

## Assignment: Final Capstone Essay

Your learning this semester will culminate in a final capstone essay of 20-25-pages in length, 5,000 words minimum, as well as a 500-word process reflection. This culminating project will build on the writing assignments we have completed all semester and must incorporate any revisions or suggestions from your peers or myself. The bulk of the writing will happen in October, with major revisions due in November, and the final essay due the penultimate week of classes in early December. This will allow me time to read your essays and meet with each of you individually before the semester is over to assess progress and final grades.

In your capstone, you will:

- Clearly articulate and sustain an inquiry question, with all content clearly demonstrating an attempt to understand and respond to the question. Your question may evolve and change over the course of the essay.
- Connect the material of personal archives (whether objects, bodies, places, or digital storage—as discussed in class) to your broader inquiry question.
- Explore an inquiry question through close readings and analysis of two course texts as well as outside sources from at least two different disciplines. Your analysis should show critical thinking with regard to both literary devices and disciplinary perspectives, drawing connections and differences between sources, and considering why and how they offer complementary or contradictory perspectives on your question.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the creative nonfiction genre, with conversational prose and your own mind at work on the page. Your thesis, for instance, may come at the end of the essay after you have explored multiple potential answers to your question. The essay should primarily lean on analysis of texts and interdisciplinary research, but your personal experiences and exploratory voice should be incorporated throughout.
- Write for an educated, general audience, demonstrating careful revision and editing for style and content.

## Process

- **Question and annotated bibliography, due October 1.** The first part of this assignment is a 250-word written response that begins by completing the phrase, “The question I plan to explore is . . .” Your question should meet the criteria for a strong inquiry question discussed in class. Explain how you have revised your question since your initial brainstorming assignment in September. The annotated bibliography should consist of at least 2 course texts and 6 outside sources (across at least two different disciplines). Each entry must contain a 100-word annotation that describes the source and its particular angle on your inquiry question. The entries must be formatted correctly according to the style guide in your field.

- **First installment, due October 8.** Submit the first 5–7 pages of your essay. This can and should draw on your personal writing and close writing assignments, and my feedback to you thus far. This is not an outline or bullet points but complete sentences in your personal essaying style. You must include at least one course text and four outside sources. Completion of this assignment demonstrates a solid start on the writing process.
- **Second installment, due October 15.** Submit the next 5-7 pages of your essay, following the same criteria as the first installment, with four additional sources, including your second course text.
- **Complete draft, due October 29.** Submit a minimum of 20 pages on Canvas and bring a hard copy to class. This is not a rough draft (the installments function more that way). Rather, this draft demonstrates your question, your research, and your argument. You must include at least eight outside sources and two sources from class. While some ideas may require further development as your essay evolves through the revision process, this should be a solid draft that demonstrates progress toward the learning outcomes.
- **Revisions, due November 5.** This assignment is a combination of written feedback (500 words) you will provide to one member of your peer team and your own revisions according to feedback. Turn in a 7-10 pages of revised work that demonstrate substantial changes. In providing feedback to your peers, you are not an editor but a reviewer. Have the above learning outcomes in mind as your provide feedback to your peers.
- **Polished Draft, due November 12.** At a minimum of 5,000 words (excluding citations/bibliography), this revised, edited, modified, and improved version of your essay should be as close to the final essay as possible. It must demonstrate mindful revision. Consider carefully any suggestions or feedback you received on earlier drafts. Refine and expand your thought processes, adding depth to your argument and analysis of key texts, your interdisciplinary research, and your personal exploration.
- **Final paper and process reflection due December 5.** Your final paper should demonstrate another round of substantial revision. You will evaluate your project yourself and it will be evaluated by me according to the above learning outcomes. Your paper will be accompanied by a 500-word process letter that narrativizes your thinking and learning over the course of drafting, revising, and editing this project.