

Grading Criteria Lioi/21W.735

Your essays will be graded according to the following set of criteria: Project, Use of Sources, Organization, and Presentation. The definitions of these terms appear below.

Definitions of Terms

Project: The project is the task the essay tries to accomplish: the story it is attempting to interpret; the problem it is trying to explore; or the thought it is trying to elaborate. Depending on the assignment, it may include: narration, argumentation, communication of a new idea, the exposition of another text or source, or a combination of these. Because the classic essay is a more flexible genre than the traditional academic paper, the project of an essay is often *not* made of a thesis with supporting evidence. (That is why the 5–paragraph essay is *never* an appropriate response to an assignment in this class.) The essay wanders or walks around; it does not always come to a conclusion. The process of writing often changes the writer’s mind, and sometimes the project of an essay is to record the process of mind–changing.

Use of Sources: The essay is a dialogic form. A piece of nonfiction prose that does not refer to another source or sources is not an essay, in the strict sense, but some other related genre (memoir, editorial, diary entry). Therefore, you will be required in every assignment to refer to other sources, which may include: class texts, print texts from outside the class, electronic texts, numerical data, other media (visual art, music, video, television, movies), physical objects, other people, or historical and contemporary events. Michel de Montaigne, the founder of the modern essay, often used his own body as a source. NOTE: The proper attribution of sources falls under this criterion. You must always give credit to the maker of the source you are using, *even when you are not using conventional academic citation*. In cases where you don’t know the maker of the source, or you know the source is anonymous, you must say so.

Organization: Though essays do not have a *formulaic* structure, they have structure. Except in the most experimental cases (some of which we will read), essays are divided into discrete paragraphs. Essays often follow certain basic plots, such as: tell a story and explore its meaning; quote a source and react to it; play with an idea until it becomes another idea. Essays are often limited by a specific word count or page length. Organizational standards vary by language and literary tradition; French essays, for instance, are not always split into paragraphs, while Chinese prose often strives for syntactic compression. We will be following Anglo–American writing conventions. At the level of the sentence, the Anglo–American tradition values clarity before complexity: if you have a choice between being clear and being stylish, be clear first, and work towards style later.

Presentation: The presentation criterion includes: grammatical and syntactic correctness; proper spelling, proper punctuation, and proper format (conventional margins, spacing between lines, block and integrated quotation, page numbers, heading, paper size, stapling). In the world of professional writing, mistakes in presentation are often unforgivable: for example, it is not uncommon for employers to throw out a letter of application or curriculum vitae the first time they encounter a mistake in presentation. Accuracy counts.

NOTE: In formally innovative essays, some of the above conventions are violated, but they are always violated consciously, for a purpose, and with full knowledge of conventional use. Before you innovate, you must understand the convention you want to break thoroughly, so you can teach the reader to understand why you are breaking the rules and what the violation means.