

EXPOSITORY WRITING 20: DOES THAT BELONG IN A MUSEUM?
HARVARD COLLEGE
SPRING 2024
[DRAFT SYLLABUS – DETAILS TBD]



Image Sources: [Harvard Art Museums](#) and [Tibet House US](#).

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<https://harvard.zoom.us/my/given>
Office Hours: [By appointment](#)

Class Meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays
10:30–11:45 AM*
Class Location: TBD

**One assignment will involve an excursion outside of regular class time to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.*

I. COURSE OVERVIEW

In the 2018 film *Black Panther*, the dashing villain Killmonger is introduced in the West African Exhibit of the fictional Museum of Great Britain, inquiring politely about a few objects on display. When he turns to an ornate adze, Killmonger’s questioning becomes more aggressive: “How do you think your ancestors got these?” he asks the curator, “You think they paid a fair price? Or did they take it, like they took everything else?” Although framed in the film as justification for supervillain’s heist, there is intellectual substance to this critique. Where do museum collections come from? Who rightfully owns the objects on display? How should the modern history of these objects affect our interpretation of them, and how should this history be

represented in museum settings? Under what circumstances should objects be removed from museums and sent back to their places of origin? Communities around the world claim that museum collections in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere hold stolen relics of their cultural heritage. Defenders of these Western collections argue that their accessibility to scientific research and a global public is worth preserving. In this class, we will interrogate the complex stakes of these debates.

Course Objectives

Expository Writing 20 is an intensive seminar that aims to improve your ability to discover and reason about evidence through the medium of essays. You will have frequent practice in formulating questions, analyzing and properly citing sources, supporting arguments with strong and detailed evidence, and crafting clear, lively essays. The work of the course will be structured around the “Elements of Academic Argument,” a set of building blocks for an academic essay with a strong thesis supported by relevant evidence and convincing analysis. Certain elements will be highlighted in each unit, allowing you to build skills over the course of the semester. Revision will be a major focus of our work together. Through one-on-one conferences, group workshops, and multiple rounds of redrafting, we will share a robust and personalized conversation about your writing. You will leave Expos 20 equipped with a sharpened ability to engage with the pressing issues of the day through your written expression.

Overview of Units

Unit 1

In our first unit, we will consider a series of prominent cases of contested cultural heritage in museum collections around the world. First, we will investigate the complex—but in many ways paradigmatic—situation of the Benin Bronzes, which inspired the aforementioned scene in *Black Panther*. The vast collection of brass, wood, and ivory sculptures were looted from the royal palace of the Kingdom of Benin (in modern day Nigeria) by British forces during a targeted military expedition in 1897. This loot was then sold off to museums and private collectors around the world, and is today housed in dozens of museums, most outside of Nigeria, including the British Museum, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and Harvard’s own Fogg and Peabody Museums. Through a variety of sources, we will learn about the historical contexts of the Bronzes’ production, original use, theft, and trafficking; the complex contemporary debates surrounding the Bronzes’ possible return to Nigeria; and the various choices made by museum leadership in light of these debates. You will write a brief assignment staking out a **normative argument** on the situation of the Benin Bronzes.

We then will pivot to a briefer consideration of cases from four other cultural contexts: the Parthenon (or so-called “Elgin”) Marbles from Greece, now in the British Museum; the Nefertiti Bust now in Berlin; ancient papyrus fragments now in the Museum of the Bible (Washington, D.C.); and sacred art from Tibet now in private collections. How do the different contexts of production and collection for these objects affect our interpretation of them today? What kinds of

ideological assumptions are revealed by Western collecting habits, museum displays, and curatorial notes? How might the original religious context of an object impact its life on the private market, or in the museum?

Through a **comparative analysis** of two case studies you will shed light on the differing historical, religious, legal, and/or ethical variables at play—as well as stable trends—in the Western fixation with antiquities.

Unit 2

In our second unit, you will undertake a **research project** on an object of your choosing from Harvard's own collections. Through visits to the Harvard Art Museums, Peabody Museum, and Houghton Library, you will become acquainted with the general history, breadth, composition, and use of Harvard's collections. I will suggest a list of possible objects for you to focus upon for your research, but you will be welcome to explore the collections for yourself and propose research on any object in Harvard's holdings. Building upon our conversations in Unit 1, we will develop research questions and explore library resources together with help from Harvard research libraries. You will consult the archival materials associated with your chosen object in the relevant museum or library, to help better understand the path that the object took to Harvard. The paper that you write out of this research will offer an analytical argument about how the meaning of the object has emerged, developed, or changed over time.

Capstone

In the final weeks of the semester, you will translate the fruits of your research into a capstone project, in which you will meet the challenge of communicating specialized knowledge and nuanced arguments to a broader audience.

II. HOW THE COURSE WORKS

Required Texts and Materials

All assigned course materials will be linked (if freely available online) or provided via PDF on the Canvas site. I will provide you with a physical journal and pencil for your commonplace book. There are no required text purchases for the course.

Completion of Work and Electronic Submissions

Commonplace book entries should be written longhand in the provided journal, unless another format is arranged in consultation with me. All other course assignments (Response Papers, Unit Paper drafts, and final Unit Papers) should be written in Microsoft Word and uploaded to Canvas in .docx format. Harvard students have free access to the Microsoft Office Suite. [Follow the instructions here to install the software](#), if you have not already done so. (Work that is completed in Google Docs and exported to .docx format is also acceptable, but **you will be responsible for**

ensuring that you can see all of my feedback in the document, which I make using Word’s review tools.) As you upload each submission, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have saved the document the correct format, and that the file you are sending is not corrupted or damaged.

Formatting and Citations

All submitted writing assignments should be formatted in the following way:

- Text should be written in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins on all sides. There should be no extra space between paragraphs.
- Do not use a title page. Include your name, course number, date, and paper title at the top of the assignment’s first page.
- Include page numbers in the footer.
- **Citations must be given in footnotes following the Chicago Manual of Style.** Footnote text should be 10-point font, single-spaced.
 - If you are unfamiliar with Chicago style, you can find guidelines and tips in the [Harvard Guide to Using Sources](#) and on [the Purdue OWL website](#).
 - If you are unsure how to automatically create a footnote in Word/Google Docs, please speak to me. Don’t attempt to manually edit the footer to add footnotes!
- The main Unit 1 and Unit 2 Essays must include a bibliography, which is not reckoned as part of the page count for purposes of assignment length. (For shorter writing assignments, footnotes with full Chicago citations are sufficient.)

The “Public” Nature of Your Writing in Expos

Much of the written work you submit for this class is “public”—which means that it may be read by your fellow writers in the class (not just by me). **If at any time you turn in a piece of writing that you would rather not have other students read, please tell me at the time of submission.** But also please note that you cannot make this request about every piece you turn in. Hearing the ideas and reactions of other readers is one of the most valuable opportunities a writer can have, and the writing that all students do in the course will often be the basis for our discussions.

Feedback and Conferences

Feedback is central to Expos. As spelled out in each assignment, you will receive substantive written feedback on each draft and final paper, as well as an individual or conference focused on your draft. Every writer benefits from having an attentive reader respond to their work, and one of my roles as your preceptor is to provide that response: identifying the strengths of a draft; noting questions and reactions to help you develop your ideas further; and offering clear assessment of your revised work. There are educational reasons for the types of feedback I’ll give you: they complement one another throughout the writing process, prepare you for different ways of receiving feedback in future circumstances, and help you think about

receiving feedback from different audiences at different stages of writing. (Feedback throughout the course also comes in other forms, such as in-class peer review or principles from workshop that you apply to your own essays.)

There are also educational reasons for the amount and timing of the feedback that I will offer. The goal of all my feedback is that you learn to incorporate the principles I'm identifying into your *own* thinking and revision, so that eventually you are making more independent decisions about how you craft your essays. This often means that I will point out a recurring issue in a draft only once, and I will trust that you to apply the critique across the whole paper. **I will not comment on every single thing that could be improved upon in a draft, so you should not treat my comments as the comprehensive list of issues to “fix.”** Instead, it is my expectation that you synthesize generalizable lessons from my feedback, our classroom discussions, and provided materials (like the “Elements of Academic Argument”) and apply these lessons independently to thoroughgoing revisions of your paper drafts.

Beyond the drafts that you are required to turn in for each unit, **I cannot offer comment on additional drafts.** If I were to offer any student multiple rounds of feedback, I would in effect be taking over some of your independent revising decisions for you, holding you back from developing autonomy as a writer. This would shortchange your learning in Expos. **I do accept limited, thoughtful questions via email about specific aspects of your revision-in-progress:** a follow-up question about whether a thesis is now clearer, or whether some added sentences of analysis make your explanation of evidence stronger. In such cases, you identify specifically what in your writing and thinking is *most* in need of targeted feedback, and you use the Elements of Academic Argument to articulate your question. (When you do want additional feedback, the [Writing Center](#) is a very helpful resource. Here too, you will find that resource works better when you arrive with specific and targeted questions.)

There are also important reasons that I schedule one draft conference per student for each essay in Unit 1. Conferences are important opportunities for thinking together about questions in your argument and strategies for revision; during conference week I am meeting with all 30 students (across two sections) and attempting to offer the same level of intensive work with everyone. If I were to grant a second full conference to any student, for reasons of equity I would need to offer a second meeting with everyone, and this is not possible in an already busy unit.

Office Hours

Beyond conference weeks, you are welcome to meet with me any time to discuss your ideas, your progress in the course, or any challenges that you are facing. I am available at a range of times every week for meetings in person or via Zoom. [See my available office hours and book an appointment here.](#) If you need to meet but no time is available that will work for you, send me an email.

E-mail

I will primarily communicate with you all via email. **It is essential that you check your**

Harvard email on a daily basis during the week. I will check my email daily during the week, and I can often reply within a few hours. Note, however, that **any emails that arrive after 5:00 PM may not be answered until the next day.** I will answer most emails **within 24 hours** (or, if over the weekend, by Monday 11:00 AM). You should take this timeline into consideration when emailing questions about assignments close to the deadline.

Grades

Your grade for the course will be calculated according to the following breakdown:

- Short Normative Argument Assignment: 5%
- Revised Comparative Essay: 25%
- Research Proposal and Annotated Bibliography: 5%
- Revised Research Essay: 35%
- Capstone Assignment: 15%
- Commonplace Book: 5%
- Engagement: 10%

The “Engagement” portion of the grade encapsulates your preparation for and attendance in class, participation in class discussion through active listening and constructive contributions, and completion of response papers and other small assignments. Only the final, “revised” version of each essay is graded, not the drafts.

Difficult Material / Content Warning

Assigned readings and classroom discussions will sometimes include potentially distressing material, including descriptions of colonial violence. Some of you may identify with communities who were the victims of this violence, and/or who stake claims on the dispossessed cultural heritage that we are studying in this course. Although I have made every attempt to select readings that are respectful and not gratuitous in their descriptions, this material can nevertheless be difficult. If you have any concerns about your ability to complete class readings or assignments for any reason (including site visits), please speak with me at any point in the semester and we will come up with an alternative plan. **I want to ensure that this class is welcoming for all students.**

Out-of-Class Excursion / Schedule Compensation

Unit 1 will involve an out-of-class activity: An excursion to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, which you will be invited to complete along with me or on your own outside of class time. Although the engagement with the MFA exhibit is required, the trip to the MFA is not; if you wish, you will be able to complete a version of the excursion assignment adequately without physically visiting the museum space. Because this excursion/assignment requires a significant time commitment outside of regular class time, in the interests of fairness I will be cancelling one regularly scheduled class to compensate: **We will not meet on Tuesday, November 21.**

III. COURSE POLICIES

Policy on Deadlines and Extensions

Expos 20 is a course that builds sequentially: the class exercises and response papers prepare you for the draft; your work in the draft lays the foundation for a strong revision; the skills and strategies you learn in Unit 1 remain essential in the new challenges of Unit 2. Because of this sequential work, keeping up with the course deadlines is necessary to your continued learning. As a first-year student, part of what you are learning is how to manage your time, to balance your academic and extracurricular responsibilities, and to build habits of working that allow you to complete long and complex assignments independently. For this reason, I grant extensions only in exceptional circumstances.

However, life also happens. In order to account for the unfathomable contingencies of the semester, you each have **one free 24-hour extension** that you can use on **any one assignment over the course of the semester** (except the Capstone). In order to claim the extension, simply email me ahead of the relevant deadline to let me know that you are using it.

Late submissions (without granted extension) will be treated as follows:

- Late graded assignments (e.g. revised papers) are subject to a penalty of 1/3 letter grade per day.**
- Late ungraded assignments (e.g. drafts) may receive less extensive/detailed feedback; very late drafts or ungraded assignments may receive no feedback.**
- Late drafts must be received, at minimum, 24 hours before a scheduled draft conference.** Draft conferences will be cancelled if there is no draft to discuss.

Yet exceptional circumstances do arise. If you find yourself dealing with medical issues, family emergencies, or extraordinary situations that genuinely interfere with your work, please let me know. You need not share personal details, but we can meet to make a plan to help you move forward in a reasonable way in light of the circumstances you are facing. In these situations I also urge you to reach out to your Resident Dean, your proctor, or your adviser so that you have the necessary support in all of your courses. **I would always prefer you email me with deadline problems instead of simply not submitting work.**

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 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 [Disability Access 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.

IV. WRITING PROGRAM POLICIES

Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Academic Integrity and Generative AI

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 other writers and thinkers, 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.

In addition to acknowledging how other writers have contributed to your work, doing your work with integrity means developing ideas that are wholly and genuinely yours. For this reason, **students are prohibited from using ChatGPT or other generative AI tools for any stage of the writing process in Expos.** The reasons for this policy in Expos are important: you discover your ideas in the messy process of drafting and revising them. Engaging with that writing process develops your ability to think clearly, organize that thinking, find appropriate evidence, pursue deeper nuances in and counterarguments to your claims and the evidence you use to present them, and work through alternative positions and evidence. To outsource any of that

process to AI robs you of the practice with these skills that will strengthen your thinking; turning to AI essentially means you are giving up *your voice* in an essay, accepting instead an average and generic answer (which is what generative AI produces). In your Expos course, submitting work as yours that you did not develop or create on your own is a violation of the Harvard College Honor Code.

While the product of an Expos class may be the papers that you write, the broader goal is to strive to become better *thinkers*. The ability to participate independently in important discussions, the confidence to add your voice to challenging topics, the precision of mind to understand when a speaker is credible and should be taken seriously and when that isn't the case—these are all skills you develop through that rigorous thinking process that writing fosters. Allowing generative AI to take the place of that thinking shortchanges your development as a writer, a thinker, and a creative participant in developing ideas. In our class, your classmates and I are eager to hear what *you* have to say.

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. You are expected to notify me ahead of time about those absences unless circumstances make that impossible. If you miss a third class for unexcused reasons, I will ask you to meet with me to discuss your plan for catching up with any missed work, as well as issues that may be affecting your attendance or that might require attention or support from your advisers or from other College resources. If you miss a fourth class, your Resident Dean will be notified 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.

Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Completion of Work

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must complete all of the major assignments to pass the course (the two final essays and the capstone project), and you must complete 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 or the capstone 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. (In the research paper assignment, the paper must include work with multiple sources to be accepted.) The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work. The research paper must include work with multiple sources to be accepted. If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay or capstone 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 [Disability Access Office](#) ahead of time. Please let me know if you are unfamiliar with that process.) The Disability Access 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.