

Course Intro Essay: Final draft

Final draft due dates:

H2 (Tuesday class meetings): March 6
H3 (Wednesday class meetings): March 7
L3 (Wednesday class meetings): March 7

Final drafts will lose 1 point per day, up to 14 days. After that, late assignments will not be accepted. Assignments are marked as “submitted” the day that I receive them, whether as a hard copy placed in my mailbox in the Music Department office or the date stamp on an email. If a final draft is submitted via email but does not follow the submission requirements below, I will not accept it and it is still late until it is properly submitted.

Formatting and submission

- Stapled, in order: 1. Rubric, 2. Revision reflection, 3. First draft with graded rubric, 4. Final draft
- 12-point font (Times New Roman is a standard choice)
- Double spaced (if you’re working in MS Word, make sure you’ve set your text style to “No Spacing” rather than “Normal” before you change the double space so there aren’t any extra blank lines between paragraphs)
- 1” margins
- Indent (tab) the first line of each paragraph
- Do not include a heading – your name and section number will be included in the name of the file you email or written on the rubric attached to your hard copy submission

Revision reflection: The revision reflection is a one-page essay in which you explain how you thought about and incorporated feedback into this draft. In your reflection, you must answer these two questions: 1) what specifically did you do differently for this version of the essay, and 2) what have you learned about yourself as a writer in the process? Even if you did not turn in a first draft, you can (and **must**) still complete this portion of the assignment. This reflection is required and I will **not** grade your essay without it.

General feedback/tips

Make sure you’ve answered all of the prompt questions. (There are five.) Make sure your essay has an introduction and a conclusion—refer to your essay prompt for ways to write an effective introduction and an effective (i.e., non-repetitious) conclusion.

Keep going. The critical thinking questions on your paper are to help you continue thinking fully through an idea. In the process of answering the questions I’ve provided, you’ll have to figure out what your real main point or perspective is.

Make sure your essay is coherent. How do the ideas in one paragraph relate to or build upon other paragraphs to tell a single story? Think of writing as leaving breadcrumbs (like Hansel and Gretel!) that connect details or ideas across paragraphs—pick a single paragraph from the middle of your essay: Does it link explicitly or directly to a unique idea found in another paragraph? Show how the range of things you mention are connected.

Put another way, what's the point of this essay at all? What main idea are you trying to communicate that all five of your prompt responses tackle from a different angle?

Watch out for repetition or redundancy. Read your essay two sentences at a time (e.g., first sentence and second sentence of a paragraph; second sentence and third sentence of a paragraph)—do these two sentences repeat each other? Remove the weaker one.

This essay is about you: your ideas, your experiences, your goals—the common thread is you. Look for sentences about “people” or generalizations about the world: do they support the central idea of exploring yourself and your experience? (Hint: probably not.) Remove them and see what holes remain or what space you've freed up for specific examples, answering implicit questions, or following a line of thought more thoroughly.

If there's a pattern of error in your writing but you're not sure how to fix it on your own (e.g., run-on sentences, sentence fragments, past participles, subject-verb agreement), make an appointment at the **Writing Center (Library, 1st floor)** so you can learn the skills that will make all of your writing more effective. They can also help you with brainstorming or organization of your thoughts if that's a roadblock for you.

Follow formatting instructions: no heading, font size, length, margins, etc.

The techniques of editing (“ARMS”):

1. **Add.** Show why you think what you think. Provide examples.
2. **Remove.** Remove anything (it could a word, or a sentence, or a half a page) that doesn't actually address your main point. Remove repetitious ideas or redundant statements.
3. **Move.** Try to imagine someone reading this for the first time. What would be confusing about the order that things are presented in? You can change the order of paragraphs or of sentences within a paragraph and end up with a completely different essay.
4. **Substitute.** Try a different anecdote, a different example, or even a different word.

Dr. J's favorite editing suggestions:

1. Imagine your essay is your side of a conversation with another person. If you were telling someone the story you convey in your essay, would you do so in the order you used in your first draft?
2. Your best editor is an imaginary, insatiable three-year-old who says “How do you know” or “Why does that matter” after every single sentence. Does the narrative you're telling pass the “three-year-old test”? If not, then there's still more critical thinking to be done in order to fully flesh out your ideas (and make them toddler-proof!).

What am I looking for? Or, what makes for a successful essay in Mu 101?

You may organize essays in this class however you like. You won't see any formulaic 5-paragraph essay topics in this course (although you can certainly write one of those if that's comfortable for you!). The important thing is that your essay displays the features of good writing, and note that these are the same parameters outlined in the grading rubric:

Good writing contains interesting ideas. This is the most important aspect of good writing—are you saying something new, exciting, provocative, and that's not predictable?

Good writing expresses those ideas clearly. Clarity is one of the most difficult things to master as a writer—have you stated your ideas in such a way that the reader understands where you are coming from, has all the pieces, and receives information in a logical order? This means supporting your ideas with specific, vivid examples—musical details from a specific song, an anecdote or brief story, or a detail that brings your idea to life and grounds it in reality.

Good writing is engaging. The most enjoyable things to read feel like a conversation between the reader and the author—as you read, you have a sense of the person writing, their sense of humor, their personality, and the things that make them unique, and this makes you want to keep reading. This comes through in their word choice, their style, how they convey their ideas (e.g., what imagery, metaphors, similes they choose to use), and the artfulness of their presentation. Sound a little vague? That's because we're talking about the *art* of writing, and art, as you know (even after only a week or two in this class!) is subjective.

Good writing follows through. Building on the concept that good writing expresses interesting ideas in a conversational manner, keep in mind that good writing also impels the reader to keep thinking about the subject in a new way. Your essay can do this by answering questions like: “Why does it matter?”, “So what?”, “What happens next?”, or “How does this relate to the world or the bigger picture?” Be aware of the implicit questions your writing raises, and don't just leave them hanging there, unanswered.

Good writing isn't repetitive. This is the trickiest thing for many young writers coming out of high school! We're often taught to reuse whole phrases from the introduction to form topic sentences or to restate the introduction as the conclusion of our essays, for example. Practical, formulaic, easy to teach—but BORING! Uninspired! Unexciting! Another trap is redundancy, or saying the same thing with different words (see what I did there?). As you reread your drafts, watch out for the habit of saying the same idea multiple times or in multiple places in your essay—pick the strongest version and get rid of the others!

There are more links to tips, descriptions, and guidance for effective writing on the class website.

Read the assignment prompt. Begin every assignment by reading the essay prompt all the way through, making sure that you understand everything that's expected of you. Return to this step throughout the writing process—it's your job to make sure that you're fulfilling the assignment requirements!

Writing takes time. Do a little bit each day. Ten minutes a day over the course of a week is more effective than an hour crammed in the night before a due date. Give yourself time to mess up and recover. Schedule time in your calendar to just write without distractions—no friends, no music, no TV, no Internet, no phone, no multitasking.

Some general tips:

1. The introduction is usually a bad place to start. You don't know what you're going to write about until you start writing, but the intro requires you to know what you're about to write—it's a recipe for writer's block!
2. Pick an idea from your brainstorming and simply start writing. Don't edit, don't second guess, just get your ideas on paper (or on the screen). You'll often find that you can get into a "groove" if you just keep writing (10 minutes is a good goal if you're using a timer) with no distractions (put the phone away, turn music off, find a quiet space).
3. After you've written, take the night off! Reread what you've written the next day. It's important to give yourself distance from what you've written so you can approach it a little more objectively, and you'll also find that a good night's sleep can help you figure out new things to say, better ways to phrase an idea, or see how good (or weak) your previous work was.
4. Try putting your sentences (or even whole paragraphs!) in different orders—the flow of how your ideas is presented is important and can change the entire scope of an essay. Oftentimes the order that we come up with ideas isn't the best order for sharing them with a reader.
5. Write your introduction last. Once you've figured out what your essay says, it's easier to welcome a reader into it.
6. Read your essay or sections of it out loud. Imagine that you're speaking to someone as you do so. It's easier to notice awkward grammar, usage, or word order when you have to say it out loud.
7. Let someone else read your essay and tell you what they liked about it and something they still don't understand after reading it. Fix whatever is unclear—if one reader had difficulty understanding your wording, logic, or point, someone else probably will, too!
8. Use the campus Writing Center. They're there to help you expand and deepen your skills as a writer so that you feel more confident about this assignment and more prepared for future assignments.
9. Don't print at the last minute. Technology can be problematic, and there's not always a stapler handy when you need it.
10. Reread the essay prompt and rubric to grade yourself before you turn anything in.