

**Existentialism**  
**(Expository Writing 20, sections 234 & 235)**  
**Fall 2018**

**Classroom: Sever 212**

**Meeting Times: Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:30-2:45pm (section 234) or 3:00-4:15pm (section 235)**

**Course Website: <https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/44258>**

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**Office: 1 Bow Street, #224**

**Office Hours: Thursdays 2-4pm and by appointment (email me with possible times).**

**No office hours on days between when drafts are handed in and end of conferences.**

**I'm also usually outside our classroom before class or can talk just after.**

**Course Description:**

“Existence precedes essence.” According to Jean-Paul Sartre’s slogan, we are not born with a purpose given to us by god, human nature, or society, but are instead “condemned to freedom,” to create ourselves through the choices we make. In our first unit, we will grapple with the idea that we create our own values, reading Sartre’s lecture “Existentialism Is a Humanism,” and consider a recent philosopher’s attempt to understand what it means to describe life as absurd. Concerned as they were with concrete situations, existentialists also produced a great deal of literature in addition to philosophy. In our second unit, we will think about coming of age, inauthenticity, and the performance of gender and identity in stories by Simone de Beauvoir (Sartre’s lifelong intellectual partner) and David Foster Wallace. Finally, at the end of the course, students will write a research paper about a major existentialist literary text of their choice, examining themes like bad faith, despair, freedom, and authenticity in a classic novel by Sartre, Beauvoir, or Albert Camus, or in a more recent text influenced by that tradition, such as Richard Wright’s *Black Boy*, Walker Percy’s *The Moviegoer*, Kobo Abe’s *The Face of Another*, Tom McCarthy’s *Remainder*, or Kamel Daoud’s *The Meursault Investigation*, among other possibilities.

**Our course will be organized into three units,  
each based on different readings and a different kind of paper:**

In **Unit 1**, we will read part of Sartre’s lecture “Existentialism Is a Humanism” and Thomas Nagel’s article “The Absurd.” Students will write a paper that isolates a claim Sartre or Nagel makes, explains what argument they put forward for that claim, then analyzes and evaluates that argument, making one of their own.

In **Unit 2**, we will think about issues of identity and gender, performance and authenticity, reading Sartre on “bad faith,” or the way we inauthentically play roles and pretend we are not responsible for ourselves, and a selection from Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* on the idea that femininity is defined in reference to masculinity. We will also turn our sights to some works of fiction, reading Beauvoir’s short story “The Age of Discretion,” about the conflict between a mother and her son as he begins to set his own path through the world, and “Good Old Neon” by David Foster Wallace (not himself an existentialist, but very much influenced by Sartre and others) about a man who knows he is constantly inauthentic, acting only to produce an image of himself for others, but can find no

solution to what he thinks is his essential fraudulence. Students will write a lens essay, using a bit of the philosophy to offer a nuanced reading of one of the works of fiction.

In **Unit 3**, students will form discussion groups centered on one of the following works of existentialist literature (or, in one case, a pair of shorter works):

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Blood of Others*

Albert Camus, *The Plague*

Albert Camus, *The Stranger* and Kamel Daoud, *The Meursault Investigation*

Richard Wright, *Black Boy* (just part one, as originally published)

Walker Percy, *The Moviegoer*

Kobo Abe, *The Face of Another*

Tom McCarthy, *Remainder*

Marie NDiaye, *My Heart Hemmed In*

(Students will rank their top choices mid-semester. I can't guarantee everyone will get their top choice, since a critical mass is needed around each work for class discussions, but everyone should get one of their top couple choices.) Each student will write a research paper, looking into existing interpretations of the work, other things written by the author, and/or finding places to put it productively into conversation with bits of existentialist philosophy.

### **Each unit will follow the same general sequence of activities and assignments:**

First, we will discuss a number of **readings**, both in terms of their content (which you will take up in your papers) and in terms of their form and rhetoric (since some of our readings are academic arguments of the same sort you'll be writing yourselves).

Early in each unit, you will write a short **response paper**, based on a prompt. This will focus on a particular aspect of writing and also allow you to begin thinking about your full draft.

Throughout each unit, we will work on a number of **exercises**, both in class and at home. These will allow us to think about and practice specific writing moves and skills. During each unit, we will also think about **transferability**, or how the skills we are working on will be useful beyond Expos in other classes, and beyond your time at Harvard.

As you are developing your papers, we will discuss a number of **models**, usually real student papers from the past, to help you think about how to structure your own.

In the middle of each unit, you will hand in a full **draft** of your paper.

We will then think about how to improve and revise your drafts in two venues. One class meeting each unit will be dedicated to a **workshop**, during which we will discuss two student drafts. Doing so will help the writers of those drafts but, even more, it will help everyone figure how to think about, discuss, and go about revision in general. In addition, you will have a one-on-one **conference** with me, during which we will discuss how you are revising your draft.

At the end of each unit (actually, we will have begun the next one), you will hand in a final **revision**

of your paper. This is the only assignment, each unit, that receives a grade. The amount of reading assigned in the class is limited so that you can have a lot of time to revise your papers; this means we expect to see a great deal of improvement during the process.

### **Some big-picture premises that will guide our approach:**

**Writing is a process:** Good writing doesn't happen overnight; it is the result of a process that includes conception, planning, drafting, revision, and a lot of other work behind the scenes that isn't explicitly included in (but very much affects) what is finally handed in. In our course, we will self-consciously break the writing process apart, practicing and discussing it stage by stage, each building on what came before. In most of your classes, your instructor will ask for only a final draft—by forming good drafting and revision habits now, your work will be much better in the future.

**Writing, reading, and thinking are deeply intertwined:** Writing is not just a form of communication, but often the best way to discover what you think about something. Writing regularly, not just when required, will help you to understand difficult ideas, develop your beliefs, and your reasons for them. Reading what others have written about a topic or question is often the best way to begin to develop your own thinking. But it serves this purpose only when you read actively, not as a passive spectator. When I ask you to “read” something this is what I mean: that you should read it multiple times, with pen in hand, marking important claims, writing questions in the margins, and so forth. If you've really read something, you should be able to summarize its main claims and arguments, and have questions and possible objections, having begun to develop your own view. In the long term, one of the best ways to improve your writing is to read as much as you can. Reading works within a particular discipline helps you learn the argumentative, rhetorical, and stylistic moves of that discipline. More generally, reading good writing allows you to internalize more complicated grammar, syntax, and idioms, and to develop your own style and voice.

**Writing is a conversation:** Most writers don't develop their views in isolation. They talk to others—literally, figuratively by reading, and rhetorically by discussing others' views in their own writing. All the writing you do in our course is public: you will share it with me and your peers and, especially in workshop, we will use some of your drafts as our central texts of discussion. If, at any point in the semester, you submit a piece of writing that you would prefer other students not read, let me know—such a request should be rare, however.

### **Required Texts:**

- Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, (New Haven: Yale, 2007).
- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Women Destroyed* (New York: Pantheon, 1969).
- David Foster Wallace, *Oblivion* (New York: Little, Brown, 2004).
- The work or works you write about for Unit 3. (Wait until mid-semester to purchase.)

The above are all available at the Coop.

-- The rest of our readings will be posted or linked to electronically on Canvas. **You are required to print out physical copies to bring to class.**

### **Technology:**

I don't allow laptops or other devices in class, and phones should be turned off and put away. Because of this, you are required to print out physical copies of our electronic readings. Our meetings will be grounded in discussion, requiring your full presence and attention. Note-taking will include things like marking up our readings, annotating handouts, and jotting down a few ideas, but

never extensive transcription.

### **Communication:**

You should check your Harvard email at least daily, and are responsible for updates I send you there. If you email me, I will almost always get back to you within 24 hours, but don't count on a faster response than that (especially at night and on weekends), so don't wait until the last minute with important questions (and check the course website, syllabus, and unit packet too).

### **Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Attendance:**

Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. *If you are absent without medical excuse **more than twice**, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.* On the occasion of your second unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you of your situation. This letter will also be sent to your Resident Dean, so the College can give you whatever supervision and support you need to complete the course.

Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In the case of a medical problem, you should contact your preceptor before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours: otherwise you will be required to provide a note from UHS or another medical official, or your Resident Dean. *Absences because of special events such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts are not excusable absences.* If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences; but again, you are expected to contact your preceptor beforehand if you will miss a class, or at least within 24 hours. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you should contact your Resident Dean and you must directly petition the Expository Writing Senior Preceptor, who will grant such petitions only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

Missed conferences will count as an absence and usually won't be rescheduled. Two latenesses of more than ten minutes will be counted as an absence. Chronic tardiness will lower your participation grade.

### **Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Completion of Work:**

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course—not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind. You will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements, therefore, if you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work, and be copied to your Resident Dean. *If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date, and you have not documented a medical problem, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.*

### **Submission of Work:**

You will often be asked to bring a physical copy of a completed exercise, response paper, or draft to class. Additionally, you will submit your major drafts and revisions electronically by uploading them to the course website. It is your responsibility to make sure your files upload correctly, and are not corrupted. (N.B.: please don't upload work directly from Pages, as it only uploads a link, not a copy that I can comment on directly within the Canvas interface.) If I cannot open or read the file, it is subject to penalties for lateness. Computer problems are not a valid excuse for late work. Get into the habit of regularly backing up your work.

**Late Work:**

Late revisions will be docked a third of letter grade per day. Late response papers and drafts will affect your participation grade. Our assignments build on one another, so it is very much in your own interest not to fall behind.

**Policy on Collaboration:**

The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the *Student Handbook*, “Students need not acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading.” However, all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.

**Policy on Academic Integrity:**

Throughout the semester we’ll work on the proper use of sources, including how to cite and how to avoid plagiarism. You should always feel free to ask me questions about this material. All the work that you submit for this course must be your own, and that work should not make use of outside sources unless such sources are explicitly part of the assignment. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to review by the Honor Council, including potential disciplinary action. **A reminder for anyone who may have studied any of these works in the past, or is doing so in another class this semester: reusing old work or turning in the same work to multiple classes is a violation of the honor code.**

**The Writing Center:**

At any stage of the writing process – brainstorming ideas, reviewing drafts, approaching revisions – you may want some extra attention on your essays. The Writing Center (located on the garden level of the Barker Center) offers hour-long appointments with trained tutors. Regardless of its strength or weakness, any piece of writing benefits from further review and a fresh perspective. Visit the Writing Center’s web site at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr> to make an appointment. Tutors also hold drop-in office hours at other campus locations; see the Writing Center website for details.

**Grades:**

Revision of Paper 1: 20%

Revision of Paper 2: 30%

Revision of Paper 3: 40%

Participation: 10% (Participation includes contributions to class discussions and workshops, and sincere efforts on exercises, response papers, and drafts. Chronic tardiness, failure to come prepared to class—including not bringing physical copies of readings—and any distractions caused by electronic devices will lower your participation grade.)

**Grading Rubric:**

For each essay, you will receive the particular goals of that assignment on the essay handout itself. Common to all three essays, however, is a fundamental goal: that your work *expresses an original idea in a way that engages, enlightens, and educates your readers*. It will help you reach that goal if you envision your work as intended not simply for your fellow students in this class, nor simply for me, but rather for a broader audience of educated, interested readers. It is a minimum expectation that your essays will

be free of grammatical, spelling, and formatting errors (since such errors distract your readers, making it harder to focus on your ideas). Essays consistently exhibiting such errors may be penalized. In addition, grading becomes more stringent as the semester goes along, since you will have mastered certain skills and techniques from earlier essays. On the meaning of the letter grades themselves:

**A:** Work that is excellent (which is not to say perfect) and complete. It has a fully realized beginning, middle, and end, and addresses (which is not necessarily to say definitively answers) the questions that it raises. Such work is ambitious and perceptive, skillfully expresses an argumentative thesis, grapples with interesting and complex ideas, and explores well-chosen evidence revealingly. It pays attention to alternate interpretations or points of view, avoids cliché, and engages the reader. The argument enhances, rather than underscores the reader's and writer's knowledge; it does not simply repeat what has been taught or what someone else has said. The language is clean, precise, and often elegant.

**B:** Work that is good and succeeds in many significant ways, but has one or more important areas still in need of work. Often this means that while the essay is an engaging and intelligent discussion, certain aspects don't yet live up to the rest of the essay, or to the promise the essay offers. The evidence is relevant, but it may be too little; the context for the evidence may not be sufficiently explored, so that a reader has to make the connections that the writer should have made more clearly. The language is generally clear and precise but occasionally not.

*Or:* Work that reaches less high than A work but thoroughly achieves its aims. Such work is solid, but the reasoning and argument are nonetheless rather routine. The argument's limitations are in its conception rather than its execution.

**C:** Work that possesses potential, but in its current form is flawed. Such work has problems in one or more of the following areas: conception (it has at least one main idea, but that idea is usually unclear); structure (it is disorganized and confusing); evidence (it is weak or inappropriate, often presented without context or compelling analysis); style (it is often unclear, awkward, imprecise, or contradictory). Such work may repeat a main point rather than develop an argument or it may touch, too briefly, upon too many points. Often its punctuation, grammar, spelling, paragraphing, and transitions are a problem.

*Or:* Work that is largely a plot summary or an unstructured set of comments on a text, rather than an argument about a text.

*Or:* Work that relies heavily on opinion rather than reason and argument.

**D and below:** Work that fails to meet the expectations of the assignment in a significant way.

### **Course Schedule (subject to slight revision):**

#### **Monday, Sep. 10**

- course introduction
- hand out syllabus
- hand out Unit 1 packet
- "existence precedes essence"

for our next meeting:

- read syllabus and Unit 1 packet, and come with any questions
- read Sartre, "Existentialism Is a Humanism," pp. 17-39
- complete get-to-know-you questionnaire (under "Assignments" on Canvas)
- digital signup for get-to-know-you conferences
- write a brief paragraph explaining how, according to Sartre (pp. 20-1), a paper knife's essence precedes its existence (upload to Canvas before next class)

### **get-to-know-you conferences Wednesday, Sep. 12 – Friday, Sep. 14**

#### **Wednesday, Sep. 12**

- syllabus and Unit 1 questions
- discussion of Sartre

for our next meeting:

- print and read Nagel, "The Absurd"

#### **Monday, Sep. 17**

- introduction to the "Elements of Academic Argument"
- discussion of Nagel (Elements: thesis, analysis, argument)
- introduce Isolating Claims Exercise

for our next meeting:

- reread Sartre and Nagel
- complete Isolating Claims Exercise and bring a copy to class

#### **Wednesday, Sep. 19**

- discussion of Isolating Claims Exercise, thesis statements
- discussion of Sartre, Nagel
- discussion of stance and orienting your reader

for our next meeting:

- read *Harvard Guide to Using Sources* (<http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/>): "Introduction," "Why Use Sources?" (and subsections), "Avoiding Plagiarism" (and "What Constitutes Plagiarism?" and "The Exception" subsections), and, under "Using Sources," the section "Integrating Sources" ("Summarizing, Paraphrasing, and Quoting" and "The Nuts and Bolts of Integrating" subsections)
- **write Response Paper 1** (upload to Canvas before class and bring a copy)

#### **Monday, Sep. 24**

- **Response Paper 1 Due before class** (upload to Canvas and bring a copy)
- discussion using Response Paper 1 on sources, citation, quotation, paraphrase, summary
- discussion of and exercise on plagiarism

for our next meeting:

- go through introductions handout
- print and read Models for Draft 1: "Aristotle's Problem with Incontinence" and "The Reality Constraint and the Problem of Observability"

- on Harvard Writes (<http://harvardwrites.com/>), watch the “Argument” video and look at the “Common Ways to Establish What’s at Stake”
- read *Harvard Guide to Using Sources* (<http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/>): “Avoiding Plagiarism” (remaining subsections) and “Citing Sources”
- I recommend you learn and use Chicago Notes and Bibliography style in our class: [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html). If you would prefer to learn MLA or APA style, that is fine, just use one consistently.
- start working on Draft 1

### **Wednesday, Sep. 26**

- discussion of introductions handout (Elements: thesis, orienting, title)
- discussion of Models for Draft 1 (Elements: structure, transitions, key terms)
- introduction to cover letters

for our next meeting:

- **finish Draft 1 and cover letter** (upload both with honor code affirmation to Canvas before class and bring a copy)
- digital signup for conferences

### **Monday, Oct. 1**

- **Draft 1 Due** (upload with cover letter and honor code affirmation to Canvas before class and bring a copy)
- exercise using Draft 1 on counter-argument
- discussion of conferences, workshops

for our next meeting:

- read workshop papers
- complete workshop feedback (upload to Canvas before class and either bring a copy to class or email to the author of each workshop paper)
- start revising

### **Wednesday, Oct. 3**

- workshop on Draft 1
- hand out Unit 2 packet
- introduce Find an Example of a Lens exercise

for our next meeting:

- read Unit 2 packet, and come with any questions
- complete Find an Example of a Lens exercise, and bring a copy of paragraph(s) to class
- continue revising

**conferences Thursday, Oct. 4 – Wednesday, Oct. 10**

### **Monday, Oct. 8: Holiday, No Class**

### **Wednesday, Oct. 10**

- discussion of and exercise on editing, final steps
- go over Unit 2 packet

-- discussion of Find a Lens exercise

for our next meeting:

- print and read Sartre, "Bad Faith" and Beauvoir, Introduction to *The Second Sex*
- on Harvard Writes (<http://harvardwrites.com/>), watch the "Evidence" video
- **finish Revision 1** (upload with new cover letter to Canvas before class)

### Monday, Oct. 15

- **Paper 1 Revision Due** (upload to Canvas before class with new cover letter that reflects on the work you've done in revision and also on how you might transfer skills you've practiced in this paper to other classes and writing)
- discussion of Sartre, "Bad Faith" and Beauvoir, Introduction to *The Second Sex*
- discussion of lens

for our next meeting:

- read Beauvoir, "The Age of Discretion"

### Wednesday, Oct. 17

- discussion of Beauvoir, "The Age of Discretion"
- discussion of close reading of literature (Elements: evidence, analysis)

for our next meeting:

- read Wallace, "Good Old Neon"
- complete Close Reading Exercise before class (upload and bring a copy)

### Monday, Oct. 22

- discussion of Wallace, "Good Old Neon"
- discussion of close reading of literature (Elements: evidence, analysis)

for our next meeting:

- on Harvard Writes (<http://harvardwrites.com/>), watch the "Stakes" video
- read *Harvard Guide to Using Sources* (<http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/>): under "Using Sources," "Integrating Sources" (and subsections)
- **write Response Paper 2** (upload to Canvas before class)

### Wednesday, Oct. 24

- **Response Paper 2 Due** (upload to Canvas before class)
- discussion of Sartre, Beauvoir, lenses
- rank final research options

for our next meeting:

- read models for Draft 2: "Vicimization and Responsibility: Self-Narrative in *The Sense of an Ending*" and "*Force Majeure's* Meta-Criticism of Globalism"
- on Harvard Writes (<http://harvardwrites.com/>) watch the "Structure" video and do the exercise on our model papers (instead of the ones on the website)
- start working on your draft

### **Monday, Oct. 29**

-- discussion of models for Draft 2 (Elements: structure, key terms, transitions)

for our next meeting:

- **finish Draft 2 and cover letter** (upload to Canvas before class and bring a copy)
- digital signup for conferences

### **Wednesday, Oct. 31**

-- **Draft 2 Due** (upload with cover letter to Canvas before class and bring a copy)

- reverse outline exercise on Draft 2
- hand out and go over Unit 3 packet

for our next meeting:

-- read first half of your novel for final paper and be prepared to lead your group's discussion for 15 minutes:

- Nausea*, 1-94
- The Blood of Others*, 1-160
- The Plague*, 1-164
- The Stranger* (in entirety)
- Black Boy*, 1-121
- The Moviegoer*, 1-116
- The Face of Another*, 1-129
- Remainder*, 1-154
- My Heart Hemmed In*, 1-140

### **Conferences Friday, Nov. 2 – Friday, Nov. 9**

### **Monday, Nov. 5**

- discussion of research questions/hypotheses, Gaipa moves
- group discussion of first half of your novel

for our next meeting:

- read workshop papers
- complete workshop feedback (upload to Canvas before class and bring a copy)
- start revising

### **Wednesday, Nov. 7**

-- Draft 2 workshop

for our next meeting:

- keep revising
- read second half of novel for final paper and be prepared to lead your group's discussion for 15 minutes:

- Nausea*, 94-178
- The Blood of Others*, 161-292
- The Plague*, 165-308
- The Meursault Investigation* (in entirety)
- Black Boy*, 122-257

*The Moviegoer*, 117-242  
*The Face of Another*, 132-237  
*Remainder*, 155-308  
*My Heart Hemmed In*, 140-279

-- start thinking about your topic

### Monday, Nov. 12

- discussion of how to evaluate potential sources
- group discussion of second half of your novel

for our next meeting:

- keep revising
- read *Harvard Guide to Using Sources* (<http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/>): Under “Using Sources,” “Locating Sources” (and subsections), “Evaluating Sources” (and subsections)
- read “A Library Starter Kit” (<http://hcl.harvard.edu/research/toolkit/>)
- continue thinking about your topic and start looking for sources
- bring your laptop to class for library introduction!
- **finish Revision 2 (upload before class)**

### Wednesday, Nov. 14

- **Paper 2 Revision Due** (upload with cover letter to Canvas before class)
- library introduction (bring your laptop!)

for our next meeting:

- keep looking for sources
- **complete Response Paper 3a** (upload to Canvas before class)

### Monday, Nov. 19

- **Response Paper 3a Due** (upload to Canvas before class)
- elevator pitches/topic speed dating
- discussion of being-for-others
- discussion of annotated bibliographies

for our next meeting:

- keep looking for sources
- print and read models for Paper 3: Caplan, “Sound Reasoning” and Hagan, “*Being John Malkovich*, Being Inauthentic”
- complete “Critical Thinking: Modeling Our Sources” handout for Caplan
- complete “Hagan Map” handout for Hagan
- **finish Annotated Bibliography** (upload to Canvas before class)
- start drafting

### Wednesday, Nov. 21: Thanksgiving Break, No Class

### Monday, Nov. 26

- **Annotated Bibliography Due** (upload to Canvas before class)
- discussion of questions concerning Paper 3, research strategies
- discussion of sources with groups

-- discussion of models for Paper 3

for our next meeting:

-- keep working on your draft

-- **complete Response Paper 3b** (upload to Canvas before class and bring a copy)

### **Wednesday, Nov. 28**

-- **Response Paper 3b Due** (upload to Canvas before class and bring a copy)

-- exercise on “flow”

-- discussion of topics/sources/thesis statements with groups

-- signup for group conferences

for our next meeting:

-- **finish Draft 3** (upload with cover letter to Canvas before class)

-- upload sources to Canvas before class

-- bring one or two paper prompts (for response papers too) from your other courses

-- bring your laptop to class for course evaluations!

### **Monday, Dec. 3**

-- **Draft 3 and sources due** (upload with cover letter to Canvas before class)

-- discussion of assignment prompts, transferability

-- course evaluations (bring your laptop!)

for our next meeting:

-- read workshop papers

-- complete workshop feedback (upload to Canvas before class and bring a copy)

-- start revising

### **Wednesday, Dec. 5**

-- Draft 3 Workshop

before your group conference:

-- read your partners' papers and be prepared to lead the discussion on them

-- complete Group Conference Feedback sheet for each paper (upload to Canvas and bring a copy)

### **Group Conferences Thursday, Dec. 6 – Tuesday, Dec. 11**

### **Monday, Dec. 17**

-- **Paper 3 Revision Due by 9pm** (upload with cover letter and honor code affirmation to Canvas)

-- upload any additional sources you've added since last time to Canvas by 9pm

**Existentialism**  
**Fall 2018**  
**Roth**

**Unit 1: Absurdity and Existence**  
**Analyzing an Argument**

In our first unit, we will consider two philosophers' discussions of existentialism. In his 1945 public lecture "Existentialism Is a Humanism," Jean-Paul Sartre explains, against some misconceptions, what existentialism is, defends it against critics, and discusses how values work if god doesn't exist. More recently, and in a more academic setting, in his 1971 journal article "The Absurd" Thomas Nagel tries to figure out what exactly someone (such as Albert Camus) might mean by describing life as absurd, whether life indeed is, and if that's a problem. Your first job will be to understand Sartre's and Nagel's claims—only then will you be able to analyze and respond critically to them. For your first paper, you will isolate a particular but important claim that Sartre or Nagel makes, explain the author's argument for that claim, and analyze that argument, defending your own thesis. The last stages will require you to make an argument of your own: that Sartre's argument works and *why*, for example, or that Nagel's argument doesn't and *why*.

**Primary Assignment (5-6 pages):** *Isolate* a key claim from our selection from Sartre's "Existentialism Is a Humanism" or Nagel's "The Absurd," *explain* the author's argument for it, and *analyze* that argument, defending your own thesis concerning whether and why it is successful or not.

**Further Guidelines for the Essay:**

You can think of this essay as involving three parts: isolating, explaining, and analyzing.

**Isolate a Claim:** As you read and re-read, you will notice that though both Sartre and Nagel have overall thesis statements, they are based on many smaller, constitutive claims. In theory-heavy disciplines like philosophy, literary theory, cultural studies, and sociology (among others), readings will often claim many more things than you could possibly examine in one paper. In this paper you won't have room to make a compelling case for or against Sartre's or Nagel's overall thesis—after all, it takes them more than five or six pages to explain and defend their claims. Instead, you will need to focus on a smaller claim that one of them makes. This claim should still be important, and connected to their main point, but something that you can defend or criticize in the space allowed. As a reading-task, you will need to isolate a manageable claim on which to focus. As a writing-task, you will need to concisely explain why you are focusing on this claim and how it is related to the author's larger project, work that is usually done in the introduction and conclusion of an essay. You will also need to be careful to not waste space, or distract your reader, by discussing other parts of the reading not strictly relevant to your focus.

**Explain the Claim and the Argument for It:**

Something that makes sense to you can often seem self-explanatory—but it rarely is. You need to explain the claim you've chosen, and the argument for it, to your reader, someone who doesn't yet understand them. Can you translate the author's language into your own? Can you offer a precise example that makes clear the more difficult or abstract parts of what is said? Can you distinguish what is claimed from what might, to a less careful reader, seem to be? What evidence is put forward in support of the claim? Can you tease out unstated assumptions? Unstated consequences? If the position seems to entail something obviously untrue, might there be another way to understand it,

one that avoids those problems? Such moves often start as explanation (“this is what is claimed”) and become analysis (“notice this particular aspect about what is claimed”), which in turn forms the basis for your own argument.

### **Analyze the Author’s Argument, and Make Your Own:**

Once you have isolated an important but manageable claim, and explained the author’s argument for it, you can then make your own argument. The thesis of your paper will concisely state your argument. *It is essential that your thesis encapsulate real argumentative work of your own.* Demonstrating that the author's claim is false, or that his argument fails: these are obvious, but far from the only ways, of making your own argumentative contribution. You might think that the author's claim is true, but the argument is missing a piece that you can provide. You might think the argument is successful, but relies on an unstated assumption that itself needs defense. You might think that, without clarification, confusion concerning a key point endangers the argument. Or you might think that the author ignores a glaring counter-argument—one that you can make, and show that he has the resources to rebut. There are many different *types* of arguments that can be made, *but they all go beyond mere report or summary.* Throughout, you'll want to take into consideration possible counter-arguments to your own. Suppose someone scrutinized your writing as closely as you are scrutinizing Sartre’s or Nagel’s. If someone could easily show that your argument fails, it isn't strong enough yet.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this kind of paper is to contribute to an understanding of the claims in the examined reading, the reasons put forward in defense of them, and whether those reasons are convincing. Good papers usually make small but pointed contributions. Very few things are definitively proven in philosophy. Instead, a good criticism is one that the philosopher criticized would feel compelled to respond to—not shrug off as based on an obvious misunderstanding or misrepresentation of what was written, or as having changed the subject. A good defense of an existing position goes beyond what an author has said or clearly implied, providing novel insight into the position and reasons to think it is true.

**Sources:** You do not need to (indeed should not) consult any outside sources for this paper. I want to see *your* explanation and analysis of Sartre’s or Nagel’s work.

**Transferability:** In other classes, a professor might simply ask you to “analyze” or “critically examine” an author’s view, or “offer a critique of the argument that...” when assigning this sort of paper. While we're looking specifically at some philosophical arguments here (and philosophers are (in)famous for scrutinizing arguments with extreme care), the general form is relevant to examining any sort of argument, whether it is made by a philosopher, literary critic, anthropologist, physicist, lawyer, journalist, or anyone else.

### **Major Due Dates:**

September 24: Response Paper

October 1: Draft

October 15: Revision

See the syllabus for full class-to-class schedule.

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### **Response Paper 1: Explain an Isolated Claim and the Argument for It**

Choose a specific claim that Sartre or Nagel makes. In a page or two, explain what it means, and what argument, based on what evidence, is put forward in support of that claim. Quote, paraphrase, and summarize where appropriate. (Reread “Isolate a Claim” and “Explain the Claim and the Argument for It” above.)

#### **FAQ:**

##### **How do I pick a claim?**

Pick something that you can explain, and explain the argument for, in a couple pages. While you are not bound by what you choose now, that is about how much space you'll have in a five- or six-page paper for this part of the overall task. Pick something that plays a significant role in Sartre's or Nagel's larger discussion, and something that interests you, not something trivial or said merely in passing. If you go on to write your fuller draft about this claim, it could be useful to pick something that seems wrong, or problematic, or that you're not sure you fully understand—since those are all signs that you might want to criticize or need to clarify the claim.

##### **Should I explain how the claim relates to the rest of the reading?**

At this stage, you should *not* do this, and you won't have space to. Just jump right in: state the claim, explain it, and explain the argument for it. Later, in your draft, you'll work on orienting your reader and on situating the claim (or another one, if you change focus) in the larger theory.

##### **Should I say whether I agree with the claim, or what I think about the argument?**

No. At this stage, just explain Sartre's or Nagel's view. Your assessment doesn't matter yet, and by withholding it you can give the author's view a more objective presentation.

##### **When should I quote?**

We'll talk about this, but some initial guidelines: Quote when the author's specific language matters, or he or she says something more concisely or elegantly than you can, or when you need to provide evidence that this really is what's claimed (essential to do if you are later going to attack it). Don't quote when the language doesn't matter, when you can explain more concisely, when what you want to explain is mixed together with other things you don't, and as part of the process of translating the author's words into your own explanation.

##### **What if I think I've done what I'm supposed to do, but I only have half a page?**

Mostly likely, you have only *stated* what Sartre or Nagel says, but haven't explained it, or the argument for it. Suppose a friend read your paper (you can actually do this and credit him or her in a footnote): what questions would he or she ask, and what would you explain further?

##### **What if I think I've done what I'm supposed to do and I have four pages?**

It could be that you haven't yet isolated one claim, but are instead trying to explain the whole reading. It could also be that you've started analyzing, or even assessing, rather than just explaining. Focus on a specific claim, and on explaining it, paring away everything else.

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**Unit 2: Identity and (In)Authenticity**  
**Interpreting a Work of Fiction through the Lens of a Theory**

Our main sources in this unit are two short stories: “The Age of Discretion” by Simone de Beauvoir (Sartre’s lifelong intellectual partner and fellow existentialist) and “Good Old Neon” by David Foster Wallace (a more recent story influenced by existentialist ideas). In “The Age of Discretion,” a mother feels betrayed by her son as he takes up values other than the ones she tried to teach him. In “Good Old Neon” a man feels he is essentially fraudulent, always acting only to produce a certain image of himself for other people. We’ll also add two further selections of philosophy in this unit, reading Sartre on “Bad Faith,” or the way in which we inauthentically deceive ourselves into thinking we are not free and so not responsible for ourselves, and part of Beauvoir’s introduction to her work of feminist philosophy *The Second Sex*, in which she argues that the concept of “woman” is always defined in relation to that of “man.” For your second paper you’ll put one of the works of fiction (“The Age of Discretion” or “Good Old Neon”) into conversation with one of the philosophical ideas we have encountered (in the new selections, or in Sartre’s *Existentialism Is a Humanism* or Nagel’s “The Absurd”), interpreting the fiction with the help of concepts and theoretical claims from the philosophy. (I would not recommend using the claim you wrote about in Unit 1. It might seem easier, but actually you’re likely to get stuck thinking about the same idea, or have trouble keeping your focus on the fiction. If you do use the same philosophical work, you have extra responsibility to do something new with it.)

**Primary Assignment (7-8 pages): Interpret a Work of Fiction through a Theoretical Lens**

Defend an interpretive thesis about “The Age of Discretion” or “Good Old Neon” through the lens of one of the philosophical ideas we have read about. Your focus should be primarily on the story, but you should examine it by looking through the theory—and make clear why we should look at this work through that theory, and how doing so helps us see the work more clearly, or differently.

**Further Guidelines for the Essay:**

It might be useful to think about how this essay differs from the first one you wrote.

**Evaluation vs. Interpretation:** In the first essay, your main task was to analyze and, ultimately, *evaluate*, an argument. You had to explain the author’s view, then argue whether he was right or not, and why. Your thesis summed up your evaluation and reasons for it. Since works of fiction don’t make arguments, they can’t be right or wrong (and another kind of evaluation—whether a work is good or bad aesthetically—isn’t important in academic writing the way it is in commercial book reviews). In this paper, your main task is not to evaluate anything, but instead to *interpret* the story. Your thesis will encapsulate your interpretation.

**What’s at Stake?:** The stakes or motivation for your first paper were largely set by the assignment itself: “Here is an influential argument. Does it work?” In this paper, you have more responsibility to motivate what you are doing, showing your readers why they should care. Part of how you will do is by interpreting the story and showing that it is interesting or insightful, and rewards close attention.

**Using a Theoretical Lens:** In the first paper, you wrote about one source. In this essay, you'll be bringing two sources—of very different kinds—together. Your main task is to interpret the story, but you will do so by looking at it through the lens of one of the philosophical selections. Though this makes your task more complicated, in many ways it actually makes it easier. Faced with just a work of fiction, it might seem that you can write about anything. By looking at it through another source, a more limited set of themes comes into focus, in much greater detail. Suppose I ask you to write a paper about *Star Wars*. Many—perhaps too many—kinds of papers would be possible. But suppose I ask you to write about *Star Wars* though the lens of Freud's Oedipal Theory—suddenly certain things (Luke's relationship to Darth Vader, for example) come into focus. Our philosophical selections develop many abstract concepts. Do you see particular instances of these concepts in “The Age of Discretion” or “Good Old Neon”? That resonance can be a good place to start thinking about how the philosophy helps you understand the fiction. Likewise, the philosophers we've read make many claims about what we are like as human beings. Perhaps a particular character in one of the stories seems to contradict one of these general claims. That dissonance can likewise be a good place to start.

**A Potential Pitfall:** Resonance between a theoretical concept and a fictional particular can be a good place to start your interpretation, but you don't want to stop there. A thesis like “Beauvoir's narrator is a perfect example of her claim that...” isn't yet very interesting. Likewise, a thesis such as “Wallace's narrator is a counter-example to so-and-so's general claim” isn't yet very interesting. But both are good places to *start*, inviting you to then look more closely at the story, developing your interpretation of it. Within *general* alignment, it is often a *specific* point of friction that allows you to get an interesting argument going.

**Structure:** It was probably easier to see how to structure your first paper. You introduced the topic and the specific claim you would focus on; stated your thesis, giving your reader a preview of your point; explained the claim and the argument for it; developed your own analysis and argument; and concluded, perhaps by suggesting how this might bear on the larger theory. The structure for this paper isn't obvious, giving us greater opportunity for thinking about how to structure papers as they get longer, more complicated, and draw on more sources.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this kind of paper is to reveal interesting ideas and insights in a work of fiction that readers couldn't see on their own, and couldn't see without the lens. A good thesis in an evaluative paper like our first one makes a very strong (though likely still not absolutely definitive) case for a significant but manageable point. In interpretive papers like this one, a good thesis is often a bit more speculative: your case should still be coherent, and supported by evidence, but might not be as compelling as in a philosophy paper, because by going a little further out on a limb in your interpretation you can reveal a more surprising and interesting insight of greater significance. This is appropriate since stories merely suggest or show things where philosophical arguments try to prove them.

**Transferability:** This sort of paper isn't relevant to just literature (or film or other art) classes. Its general form is that of looking at something particular through the lens of a theory or set of abstract concepts. Here that particular thing is a work of fiction. But it could just as well be data from a psychology experiment, or people's economic behavior, or a set of field observations.

See the syllabus for full class-to-class schedule.

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### **Response Paper 2:**

#### **Use a Theory or Concept to Ask a Question about a Work of Fiction**

Focus on some aspect of or event in “The Age of Discretion” or “Good Old Neon” and on some concept or claim from one of our philosophical selections. Choose a pair that seem to you to have something to do with each other: perhaps they are strikingly similar or, contrariwise, in tension with one another. Write about two pages in which you begin to put these two sources into conversation with each other. Work your way toward, then raise, an interpretive question that the philosophical concept or claim allows you to ask about the fiction. A good question is one that could eventually motivate and guide your entire paper of 7-8 pages. The main point of this response paper is to raise a genuine *question*, not a claim. (Reread “Using a Theoretical Lens” above, and keep in mind the models of lenses we discussed in class.)

#### **FAQ:**

##### **How do I choose something?**

Are there moments during one of the stories when you thought “This is what Sartre was talking about” or “That seems to contradict Beauvoir”? Those are great places to start. Now try to pinpoint your focus: what exactly in the fiction or philosophy reminds you of the other?

##### **What if I don't see any connections?**

You could start simply by choosing a concept or claim from the philosophy. Now try explaining it by using an example from one of the stories. Alternatively, you might start by choosing an event from one of the stories. It might be something central, but might also be more peripheral, yet still interesting—something that might turn out to be more important on close interpretation. Having chosen something, imagine what one of our philosophers might say about it.

##### **How do I organize this response paper?**

You might start by pointedly summarizing the relevant parts of the story, transition to the philosophy, explaining the relevant claim or concept and how it seems to bear on the story, then conclude by articulating a question about the story, one that the philosophy has allowed you to see. Alternatively, you might start by explaining the philosophical claim or concept, but only in as much detail as necessary, then transition to the story, explaining how an event or character is an apparent example or counterexample of the abstract philosophical idea, then conclude by articulating your specific question about the story. Don't feel constrained, however—test your own sense of what works. We'll discuss structure quite a bit during this unit.

##### **What does a good interpretive question look like? Should I know the answer?**

A good question is one that forces you to think carefully about the work of fiction, and to go back to it looking for specific evidence. If the answer is straightforward, then it probably isn't very interesting. You might have a hypothesis now, but a good question will force you to go back and look carefully at the story in order to prove it. It's really important that you *don't* skip over the question. Asking a genuine question ensures that your paper has real stakes, that there is a reason for writing (and reading) it. A genuine question can be answered in different ways.

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**Unit 3: A Major Existentialist Novel**  
**Defending a Nuanced Thesis in Conversation with Outside Research**

This final unit will introduce you to the basics of scholarly research: how to find sources in the library and online, and how to make use of them as you develop your own ideas. The starting place for these papers will be a major existentialist novel: either a classic one by Sartre, Beauvoir, or Camus, or a more recent one influenced by that tradition, by Richard Wright, Walker Percy, Kobo Abe, Tom McCarthy, Kamel Daoud, or Marie NDiaye. Based on your rankings, I've sorted you into groups of three or four students. Your group will have a couple of class meetings to discuss your novel, as well as opportunities to share ideas and questions about sources you are finding in your research. You will all meet together with me for a conference at the end of the semester in which, having read your partners' papers, you give them feedback and receive feedback on your own draft in turn.

The goal of this paper is to start breaking down the arbitrary parameters we have previously set: instead of forcing you to write, in isolation, about one or two provided sources, you will now have the entire Harvard Library System to draw on, so more freedom and therefore responsibility to follow your own interests. That said, this is still an apprenticeship work: we do not expect you to exhaust the secondary criticism or, much less, philosophical influences on your novel. We just expect you to find some good sources that allow you to push deeper into interpreting your core novel than you could on your own. The quality of your argument remains the most important thing (as, indeed, it does for professional scholars even when they are expected to know the relevant literature exhaustively).

While this is a "research paper," don't be misled by what that means. In the past, you might have been asked to write a research paper in which you found sources, then reported back, having synthesized what they said in a well-organized summary. In this paper, it is essential to go further. Your task is not merely to understand, combine, and report what others have said. Rather, your task is to understand those sources so that you can enter into conversation with them—by making your own, original argument. By drawing on other sources, you will be able to raise a much more specific question, and defend a much more nuanced thesis, than if you were to proceed wholly on your own. This is the main reason scholars conduct research: not simply so they can understand what others have already said, but to use what others have said in order to see new questions, and as a background against which to defend more nuanced answers.

Note: I refer to "your main source" throughout this packet. If you are reading *The Stranger* and *The Meursault Investigation*, your paper might be about both, or just one (though it would be hard to write a good paper about Daoud's novel without some reference to Camus's).

**Primary Assignment (~10 pages): Make an Argument Shaped by Outside Research.**

Make an argument about your main source—the major existentialist novel you are reading with your group. Guided by a research question, find other sources (and carefully document them, as described below) that will help you deepen your understanding and analysis, and integrate those sources into your paper. Against the background of your research, defend a nuanced thesis about how we should understand your main source, and what the best answer to your question is.

## Further Guidelines for the Essay:

**Research:** What sort of sources might you look into? Here are some ideas:

1. Secondary sources in literary criticism and philosophy that directly discuss your novel,
2. or that discuss the work and ideas of your author more broadly.
3. Reviews of your novel, from when it was first released (or translated into English).
4. Other things (essays, criticism, fiction, philosophy) written by your author.
5. Philosophical works that your author was influenced by (or maybe even influenced).
6. Secondary work about the philosophical ideas that your author was influenced by.
7. Other philosophical ideas that help you understand your novel.

1 and 2 are a great place to start, and may be where you get most of your sources. 3 can give you a sense of the situation in which the novel was written and received. Notice that, for 4, you'll need to be targeted. You won't have time to absorb, e.g., all of *Being and Nothingness*, much less all of Sartre's or Camus's corpus, but sources from 1 and 2 can point you to specific works, sections, and passages (as can indexes and tables of contents). Likewise for 5, 6, and 7, and I can also help point you toward manageable things that might be useful. It is also perfectly fine to lean on 6 instead of 5 directly, reading things like guides, handbooks, companions, and introductions to philosophers.

**Dig into the Details:** The big ideas of our authors are easy to see. But it is the specific details, and specific disagreements among critics, that will give you a foothold for your research and own argument. If you try to write a paper about absurdity in Camus, you will likely get stuck spouting generalities and be unable to make a compelling argument. But if you dig into the details and find some existing sources that disagree with each other about how to interpret your author's ideas, then you will be able to discuss specific points at length and in depth. Remember the Isolating Claims Exercise we did way back at the beginning of the semester.

**Put Texts in Conversation:** In your lens essay, you got some practice putting two texts, of different sorts, into conversation together. You can now take that further, creating a network of texts in conversation with each other on different points that help you make your argument.

**Structure:** Very generally, you have a number of interrelated tasks in this paper. You need to:

1. raise a question
2. explain how that question illuminates your core text
3. draw on other sources to help you understand your core text, question, and own answer
4. find a place to insert yourself into the conversation
5. make your argument

How exactly you organize those different tasks will depend on the specifics of your question, your sources, the type of conversation, and your own argument. For example, you might raise your question, then turn to your research for initial possible answers—before going on to offer your own new and/or better answer. Or you might instead start from your research, using it to raise a more specific question. One thing to keep in mind: as papers become longer and more complicated, you need to spend more time thinking explicitly about structure and may need to do more work behind the scenes to keep your thinking well-organized. If you haven't, before now, needed to outline your thinking before and as you are writing, it may be useful to start. If you haven't had to separate writing-as-discovery and writing-as-communication, you may need to now. A good ten-page paper usually requires extensive note-taking, outlining, brainstorming, and rewriting that isn't included

explicitly in the final product. You will also need to spend more time—using key terms, signposts, and transitions—in the paper itself explaining its structure to your readers, so that they are not confused by what you are doing. These are all things we will work on during this unit.

**Think of Your Paper in Parts:** As papers get longer, they often aren't guided by one simple claim. Instead, they are often a *sequence* of claims that unify into one larger argument. Remember how Nagel surrounded his main claim—his definition of philosophical absurdity—with an initial discussion rejecting others' definitions of it and a subsequent discussion of if it is really a problem and how we should respond to it. Your thesis might be a sequence of claims that unify into a larger argument, and, if so, it could be useful to think of your paper as a series of sections, even little papers, each arguing for part of the sequence in turn.

**Documenting and Uploading Your Sources:** I will not be familiar with many of the sources that you use for this last paper, but I need to be able to check that you are using them in a responsible manner, since that is one of the things we aim to practice with this last, research-based paper. As a Program-wide policy, **you are required to upload digital copies of all of your sources (including scans or photos of any physical sources)** along with your draft and final paper. This will force you to keep track of your research, and it will allow me to quickly check, should I have any worries about the way you are citing or representing a source. As you are doing research, you should download and save copies of any online resources you consult (whether through Hollis or otherwise) and scan or photograph any physical sources you consult (you needn't scan entire books, just whatever sections you draw on). We realize that this will add some time to your research process, but it would take us an impossible amount of time to track down the sources for all of our students. Do not wait until you are finished with your paper to document your sources; do it right from the start, as you are finding them.

**Purpose:** The purpose of a research paper is to enter into an existing scholarly conversation about your main source. By conducting research into what scholars have already argued about it, you can offer a much more detailed argument of your own, and push the conversation a little deeper, or in a slightly new direction, or make a connection no one has before. In turn this could help future scholars make more detailed arguments, and continue the conversation yet further.

**Transferability:** While your papers are specifically about major existentialist novels, and so this assignment is most obviously relevant to philosophy and literature, your wider aim is to enter into a conversation that scholars have already begun. Biologists, economists, and other scholars, just as much as philosophers and literary critics, have debates and conversations in which they criticize, attack, draw on, and develop each others' views.

**Due Dates:**

November 19: Response Paper 3a

November 26: Annotated Bibliography

November 28: Response Paper 3b

December 3: Draft (and copies of sources)

December 17: Revision (and copies of any additional sources)

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**Response Paper 3a (Due Nov. 19):**

**Propose a Research Project, Guided by a Question or Hypothesis**

Write a short paragraph proposing your topic, centered on the question or hypothesis that will motivate your paper. What in the novel do you seek to better understand? What sort of research, into what sort of sources, might you do? This first response paper can be fairly informal, if you prefer, but should still be rich in content—the point is to get your thinking going and then to give me an idea of what your thinking is, so that I can offer you some feedback and guidance, and perhaps point you to some relevant sources.

**Annotated Bibliography (Due Nov. 26):**

Prepare an annotated bibliography of at least five sources that you expect to draw on in your final paper. Use one established bibliographical style consistently throughout, then annotate each entry with a short paragraph explaining what the source is about and how you expect to use it in your paper. You will probably need to consult more than five sources to find five relevant to your project. You needn't include ones that you quickly decide will be completely irrelevant (though you should keep a record of what you are reading, in case you change your mind), but do include them even if they have merely changed how you think about your question, explaining how in your annotation.

**Response Paper 3b (Due Nov. 28):**

**Introduction and Thesis**

Write an introduction, ending in a thesis statement. Ideally, you will have done significant work on your draft by this point. At a minimum, you should have a solid idea of what your topic is, what question, problem, or hypothesis motivates the paper, what the (or at least some of the) major sources from your research you will engage with are, and what your central claim will be. Introduce your novel, topic, and motivation, set up the main sources that you will be entering into conversation with, and try to state your thesis as clearly as possible. As in our model papers, it is likely that your introduction will be more than one paragraph. And as we saw in those models, a good introduction already reveals a clear map of the entire paper. If you do not yet have a solid sense of where you are going with your draft, what you write in this response paper might be more provisional, but hopefully will help you catch up by moving your ideas forward significantly.