen-related topic of your choosing: **40% of your final grade**

Engagement: your consistent and active involvement in the day-to-day business of the course: **10% of your final grade**

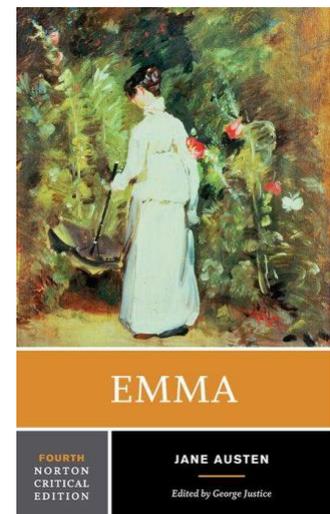
I’ll give you a rubric for how the essays themselves are assessed, but a quick note here on what I mean by “engagement.” One part of engagement is class participation. Good class participation doesn’t mean that everything you say is brilliant or even correct; rather, it means you’re willing to speak in class discussions and offer thoughtful responses to your peers’ work in small groups and workshops. The classroom is a learning environment, so I don’t expect you to have everything figured out. But I do expect you to try. Don’t worry about saying something “smart”—just say what you’re thinking, even if it seems obvious. (Often, in writing and in discussions, the things that seem obvious are what actually need to be articulated.) I hope to hear from each of you, every class.

Of course, effective class participation also means that you’re focusing entirely on the class itself. As noted below under “Classroom Policies,” you must close anything on your laptop that might distract you, such as social media or messaging apps. Don’t think that you can get away with it: in such a small class, it’s obvious, both to your classmates and me, when you’re messaging with a friend or looking at posts rather than engaging with the class. This behavior will result in a lower engagement grade.

Engagement includes more than productive participation in class. This part of your final grade will also reflect your completion of the ungraded assignments (such as response papers) and your preparation and engagement in our conferences, among other elements.

Texts

Please buy the fourth edition of the Norton Critical Edition of *Emma* (ISBN 978-0-393-92764-1). You must use this version of the novel, since it includes a scholarly apparatus and scholarly essays that we’ll be working with in class.



You'll also need to watch *Clueless* and the 2020 version of *Emma*—both are available to rent on YouTube and on various streaming services.

Classroom Policies



Expos 20 is a seminar. Our time together is largely devoted to discussion and small-group work. Obviously, then, you must be prepared and on time to each class meeting and conference. We all benefit when every student participates fully in the class; you learn much more from contributing your own ideas to our discussion than from simply listening to others do so.

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.

For each class meeting, you should have:

- The readings for the day, annotated and ready to discuss
- Completed versions of any assigned at-home exercises
- Our Canvas site, ready to access

I encourage you to take in-class notes by hand, if possible, rather than on a device; this will allow you to focus on our discussions without all the potential distractions of the internet. However, if you do use a device during class, you must close any apps, browser windows, or files that aren't directly related to our class. If you use social media, messaging, or any other distractions during class (including your phone), your engagement grade will be lowered.

Communication

Here are a few important things about keeping in touch this semester:

- **Office hours:** In addition to our conferences, you're welcome to schedule time with me individually to discuss your work and other aspects of the course. Due to COVID, I will not have a scheduled "drop-in" time. Instead, I'll be doing my office hours by appointment (in addition to some scheduled blocks at key points in the semester). If you'd like to talk, just send me an email, and we'll find a time to meet that works for both of us. I will be holding office hours primarily via Zoom, but if you have a strong preference for an in-person meeting, let me know and we will find a safe way to accommodate that (whether that's meeting outside or masked in a well-ventilated area).
- **Email:** I'll send out emails with important information about deadlines, changes to the schedule, etc., so please check your Harvard email daily. I check mine on the weekdays, but please note that I have a life outside of teaching: if you email me after business hours or over the weekend, I probably won't respond to you until the next weekday.

I'm happy to talk about your writing with you, but it's more efficient to do this in office hours than over email. I won't answer specific questions about your writing over email; instead, ask me to set up an office hours appointment.

- **Canvas:** We'll use the course Canvas site in two important ways. All the assignments and readings will be posted there, along with most of the course handouts and the slides that I use in class. The website is also a way to turn in your own written work and find the most up-to-date version of the calendar for each unit.

Finally, a quick note about availability. The pandemic and the rise of Zoom have blurred the line between home and work for many people, but it is important—for both students and teachers—to have some boundaries. For that reason, we'll try to hold all our meetings during business hours (9:00am–5:00pm, Monday–Friday).

Deadlines

You must turn in your work by the date indicated on the course schedule (found on the front page of Canvas). Drafts or revisions turned in after the deadline will be penalized by one “step” on the final grade for each day that they are late. (In other words, if your paper is an A, but it's one day late, it goes down to an A-; two days, a B+; and so on.) Drafts will also be considered late if you haven't signed up for a draft conference by the time the draft is due. Non-graded work that is submitted late may affect your engagement grade.

I will give short extensions for revisions, if you ask me at least twenty-four hours before the deadline. That said, I *cannot* give extensions on drafts. Draft week is very busy for me: I have to read all my students' drafts, write detailed feedback, choose two of the drafts for workshop, and meet with each of you individually. If I give extensions on the drafts, I don't have enough time to do my job and give you the feedback you need. Fortunately, you aren't graded on your drafts, so do your best and turn in what you have by the deadline.

I understand that this semester is unusual. You may run into circumstances that prevent you from doing your work on time. If so, let me know as soon as possible so that we can make a plan to get you caught up.

Electronic Submissions

You will submit your work on Canvas as a Microsoft Word document. 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 subject to a late penalty.

Feedback and Conferences

Every writer benefits from an attentive reader responding to their work, and one of my roles as your preceptor is to provide feedback that identifies the strengths of a draft and asks questions that help you develop your ideas further. I'll give you comments in different forms throughout the

semester—in class, in conferences, in writing. There are pedagogical reasons for offering you comments in these different forms: they complement one another throughout the writing process and help you think about receiving feedback from different audiences at different stages of writing.

There are also pedagogical reasons behind the amount and timing of my comments. The goal of all my feedback is to help you incorporate the principles I'm identifying into your own thinking and your revision; by the end of the course, I want you to be able to do many of these skills independently (as you'll have to do in your other classes). If I were to read a draft multiple times and offer several rounds of feedback, I would take over some of those decisions for you, keeping you from developing autonomy and growing as a writer and a thinker.

After our draft conference, I will discuss one or two *specific* questions about your revision: for instance, a follow-up on whether your thesis is clearer, or a brief conversation about your analysis of a particular piece of evidence. However, I can't schedule a second draft conference with you or read another version of the essay before you submit the revision. In addition to the pedagogical reasons that I describe above, this is also an issue of equity. Draft conferences require a lot of time and intensive work on my part, so it's impossible for me to read a second draft and have another meeting with all thirty of the students that I teach each semester; thus, it's only fair that I limit everyone to one conference.

Writing Center

At any stage of the writing process—brainstorming ideas, reviewing drafts, approaching revisions—you may want some extra attention to or feedback on your essays. Harvard's Writing Center offers hour-long appointments with trained tutors. Visit the Writing Center's web site at writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu to make an appointment. Tutors also hold drop-in office hours where students can receive feedback in briefer sessions.

Course Materials

The work we do together in class—discussions, exercises, workshopping essays—is intended for the members of our class. Students are not allowed to record class and are not allowed to post video or audio recordings or transcripts of our class meetings. (Students needing course recordings as an accommodation should contact the [Accessible Education Office](#).) While samples of student work will be circulated within the course (and all work you do may be shared with your classmates), you may not share fellow students' work with others outside the course without their written permission. As the *Handbook for Students* explains, students may not “post, publish, sell, or otherwise publicly distribute course materials without the written permission of the course instructor. Such materials include, but are not limited to, the following: video or audio recordings, assignments, problem sets, examinations, other students' work, and answer keys.” Students who violate any of these expectations may be subject to disciplinary action.

Collaboration and Academic Integrity

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.

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 for developing 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.

Accessibility

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.

Official 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; you should also copy your Resident Dean on that message. In the case of extended illness, you may be required to provide medical 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.

Official 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.

The information presented here in this syllabus is designed to help us begin the semester with a common understanding about how the course works. If you have any questions about the policies or details included in this syllabus, just ask. Looking forward to working with you this spring!

