

Course Description

As the course title suggests, this class is meant to acquaint you with the literary and rhetorical tradition of the essay, a genre which has been described by one scholar as "the meeting ground between art and philosophy," and by another as "the place where the self finds a pattern in the world, and the world finds a pattern in the self". Though the essay is part of a tradition of prose which stretches back to antiquity, it is also a thoroughly modern and popular form of writing, found in print media and on the web. This class will emphasize a specific range of the essay's functions:

- The essay as commentary on the writing of others and on textual/numerical data.
- The essay as the discovery of meaning in personal experience through the narration of experience.
- The essay as a vehicle conveying specialized knowledge to a general audience.

By the end of the semester, you will be familiar with each of these modes in the class reading and in your own writing.

Course Requirements

- Assigned reading (see schedule below)
- 5 essays (5-7 pages each), rough *and* final drafts
- 2 oral reports (5-10 minutes long)
- Participation in class discussion
- In-class peer review (see below)
- Peer-review-related photocopying
- In-class and out-of-class writing exercises (1-2 pp)
- Maintenance of a portfolio (see below)
- Regular attendance (see below)

NOTE: It is not possible to pass the course if you have failed one of the essays, if you have failed to participate in peer review, or if you have more than 5 absences. Failure to participate in class discussion will result in a deduction of one-half or one grade point from the final grade, depending on the severity of the problem.

Attendance Policy

Because this course is a laboratory for composition and interpretation, you must be present at every class and arrive in a timely fashion. Only 5 unexcused absences are permitted.

An absence on a peer review day will count as a regular absence *and* result in the deduction of two grade-steps from the final draft (e.g. B reduced to C+). 2 latenesses = 1 absence. You are late if you arrive at class after I take attendance.

In case of personal emergency, serious illness, or injury, do not come to class, but inform me of the reason for your absence as soon as possible. [A dean's note will be necessary to be excused from class under these circumstances.] Absence for religious observance is automatically excused; nonetheless, please inform me before the fact.

Portfolio

During the semester, you are required to keep a folder (or whatever) in which you collect all of your rough and final drafts. This portfolio will be handed in for assessment in lieu of a final exam on the last scheduled day of class.

Peer Review

Each of your rough drafts will undergo peer review, meaning that, in addition to my comments, you will receive comments from your classmates. This process is designed to provide multiple perspectives on each of your essays, and imitates the editorial processes that essays endure during the process of publication. If diligently practiced, peer review will make you a better reader of your own essays and a better interlocutor for the work of others.

For each day of peer review, you will be required to bring several copies of your rough draft. The copying process is your responsibility; please take care of it **BEFORE** coming to class.

Grading Criteria

See Grading Criteria Sheet. ([PDF](#))

Plagiarism

Plagiarism occurs when the work of others is used and represented as if it were your own. Plagiarism is anathema in academe. MIT does not tolerate plagiarism, and the consequences of conscious plagiarizing are severe, and include the possibility of expulsion. Please review the MIT Policy on Plagiarism, available through the Writing Center web site.

Wiggle Room

The final draft of Essay 2, 3, OR 4 may be handed in late with my permission. [Like Daffy Duck swallowing Uranium-238, you can only pull this trick once.] This policy takes account of the other demands on your time; use it wisely.