

Writing Exam 2023

A Note on How the Exam Works and Advice on Keeping Track of Your Responses

- You will be answering six questions in the Writing Exam. *Please write your answers to all six questions in a Word document or other word-processing program; then return to the exam page and paste your six answers into the relevant text boxes.* You can work on your answers in that separate document while the 5-hour clock keeps time for your exam. (We expect the exam will take most writers 2-3 hours.)
- *If you enter some of your answers on the test page and then leave the exam, those answers may be lost. Please do NOT paste in any answers or click "Submit" at the bottom of the page until ALL of your answers are ready to copy into the test page.*

The Purpose of the Exam

The purpose of this assessment is to learn more about your writing background, to gain a sense of how you might approach the kind of writing and analysis expected in your Harvard courses, and to help you think about which writing course is the most appropriate placement for you. Your thoughtful answers to the following questions are the most essential material for the Writing Program to make a recommendation about that placement. Therefore you should not view the questions below as an assessment for you to try to "do well" on; instead, your goal should be to help us get to know you as a writer, so that we can recommend the most appropriate initial writing course for you at Harvard. Ultimately, informed by a

recommendation from the Writing Program, you will make a choice about the course that is right for you.

All incoming first-year students will take a course to complete the Expository Writing requirement. As you will see in the final question below, first-year students are recommended either for Expos Studio 10 or Expos 20 (ultimately the choice of which course to take is yours). Some students may be interested in meeting the writing requirement by taking Humanities 10a/b; however, only students who are recommended for Expos 20 are eligible to apply for Humanities 10a/b. If you are a transfer student, you will receive information from the Writing Program about your possible paths to meeting the writing requirement. The Writing Placement Exam is an important part of that process.

You will answer brief questions about the following areas:

- Section 1: Your Writing Experience
- Section 2: Analytical Writing at Harvard
- Section 3: Your Self-Assessment

Section 1: Your Writing Experience

A Reminder about Keeping Track of Your Responses

- We advise you to write your answers in a Word document or other word-processing program, and paste that text for Section 1 into the first text box on the exam page when you have written your answers to *all* of the exam questions. Please begin each answer with the question number (Question 1, Question 2) to correspond to the question being asked.

Question 1: Your Goals for Writing at Harvard

In your Expos course, you will learn the expectations of and the skills required for academic writing at Harvard. Our courses are structured so that you receive both abundant written and oral feedback as well as the opportunity for individual conferences with your instructor about your work.

An important premise in every Expos course is that you advance your learning in even more significant ways when you articulate your own goals, assess your own progress, and identify the specific issues you are focusing on in each assignment. In this placement assessment, we are asking you to begin one of those steps now.

- Please write 1–2 paragraphs describing the goals you have for your development as a writer at Harvard. What skills do you want to develop; what learning do you want to accomplish; what areas do you want to see improve in your own writing? Why are these particular goals important to you?

Question 2: Your Analytical Writing Experience

Please tell us about one ACADEMIC writing assignment from your junior or senior year. (Please do not include personal or creative essays or your college essay as examples—we are trying to get a sense of your analytical writing background). The essay you describe should be a substantial paper that you wrote at home (not an in-class essay or an essay preparing for a standardized exam).

- What did the assignment ask you to do?
- What was your main idea or thesis in that essay?
- What kind(s) of evidence did you use to support your ideas?
- How many pages long was the final essay?

- If you've written a paper like this and you can access it now, please copy and paste your introductory paragraph and thesis at the end of your answer to this section on the exam page.
- If you have not written an assignment of this type, please write "no assignment of this type" as your answer to this section.

Section 2: Analytical Writing at Harvard

A Reminder about Keeping Track of Your Responses

- In the following section, you will answer a series of short questions (Questions 3–5), focusing on your familiarity with the kind of analytical writing that Harvard courses will require. For each of the questions in this section, you should write one or more paragraphs in response (each question will give you directions about the expected length).
- We advise you to write your answers to Questions 3–5 in a Word document or other word-processing program, and then paste that text into the middle box on the exam page when you have written your answers to *all* of the exam questions. Please begin each answer with the question number (Question 3, Question 4, etc.) to correspond to the question.
- THE MATERIALS YOU WILL NEED TO ANSWER QUESTIONS 3–5 ARE IN THE [SECTION 2 MATERIALS DOCUMENT LINKED HERE](#).
- You will need to be able to download and view a PDF document. If you do not already have access to Adobe Reader, please [follow this link to a free download](#).

Question 3: Introducing an Analytical Argument

One of the most central elements of analytical writing in your Harvard papers will be the main idea that you argue for. While many students arrive at Harvard having written essays that support a thesis, the expectations for what a thesis should do and for how to frame that idea in an introduction are vastly different than in many secondary school writing assignments.

In the Section 2 Materials document (linked at the beginning of this section), you will find introductions from two student essays, both writing about the same topic. Please read the two introductions on pages 1 – 4 of the document and then answer the questions below.

You should answer the questions about one source at a time (in other words, first write a paragraph or two answering the questions about Introduction #1, then do the same for Introduction #2).

- What sentence(s) do you identify as the thesis statement for each introduction?
- The introductions include ideas from three sources (Marx, Braverman, Leidner). In each introduction, what role do those sources play? Why does each writer bring them together in the essay? What types of sources are they?
- What question is each writer trying to answer?
- After you have discussed each introduction separately, choose which of the two introductions seems stronger to you, and describe why. Given what you see in that stronger introduction, what ideas would you expect that writer to explore? (Do not be concerned with a formal outline that puts those ideas in a specific order; just list the main ideas that you think would be necessary to support the essay's thesis.)

Your answer for Question 3 should consist of 2–4 paragraphs.

Question 4: Analysis

In the Section 2 Materials document, you will find the opening pages of a source typical of what you might read in an Expos course. Please read that opening section on pages 5 – 6 of the document and then answer the questions below.

- In your own words, state the author’s main idea in this passage.
- What positions does the author argue against and why?
- If an assignment asked you to analyze this excerpt, what would you focus on? What elements or ideas seem most significant or most in need of analysis?

Your answer for Question 4 should consist of 1 – 2 paragraphs.

Question 5: Expos Assignment Prompt

Next you will read a sample assignment prompt from a typical Expos course. First read the prompt found on pages 8 – 9 of the Section 2 Materials document, and then answer the questions below.

Please describe in 1–2 paragraphs what your process for writing this paper would be:

- How would you begin working on the paper? What would your first steps be?
- How would you develop a thesis?
- How would you approach evidence that did not fit your thesis?
- How would you organize your ideas?
- What parts of this assignment might feel challenging or unfamiliar for you?
- In what ways has your previous writing instruction prepared you for a prompt like this?
- What is one question you might want to ask your instructor?

Your answer for Question 5 should consist of 1 – 2 paragraphs.

Section 3: Self-Assessment

A Reminder about Keeping Track of Your Responses

- We advise you to write your answers to Question 6 in a Word document or other word-processing document, and then paste that text into the text box at the end of the exam page when you have written your answers to *all* of the exam questions.
- For your final section of the placement assessment, please read the descriptions of Expos 20 and Expos Studio 10 in [the Section 3 Materials document linked here](#).

Question 6: Your Self-Assessment

Based on the descriptions of Expos Studio 10 and Expos 20, please write a self-assessment about which course you believe is the appropriate one for you to enroll in. (If you are interested in applying to enroll in Humanities 10a/b, you must first be recommended for Expos 20.) Your self-assessment should refer to *specific features of the course you are selecting*, as well as to *specific details of your writing background and preparation*. A thoughtful reflection about the best option for you is an important first step in making sure you will enroll in the course that best meets your previous writing experience. That essential writing instruction in your first year is the foundation for the reading, writing, and learning that you will do at Harvard.

Please note that the statement you make here does not *commit* you to enrolling in that course. If you are considering Expos Studio 10, you will make the final decision about enrolling after an advising session with a Writing Program faculty member. It is also possible that you might be choosing a different course here at the end of the Writing Exam than you did on the earlier survey page; that change is completely fine, and neither choice commits you to a specific course.

A Final Reminder about Submitting Your Responses

- After you have composed your answers to all six exam questions, please paste your answer to each question in the corresponding box on the exam page.
- When you have completed your answers to Questions 1–6 and you have pasted them into the appropriate text boxes on this screen, please click "SUBMIT" at the bottom of the exam page. You will not be able to return to the exam again after that time.
- Please be sure you have saved a copy of your answers.
- We look forward to reading your placement exam.