

MICROESSAYS**THE TASK**

A microessay is a highly compact single-spaced, single page essay (500-600 words). The idea behind the microessay is to grab some things that interest you from the readings and throw yourself into articulating a specific question, idea, and/or concern that they brought to your attention. Your paper should respond to a major or minor theme of the course, address readings from the week during which you submit, and demonstrate your ability to think critically about the readings.

Three times over the course of the quarter you will post a microessay to our course discussion board in advance of class meetings in order to:

- delineate a field of inquiry and establish a point of entry for class discussions and activities
- generate a range of potential lines of inquiry that you or your peers might pursue in final papers

A FEW WORDS OF ADVICE

- Begin with a line of inquiry that develops out of what you find interesting, wrong-headed, surprising, or thought-provoking about the readings you've done. But don't stop with an evaluation.
- Be sure it will be clear to readers what specific question, idea, and/or concern you are addressing.
- Don't waste precious page-space summarizing. It is very important that you demonstrate understanding of others' ideas and positions adequate for your purposes, but your focus should be on what you can do with the ideas others have brought to your attention.
- Don't be fooled by the length; this will take time to do well! A short paper requires you not only to put thought and energy into exploring ideas but also into carefully revising and editing to maximize the effectiveness of your writing in a concise form.

FORMATTING AND DOCUMENTATION

- 500-600 words
- All sources not assigned for this course must be cited both in the text and in a bibliography following your essay. (MLA is standard in my field, but as long as you document your sources clearly and consistently you may use whatever system you prefer.)

EVALUATION

At the end of the quarter, when you submit revisions of your microessays, they will be evaluated according to how well they meet the following set of criteria:

- The discussion is appropriately complex, addressing the questions of the course with new insight and ideas provided by the week's readings.
- The stakes of the discussion—that is why the question, idea, and/or concern is worth addressing—are articulated and persuasive.
- The discussion involves close scrutiny and examination of assumptions and textual evidence in support of a larger set of ideas.
- The writing is intertextual, meaning that a "conversation" between texts and ideas is created in support of the writer's goals.
- The writing displays a clear understanding of its audience, and various aspects of the writing (mode of inquiry, content, structure, evidence, appeals, tone, sentences, and word choice) address and are strategically pitched to that audience.