

“Making Sense of Life, for Life”
Fall 2013

Required Reading List

Walker Percy, *The Moviegoer*
C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (handout)
Christopher Hitchens, *god is not Great*
Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*
Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other by Sherry
Turkle
Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle by Chris Hedges
The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement by Jean M. Twenge and
W. Keith Campbell
Anton Chekhov, “Ward 6” (handout)
James Joyce, “The Dead” (handout)
Miguel Unamuno, “San Manuel the Good” (handout)
Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*
Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*
Albert Camus, *The Stranger*
Select essays by Lucian, Cicero, Aristotle, Seneca, Augustine, Lewis, Bacon (handout)

Expectations

Read, Think, Discuss & Write.

"Truth is great and will prevail if left to herself. She is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict unless human interposition disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate."

Thomas Jefferson

"...books are the printed score, while talk is the singing."

Anton Chekhov, “Ward 6”

Everything we read we will write about and talk about. Great books, like great ideas are meant for discussion. The books we will be reading are written from a variety of perspectives and assumptions. They are intended to stimulate thoughtfulness about their given subjects, not necessarily to endorse or encourage embracing the author’s position on any or every issue. In all our discussions and readings the four core questions for this course will be the focus. Those questions are:

1. What is a worldview?
2. What are some of the significant component parts of a worldview?
3. How do I build my worldview and live my life in light of my worldview?
4. Can my worldview hold the weight of life?

Through our reading and discussions of literature, philosophy, and essays, we will attempt to get at these questions, and a host of others, as we explore the topic of making sense of life, for life. The course will consider the areas of Contemporary Culture, Metaphysics, Human Nature & Ethics, The Problem of Evil, Existentialism and The Problem of Good, Friendship and Building a Worldview for Life.

All reading will be completed by the time it is first discussed in class. You will sign and turn in a Reading Log for each of the assigned readings; more on this in a moment.

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Contact

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Grading

Attendance & Participation	25%
Essay #1	25%
Essay #2	25%
Essay #3	25%

All work in these four areas must be completed on time in order to avoid receiving an “incomplete” or failing grade for the course.

Guidelines for the Essays

Each of the Essays is intended to cover only those readings completed either prior to the due date or between due dates. The intent of these Essays is not to write book summaries of what we’ve read and discussed in that selection of readings. Rather the Essays are an opportunity for you to interact with what we’ve read and what we’ve talked about in class and gather it together in one concise, articulate, thoughtful and provocative essay. You are to demonstrate a ***thorough*** knowledge of the texts—not just what we covered in class discussions—and how they interact together to inform you about the issues, questions and possible answers to the questions of life—what they have to say about particular puzzle pieces.

The essays are graded on content, creative and thorough engagement with all of what was read and discussed, grammar and clarity. The essays are to range between seven to eight pages in length.

Each essay may be re-written as many times as you like in order to try to receive a higher grade. The Essay will receive a one-letter grade reduction for each day that it is late passed the due date listed in the syllabus. This grade reduction is permanent, so get the essays in on time. All of the Essays must be turned in order to avoid receiving an Incomplete or failing grade for this course.

Please use the suggested format at the end of this syllabus for writing your essays.

Class Attendance and Participation

Given the nature and structure of this class, my expectation is that you will attend every class, participate in discussions about the lectures and books that we read, pose questions, debate points—expressing and defending your point of view and listening to the point of view of others—and that you will stay engaged and alert. You will receive a letter grade for your participation in each class based on these criteria.

A lot is riding on your being class, so unexcused absences are not permitted. If you have to miss class for a legitimate reason (*severe* illness, personal or family emergency, etc.), you **must** notify me in advance and you must receive permission from me in order for your absence to be counted

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as excused. Failure to attend class without an excused absence will result in **severe, negative consequences concerning your final grade for the course.**

Reading Log

For each class that we have assigned reading, you are expected to turn in a Reading Log that indicates precisely what you have read (author and title) and how much of the work you have read. It is look like this:

Reading Log

I _____ affirm and promise that I have read _____ of the assigned portion of _____ by _____ for our class discussion today.

Signed

Date

Failure to turn in a Reading Log for any of the assigned readings will result in a one letter grade reduction for each occurrence for that section’s Essay.

Plagiarism

Any paper that is turned in and it can be adequately demonstrated to my satisfaction that the material has been entirely or in significant measure plagiarized from another source or sources will receive a failing grade and be reported to the department chairman. This includes use of the internet to obtain book summaries.

TCNJ’s academic integrity policy *is available on the web:*
<http://www.tcnj.edu/~academic/policy/integrity.html>

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy

Any student who has a documented disability and is in need of academic accommodations should notify the professor of this course and contact the Office of Differing Abilities Services (609-771-2571). Accommodations are individualized and in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992.

TCNJ’s *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) policy is available on the web:*
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Syllabus

Tuesday, August 27	Introduction & Expectations; The Puzzle Pieces
Tuesday, September 10	Discussion of “On the Shortness of Life” by Seneca and “Hermotimus” by Lucian (handout via email)
Tuesday, September 17	Discussion of <i>Empire of Illusion</i> by Chris Hedges
Tuesday, September 24	Discussion of “Nicomachean Ethics” by Aristotle and “Treatise on Friendship” by Cicero
Tuesday, October 1	ESSAY #1 DUE and Discussion of “Ward 6” by Chekhov, “The Dead” by Joyce, and “San Manuel the Good” by Unamuno (handout via email)
Tuesday, October 8	Discussion of select portions of <i>Alone Together</i> by Sheryl Turkle
Tuesday, October 15	Discussion of select portion of Christopher Hitchens’, <i>god is not Great</i> , chapters 1-3, 5, 7-9, 13-14, 17-19
Thursday, October 22	Discussion of selection portions of Francis S. Collins, <i>The Language of God</i> , and C.S. Lewis, “Mere Christianity” (handout via email)
Tuesday, October 29	FALL BREAK—NO CLASS
Tuesday, November 5	Discussion of <i>Crime and Punishment</i> by Fyodor Dostoyevsky
Tuesday, November 12	ESSAY #2 DUE and Discussion of Augustine, Bacon and Lewis on Friendship (handout via email)
Tuesday, November 19	Discussion of <i>The Narcissism Epidemic</i> by Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell
Tuesday, November 26	Discussion of <i>Waiting for Godot</i> by Samuel Beckett and <i>The Stranger</i> by Albert Camus
Tuesday, December 3	Discussion of <i>The Moviegoer</i> by Walker Percy
Tuesday, December 10	ESSAY #3 DUE

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Essay Writing

Summary: This resource begins with a general description of essay writing and moves to a discussion of common essay genres students may encounter across the curriculum. Note: The Modes of Discourse: Description, Narration, Exposition, Argumentation (EDNA) The four genres of essays (description, narration, exposition, and argumentation) are common paper assignments you may encounter in your writing classes. Although these genres, also known as the modes of discourse, have been criticized by some composition scholars, the Purdue OWL recognizes the wide spread use of these genres and students' need to understand and produce these types of essays. We hope these resources will help.

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What is an Essay?

Though the word 'essay' has come to be understood as a type of writing in Modern English, its origins provide us with some useful insights. The word comes into the English language through the French influence on Middle English; tracing it back further, we find that the French form of the word comes from the Latin verb *exigere*, which means 'to examine, test, or (literally) to drive out'. Through the excavation of this ancient word, we are able to unearth the essence of the academic essay: to encourage students to test or examine their ideas concerning a particular topic.

Essays are shorter pieces of writing that often require the student to hone a number of skills such as close reading, analysis, comparison and contrast, persuasion, conciseness, clarity, and exposition. As is evidenced by this list of attributes, there is much to be gained by the student who strives to succeed at essay writing.

The purpose of an essay is to encourage students to develop ideas and concepts in their writing with the direction of little more than their own thoughts (it may be helpful to view the essay as the converse of a research paper). Therefore, essays are (by nature) concise, and require clarity in purpose and direction. This means that there is no room for the student's thoughts to wander or stray from her purpose; she must be deliberate and interesting.

It is the purpose of this handout to help students become familiar and comfortable with the process of essay composition through the introduction of some common essay genres.

What is an Expository Essay?

The expository essay is a genre of essay that requires the student to investigate an idea, evaluate evidence, expound on the idea, and set forth an argument concerning that idea in a clear and concise manner. This can be accomplished through comparison and contrast, definition, example, the analysis of cause and effect, etc.

Please note: This genre is commonly assigned as a tool for classroom evaluation and is often found in various exam formats.

The structure of the expository essay is held together by the following:

A clear, concise, and defined thesis statement that occurs in the first paragraph of the essay.

It is essential that this thesis statement be appropriately narrowed to follow the guidelines set forth in the assignment. If the student does not master this portion of the essay, it will be quite difficult to compose an effective or persuasive essay.

Clear and logical transitions between the introduction, body, and conclusion.

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Transitions are the mortar that holds the foundation of the essay together. Without logical progression of thought, the reader is unable to follow the essay’s argument, and the structure will collapse.

Body paragraphs that include evidential support.

Each paragraph should be limited to the exposition of one general idea. This will allow for clarity and direction throughout the essay. What is more, such conciseness creates an ease of readability for one’s audience. It is important to note that each paragraph in the body of the essay must have some logical connection to the thesis statement in the opening paragraph.

Evidential support (whether factual, logical, statistical, or anecdotal).

Often times, students are required to write expository essays with little or no preparation; therefore, such essays do not typically allow for a great deal of statistical or factual evidence.

A bit of creativity!

Though creativity and artfulness are not always associated with essay writing, it is an art form nonetheless. Try not to get stuck on the formulaic nature of expository writing at the expense of writing something interesting. Remember, though you may not be crafting the next great novel, you are attempting to leave a lasting impression on the people evaluating your essay.

A conclusion that does not simply restate the thesis, but readdresses it in light of the evidence provided.

It is at this point of the essay that students will inevitably begin to struggle. This is the portion of the essay that will leave the most immediate impression on the mind of the reader. Therefore, it must be effective and logical. Do not introduce any new information into the conclusion; rather, synthesize and come to a conclusion concerning the information presented in the body of the essay.

A Complete Argument

Perhaps it is helpful to think of an essay in terms of a conversation or debate with a classmate. If I were to discuss the cause of the Great Depression and its current effect on those who lived through the tumultuous time, there would be a beginning, middle, and end to the conversation. In fact, if I were to end the exposition in the middle of my second point, questions would arise concerning the current effects on those who lived through the Depression. Therefore, the expository essay must be complete, and logically so, leaving no doubt as to its intent or argument.