

Question 6: Self-Assessment

Please read the information below and then answer the questions posed in Question 6 on the placement exam page.

To help you write your self-assessment, please first read the descriptions below of Expos 20 and Expos Studio 10. While the courses differ in significant ways, they share some fundamental premises:

- Both emphasize *writing as a process of critical and analytical thinking*. Harvard prioritizes learning to write well as a cornerstone of its liberal arts education. The College does so because writing an analytical paper does not consist of simply putting ideas down on the page as a polished final product; analytical writing is also a *process* of discovering and developing ideas. When you practice analytical writing, you engage in complex intellectual work: you ask a question, explore possible answers, form an initial idea, formulate an argument, and then refine those ideas. At the end of that process—when you’ve completed your paper—you know more than you did at the beginning, and those new ideas and insights have arisen precisely because you engaged in that analytical process.
- Both courses foreground that writing process—one in which you explore initial ideas, organize them in a draft, and refine them in a fully-realized revision. Those rounds of drafting and revising ideas form an essential part of the structure of both courses.
- Both courses focus on analytical *argument*—a mode of writing intended to explain and persuade, grounded in evidence. Analytical argument engages its audience by making clear what’s at stake in the ideas, and by considering and responding to alternate interpretations or opposing ideas.

- Both courses prioritize feedback, from the instructor and from fellow writers in the class.

However, the significant differences between the two courses mean that it is important to reflect on which one seems to match your writing experience best, and on which one seems most likely to prepare you most effectively as you begin your development as a writer at Harvard. Both courses serve as an introduction to college writing; however, each course is also grounded in very different assumptions about students' prior writing experience.

Expos 20:

What kind of previous writing experience do I need? One of the most important features of Expos 20 to consider is that the course assumes some significant secondary-school experience with analysis and argument. While Expos 20 is intended as an introduction to college-level writing—it does not assume that you have already written college-level papers—the course structures that introduction assuming that students are familiar with elements that they have had the chance to practice in their high-school writing: developing a thesis and arguing for it, analyzing evidence, and structuring ideas logically.

What is the pace like? Because students coming to Expos 20 have that foundation of analytical experience, the course moves at a faster pace than Expos Studio 10. Each main assignment will present several complex writing goals, and instruction about those goals focuses on putting them all together, rather than exploring and practicing each of them one at a time. While Expos 20 does place an important emphasis on the writing process, you will move through the phases of that process more quickly than you would in Expos Studio 10, and the process will consist of fewer steps.

What kinds of essays will I write? Expos 20 courses are typically structured around three major assignments. There will be some variety in those assignments across Expos sections: some

might start with a single-text close analysis, while others might begin with a comparative essay testing a theory. However, every section of Expos 20 includes a complex research paper involving independent research in Harvard's vast libraries. Each course emphasizes the importance of substantive analytical questions that frame the argument; rigorous work with evidence; depth of analysis; logical structure of ideas; consideration of and response to counterargument; clarity of expression; working with both primary and secondary sources; and the principles of academic integrity and appropriate use and citation of sources. While much of your work in Expos 20 will be grounded in your analysis of other texts and ideas, the goal is to develop that analysis into an argument of your own. By the end of the semester, most students find that their writing has been transformed from their strong secondary-school practices to a more nuanced, complex, and sophisticated form of analysis and argument.

What will I write about? When you register for Expos 20, you will select your top nine choices of course themes and meeting times; you will then be assigned to one of those nine. You can browse topics from the previous semester [on the page linked here](#). Expos courses are not intended to provide a full introduction to a particular field—they are not survey courses. Instead, each course focuses on particular issues, cases, or problems within its broader theme, giving you a basis for considering, analyzing, and responding to them in your own analytical arguments.

How does the course work? Expos 20 is structured as a small seminar, with no more than 15 students enrolled in each section. Expos is not a lecture course, and the seminar succeeds when students are learning from each other as well as from their instructor. Therefore you will be expected to contribute to the generation of ideas in your seminar, and you will have a number of ways to do so, including involvement in class discussion, commenting on peers' writing, responding to reading questions, and participation in small-group collaborations.

What other support will I have for my writing? All Harvard undergraduates can make use of the Writing Center, the free-of-charge peer tutoring service that offers feedback on student

papers. You can also connect with the Academic Resource Center (ARC) to work on or receive support for issues related to writing, such as reading strategies, writer's block, or procrastination. Using those resources in the context of Expos 20 means being proactive: you will need to seek out that support independently and integrate it into your work for the course.

Does Expos 20 meet Harvard's expository writing requirement? Yes. One semester of Expos 20 completed with a passing grade meets the writing requirement that all students must complete in their first year.

How do I know if Expos 20 is the right entry point for me? In the list below are elements of self-assessments we typically hear from students who feel they are ready for Expos 20 (not all statements are true for every student, but most Expos 20 students describe themselves in at least one or two of the following ways):

- I have a solid background in analytical writing from high school.
- I am excited by the challenge of learning how to write at the college level.
- I find that many steps of writing a paper come relatively easily to me (developing a thesis, organizing my ideas, etc.).
- When I receive feedback on my writing, I can usually use it to improve my work.
- When I have the opportunity for revision, I am often able to revise my work to make my ideas stronger.
- I have experience writing papers longer than 3–4 pages (essays written at home rather than in-class essays).

Expos Studio 10

Expos Studio 10 differs from Expos 20 in some significant ways. We have designed the course to be an introduction to writing at Harvard that does *not* assume previous experience with analytical writing and that addresses any lack of familiarity, experience, or comfort level that an incoming student might have in their writing background.

What kind of previous writing experience do I need? Students in Expos Studio 10 come to the course with a wide variety of writing backgrounds; there is no one level or type of preparation expected. Some students in Expos Studio 10 have less experience in writing, or have writing preparation that suggests that an additional term of coursework would support their transition to writing at Harvard. Some have strong writing experience in other areas (for example, journalism or creative writing), but have less experience in the kind of analytical writing that Harvard courses will require. Some students know that they haven't written extensively in their previous courses and want more practice, or feel that they have strengths in other academic areas and want to take this opportunity to develop their writing abilities as well. Others feel unfamiliar with the conventions of the American academic essay. (It is important to note that the course is not intended as an ESL course, but lack of familiarity with the specific conventions of the American academic essay leads some students to want the extra practice of Expos Studio 10.)

What is the pace like? Because of that diversity of students' backgrounds in Expos Studio 10, the class is structured to introduce students to college writing in a more step-by-step way. The first two assignments in Studio 10 are shorter than a typical Expos 20 essay, and all Expos Studio 10 assignments are broken down into incremental steps that you can practice through in-class activities as well as your writing assignments outside of class. In some instances, you have the opportunity to practice certain essential skills more than once, and those skills tend to be taught one at a time to allow for that focus. The third longer assignment for the course is likewise broken down, so that you have the chance to write an introduction and a partial draft before writing a complete draft of the essay.

What kinds of essays will I write? The Studio 10 curriculum contains three main assignments. The first two are shorter pieces, designed to give you experience with recognizing and practicing the foundational elements of analytical argument. Because these assignments are briefer, you will develop expertise with those elements, often by refining your work more than once in light of feedback from your instructor and peers. The third assignment builds on the skills of analysis and argument you have developed in the earlier assignments, giving you the opportunity to write a more traditional analytical essay assigned in many Harvard courses.

What will I write about? All sections of Studio 10 share the same curriculum, exploring diverse concerns and live debates happening within the broader Harvard community and in our contemporary world. The three major units of the course focus on three distinct themes and questions, to give you practice in analyzing a variety of texts and responding to different kinds of problems. With those three diverse topics, you have the chance to engage with arguments on a range of subjects as you develop a strong foundation for the writing you will do at Harvard. (Since all Studio sections cover the same material, you will “section” for Expos Studio 10 by submitting your preferred meeting times to the Expos sectioning lottery.)

How does the course work? Expos Studio 10 is structured as a smaller seminar: each section enrolls no more than 10 students. That smaller size allows students to practice skills of class discussion more easily, and you will also have frequent opportunities to collaborate with smaller groups of students within the class. In every unit, some class time is focused on discussing and analyzing the readings; you will also have the opportunity within class to practice important steps in developing your ideas and building your draft, and to receive feedback on your ideas in progress. This is why we call the course “Expos Studio”: the course uses a hands-on and intensive approach to writing and emphasizes both individual and collaborative work. In the Studio course, you will try out your ideas in many short pieces of writing as well as in lively discussions. Each week you will work in teams and on your own to generate and test your positions in debates and your interpretations of evidence, and to imagine alternative ways of

understanding an issue. Every step of the way, instructors are there to coach students in their development as thinkers and writers, leading students through innovative exercises and assignments that draw on a variety of media and the diverse thinking found in disciplines like psychology, philosophy, sociology, political theory, and anthropology.

What other support will I have for my writing? The Studio 10 course itself is designed to provide extra support, both through its small class size and its more frequent conferences—this means that you receive ongoing support folded into the structure of the course. In addition, all Harvard undergraduates can make use of the Writing Center, the free-of-charge peer tutoring service that offers feedback on student papers. You can also connect with the Academic Resource Center (ARC) to work on or receive support for issues related to writing.

Does Expos Studio 10 meet Harvard’s expository writing requirement? No. After enrolling in Expos Studio 10 in the fall, students then take a 20-level Expos course in the spring. The typical path is to take Expos Studio 20, which teaches the skills taught in Expos 20 at a more gradual pace, in smaller sections, with more frequent feedback (the structure is modeled after Expos Studio 10). Studio 10 students can also elect, in consultation with their Studio 10 instructor, to enroll in a standard Expos 20 course in the spring, if they feel they are ready for the faster pace and greater number of assignments in that course.

How do I know if Expos Studio 10 is the right entry point for me? In the list below are self-assessments we typically hear from students who feel that beginning with Expos Studio 10 is right for them (not all statements are true for every student, but most describe themselves in at least one or two of the following ways):

- I have not had much experience in analytical writing from high school, or the experience that I’ve had hasn’t been as rigorous as I would like.
- Most of my high school writing has consisted of very short papers (1–2 pages).

- I feel like I have good ideas, but I tend to have a lot of trouble getting them down on paper.
- Mostly what I've written so far has been summary, brief practice essays for standardized tests, or technical writing/lab reports.
- It is sometimes hard for me to start an essay or to develop my initial ideas.
- I haven't received much feedback on my writing, so I'm not sure if my academic writing is effective or not.
- I have not had much opportunity to practice revising my writing.
- I've done some academic writing, but very little or none of it has been in English.
- I am not as confident about my academic writing as I would like to be.

The chart on the next page summarizes some of the key differences between the two courses.

Expos Studio 10 and Expos 20: Key Features

Expos Studio 10

Standard Expos 20

Sections limited to 10 students	Sections limited to 15 students
Topic: students explore three different issues during the semester, with the chance to explore different kinds of sources and to craft arguments addressing different problems	Topics: multiple choices offered; students are sectioned into one of nine choices they select
Two brief assignments followed by one major essay assignment	Three major assignments
Several pre-draft steps per essay, sometimes revised more than once, giving students the chance to practice specific skills and approaches for each assignment	Typically one pre-draft response paper per essay
Frequent one-on-one conferences throughout the semester, both before and after drafts	Typically one individual conference per essay
Dedicated exercises in effective writing at the sentence level, focusing on clarity, tone, and strategies for crafting sophisticated sentences	
Occasions for developing as writers beyond the classroom, particularly in writing a compelling statement of purpose for opportunities in research, internships, and study abroad (practice in presenting ideas to wider audiences)	

