

The Narrative Self
(Expository Writing 20, sections 246 & 247)
Spring 2017

Classroom: Sever 112

Meeting Times: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:07-2pm (section 246) or 2:07-3pm (section 247)

Course Website: <https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/22580>

Ben Roth

broth@fas.harvard.edu

Office: 1 Bow Street, #224

Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:30-4:30 & by appointment (no office hours on conference days); I'm also usually outside our classroom before class or can talk just after

Course Description:

“Life must be understood backwards, but lived forwards,” the philosopher Kierkegaard wrote. Sartre, in one of his novels, develops the thought: “You have to choose: live or tell.” Both suggest that living one's life and telling the story of it are mutually exclusive. Over the past few decades, many philosophers have disagreed, developing the view that understanding one's life as a story is not only something that most of us do, but allows us to become full persons and to live well. Are we right to speak of chapters of our lives and authoring our selves? To explain someone's behavior by referring to her character, or alternatively her role? To use literary genres such as tragedy to describe events in real life? What is entailed by such metaphors? Do they withstand careful scrutiny? Do our lives enact typical narrative arcs? Should they? Or do such claims confuse fiction and reality?

**Taking up these themes, our course will be organized into three units,
each based on different readings and a different kind of paper:**

In **Unit 1: Narrative and Self-Understanding**, we will consider two philosophers' arguments for and against the relevance of narrative to how people understand themselves, indeed perhaps even make themselves into full selves or persons. Marya Schechtman, in “The Narrative Self-Constitution View” (a chapter of her book *The Constitution of Selves*) argues that “a person creates his identity by forming an autobiographical narrative—a story of his life,” and that we are akin to well-drawn characters in realistic novels. Peter Lamarque, in his essay “On the Distance between Literary Narratives and Real-Life Narratives,” argues that to see our lives as like literature both distorts life and devalues art. For your first paper, you will carefully isolate, explain, analyze, and evaluate one of their claims.

In **Unit 2: Memory and Character**, we will look at two fictional works that investigate similar issues: Julian Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending*, a short novel about the fallibility of memory, and *Force Majeure*, a recent Swedish film about character, bravery and cowardice specifically. In addition, we will add two more brief philosophical selections: one by Kwame Appiah on studies which suggest that it is situation, not character, which determines how we act, and one by Peter Goldie on the relation of autobiographical narrative to traumatic events. For your second paper, you will interpret one of the fictional works by looking at it through the lens of a claim or concept from one of the philosophical selections.

In **Unit 3: Critics and Extensions of Narrative Self-Understanding**, we will consider some opponents' arguments against narrative self-understanding, as well as more specific applications of it. Readings will include selections from Jean-Paul Sartre, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Galen Strawson. You will develop your own research topic, beginning from a pair of texts that we have read together. You could start from a pair of texts that disagree, for example, entering into and referring an existing debate. Or you could begin from a text that picks up and develops the view of another, and analyze an assumption they share. Do empirical studies challenge the idea that we have stable character? Does understanding one's life as a story preclude living in the moment? If lives are like stories, do they have a genre? You could begin from one of these or (many) other questions as you develop your own topic.

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 most 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:

- Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending* (New York: Vintage, 2011).
- During Unit 2, you will be responsible for watching *Force Majeure*. I'll organize one screening on campus, there will be a copy on reserve at Lamont, or you can find it online.
- 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. Class begins promptly at seven minutes past the hour. 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. (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.

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):

Tuesday, January 31:

- course introduction
- discussion of evidence in different fields
- discussion of songs
- hand out syllabus

for our next meeting:

- read syllabus, and come with any questions
- print and read Schechtman, “The Narrative Self-Constitution View”
- respond to get-to-know-you email
- digital signup for get-to-know-you conferences

Thursday, February 2:

- discussion of Schechtman
- hand out and go over Unit 1 packet

for our next meeting:

- read Unit 1 packet, and come with any questions
- print and read Lamarque, “On the Distance between Literary Narratives and Real-Life Narratives”

get-to-know-you conferences Monday, February 6 – Friday, February 10

Tuesday, February 7:

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

for our next meeting:

- reread Schechtman and Lamarque
- complete Isolating Claims Exercise and bring a copy to class

Thursday, February 9:

- discussion of Isolating Claims Exercise, thesis statements
- discussion of Schechtman and Lamarque
- 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 to class)

Tuesday, February 14:

- **Response Paper 1 Due** (upload to Canvas before class 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 Marks, “Marx’s Elusive Utopia”
 - 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
If you would prefer to learn MLA or APA style, that is fine, just use one consistently.
- start working on Draft 1

Thursday, February 16:

- discussion of Introductions
- 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 to class)
- digital signup for conferences

Tuesday, February 21:

- **Draft 1 Due** (upload with cover letter and honor code affirmation to Canvas before class and bring a copy to class)
- 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 bring a copy to class)
- start revising

conferences Thursday, February 23 – Wednesday, March 1

Thursday, February 23:

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

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

Tuesday, February 28:

- 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 Appiah, “The Case against Character” and the included pages from Kamtekar
- print and read Goldie, “One’s Remembered Past”
- on Harvard Writes (<http://harvardwrites.com/>), watch the “Evidence” video
- keep revising

Thursday, March 2:

- discussion of Appiah
- discussion of Goldie
- revisit evidence in different fields
- discussion of lens

for our next meeting:

- watch *Force Majeure*
- finish revising

screening of *Force Majeure* at 7pm on Monday, March 6, 1 Bow St.

(You don’t have card access at night; I’ll come down and let everyone in just before 7)

Tuesday, March 7:

- **Paper 1 Revision Due before class** (upload with new cover letter to Canvas)
- discussion of *Force Majeure*
- discussion of close reading of film (Elements: evidence, analysis)

for our next meeting:

- read Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending*, pp. 1-61
- complete Close Reading Exercise (bring copy to class)

Thursday, March 9:

- discussion of Barnes, pp. 1-61
- discussion of close reading of literature (Elements: evidence, analysis)

Spring Break

for our next meeting:

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

Tuesday March 21:

- **Response Paper 2 Due** (upload to Canvas before class)
- discussion of rest of Barnes

for our next meeting:

- read models for Draft 2: Simon, “An Unsuspected Ideal” and Hoch, “Gothicism and Madness” In reading the Simon, you'll notice that the focus is more on the theory than the painting (see it here: <http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/art/217448>). Ask yourself: how would you revise the paper to fit our assignment, for which the focus is supposed to be primarily on the art object (here, a painting, in our assignment, the novel or film). How would you reword the question and thesis? In reading the Hoch, which uses a theory as a lens to interpret both a novel and the film adaptation of it, ask yourself what the paper would look like if interpreting just one or the other.
- 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

Thursday, March 23:

- discussion of models for Draft 2 (Elements: structure, key terms, transitions)
- discussion of writing about film vs. literature (Elements: sources, evidence, analysis)

for our next meeting:

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

Tuesday, March 28:

- **Draft 2 Due** (upload with cover letter to Canvas before class and bring a copy to class)
- reverse outline exercise on Draft 2
- hand out and go over Unit 3 packet

for our next meeting:

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

Conferences Wednesday, March 29 – Wednesday, April 5

Thursday, March 30:

- Draft 2 workshop

for our next meeting:

- keep revising
- print and read Strawson, "Against Narrativity" (beginning Unit 3)
- start thinking about your topic

Tuesday, April 4:

- discussion of Strawson
- discussion of research questions/hypotheses, Gaipa moves

for our next meeting:

- keep revising
- print and read Sartre, "Bad Faith"
- continue thinking about your topic

Thursday, April 6:

- discussion of Sartre
- discussion of how to evaluate potential sources

for our next meeting:

- **finish Paper 2 Revision** (upload with cover letter to Canvas before class)
- 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
- our next meeting is at Lamont (see below)

Tuesday, April 11:

- **Paper 2 Revision due before class** (upload with cover letter to Canvas)
- library visit: meet (normal time) in Room B30 in Lamont Library, and bring your laptop!

for our next meeting:

- print and read MacIntyre, "The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life, and the Concept of a Tradition"
- keep looking for sources

Thursday, April 13:

- discussion of MacIntyre

for our next meeting:

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

Tuesday, April 18:

- **Response Paper 3 Due** (upload to Canvas before class and bring a copy)
- discussion of "flow," exercise on Response Paper 3
- discussion of annotated bibliographies

for our next meeting:

- **complete Annotated Bibliography** (upload to Canvas before class)
- print and read model for Paper 3: Caplan, "Sound Reasoning"
- complete "Critical Thinking: Modeling Our Sources" handout
- if you are pursuing the "literary wrinkle," read Hagan, "*Being John Malkovich*, Being Inauthentic"
- start drafting

Thursday, April 20:

- **Annotated Bibliography Due** (upload to Canvas before class)
- discussion of models for Paper 3
- discussion of questions concerning Paper 3, research strategies
- discussion of group conferences

for our next meeting:

- **finish Draft 3**
- digital signup for group conferences
- bring one or two paper prompts (for response papers too) from your other courses
- bring your laptop to class for course evaluations!

Tuesday, April 25:

- **Draft 3 and sources due before class** (upload with cover letter to Canvas)
- discussion of assignment prompts, transferability
- course evaluations (bring your laptop!)

before your group conference:

- read your partners' papers and be prepared to lead the discussion on them
- write a (workshop-like) letter to each (upload to Canvas and bring a copy)

Group Conferences Thursday, April 27 – Wednesday, May 3

Thursday, May 11:

- **Paper 3 Revision Due by 5pm** (upload with cover letter and honor code affirmation to Canvas)
- upload your additional sources to Canvas by 5pm

The Narrative Self
Spring 2017
Roth

Unit 1: Narrative and Self-Understanding
Analyzing an Argument

In our first unit, we will consider two philosophers' arguments about the relation between narrative and how people understand themselves, indeed perhaps even make themselves into full persons. Marya Schechtman, in "The Narrative Self-Constitution View" (a chapter of her book *The Constitution of Selves*) argues that "a person creates his identity by forming an autobiographical narrative—a story of his life," and that we are akin to well-drawn characters in realistic novels. Peter Lamarque, in his essay "On the Distance between Literary Narratives and Real-Life Narratives," argues that to see our lives as like literature both distorts life and devalues art. Your first job will be to understand Schechtman's and Lamarque's claims. An important part of doing so will be to get a handle on what they mean by abstract, amorphous terms such as "identity," "personhood," and "character," a task which is, perhaps counterintuitively, harder because these words are not completely unfamiliar, but they might not be using them in exactly the way you expect. For your first paper, you will isolate a particular but important claim that Schechtman or Lamarque 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 Schechtman's argument works and *why*, for example, or that Lamarque's argument doesn't and *why*.

Primary Assignment (5-6 pages): *Isolate* a key claim from Schechtman's "The Narrative Self-Constitution View" or Lamarque's "On the Distance between Literary Narratives and Real-Life Narratives," *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 Schechtman and Lamarque 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 Schechtman's or Lamarque'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. For example, Schechtman specifies what she means by "narrative form" and introduces "the articulation constraint" and "the reality constraint" as part of her larger theory—essential parts, but more manageable than the whole. Lamarque explicitly enumerates a set of principles. 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 or her 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 or she 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 Schechtman's or Lamarque's. If someone could easily show that your argument fails, it isn't strong enough yet.

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 Schechtman’s or Lamarque’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:

February 14: Response Paper

February 21: Draft

March 7: Revision

The Narrative Self
Spring 2017
Roth

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

Choose a specific claim that Schechtman or Lamarque 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” on pp. 1-2 of the Unit 1 packet.)

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 Schechtman's or Lamarque's larger theory, and something that interests you, not something trivial or said merely in passing. Were you to write your fuller draft about this claim, it could be useful to pick something that seems wrong, or confusing, 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 Schechtman's or Lamarque'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* Schechtman or Lamarque 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.

The Narrative Self
Spring 2017
Roth

Unit 2: Memory and Character
Interpreting a Work of Fiction through the Lens of a Theory

Our main sources in this unit are two works of narrative fiction: *Force Majeure*, a recent Swedish film, and *The Sense of an Ending*, a short novel by Julian Barnes. In *Force Majeure*, a well-to-do family's ski vacation—and sense of themselves—is upset when the husband reacts to an avalanche in an apparently cowardly manner. The film raises questions about character and situation, what it means to be brave, if we can choose to be so, and if we can know that we are. In *The Sense of an Ending*, the narrator's understanding of himself and his school years is upset by the revelation of new information late in his life. The novel explores the fallibility of memory, its relation to material evidence, and how we understand who we are and how we've lived—issues broached in our philosophical readings, but here explored in a story. We'll also add two more philosophical selections during this unit: one by Kwame Appiah about character and whether empirical psychology calls its reality into question (supplemented by Rachana Kamtekar's concise description of the relevant experiments), and one by Peter Goldie about the role narrative might play in coming to terms with traumatic events. For your second paper you'll put one of the narrative works (*Force Majeure* or *The Sense of an Ending*) into conversation with one of the philosophical essays (by Appiah, Goldie, Schechtman, or Lamarque), interpreting the narrative work with the help of concepts and theoretical claims from the essay. (I would not recommend using the work 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 Sense of an Ending* or *Force Majeure* through the lens of one of the philosophical selections we have read (by Appiah, Goldie, Schechtman, or Lamarque). Your focus should remain on the novel or film, but you should examine it by looking through the theory—and make clear why it makes sense to 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 or she 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—isn't important in academic writing the way it is in commercial book and film reviews). In this paper, your main task is not to evaluate anything, but instead to *interpret* a story (the novel or film). 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 for motivating the paper, showing your reader why they should care. Part of how you will do this will be by interpreting the novel or film and showing your reader 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 novel or film, 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 makes it easier. Faced with just a novel or film, it might seem that you can write about anything. By looking at the novel or film 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 Sense of an Ending* or *Force Majeure*? 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 how most people think about themselves and their lives. Perhaps a particular character in one of the works of fiction 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 “Barnes's narrator is a perfect example of Schechtman's theory” isn't yet very interesting. Likewise, a thesis such as “The husband in *Force Majeure* 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 novel or film, developing your interpretation of it.

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.

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 novel or film. But it could just as well be data from a psychology experiment, or people's economic behavior, or a set of field observations.

Due Dates:

March 21: Response Paper

March 28: Draft

April 11: Revision

The Narrative Self
Spring 2017
Roth

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 *Force Majeure* or *The Sense of an Ending* 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. (Reread “Using a Theoretical Lens” on the Unit 2 sheet, and keep in mind the models we discussed in class.)

FAQ:

How do I choose something?

Are there moments during the novel or film when you thought “This is what Schechtman was talking about” or “That seems to contradict Goldie”? 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 one of the essays. Now try explaining it by using an example from the novel or film. Alternatively, you might start by choosing an event from the novel or film. It might be something central: the husband breaking down into tears in *Force Majeure*, or the revelation that the narrator's letter in *The Sense of an Ending* is quite different from how he remembered it. Or you might choose something more peripheral, but still interesting: what role does the mother play in the film? Or Mats (the bearded friend)? 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 novel or film, 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 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 story, 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 novel or film in order to prove it. It's really important that you *don't* skip over the question to your answer. Asking a genuine ensures that your paper has real stakes, that there is a reason for writing (and reading) it.

The Narrative Self
Spring 2017
Roth

Unit 3: Critics of Narrative Self-Understanding
Entering into a Scholarly Debate and Defending a Nuanced Thesis

So far this semester, we have read selections from four philosophers (Schechtman, Lamarque, Appiah, and Goldie) concerning the relation of narrative and character to the self, personhood, and how we understand ourselves. Already from these selections, you will have gotten a sense of how many other works are out there (given the many texts they cite) and how many different sorts of questions relate to their discussions. In this final unit of the course, you will have more freedom to pursue your own interests, as well as more responsibility to find some of your sources and to read and understand them on your own. Your paper will focus on a specific debate or disagreement between two scholars. In relation to that debate, you will develop a question to guide your research, finding sources to help you to further understand the debate, analyze it, and defend a nuanced thesis. At the beginning of this unit, we will discuss works by two critics of narrative self-understanding: Galen Strawson, and Jean-Paul Sartre. We'll also read a chapter by Alasdair MacIntyre (who influenced Schechtman and Goldie). Especially with the addition of the critics, this will provide you with many potential pairs of texts on which to focus your paper and from which to start your research. These are all major voices in recent scholarship, so you will be able to find many sources that respond directly to what they write.

You might start your paper by deciding to focus on one proponent of narrative understanding and one critic, and a specific issue about which they disagree. For example, Schechtman argues that we need to see our lives as a certain kind of story to achieve personhood, whereas Strawson argues that doing so actually harms many people. Or: MacIntyre writes about the way that we learn to understand the patterns of everyday life through stories, whereas Lamarque argues real-life and literary narratives are very different. You might begin from more subtle disagreements as well. Schechtman and MacIntyre, though both proponents of narrative understanding, appeal to different literary genres as best modeling that understanding. Strawson and Sartre are both critical of narrative understanding, but for different reasons. Some of the authors we have read refer directly to each other. Strawson, for example, names and criticizes Schechtman and MacIntyre. MacIntyre and Strawson refer to Sartre. Other disagreements remain implicit (Sartre, writing decades before the rest of these people, of course doesn't name them). In either case, part of your task will be to explain exactly how your pair of authors disagree, or how their ideas, which you are bringing together, are in competition. Your main task is to use the disagreement between your two core texts, as well as the other sources you find in your research, to set up and develop your own argument and thesis.

While this is a "research paper," don't be misled by what that might mean. 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 regarding your question. Rather, your task is to understand those sources so that you can enter into conversation with them—by making your own, original argument. By analyzing a debate, and 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 raise a question out of the blue.

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.

Primary Assignment (~10 pages): Make an Argument against the Background of an Existing Scholarly Conversation. Explain and analyze a specific disagreement between two of the philosophers we have read. 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 analysis of the debate, defend a nuanced thesis about how we should understand it, and what the best answer to your research question is.

Further Guidelines for the Essay:

Narrow your focus: The big disagreements between our authors are easy to see. But it is the specific points of disagreement that will give you a foothold for your research and own argument. If you try to write a paper about Schechtman and Strawson's overall disagreement about whether there is a necessary narrative component to selfhood, you will get stuck spouting generalities and be unable to make a compelling argument. But if you ask specifically what they each think about our susceptibility to revise our memories, and what role that question plays in their larger theories, you will be able to discuss specific points at length and in depth. Remember the Isolating Claims Exercise we did at the beginning of the semester.

Put your core texts in conversation: At the center of your paper should be two core texts and the disagreement between them. Aligning those two texts, such that your reader can see their disagreement and understand what is at stake in it, is a key part of your task. Confusion here will lead to confusion as you move on to make your own argument. Some alignments are easy to make initially—Strawson criticizes Schechtman and MacIntyre by name, for example—but then require subtler work as you narrow the disagreement to a specific aspect. Others can be hard to make initially. For example, Schechtman draws on various literary terms in her theory and Lamarque makes numerous claims about how literary narratives are different from real-life ones, but it can take some work to see exactly what each says about real-life, and how they disagree.

An empirical wrinkle: If you have been dissatisfied with the “armchair” nature of some of our readings, one way you could go in this final paper would be to focus on more empirical findings. Appiah and Kamtekar cite various studies and the conclusions some scholars have drawn from them about character and situation. You could look closely at one study, a couple of interpretations, and carefully argue how we should interpret that study as we think about the notion of character. Strawson quickly cites studies to ground some of his psychological claims. You might follow those footnotes back and ask what philosophical conclusions they truly merit.

A literary wrinkle: If you enjoyed using literary sources in Unit 2, you could integrate that aspect into this final paper, in one of two ways. Either you could use a novel, story, or film (instead of hypotheticals) as your chief example, or as a test case, in the paper in order to develop your thesis about the philosophical debate. Or you could use a specific philosophical debate as a lens in order to offer an interpretive thesis about a novel, story, or film. In the latter case, where

your thesis is actually about the novel, story, or film, you would need to familiarize yourself with it quite early. The works below are good candidates, in that they handle our course's themes, but in complicated ways that make numerous—even contradictory—interpretations possible.

Nausea by Jean-Paul Sartre

The Remains of the Day by Kazuo Ishiguro

"Good Old Neon" (in *Oblivion*) by David Foster Wallace

Memento, directed by Christopher Nolan

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, directed by Michel Gondry

Synecdoche, New York, directed by Charlie Kaufman

"The Entire History of You" (a standalone episode of *Black Mirror*)

Stories We Tell, directed by Sarah Polley (documentary)

While the above works are pre-approved, there's also some possibility you could write about another work of fiction or film, but you would have to convince me very early on both that it is something worthy of close attention and that you have a promising idea about it.

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

1. raise a question
2. explain how the core pair of texts you've chosen disagree with each other
3. draw on other sources to help you understand your core texts, 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 two core sources for two initial possible answers. But you might instead start from your two core sources' disagreement, 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.

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 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 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.

Transferability: While our shared sources are mostly by philosophers, the general form of this last paper isn't applicable to philosophy alone. Your aim is to enter into a debate or conversation that scholars have already begun. Biologists, economists, and other scholars, just as much as philosophers, have debates and conversations in which they criticize, attack, draw on, and develop each others' views.

Due Dates:

April 18: Response Paper

April 20: Annotated Bibliography

April 25: Draft (and copies of sources)

May 11: Revision (and copies of any additional sources)

The Narrative Self
Spring 2017
Roth

Response Paper 3 (Due April 18th):

Propose a Research Project, Guided by a Question or Hypothesis

Pretend that your classmates and I form the board of a non-profit institute that funds research in the humanities and social sciences. Write a proposal of no more than 500 words, which we will use in order to decide who to award financial support. Explain the scholarly disagreement that you will enter into, what question or hypothesis you will investigate, what sort of sources you will use, and why your project matters. (Make this a finished, polished piece of writing.)

Further Guidelines:

Stance: Remember that your classmates and I are familiar with the general topic. That means you don't have to explain the background that we're already familiar with in any great detail, but you can't assume we know as much about your specific topic as you do, or have thought about it as carefully as you have. If you were writing for a board composed of Schechtman and Goldie (experts in this area) on the one hand, or for a general group of academics (who might not know anything about this area) on the other, you would have to make your pitch differently.

Stakes, or “Why It Matters”: It might be tempting to promise great returns on your research: “I will open up new approaches in psychotherapy” or “This paper will change the way historians think about their writing for years to come.” But—especially given that we know something about the topic—we know what it is possible to argue in ten pages, and making unrealistic promises will weaken your proposal. An argument doesn't need to radically change the debate, or have practical effect, to matter. An argument that fills a gap, or reorients a discussion, or puts sources that have previously ignored each other into conversation can be a very good one.

Sources: It's okay, at this stage, if you don't know what exact sources you'll be citing in your final paper. You can use our shared readings to orient your proposal, and you can state what *kinds* of sources you'll be investigating: scholars who clarify what MacIntyre and Strawson are arguing, for example, or one of the studies that Appiah and Kamtekar cite and interpretations of it, or other philosophers who have written about narrative and different types of personality, or people who use the film *Memento* in discussions of personal identity.

Annotated Bibliography (Due April 20th):

Prepare an annotated bibliography of at least five sources (plus any of our shared sources, though they don't count toward the five) 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.