

Intro to Critical Thinking in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Hum 100-1 BR | Summer 2026 | Tuesdays - Fridays 10:30am - 11:50 am

Professors

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Our Welcome to YOU!

Welcome, everyone! You're entering an exciting phase of your lives, and we— your Critical Thinking professors and writing mentors— are here to accompany you as you prepare for that phase. The intellectual focus of our course is to develop your critical-thinking skills; we'll do this by questioning and challenging a few dominant narratives that we have selected based on our academic interests.

This is also a course about getting anchored in your life in a new place. We want you to see that a college community is first and foremost about its human relations. We are all here in the same place, sharing overlapping challenges and aspirations, while coming here from different places and with different experiences. How do we discover what we have in common while respecting and learning from what we don't? We ourselves are still on this journey of discovery, and we'll be with you as you learn and grow during these few weeks of Bridge; we expect to learn from you as well as to guide you!

This is a course in critical thinking, which means many things. For example, we use critical thinking to question, examine, and interpret assumptions, behaviors, texts, arguments, and the world we operate in. We might use critical thinking to inform and justify our decisions and actions and even to imagine how things might be otherwise.

Our theme for the course is "questioning dominant narratives." We'll practice asking critical questions using topics of environmental justice, commodification, and language – but the skills you practice here will apply across academic disciplines. We'll treat these as academic topics, but we'll also consider them as deeply personal questions affecting our common life together on the university campus. No question or topic will be off limits, though we'll also work to treat these issues – and each other – with respect and enthusiasm for our common enterprise. It takes a village to have an idea!

Land Acknowledgement | #LandBack

Northwestern is a community of learners situated within a network of historical and contemporary relationships with Native American tribes, communities, parents, students, and alumni. It is also in close proximity to an urban Native American community in Chicago and near several tribes in the Midwest. The Northwestern campus sits on the traditional homelands of the people of the Council of Three Fires, the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa as well as the Menominee, Miami and Ho-Chunk nations. It was also a site of trade, travel, gathering and healing for more than a dozen other Native tribes and is still home to over 100,000 tribal members in the state of Illinois.

It is within Northwestern's responsibility as an academic institution to disseminate knowledge about Native peoples and the institution's history with them. Consistent with the University's commitment to diversity and inclusion, NU works towards building relationships with Native communities through academic pursuits, partnerships, historical recognitions, community service and enrollment efforts.

Critical Thinking Course Learning Objectives

College reading, writing, and discussion strategies, including:

- Engaging with, interpreting, and citing multiple kinds of texts e.g., academic journal articles, book chapters, popular news articles, documentaries, short videos, TED talks.
- Putting texts (e.g., readings, videos) into conversation with one another, with your life experience, and with observations of the world around you.
- Identifying and explaining critical questions about a text.
- Creating and organizing notes.
- Using structures in readings as a model for your own writing.
- Entering class discussions in a constructive way; communicating your thoughts and listening actively and empathetically.

Introduction to disciplinary methods, including:

- Comparing the approaches to issues and topics by scholars in various humanities and social science fields, including anthropology, philosophy, writing pedagogy and linguistics.

How to navigate life at a university, including:

- Surveying important issues in life and on campus, and how scholars approach those issues.
- Organizing your time, anticipating the rhythm of the quarter system.
- Finding resources at Northwestern, from peer advising to counseling to student organizations.
- Determining how to find and develop peer and mentoring relationships.
- Seeking help and clarification.
- Learning how to care for your health.
- Navigating Canvas, the online platform for all classes.
- Working collaboratively with peers, graduate student writing mentors, and professors.

Accessibility and Accommodations

Northwestern University and your Critical Thinking teaching team are committed to providing the most accessible learning environment possible for students with disabilities.

- Should you anticipate or experience disability-related barriers in the academic setting, please contact [AccessibleNU](#) to move forward with the university's established accommodation process (email: accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; phone: 847-467-5530).
- If you already have established accommodations with AccessibleNU, please let us know as soon as possible, preferably within the first week of the program, so we can work together to implement your disability accommodations.

Disability information, including academic accommodations, is confidential under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

We recognize that not all disabilities are documented and not all needs are fully accommodated (yet) by formal education systems. If any of that is the case for you or if you had helpful accommodations in high school that have not been formalized yet at Northwestern, please communicate with us about what might help you succeed in our class. To get a conversation like this started, you can email your professor and/or writing mentor or you can stop in to our open office hours. We ask that you do this during the first week of the Bridge program if you can, though if something comes up later on in the program, please do not hesitate to start a conversation at any point.

Academic Integrity

We, your Critical Thinking professors and writing mentors, trust that you come to our courses with a deep commitment to your own and your peers' learning and growth and with genuine questions, curiosity, and maybe even some uncertainty about academic expectations. One set of expectations that you might wonder about is academic integrity. When we at Northwestern talk about academic integrity, we're talking about a set of conventions and expectations regarding the exchange and presentation of ideas in academic settings.

We recognize that it takes time to observe, interpret, practice, and apply academic integrity conventions, and our Critical Thinking course is one site where you can begin that process. We'll have some discussions about academic integrity, and you can also bring us any questions or uncertainties you have – without judgment from us! Northwestern's [Academic Integrity: A Basic Guide](#) lays out various principles, procedures, and resources that will be helpful for you to learn about.

Below are some key academic integrity guidelines and expectations for our course.

Using, identifying, and citing sources of information and ideas

- Identify any sources you use for assignments in those assignments. Sources include anything that you have not created yourself, such as someone else's published or unpublished writing, peers' work, videos online, lecture slides, Wikipedia pages, etc.
- Provide in-text citations and a references list using the [Chicago Manual of Style](#).
- You are welcome to use automatic citation generators (e.g. Zotero, EndNote, Citation Machine) to create in-text citations and reference lists. The Northwestern Libraries offer [free citation management software and helpful instructions and support](#).

Using generative AI

- Because generative AI is rapidly developing, classes, instructors, and departments have different— and shifting— orientations to and policies on using AI for class work.
- We'll use generative AI together in class on occasion.
- You may use generative AI to outline or organize your thoughts for writing assignments or in preparation for class discussions.
- Please do not use generative AI for ideas or information— it may provide information that is inaccurate, biased, oversimplified, or just entirely made-up!
- The skills we're working on in this class require frequent practice, but you won't get that practice or acquire those skills if you outsource your work to AI! So, we ask that you:
 - do your own reading rather than using AI summaries
 - generate ideas, text, images, video, and audio yourself without the use of generative AI
 - revise your writing for content and organization based on peer and instructor feedback without using AI tools. If you wish, you may use AI editing tools (e.g. Grammarly) for sentence-level edits

If you have questions, curiosities, or uncertainties about the academic integrity expectations in this syllabus, or questions about other expectations regarding citations, use of sources, and use of AI, you are always welcome to ask your professor or writing mentor during class, office hours, or via email!

Northwestern's Registrar asks that the following academic integrity statement be included in all syllabi:

Students enrolled in Northwestern courses are required to comply with [Northwestern's academic integrity policy](#). All papers submitted for credit in this course must be submitted electronically unless otherwise instructed by the professor. Your written work may be tested for plagiarized content. Any form of cheating, including improper use of content generated by artificial intelligence, constitutes a violation of Northwestern's academic integrity policy. To download Academic Integrity: A Basic Guide go to <https://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies-procedures/academic-integrity/index.html>

Canvas and Required Course Materials

Course readings, the syllabus, assignments, and announcements will be available on [Canvas](#).

- The modules section on Canvas functions as a course schedule with readings, videos, and assignments listed for each day of class. Please complete all the materials and assignments listed for that day.
- Most course readings and videos will be available for free via links or pdfs on Canvas. The Bridge program will also provide a few hard copies of these readings in your res hall.
- We also require one book, which the Bridge Program will provide for free to all students. Please bring this book to class every day.

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*. 6th ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2024.

- Check Canvas daily to stay on top of any changes or announcements.

Daily Schedule

You'll be placed in a section in a designated classroom with one of the 4 professors and one of the 4 writing mentors listed at the beginning of this document. You'll have the same instructor and writing mentor for the entire 4 weeks of the program. You'll get feedback and grades from that same pair throughout our 4 weeks together.

The Bridge Critical Thinking Course will meet from Tuesday, August 11 through Friday, September 4, 2026, on the following schedule:

- Tuesdays: All sections convene for a lecture at the start of the week, from 10:30-11:10 am. Individual sections meet 11:10-11:50 am.
- Wednesdays through Fridays: Individual sections meet 10:30am -11:50am.

We will engage in approximately 80 mins of daily class time with a mixture of discussion, group work, and directed individual work. Every Tuesday there will be a short, entertaining lecture from one professor about that week's reading and assignments. These lectures fill in background information or give you tips about what to look for in upcoming assignments.

Required Conferences & Open Office Hours

Scheduled conferences and drop-in office hours are good opportunities to get individualized feedback on your work and to bring up any questions you have about what to expect in a college classroom, how to navigate studying, how to interact with professors and TAs, what professors and TAs do, what office hours are for, why we chose our fields, etc. And they're a good chance to practice approaching and interacting with your instructors, which you'll do a lot during your time at Northwestern!

Each Critical Thinking student will have a total of 4 scheduled meetings (or "conferences") during the 4 weeks of our course. These conferences are central to your learning for our class, so they are required. You'll sign up for your conferences via a link on Canvas during the first week of class. Here's a schedule and some goals for our conferences:

In **Week 1**, you'll have a 15-minute conference where you'll meet with your instructor and writing mentor together. These initial conferences will allow us to get to know each other, to discuss your goals for our class, and to answer your questions.

In **Week 2 and Week 3**, you'll meet one-on-one with your writing mentor. The Week 2 and Week 3 conferences will last 15 minutes each and will give you an opportunity to get individualized attention and feedback on your course assignments, to synthesize any other feedback you've received, and to reflect on your work. You can also talk with your writing mentor/TA about campus life, navigating the transition to college, various classes and subjects you're interested in, fun things to do in Evanston and Chicago, etc.

In **Week 4**, you'll have one scheduled 20-minute conference where you'll meet with your professor and writing mentor together to get feedback on a draft of your final assignment. We will also discuss your learning and experience in Bridge as well as how you can maintain and improve the skills you'll need for your studies at Northwestern.

You should attend each of your conferences in person. If there are extenuating circumstances that prevent you from joining a conference in person, please communicate with your professor and writing mentor in advance to request a Zoom meeting. If a Zoom meeting is granted, please make sure you are seated in a quiet place where you can talk openly, listen carefully, and see all relevant documents and written feedback on Canvas. These conferences don't achieve their purpose if you're using your phone for Zoom while you're walking between classes, for example!

In addition to these conferences, the Critical Thinking professors will hold open office hours each week. Our teaching staff section on the Canvas home page lists professors' open office hours. While conferences are scheduled in advance and you should only attend the time you signed up for, you don't need to arrange to come to open office hours in advance-- you can just show up during the times listed to talk with your professor!

Class Attendance

We will take attendance each day and hope everyone can attend every class session. If you need support or are experiencing illness, please let us know promptly and we can help you get the support you need. Each student is allowed one unexcused absence for Critical Thinking. (Note that this policy does not necessarily extend to the other classes you are taking for Bridge; be sure you know the attendance policy for those courses!)

Students gain the most from Bridge (and college) consistently attend class; you'll benefit from the social experience of processing and questioning information as a community. For this Bridge course, it will be beneficial to process and navigate difficult, interesting, and sometimes scary questions about dominant narratives in collaboration with your peers, professor, and writing mentor.

Assignments, Assessment, and Grades

Together, we are going to practice an assessment approach that focuses on *engagement* and *growth*. Because we grow as learners, writers, researchers, readers, students, and scholars through regular practice, interaction, and reflection, you will be graded based on your engagement with those tasks and your individual growth along the dimensions of our course learning objectives. You will NOT be graded on some measure of the absolute quality of your work or in comparison to other students, but on the quality and quantity of your engagement and growth.

While you won't get letter or number grades on individual assignments, you will get a complete or incomplete for all assignments on Canvas. Anyone who completes assignments (mostly) on time, with academic integrity, making progress from one draft to the next, applying lessons from our discussions and readings, and contributing to the intellectual and social community in our class, will earn "completes" for those assignments. Additionally, you'll get lots of feedback from your professor and writing mentor throughout the program. You'll also get feedback from your peers each week. And, just as important, you will reflect on your own growth and learning.

In calculating your course grade, your coursework will be weighted as follows:

1. Daily preparation assignments: 10%
2. Weekly Friday writing assignments: 20%
3. Final portfolio: 30%
4. Conferences with instructors and writing mentors and related tasks: 20%
5. Class attendance and engagement: 20%

Below is a description of the above grade elements. Details for specific assignments are on Canvas.

1. Daily preparation assignments: 10%

- These daily assignments include prompts to help you form ideas before class discussion.
- You submit some of these assignments on Canvas, while others will have no Canvas submission but you will bring them to class. In either case, we'll ask you to share and build on these assignments during our sessions, so please complete them before class

2. Weekly Friday writing assignments: 20%

- Your first draft of each Friday writing assignment is due on Canvas by 9:00 am Friday.
- These assignments ask in-depth questions about course materials. These will take more time and energy, so ensure you make time for these assignments throughout the week.
- You'll peer review these drafts in class every Friday.
- You may then submit a revised draft by 8:00 pm that same day.

3. Final portfolio assignment: 30%

- Your final portfolio will consist of the following elements:
 - *Two* Friday writing assignments of your choice, revised in light of the comments you received from your classmates, your TA, and your instructor.
 - A one-page revision memo, explaining your revisions
 - A reflection (in writing, audio, video, or other illustration) on a theme or thread that ties your two revised writing assignments together.

4. Conferences with instructors and writing mentors and related tasks: 20%

- As explained above , you have 4 required conferences during the 4 weeks of our class.
- You will also be asked to complete small assignments related to these conferences, such as signing up for meetings and preparing notes.

5. Class attendance and engagement: 20%

- Please come to class each day prepared to participate in our discussions and other activities. Each student is entitled to one (1) unexcused absence during the program.
- This is not a mere attendance grade! This is a chance to learn about and practice expectations for active participation in small college classes, so we ask that you regularly contribute to class discussion and other class activities to get that practice.

Course Schedule in Brief

WEEK 1: CLIMATE CHANGE

Tuesday, August 11 | The Anthropocene: Argument

Wednesday, August 12 | The Anthropocene: Critique

Thursday, August 13 | The Anthropocene: Evidence

Friday, August 14 | Synthesis, Peer Review

WEEK 2: COMMODIFICATION

Tuesday, August 18 | Two Kinds of Anti-Commodification Arguments

Wednesday, August 19 | Commodification in Practice I: Kidney Sales

Thursday, August 20 | Commodification in Practice II: Commercial Surrogacy

Friday, August 21 | Synthesis, peer review

WEEK 3: LANGUAGE

Tuesday, August 25 | Some linguistic facts of life

Wednesday, August 26 | Language and everyday experience

Thursday, August 27 | Language ideology and education

Friday, August 28 | Synthesis, peer review

WEEK 4: FINAL PORTFOLIO PREP

Tuesday, September 1 | Discuss revision strategies + peer review revision plans + work on reflection drafts

Wednesday, September 2 | Peer review reflection drafts + revise reflection drafts

Thursday, September 3 | No class meeting: portfolio draft conferences

Friday, September 4 | No class meeting: portfolio draft conferences

WEEK 5: FINAL ASSIGNMENT

Wednesday, September 9 | Final portfolio due on Canvas by 8:00 pm