

WRIT 150

Issues in Law & Social Justice
Dr. Patricia Taylor

Assignment Guide

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About This Guide

This assignment guide has the directions for all of the major writing projects and their ancillary writing assignments (generally, process documents for each paper). However, assignments for asynchronous class sessions are not generally included in this guide. If an assignment is not listed here, the instructions will be on Blackboard, delivered in the weekly announcements, or given in a class session. Such assignments will not count as AWAs, but will be used to help determine your attendance for asynchronous classes. (Annotation assignments may also serve for attendance or fulfillment of academic responsibility.)

Remember: **all assignments are due at 10AM Pacific Time on the morning listed on the course schedule unless otherwise noted.** If you need an extension, you must email Dr. Taylor in advance of the deadline. The further in advance you ask for the extension, the more likely you will receive it.

All assignments must be typed and submitted on Blackboard as Word documents (.docx) unless specifically noted otherwise.

Annotation Assignments

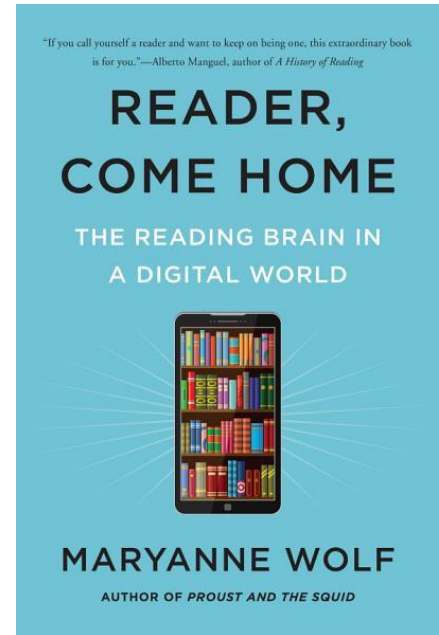
For most of our readings this semester, you are expected to engage with the text in the form of annotations, or comments in the margins of the text. The reasons for this are complex, and I hope you'll bear with me as I explain why this assignment is so key for our work this semester.

In her book *Reader Come Home*, neuroscientist and expert on reading Maryanne Wolf explains that “*humans were never born to read*” (1). Reading isn't natural. It is something we invented—a tool—and our brains have to be trained to do it. Unlike spoken or signed language, which nearly every young child masters simply by being around other humans who are communicating, reading (and writing) must be taught to everyone.

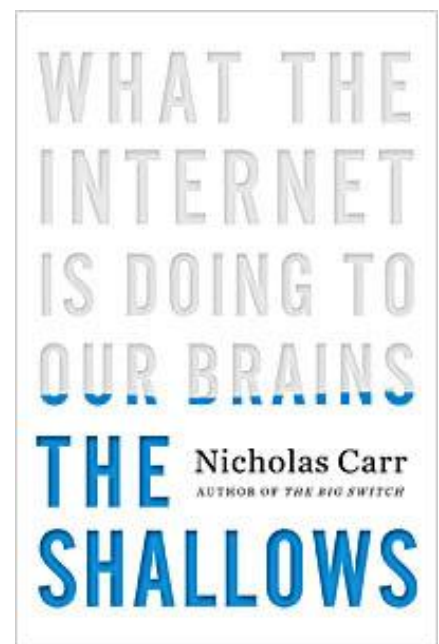
At this point in your education, you probably think of yourself as a capable reader, and you're right on at least one level: most of you have few problems decoding the little squiggles on the page—indeed, you're doing it right now, even if some are faster than others. (Perhaps some of you are doing the rather astonishing thing of reading in a language and alphabet that you've only learned relatively recently.) However, many of you have been trained over the years—both by your schooling and by your participation in online media—to read short texts, or to read longer texts mostly for factual information. You have been taught, implicitly or explicitly, to skim over the surface of a text, looking for the thing that will satisfy a particular need. If you are here at USC, you have probably demonstrated your proficiency at picking information out of a text and putting it to use in numerous testing circumstances (SAT, ACT, AP, etc.). This is what Nicholas Carr and Maryanne Wolf both call “shallow” reading. It's a very valuable skill, to be sure, but it is one that poses dangers if you do not have the counterbalancing skill of deep reading as well.

Deep reading is about both immersing yourself in the text, and immersing the text in yourself. It's partly about understanding the text on its own terms—what it's trying to say, how it says it, why it says it—but also about building specific connections between the text and what *you* know, think, and feel. With fiction, it can happen when you suddenly feel like you're part of the story, when you feel the emotions of a character or the fear of anticipation for what you can sense is coming next. With both fiction and non-fiction, it can be typified by intellectual engagement, the kind that comes when you feel compelled to respond, either by stopping and thinking, by throwing the book across the room, or by scribbling a summary or question or comment in the margins. Deep reading is about taking the text and making it your own, and it is deep reading that provides us with the opportunity for true intellectual growth.

Numerous studies have shown that for most people, online or digital reading consists primarily of shallow reading, even when they think they are deep reading. [One study](#) showed that students who read a text online were more likely to believe they had absorbed everything they needed compared to those who read a print text, but actually were worse at remembering details or understanding complexity than their print-reading counterparts. The effects of shallow reading on students in writing classes is even greater: when reading



Cover from Maryanne Wolf's 2018 book on the effects of digital reading on the brain.



Carr argues in *The Shallows* (2010) that our habits of shallow reading online are damaging our abilities to think deeply, make new connections, and be truly innovative.

online, students are still able to absorb main points easily, but they are more likely to miss the things that actually matter in a writing class. It becomes easy to skim and miss the complex logic and structure of a piece of writing, the nuances of tone and implication, and the subtle rhetorical or persuasive choices the author employs. Since we read in a writing class not merely for information, but to study how other writers *write*, deep reading is what is required.

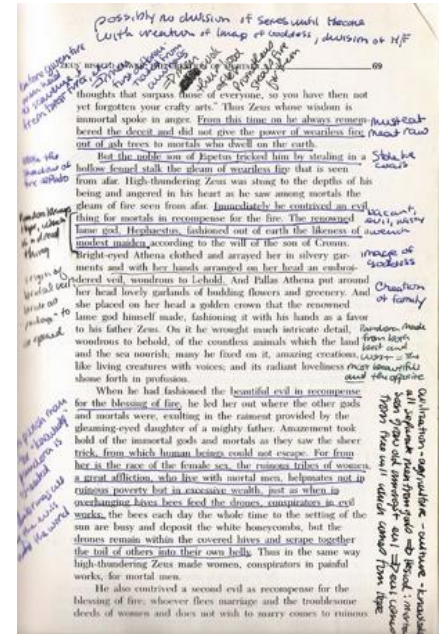
Yet here we are, in an online writing class, where all our texts are online. That said, we are not condemned to read shallowly forever just because a text is online. Purposeful, slow engagement with a text can mitigate the damage created by our shallow reading habits, as can making annotations a social activity. **This is the purpose of our annotation assignments:** to put the necessary pressure on our brains to slow down and *think*, to process deeply, rather than moving along too quickly. It's also meant to help us build intellectual relationships with each other, because those relationships can also help us process texts more effectively, as we can see what others think about the text and compare our reactions to them, or explain our own perspectives when someone asks a question.

We will complete these annotations in a program called Perusall, which I piloted with students last semester at the start of the pandemic. Most students said they found that when they came in with an intentional attitude to engage with the text and with their classmates, it improved their individual understanding and our class discussions.

Especially at the beginning of the semester, I will provide questions in Perusall to help you to move deeper with your thinking about the text, and recommended minimums for how many annotations you must complete—but doing it “just” to meet the minimums will miss the point of the assignment. You do not necessarily need to respond to all of the questions I pose, but you should respond to at least a few. You should also add your own questions and comments, and respond to those of your classmates.

However: don't waste your time *just* agreeing with classmates. You need to find ways to build on, clarify, question, dispute, and offer alternatives when you respond. Otherwise we'll create a superficial echo chamber that probably won't result in deep reading at all.

Minimum annotations are due by 10AM Pacific Time just as with all other assignments. Individual instructions will accompany most assignments on Perusall, and Perusall will provide me with analytics about your reading (did each student get all the way through the text, or stop early? Where did students have the most confusion, or the most engagement with the text?). If it becomes clear you are not completing the reading or the annotations on a regular basis, or are doing so superficially, you may be considered in breach of academic responsibility and the grading contract.



“Marginalia in *Classical Mythology* (4th ed.), Morford and Lenardon, 1991.” Shelly. Source: Flickr.



The Perusall Logo from Twitter.

Writing Project 1

“Responding to Unjust Laws”

Purpose

This assignment is designed to introduce you to academic argumentation and critical reasoning. We will begin to explore how to critically break down a question or problem as you make it your own, develop your own answer to the question (which will eventually become a thesis), and support your answer(s) with reasons, evidence, and analysis.

Premise

Most people have an intrinsic assumption that law and justice should be, on some level, connected. Indeed, parts of our legal system are called “the criminal justice system.” But nearly everyone can think of cases where a law or a legal system has done something that seems unjust: sent an innocent person to prison, failed to convict a guilty one, criminalized people for things they cannot control, enforced unfair discrimination, even helped systematically enslave or exterminate entire groups of people. **When we agree that an injustice is occurring under the law, the question becomes what can, should, or must be done? What should not be done?**

These are especially important questions in our present moment, as protests broke out in the US this spring first over coronavirus lockdowns and then over the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others. Our readings offer a variety of answers to these questions. King’s *Letter* makes a case for publicly breaking laws that one believes are unjust in order to make injustice visible and put pressure on the system to change. However, he limits the forms such disobedience must take to non-violent disobedience. Van Dusen, by contrast, rejects King’s case for even non-violent disobedience in a democratic society. Vicky Osterweil, makes the argument that looting is a reasonable response to certain kinds of oppression. Still others believe that violent, even deadly action can be justified in some circumstances. Violence by those who believe a law or legal system to be unjust can be intentional and widespread, as in the American Revolution, or very limited in the context of larger, peaceful protests, as in some of the George Floyd or recent Hong Kong protests.

For this paper, I would like you to make your own efforts at answering these questions (what actions can, should, or must be taken when faced with injustice?), with a special emphasis on how and why you might *personally* draw the line between justifiable or unjustifiable protest of an unjust law or system.

Readings

- Brownlee, Kimberley. “Civil Disobedience.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta. (selections)
- Dusen, Lewis H. Van. “Civil Disobedience: Destroyer of Democracy.” *American Bar Association Journal*, vol. 55, no. 2, 1969, pp. 123–26. [JSTOR](#).
- King, Martin Luther, Jr. “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” 16 Apr. 1963. Edited by Ali B. Ali-Dinar, *African Studies Center, University of Pennsylvania*.
- Osterweil, Vicky. “In Defense of Looting.” *The New Inquiry*, 21 Aug. 2014. [thenewinquiry.com](#).

Big Question to Answer (Prompt)

How may one justly challenge an unjust law or system, and why? Alternatively, what limits must one have on challenging an unjust law or system, and why?

Technical Requirements

1. Papers should be 1500-2000 words (about 4-6 full pages), but length is not as important as the quality of your thinking. I will not penalize simply for being too short or too long.
2. Paper should be formatted according to [MLA guidelines](#). Make sure you especially include the proper headings for the paper.
3. Cite any sources (including class readings) that you use. This means referencing them in the text with a parenthetical citation and including a bibliographic entry.

Tips for Doing Well

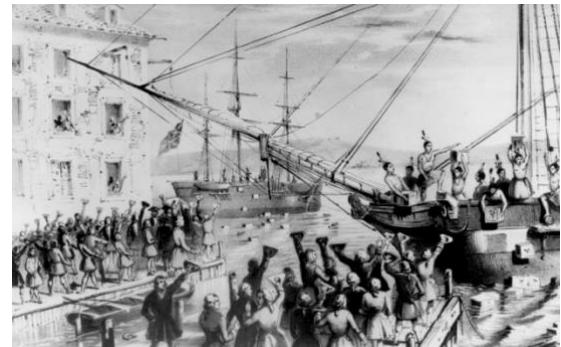
1. **Narrow down your question.** The big question to answer is, well, big. In fact, there are two questions, each of which is more than big enough to write a paper on by itself. Students have been most successful when they think about how they can personalize the question, or think about an audience that they have some affinity to. For example, students who are not from the US often focus on what limits are appropriate to challenging unjust laws in their own countries—or, alternatively, how they can justifiably protest unjust laws or systems in countries like the US where they are not citizens. Other students consider how their own personal philosophical or religious commitments affect where they think the line between acceptable or unacceptable protest lies. However, you don't have to be personal: you could think about how context (such as the type of government in control, or the nature of the injustice) affects the answer to this question, or choosing a particular tipping point that might affect whether it is justifiable (breaking the law, violence against property, particular kinds of violence against people).
2. **Develop cohesion.** Your paper should not be a list of criteria or behaviors—that would lend itself to a superficial, five-paragraph essay. Instead, work to identify something that links those criteria or behaviors together—this will be crucial for developing a strong argument, rather than simply a list of points. For the same reason, you don't have to cover every idea you come up with. Focus on one big idea rather than lots of small ones.
3. **Be specific.** You may find it useful to think about your position in relationship to specific examples of unjust laws or systems, and what would be appropriate or going too far in protesting them. It can also be helpful to think of specific cases of protest that you think went too far, or not far enough, and why. Describing these situations and explaining your reasoning can provide support for your thesis.
4. **Use the readings.** Where are you borrowing from the same ideas as King, Van Dusen, Osterweil, or Brownlee? Where are you different and why? What are the uses and limits of their ideas? You can reference the texts—and quote from them—to help illustrate what you think.
5. **So what?** While this assignment does ask you to focus on your own personal views of what you should (or should not) do, think also about why someone else might want to read such an essay. What will your audience gain from reading your perspective? Why should your perspective matter to other people? Making the case for why people should listen to the perspective you offer will be crucial.
6. **Checklist!** Students from last year created checklists for the writing process, available on Blackboard. We will cover most of the steps in class over the semester, but we don't have time to cover them all for the first assignment, so use these to help you! And don't be afraid to go to the [Writing Center](#) for help at any stage of the process, from brainstorming to revision.



Protesters following the Stonewall riots in lower Manhattan in 1969. [Harvard Gazette](#).



Hong Kong Protesters against a new national security law in 2020. [Photo by Vincent Yu](#).



The Destruction of Tea at Boston Harbor. 1773. Copy of lithograph by Sarony & Major, 1846. [National Archives Catalog](#).

WP1 Ancillary Writing Assignments

AWA 0: First Pre-writing (8/18, Due in Class)

To help me get a sense of your current writing abilities, please write a short essay (taking no more than a half-hour) on ONE of the following prompts:

1. What is a public protest have you participated in, and what was the value of participating in that protest?
2. If you have not participated in any forms of public protest, what is **one** public protest you have witnessed that you particularly admire and why? What do you see as the value of that protest?
3. If there are no public protests that you admire, what guides your disagreement with public protests and why?

Do not be afraid to think broadly about what constitutes a “public protest.”

AWA 1: Fact/Idea List (8/20, Due 11 PM PDT)

In class, we will begin to create a fact/idea list (see pages 22-24 of *Writing 150 Coursebook*) about protests in preparation for your WP1. The purpose is to brainstorm both facts that you can use in your paper, analysis of those facts, and points of conflict or questions that you might have about those facts and analysis. On the fact side of your list, consider listing specific protests, types of protest, and quotations from the readings that you think are important. On the “idea” side of your list, record some of what you think about those facts. What questions do you have about them? What opinions do you have, and how are they supported by or complicated by those facts? What are the relationships between different facts (are they sometimes in conflict? Do they support one another?)?

*This assignment is one of the few that can be done by hand on a piece of paper or two if you choose—if you do write by hand, take a picture or scan and submit them instead of a Word document.

AWA 2: Draft Question (8/25, Due 11 PM PDT)

In preparation for completing your logical outline, you need to come up with a refined, personalized version of the “big question to answer” from WP1. Following the recommendations from WP1 (“Tips for Doing Well”) and the guidelines on what a good question will do in an outline, draft your new question. Please note: this assignment should take some substantial thought, and you are welcome to submit more than one question if you are having a hard time choosing between options.

AWA 3: Logical Outline (8/31-9/2, 15 minutes before conference)

Complete your logical outline; assume it should 2-3 full pages, single spaced. Come to your conference prepared to discuss the outline—bring any questions you might have!



"Protestor Holding a Sign." [Kelly Lacy](#).



Writing Project 2

“Rhetoric and Social Justice”

Purpose

This paper comes at writing from a very different angle than the first paper while building on writing concepts we touched on briefly in WP1. Where WP1 put a strong emphasis on developing your own personal opinion on a topic into an argument, WP2 focuses on reading, analyzing, and understanding sources deeply, and making an argument directly about them. We will focus less on the content of the readings and more on the means they use to make compelling arguments—that is, their rhetorical appeals, their structure, and their style.

The paper will also ask you to engage in a basic analytic skill (comparison), analyzing complex sources and drawing complex conclusions from your analysis. However, I will ask you to go beyond the structure of a compare-contrast essay you might have practiced in high school, just as we went beyond the structure of a five-paragraph essay with WP1.

Premise

Our texts for this unit are selections from two books: Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow* and Bryan Stevenson’s *Just Mercy*. Alexander and Stevenson, both experienced lawyers, are engaged with interrogating, criticizing, and provoking new responses to the relationship between race, law, and justice in America. They even have similar conclusions about the fundamental problems with our legal system and how it treats people of color, particularly African Americans. Yet for all their similarities, the texts have massively different tones and strategies for achieving their goals.

These fundamental differences can be traced back to different approaches to rhetoric, or the means of persuasion an author uses. In class, we will discuss the rhetorical triangle, the three major types of rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos [see *W150* 16]), as well as questions of style. You will use these principles to analyze both Stevenson and Alexander, and through comparing them come to a conclusion about why the two texts use such different approaches. Studying the rhetoric of these authors will be important for you as we head into the final two projects of the semester, which will ask you to make rhetorical decisions about how you will make your own arguments and reach your own audiences.

Big Question to Answer (Prompt)

How do Bryan Stevenson and Michelle Alexander use rhetorical strategies and choices to attempt to persuade their audiences, **what accounts for their differences, and why do those differences matter?**

Tips for Doing Well

1. **Come to Terms with both Texts.** While we introduced “coming to terms” as a concept in WP1, this assignment demands a full commitment to generous yet critical reading. It will be essential for you to come to terms with both texts, to assess their aims, methods, materials, uses, and limits. You’ll need to identify those

Readings

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New Press, 2012.



Stevenson, Bryan. *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*. Spiegel & Grau, 2015.



key terms and passages that serve as lynch pins for their arguments, either logically or emotionally, and dig into how they work and why they work.

2. **Narrow down the “big question to answer.”** As with WP1, the current question is too big for a 5-6 page paper. Rather than covering lots of rhetorical strategies, dive deep into one or two elements. You will need to also get more specific than just “logos” or “pathos” or “ethos,” and get into the specific types of logos, pathos, or ethos that each writer uses, or how specific techniques intersect with one another. We will discuss how to do this in class.
3. **Go beyond simplistic compare/contrast.** As mentioned in the purpose, while there will be an element of comparing-and-contrasting for this paper to work, it can be too easy to fall into an overly simplistic back-and-forth structure without a stronger rationale. You will need to be conscientious in developing a structure that has purpose and serves a complex argument.
4. **Carefully integrate your sources.** We will be focusing on your ability to work with the ideas and words of others on a technical level—that is, the art and skill of summary, paraphrasing, and quotation. To do well, you’re going to have to be intentional in addressing these skills.
5. **So What?** The tricky part of this paper can be identifying *significance*: why does it matter that they both use logos the same way, or are responding to different audiences? What do we learn from all of this close examination of the rhetoric? To make sure you go beyond just the “what” and “how” into “why” and “so what,” you’ll want to make sure that your own approach is looking for significance. For example, you might ask:
 - a. When looking at Stevenson and Alexander together, what conclusions can we draw about the role rhetoric might play in pursuing social justice?
 - b. What might we learn from them about how to ethically write about contentious or complex issues?
 - c. Why do we need to read texts with an eye not just towards what they say, but how they say it?

Technical Requirements

1. Paper should be around 1700-2100 words (about 5-6 full pages).
2. Paper should be formatted according to [MLA guidelines](#). Make sure you especially include the proper headings for the paper.
3. Cite any sources (including class readings) that you use. This means referencing them in the text with a parenthetical citation and including a bibliographic entry. See pages 99-120 of the *Writing 150 Coursebook* for help on this.

WP2 Ancillary Writing Assignments

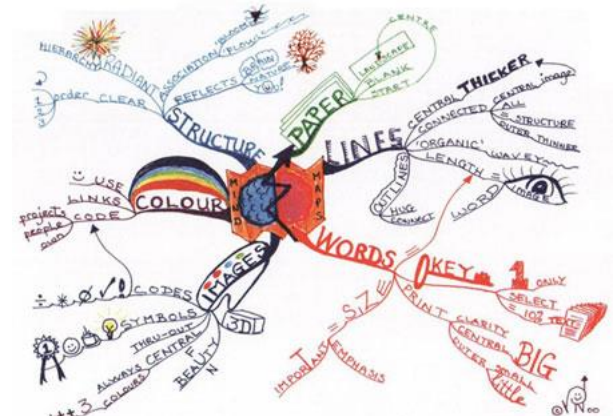
AWA 4: Rhetorical Analysis Chart. (9/15, 10AM PDT)

In class on 9/3, we will begin our discussion of rhetorical analysis. On Blackboard, there is a downloadable form that we will begin filling out in class, and that you will continue to fill out as we read our two texts. Add to it every time we have a new reading! This should serve as a variation on a fact/idea list, or at a minimum the “fact” part of a fact/idea list.

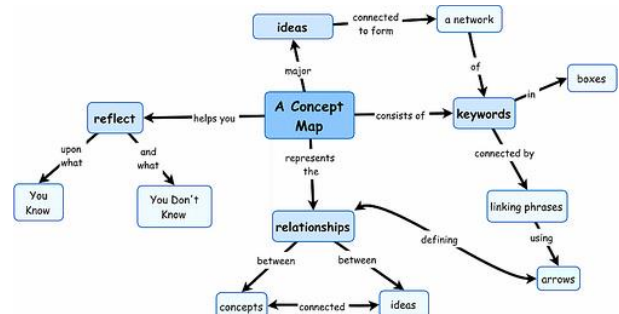
AWA 5: Revised Question and Mind Map (9/17, 10AM PDT)

There are two components to this assignment, and they can be done in either order depending on what you want to achieve. If you have already developed a narrow idea to focus your question, you may want to do them in the order presented below, so that you are simply visualizing relationships to help you work towards an organization for your paper; if you are struggling to revise your question, you may want to do the second element first to help you figure out *how* to narrow the question.

1. **Revise the “big question”** into something manageable in a 5-6 page paper. Make sure to review the recommendations under “tips for doing well.”
2. **Create a mind map** (or concept map) that helps you conceptualize the relationship between Stevenson and Alexander’s rhetorical strategies. You will need to identify relationships between their texts and strategies, and a hierarchy of ideas. Use the rhetorical analysis chart to help identify specific elements that should be on the mindmap.
 - a. Not sure how to create a mind-map or concept map? See links in the captions on the examples to the side, or [this article](#) from Lifehacker.
 - b. This mindmap can be done electronically *or* by hand. Submit a photo if you do it by hand.



Mind Map example on mind-mapping from [Litemind](#).



Concept Map from [Morgan State University](#).

AWA 6: Logical Outline (Due 15 minutes before your conference)

Complete your logical outline; assume it should 2-3 full pages, single spaced. Come to your conference prepared to discuss the outline—bring any questions you might have!

AWA 7: Rough Draft (9/24, 10AM PDT)

For your rough draft, you must have *at least* 3 full pages written, but a complete draft will be more useful. We will use the rough draft for some initial peer review.



Big Question to Answer (Prompt)

What concepts of justice are at play in the discourse on your issue, and how do they help, hinder, or otherwise affect the possibility of achieving either agreement or effective solutions?

Technical Requirements:

1. Paper should 2000-2400 words (6-8 pages).
2. Paper should be formatted according to [MLA guidelines](#).
3. Cite all sources that you use. **We will discuss how to use source management software in class.**

Tips for Doing Well:

1. **Choose a topic you will want to write *two* papers on.** Your fourth paper will build on your research for this paper. You should choose a topic that you care enough about that writing about the same topic for the next 7 weeks will not bother you, and where you think you might have something to contribute to the conversation.
 - a. **Any legal or social justice topic is fair game, but most students do better when they choose a topic they have a deep interest in or special knowledge about.** You may want to choose an issue that is related to something in a potential profession you are considering (health care, business, journalism, education, military), an identity you share or care about (race, gender, sexuality, religion, ability/disability), a larger social issue that has affected or is important to you (criminal justice, the environment, economics), or a cultural concern you are invested in (art, sports, film/television, social media). Even better might be to look at an issue at the intersection of two of these.
 - b. **Your topic will need to be narrow.** “Mass Incarceration” would be too big—as we have already seen, whole books have been written on it! More manageable might be “voting rights for felons,” “prison pay for work,” or even “sanitary products for women in prison.” As you research, you can look for even smaller topics: instead of trying to tackle homelessness, consider how public spaces employ hostile architecture meant to discourage the homeless from sleeping or congregating; instead of tackling climate change, consider the role of trees in urban spaces, or the disproportionate effects of sea rise on low income populations.
 - c. **Have an open mind on your topic.** It can sometimes be tough to balance personal interest in this paper with the objectivity necessary for this assignment. I recommend you choose an issue you care about, but make sure that you narrow down to an aspect of the issue where you are uncertain what the best form of justice will be, or where you haven’t already determined what you think the solution should be.
2. **Revise the “big question to answer” into something specific for your issue.** This will mean at a minimum making it specific to your topic and defining the current state of the discussion. However, it might also mean moving the focus from “justice” to some other concept related to your topic. If the latter, make sure you discuss it with me!
3. **Figure out the conversation.** One of your goals should be to make sure you are familiar with the contours of and participants the discussion of your topic—who are the stakeholders, or the people who are invested in the conversation? Are some of the stakeholders more represented in the conversation than others, and if so, why? Are there gaps in the conversation, things that you are surprised are not being addressed?
4. **Choose your sources carefully.** For this assignment, I expect you to deeply engage with only 3-4 sources that represent different stakeholders or approaches to the conversation, *but you should reference other sources as needed*. Focus on common ideas or approaches more than fringe ones (though keep track of those fringes; they may be useful in WP4).
5. **Rhetorical analysis.** This assignment may require you to engage in some rhetorical analysis like you did with the previous paper, focusing on word choice, appeals to logos/pathos/ethos/kairos, etc. However, this in itself is not the purpose of the paper, merely the tools you might use to answer your question.
6. **Don’t try and fix the issue.** This paper is not where you are proposing a solution to the social justice issue you are researching. WP4 will ask you to write a paper on this same topic, where you will make your own argument or proposal to an audience that does not already agree with you. Because WP3 is not supposed to propose a solution, past students have said that this is both the most difficult *and* the most important paper they did. Doing well on this will improve your chances of success on WP4, your only graded writing project.

WP3 Ancillary Writing Assignments

AWA 8: Topic List (9/29, 10AM PDT)

Develop a list of at 3-5 justice topics that you think are important and that you might want to work on—what issues are you interested in but don't feel like you know what the best solution might be?

AWA 9: Research Question and Initial Bibliography (10/1, 10AM PDT)

At the top of the page, write your initial version of the big question to answer that has been made specific to your topic. Underneath, include a bibliography (properly formatted in APA or MLA format) of at least 8 sources.

1. At least four sources must make their own arguments about what is needed to achieve justice on your issue—that is, they cannot simply report other people's views (coming to terms with other people's views is fine, but only in the context of making their own). These should be marked with an asterix (*) at the end of the bibliographic entry.
2. At least two sources should be scholarly sources (scholarly books or journal articles). *Make the font green for these sources.*
3. At least two should be substantive sources from well-respected news organizations, such as magazines, newspapers, radio, television, etc. *Make the font blue for these.*
4. At least two sources should be substantive but non-scholarly sources created by activists, experts, government agencies, or non-profit organizations working on the issue (websites, white papers, blog posts, podcasts, TEDTalks, etc.). *Make the font red for these.*

AWA 10: Synthesis Matrix (10/6, 10AM PDT)

Choose *at least* four sources that represent distinct points of view on your issue. The sources don't have to be in disagreement with each other; they simply need to have different values, concerns, or points of view in some important way. Create a synthesis matrix (following the instructions in the synthesis matrix handout) with all four sources, plus any additional ones you wish.

AWA 11: Logical Outline or Partial Draft (Due 15 minutes before Conference)

Outlines should follow the same guidelines from previous projects. If turning in a partial draft, make sure to include a clear thesis statement and at least 3 full pages.

AWA 12: Complete Rough Draft (10/13, 10AM PDT)

Complete a full rough draft to the best of your ability. Turn it in on Blackboard for credit, but also upload a copy to the Google Drive for your class.

AWA 13: Peer Review Letters (10/15, 10AM PDT)

When you receive the rough drafts from your peers, you will read their essays and write each person a one-page, single-spaced letter in response, though length is not as important as quality. Your peer review letters must be submitted on Blackboard AND e-mailed to your peer review partners.

In the letter, make sure to cover the following from the rubric:

1. **Argumentative Force:** Come to terms with the paper. What is the author's project? What materials and methods do they use, and how effective are they? What are the uses and limits of the author's position? By the end of the paper, how well do you understand both the issue and the conversation around the issue? What questions do you still have?
2. **Control:** Is the paper point driven with a clear thesis and introduction? Does the author make effective use of transitions, topic sentences, and paragraph structures? Could the points go in a different order to be more effective, and if so, how?

3. **Support:** Is every claim backed up with sufficient evidence and analysis? How effectively does the writer transition into and out of quotations? How could the author acknowledge other points of view? Where do you think, “That’s not what I thought when I read that,” or “Maybe, but what about X?” Where might they be wrong in their analysis? Have they missed anything obvious about their topic?
4. **Style and Mechanics:** Are there any passages that stand out as particularly well-written and powerful? Any that are difficult to understand? Can you identify what makes them strong or weak, and make suggestions for how they might be clearer?
5. **Anything Else:** Is there anything else that stands out as particularly strong or weak? Why?

Tips:

1. Don’t ever just say “this is a good paper” or “this is a good paragraph.” Instead, identify specific elements that work well: “Your opening is strong because you set up a vivid image of what your topic is about—I could immediately see how a homeless person might see a park bench as hospitable or hostile.”
2. Always give specifics, especially with suggestions for improvement. For example: “I really didn’t understand how the quotation in the second paragraph had anything to do with your point that Michelle Alexander was hostile to audiences besides her main three. Could you find a more appropriate quotation, or explain what you were thinking a bit more?” Quoting the paper will help immensely.



Writing Project 4 (Portfolio Part A)

Purpose

WP4 asks you to pull together the writing skills we have been working on all semester into a single, cohesive project: developing cogent arguments with strong so-what factors, supporting your arguments with carefully researched evidence and thoughtful analysis, thinking about how your rhetorical choices respond to the needs of audiences, and revising and editing your work.

Premise

In WP3, you explored an ongoing conversation about an issue of justice, examining the different beliefs participants in the conversation bring to the question of what a just solution would look like. Hopefully now you have an understanding of the stakeholders in the conversation and how their different assumptions about what justice looks like influences how they think about both the problem and its solutions. For WP4, I want you to build on the work you have already done and write a persuasive, researched essay in which you make an argument about a change a specific audience needs to make with regards to your issue. This might involve making an argument for a particular policy, for a fundamental change in attitude or belief that will move them closer to a just solution, or both together. Most of our readings will offer examples of such focused, researched arguments.

Big Question to Answer (Prompt)

What should your audience do to move towards a just response to your issue?

Tips

1. **Choose a specific audience.** You will need to start by choosing an audience that needs to be persuaded of something with regards to the issue—you can't choose an audience that already believes what you want to argue. You will probably want to think about primary and secondary audiences, just as Michelle Alexander did in *The New Jim Crow*. Your audiences may be very broad (American conservatives, American progressives, etc.) or narrow (activists working on a particular issue, policy makers in Texas, high school teachers in Baltimore), but they must be people who need to be persuaded of something—that is, they must not be people who already agree with what you have to say. **Note:** Even if your primary audience is a very specific group of experts, at least 2 people will be reading your paper without detailed knowledge of your topic—myself and one or two other graders. Write accordingly: make sure to provide sufficient explanation of the issue and the stakes.) You will want to be able to answer the following questions about your audience choice:
 - What is the audience's current connection to the topic? Why does the topic already matter to them, or why should it matter to them?
 - What kinds of knowledge, assumptions, or beliefs about the topic do they currently hold? Will you need to bolster or challenge those beliefs?
 - What kinds of emotions are they likely to currently have about your topic? Why? Will those emotions be useful to you or are they emotions you may need to counteract?
 - What values do they hold that are relevant to the discussion? Consider both the ideas about justice that they might value (equality, equity, getting what one deserves, etc.) and other values you might want to appeal to in the course of making your argument.
2. **Rewrite the question** to focus on your specific audience, your issue, and your own ideas. While you want to be working on an answer that builds on your work in WP3, it is also appropriate to shift your focus slightly,



usually to a more narrow or related topic. For example, a student last semester who researched the ways people made arguments about mental health education in public schools narrowed her paper to focus on the need for mental health education in Texas schools.

3. **Advance your research.** You will need to think carefully about your sources and whether they are sufficient for supporting your argument. You may need to do more research on particular elements that haven't been fully explored yet, and you will also want to think about how your sources may build or diminish your credibility with your audience, especially popular sources.
4. **Briefly define the conversation.** You will likely need to spend some time discussing the current state of the conversation, albeit in abbreviated form compared to WP3. However, you do not necessarily need to explicitly state the ideas of justice underlying the positions in the conversation unless it is useful to you as you make your argument.
5. **Build on your previous work.** You may reuse portions of WP3 in this paper. However, because your audience and purpose will be different, you will likely need to rewrite such portions substantially.

Technical Requirements

1. Paper length is flexible. The average paper is about 2500 words, but I've had successful short papers and long papers. Because this paper will be read by other faculty, please do your best to come in under 3000 words.
2. Paper should be formatted according to [MLA guidelines](#). Make sure you especially include the proper headings for the paper.
3. Cite any sources (including class readings) that you use in an appropriate citation format (either MLA, APA, or CMS). This means referencing them with in-text citations and a bibliographic entry. Use Zotero to properly format your citations. If you want to use footnotes, please use CMS format.



WP4 Ancillary Writing Assignments

AWA 14: Logical Outline or Partial Draft (15 minutes before conference)

Outlines should follow the same guidelines from previous projects. If turning in a partial draft, make sure to include a clear thesis statement and at least 3 full pages.

AWA 15: Rough Draft (11/3, 10AM PST)

Complete a full rough draft to the best of your ability. Turn it in on Blackboard for credit, but also upload a copy to the Google Drive for your class.

AWA 16: Peer Review Letter (11/5, 10AM PST)

When you receive the rough drafts from your peers, you will read their essays and write each person a one-page, single-spaced letter in response, though length is not as important as quality. Your peer review letters must be submitted on Blackboard AND e-mailed to your peer review partners.

In the letter, make sure to cover the following from the rubric:

1. **Argumentative Force:** Come to terms with the paper. What is the author's project? What materials and methods do they use, and how effective are they? What are the uses and limits of the author's position? By the end of the paper, how well do you understand both the issue and the conversation around the issue? What questions do you still have?
2. **Control:** Is the paper point driven with a clear thesis and introduction? Does the author make effective use of transitions, topic sentences, and paragraph structures? Could the points go in a different order to be more effective, and if so, how?
3. **Support:** Is every claim backed up with sufficient evidence and analysis? How effectively does the writer transition into and out of quotations? How could the author acknowledge other points of view? Where do you think, "That's not what I thought when I read that," or "Maybe, but what about X?" Where might they be wrong in their analysis? Have they missed anything obvious about their topic?
4. **Style and Mechanics:** Are there any passages that stand out as particularly well-written and powerful? Any that are difficult to understand? Can you identify what makes them strong or weak, and make suggestions for how they might be clearer?
5. **Anything Else:** Is there anything else that stands out as particularly strong or weak? Why?

Tips:

1. Don't ever just say "this is a good paper" or "this is a good paragraph." Instead, identify specific elements that work well: "Your opening is strong because you set up a vivid image of what your topic is about—I could immediately see how a homeless person might see a park bench as hospitable or hostile."
2. Always give specifics, especially with suggestions for improvement. For example: "I really didn't understand how the quotation in the second paragraph had anything to do with your point that Michelle Alexander was hostile to audiences besides her main three. Could you find a more appropriate quotation, or explain what you were thinking a bit more?" Quoting the paper will help immensely.

Reflection Essay (Portfolio Part B)

Purpose

This assignment asks you to reflect on what you have learned this semester. Reflection will help you thoughtfully consider what you need to do to continue to improve in your communication skills—a central feature that employers look for—as you leave this class and continue in your course work.

Premise

At the beginning of the semester, I explained my teaching philosophy: high quality failure is essential to learning—and this is especially true when it comes to writing. The writing process is a perpetual process of planning, drafting, recognizing the weaknesses and failures of what we have written, rewriting, and then repeating the process. Sometimes, at the end, we have still “failed” according to some external criteria, even we have improved during the process. This assignment is your chance to reflect on your failures and successes, and to show me that you have learned even if you have “failed” at one point or another.

For your essay, however, do not imagine me as your primary audience. Instead, imagine that a professor who taught a different section of this class will be reading and evaluating your work (especially WP4) to decide whether you have learned the things you this semester that you were supposed to learn. Write a cover letter to that professor, explaining what you learned, how you learned it, what your failures were, and how the papers you produced this semester represent (or don’t represent) that learning.



Big Question(s) to Answer (Prompt)

What have I learned in WRIT 150, what did the process of learning it look like, and why does what I learned matter?

Tips

1. Review your work, including AWAs, notes, outlines, rough drafts, peer review, final drafts, and comments.
2. Below, you will find a series of questions to help you brainstorm possible avenues for reflection. You should NOT try to answer all of these questions in your letter. Choose just one set of questions, or piece together bits from several of these. Also, don’t exaggerate your abilities or spend time trying to impress me. If you haven’t perfected some aspect of writing, that’s fine. I’m much more interested in an honest reflection.
 - a. What is the purpose of academic writing? How did this class and the papers you wrote fit or challenge your expectations?
 - b. Look at the chart of course outcomes on the next page. Which of those outcomes or sets of outcomes was most important to you in terms of what you learned? How well do you think you mastered them? What assignments most helped you master the outcomes?
 - c. What did you learn or figure out about writing that you didn’t know before? What did you learn or figure out about the topics we wrote on that you wouldn’t have if you hadn’t written the papers?
 - d. Have you challenged yourself and taken risks that might result in failure? Why or why not? How did those decisions (in either direction) affect your work? Did anything valuable come from your failures, and why or why not? Did you find ways to use your failure to create something new and interesting? Did you grow from your failures? If so, how and why?
3. To make sure your letter proves you have learned to do what you say you have done, make sure you do all the things you have been asked to do in your other papers.
 - a. Be point first! Have an argument in your first paragraph that guides what you choose to include in your paper, use a clear structure with topic sentences, have transitions, etc.

- b. Use evidence! Quote from your textbooks, quote from your papers, quote from the comments you received in peer review or on your papers.
 - c. Have a so-what factor! Draw some conclusions about what you've learned over the course of the semester and where you still need to go.
4. **Optional:** do something you maybe haven't done in a past essay: be creative or visual! Past students have included memes (much like this assignment sheet), artwork, diagrams, screenshots, even poetry.

Course Outcomes: At the end of the course, students should be able to...

Rhetorical Knowledge and Judgment	Critical Reasoning and Ethical Inquiry	The Craft and Processes of Writing	Grammatical and Genre Conventions
Discover genuine issues and focus on significant purposes in your writing	Interrogate assumptions that underlie personal, social, and cultural beliefs	Understand the function of the writing process to create and complete a successful text	Understand common formats for different kinds of texts
See writing as an interaction between the writer and reader and recognize how to meet the reader's needs	Use writing as a tool of discovery to facilitate inquiry, creativity, personal learning, independent thinking, and compelling communication	Develop multiple tools and flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proof-reading texts	Demonstrate knowledge of genre conventions ranging from structure and paragraphing to tone and mechanics
Assess different rhetorical situations and respond in a manner that maintains the integrity of your point of view	Integrate your own ideas with those of others (establishing your own authority while appropriately employing outside sources) to both understand and enter scholarly discussions	Understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes, but also the individual's responsibility in terms of authorship of the finished product	Be familiar with the appropriate means of documenting your work
Use conventions appropriate to the rhetorical situation	Understand the epistemic and ethical uses of writing and critical reasoning in the creation of meaning and knowledge	Identify the components of your own writing style while experimenting with diverse styles	Understand the crucial importance of controlling surface features such as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling
		Be able to critique your own and others' works	

Technical Requirements

- Papers should be 1500-1800 words (about 4-5 full pages), but length is not as important as the quality of your thinking. I will not penalize simply for being too short or too long.
- You only need to use signal phrases to cite your own work, but you will need full citations for any readings or outside sources.

Portfolio Ancillary Writing Assignments

AWA 17 (11/12, 10AM PST): Process Work of Your Choice

Choose at least one form of pre-writing (free writing, fact/idea list, points-to-make list, mind-map, logical outline, draft) to use to prepare you to write your reflective essay/letter. Make sure your personal revision of the question to answer is at the top. If you want feedback on this assignment for writing your reflection, sign up for an optional conference.