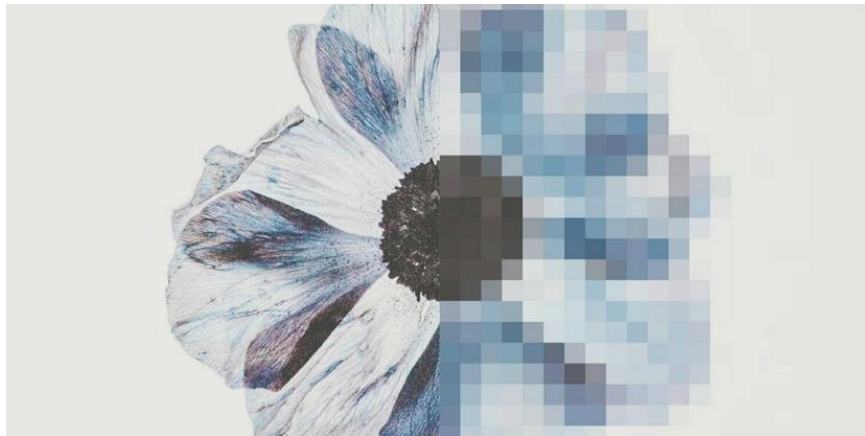


## Great Themes in the Humanistic Tradition



# The Past and Future of Images:

## *From Cave Art to GenAI*

**Instructor:** Adrian Ivakhiv (aivakhiv@sfu.ca)

**Seminars:** Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:30 am to 2:20 pm, WMC3250 Burnaby campus

**Office hours:** Tuesdays & Thursdays 3:00-4:00 pm, AQ 6197; or in Zoom by appointment

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Images surround us on all sides, and in a world increasingly defined by digital media, they are created, reproduced, multiplied, and transformed all the more rapidly. But what *are* images? And how have people related to them in different times and places? What functions have they served, and how are those functions changing in the world of digital media?

This course will begin by examining the history of ways humans have related to images, from prehistoric art forms to religious, imperial, or nationalist uses of images, to contemporary visual, musical, cinematic, and performative artworks. (We will not restrict ourselves to visual images, but consider all kinds of images, i.e., things that represent *other* things to us by virtue of their resemblance to those things.) It will then delve into digital media to assess how these forms of image making and use are being altered by technologies of digital reproduction, manipulation, algorithmically shaped engagement, and artificial generation of images.

The second half of the course will delve into a suite of artworks and projects that help us make sense of three sets of relationship: between humans and the Earth, between humans and other animals, and between humans and our divinities (gods, spirits, ancestors, ideals, et al.). The goal will be to get a sense of both the constraints and the possibilities for creative image-making today, so as to reimagine ourselves and the world toward a more viable future. Throughout, we will ask: *how do digital media and generative AI change our relationship to images and, by doing that, change our relationship to ourselves?*

The course will be seminar-based, with a focus on discussion and application of ideas. Readings will be complemented with visual art, music, videos, and other media. Students will be required to apply course ideas and methods either to an artist or set of art works of their choice, in an analytical paper, or to their own creative production through an applied project.

## REQUIRED TEXT

- Adrian Ivakhiv, *The New Lives of Images: Digital Ecologies and Anthropocene Imaginaries in More-than-Human Worlds* (Stanford University Press, 2025).

This will constitute the primary text for the course. It is strongly recommended that you obtain a print copy of this text in time for the first class. All other (supplementary or required) texts will be provided in Canvas.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

*In taking this course, students will be able to gain the following:*

1. An introductory to intermediate-level understanding of key theories of images and imagination, as found in fields including art history and visual studies, cultural and media studies, and philosophy;
2. A working understanding of diverse perspectives on contemporary controversies over the ethical and political implications of digital information technologies, including artificial intelligence;
3. An extended experience in applying relevant theoretical perspectives to the critical analysis of an artist or artwork and/or to one's own creative product for this class;
4. Practice in critical thinking, reading, writing, analysis, and presentation (verbal and/or audio-visual) appropriate to an upper-level university Humanities course.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS (subject to change)

### 1. Participation (40 pts)

- Attendance & participation in class and group exercises = 15 pts.
- Image inventory assignment (due May 28) = 5 pts.
- 8 short writing assignments (2 pts. each for completion plus 4 pts. for overall quality) = 20 pts.

### 2. In-classes quizzes & tests (30 pts)

- 4 to 6 in-class pop-up quizzes = 10 pts. total
- In-class midterm and final tests (mini-exams): 10 pts. x 2 = 20 pts.

### 3. Analytical Paper or Creative Project (30 pts)

This will be an iterative project or paper in which you develop a proposal, share it for peer review, draft or produce parts of it for instructor review, and develop those into a final, presentable paper or creative art object.

- Proposal (due May 28) = 2 pts.
- First draft, shared in class (June 9) & submitted (June 11) = 3 pts.
- Class presentation (June 16 or 18) = 5 pts.
- Final paper/project (due June 22) = 20 pts.

**Options:** choose **one** from the following (done individually or in groups of up to 3 students):

- **A. Critical analysis paper & presentation:** Choose an artist or artwork that represents a creative engagement of the relationship between either humans and the Earth (geographically specific or general), human and nonhuman animals (biologically specific or general), or humans and divinities (defined loosely, as in *NLI* chapter 7). Analyze their work using terms and concepts from the course. Present your analysis in class.
- **B. Theoretical critique paper & presentation:** Develop and write a rigorous analysis of *The New Lives of Images* from a specific alternative theoretical perspective of your choice. Present your analysis in class.
- **C. Creative project, self-reflection & presentation:** Create a work of visual, musical, theatrical, literary, or multi-media art drawing upon concepts from the course. Write a self-analysis reflecting on how the course concepts either inspire or help you to understand the artwork. Present your work in class.

## SCHEDULE OF TOPICS & READINGS

- May 12      **Course Introduction & Overview**
- May 14      **What is Imagination? What is an Image?**
  - Read: *NLI*, Preface & ch. 1, pp. 1-18; R. Mesle on process-relational theory
- May 19      **Image Ecologies**
  - Read: *NLI*, ch. 1 pp. 19-30; A. Ivakhiv, "The Three Ecologies"
- May 21      **Animate-image, Ideal-image, & Expressive-image**
  - Read: *NLI*, ch. 2 pp. 31-53
  - Image inventory assignment due
- May 26      **World-Picture & Moving-Image**
  - Read: *NLI*, ch. 2 pp. 53-70; EMI excerpts
- May 28      **The Data-Image & the Digital Image-World**
  - Read: *NLI*, ch. 3
  - Paper/project proposal due
- June 2      **Image Regimes in (Inter-)Action**
  - Read: *NLI*, ch. 4
  - Midterm in-class test
- June 4      **"Anthropocene" & Montage-Image: Reimagining Our Relationship with the Earth**
  - Read: *NLI*, Introduction to Part II & ch. 5
  - Watch: *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch* (2018)
- June 9      **"Therioscene" & the Cine-Sensorium: Reimagining the Animal**
  - Read: *NLI*, ch. 6
  - View: YouTube videos (selection TBA)
  - First draft of paper/project to be presented in class for review
- June 11      **"Theoscene" & Creative-Image: Reimagining Religion & Creativity**
  - Read: *NLI*, ch. 7 pp. 237-276
  - View: Kandinsky, Af Klint, and other artists (TBA)
  - First draft of paper/project due
- June 16      **Reimagining the Past & the Future**
  - Read: *NLI*, ch. 7 pp. 276-326; A. P. Gumbs selections from *Dub: Finding Ceremony*
  - View: Sun Ra video. Listen: free jazz selections (TBA)
  - Student paper/project presentations (in class)
- June 18      **Conclusions & Presentations** (final class)
  - Student paper/project presentations (in class)
  - In-class final exam
- June 22      Papers/projects due

# APPENDIX I – COURSE POLICIES

## I. GRADING

Grades in this course will follow this standard model:

A+ = 95-100	A = 90-94.9	A- = 85-89.9
B+ = 80-84.9	B = 75-79.9	B- = 70-74.9
C+ = 65-69.9	C = 60-64.9	C- = 55-59.
D = 50-54.9	F = below 50	

That said, with the goal of providing you with an easily understandable assessment of your performance in the class, my overall grading policy is fairly straightforward:

**If you do all the things you're asked\* to do in the course, you will normally get a 'B'. If you do them especially well—with rigor, insight, and effective expression\*\*—you will get an 'A'.**

Exceptions to this rule will be noted.

**\*Regarding what you're "asked to do":** The expectations are outlined either in the syllabus or in assignment instructions. If you mess up on a few little things (e.g., miss a class, hand in a couple of assignments late, do poorly on a quiz or written assignment) and this appears to be inordinately affecting your grade, let me know and I will adjust it. (You can also let me know these things in a final self-evaluation, which you are welcome to provide within one week after the final class in the semester.) But if these appear to be a pattern, then your grade will be affected negatively.

**\*\*Regarding "rigor, insight, and effective expression":** I will be assessing these using models I have developed over 30+ years of grading student work as well as reading, writing, editing, and reviewing scholarly and professional writing. (Please see Writing Policy, below.) I will provide feedback where possible, but given the size of the class, this will not always be feasible. If you need clarity on anything in particular, please talk to me about it. Note that these qualitative criteria do not directly extend to quantitatively assessed work such as quizzes, correct-answer exams, number of reading responses submitted (where these are required), etc., but I will attempt to follow them in the design of such work.

With that in mind, if your goal is to get a different grade — for instance, a 'C' or a passing 'D' — I recommend that you calculate which assignments or course expectations you can 'let go' (if any) in order to achieve your target grade.

If you are uncertain about grading or wish you propose some deviation from the norm, you are also welcome to propose an individual '**work contract**' for your performance in the course. This should be submitted to me **within the first 2 or 3 weeks of classes**, so that I can provide feedback and we can arrive at an agreement well before most of the assignments and expectations are due.

## 2. ABSENCES

Classroom learning and discussion is important to this class, so classes should not be missed except for illness, emergencies, or religious holidays. Please see "Attendance and quality of participation," above. If you have to miss a

class, please ask another student for assistance in catching up on the material.

## 3. RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATIONS

SFU respects students' right to have their religious practices accommodated (with some exceptions). Students wishing to be excused from class participation, exams, or assignment deadlines during their religious holidays should submit a documented list of such holidays **by the end of the second week of classes**. In cases where any class, exam, or assignment is missed for this reason, it is up to the student to request a make-up date, additional assignment time, or other accommodation as appropriate. I will do my best to honour your requests.

## 4. WRITING SUBMISSIONS

If you are submitting work in paper format or as Word documents or PDFs, please type them in a common font style (such as Times New Roman or Arial), 11- or 12-point in size, with at least 1-1/2 line spacing, and 1 inch margins for comments; number and staple together your pages; and include your name on the first page. Please spell-check and proofread your work, and use inclusive language where appropriate (i.e. be conscious of your use of gendered pronouns and referents, using "people" or "humanity" instead of "man", "he or she" or "they" instead of simply "he," and so on). Late work is subject to penalties, with grades dropping half a letter grade each day your work is late unless you have a valid medical excuse or receive an extension from me beforehand. I will do my best to read all the assignments soon after they are turned in and try to return them to you within two weeks.

## 5. ACADEMIC HONESTY: COLLABORATION, PLAGIARISM, etc.

**Collaboration:** You are encouraged to work with others in the class on your assignments, sharing resources and ideas and helping each other with direction, focus, clarity, and personal support. Collaborative networking is an important skill for most professions and I welcome it in this class. At the same time, SFU's commitment to academic honesty will be followed. This means that unless otherwise stated, all written assignments should be your own.

**Academic honesty:** Academic honesty is a foundational pillar of all scholarship. In order to be useful, academic work requires honesty and openness about its own making, providing maximal credit for sources so that it can be properly verified, evaluated, and added to. When it hides its sources, it is deceptive; this makes it unreliable and a kind of "pollution" for scholarship. Academic dishonesty and plagiarism – i.e., passing off other people's ideas or work as your own – has not only ruined the individual careers of those who cheat or plagiarize; it can also ruin entire collaborative research efforts, which are the core of scientific and scholarly progress.

**Plagiarism:** Unless otherwise stated, all written and creative assignments submitted for a grade in this class should be your own. If you work with other students to

prepare for an exam, your written answers should be individually constructed, not copied from each other or shared notes. Work that appears to be plagiarized will be given no credit and students will be asked to meet with me to explain the situation. Plagiarism can also be of one's own work if that work is presented as original for more than one course at a time; therefore any work that duplicates or overlaps with work that you are producing for another course should be clearly defined in terms of its originality and contribution for this course. Plagiarism is grounds for academic suspension; please don't do it. Further information on plagiarism can be found at SFU's "Avoiding plagiarism" page: <https://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/academic-integrity/plagiarism>.

**Citations:** Any scholarly writing in this course (i.e., apart from in-class reflective writing, short reading responses, et al.) requires proper citation of sources for any ideas or content that are not your own or that don't fall into the category of "common knowledge." This includes books, journals, online articles, e-mails, live presentations, relevant conversations with other people, or any digitally generated (AI) sources.

**Artificial intelligence:** The use of so-called artificial intelligence – which can range from Google's "AI Overview" search results to content generators like ChatGPT, Gemini, and others – may be allowed for specific purposes in this course, but it falls under the rules of academic honesty (see above). AI content can be both immensely helpful and notoriously unreliable. AI can create perfectly coherent sentences, paragraphs, and essays, and help you structure your own thinking and writing. But its factual capacities are dependent on the training data found in online sources that are far from reliable.

If you use AI for any assignments in this class, you will be required to provide details about how your data was generated: what web site, app, or content generator you used; what search terms or queries you provided; what you cross-checked this data against; and so on. AI generated materials should be considered in the same way as other authors' materials, with reliability being assessed through scholarly methods, by asking: Do they cite their sources and can those sources, in turn, be reliably traced to expert-reviewed scholarship? If so, are the forms of expertise from which this knowledge is derived appropriate to the question at hand? If not, why should any claims from these sources be considered credible or useful?

Aside from the usefulness of AI-generated content, however, your writing skills will only develop if you draft, edit, and improve your own writing. The skill of communicating clearly and coherently across multiple contexts is a skill that cannot be outsourced to other people or content providers. In the end, your ability to excel as a writer, communicator, and scholar will depend on you developing these skills for yourself.

For more on academic writing, citation, etc., see the writing section in Appendix 2 below.

## 6. CLASS USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Unless they are being used for a class activity, **cell phones should be turned off and put away during class.**

Laptops will be allowed for some class activities, including note-taking, but should not be used for outside activities. I will post lecture slides online, so you need not write down what you see on them. Either way, I recommend paper note taking. If you use a laptop for note-taking, please sit toward the back of the class (back two rows, unless those are occupied by other laptop note-takers) or the side of a row, so that the central and front parts of the classroom can be screen-free and pose fewer distractions to other students.

## 7. RESPECTFUL CLASS CONDUCT

In its mission statement, SFU professes to be "an open, inclusive university whose foundation is intellectual and academic freedom," and whose scholarship "celebrate[s] discovery, diversity and dialogue." The statement continues by calling SFU "a university where risks can be taken and bold initiatives embraced," and by committing us to "engage all our communities in building a robust and ethical society." Two potentially competing prerogatives stand out in the statement: "**inclusiveness**" and "**diversity**" suggest an absolute respect for difference, while "**intellectual and academic freedom**" might suggest the freedom to think and say whatever one would like. The key to resolving any potential contradiction between these is another term mentioned: "dialogue." It is through dialogue among competing positions that an "ethical society" can be built.

These principles will guide us in the classroom. The issues we will examine in this course may elicit deeply held personal feelings and competing perspectives, and it is important that students feel welcome and safe to express their views on the subjects of our study. Respectful treatment of others and their views is key to this. I will do my best to uphold it in my own behavior, and will expect a similar effort from each student. My goal is for the classroom to be a space where differences of perspective and of identity, including those of ethnic, racial, cultural, economic, religious, gender, and other identifiers, are respected and appreciated. I recognize that this is not always easy. I myself hold strong moral and ethical convictions and commitments that inform my teaching and scholarship, and I try to acknowledge these commitments even as I work to respect others' freedom to arrive at their own. I believe in and uphold the value of the university as a space to support critical and creative thinking, not to impose any particular forms of it.

At the same time, intellectual and academic freedom sometimes elicits statements that may appear contradictory to the respect for differences. The classroom, however, is not a forum for the airing of any views whatsoever. It is a forum for learning about specific topics, and this is best done within a respectful and open-minded setting in which divergent views can be discussed, critically considered, clarified, and evaluated. In seeking a balance between freedom of expression and respect for difference, I have found the following guidelines to be most helpful, and I suggest that we adopt them in our class:

- (1) Seek to **understand** other points of view, even if you disagree with them;
- (2) Where disagreement or criticism seem warranted, seek to **engage constructively** and to criticize ideas or behaviors (at most) but not the people who hold them;
- (3) When in doubt, practice **kindness and civility**.

Disrespect of individuals or groups, such as would create an atmosphere of hostility or fear, should not be tolerated in the classroom. If disrespect arises, students should feel free to “flag” it without fear of retribution. In the end, however, it is in engaging with differences in perspective and expression that we develop our capacity for building the “robust and ethical society” SFU aims to build. Through practicing kindness with each other, we learn how to engage in civil conversation with our peers and to model such conversation in our country and in the world.

## 8. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY: PROHIBITION ON SHARING ACADEMIC MATERIALS

According to SFU policies, students are **prohibited** from publicly sharing or selling academic materials that they did not author. This includes the course syllabus, outlines or class presentations authored by the professor, practice questions, text from the textbook or other copyrighted class materials, and assessments (of homework, exams, etc.).

## 9. CONTACTING THE INSTRUCTOR

I will hold regularly scheduled **office hours**, which are drop in or by appointment (if I am meeting with another student, you may have to wait). The best way to get in touch with me is by **e-mail** ([aivakhiv@sfu.ca](mailto:aivakhiv@sfu.ca)), with a clear Subject line. If you don’t hear back by the end of the next day, it may mean that your message has sunk to the bottom of a deep e-mail barrel, so please send a follow-up email with a clear indication (“following up,” “2nd attempt,” etc.) in the Subject line. I get hundreds of emails a day pertaining to multiple classes, research projects, committees, journals, listservs, et al., and on some days I cannot sort through them adequately. If something is urgent, please include “URGENT” in the subject line. Please include all relevant information in your e-mail.

## APPENDIX 2 - HUMANITIES & WRITING

### What are the humanities, and why study them?

“The humanities” are commonly taken to be one of two great branches of knowledge, the other being “the sciences.” But sometimes they are defined as “the *human* sciences.” The division and confusion may come from the German words *Naturwissenschaften*, literally “the natural sciences” or “studies of nature,” and *Geisteswissenschaften*, “the human sciences” or “studies of the human spirit.” As this suggests, not all languages distinguish between “science” and “study.”

So are the humanities *sciences*? It depends on how we define science (and there may be as many ways of doing that as there are sciences) – and on whether they include the *social* sciences (like economics, political science, psychology, and

sociology). The latter are sometimes considered to be hybrids of the humanities and the natural sciences. The two main scholarly granting agencies in Canada are the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), and the Natural Science and Engineering Research Council (NSERC). So in Canada at least, we are used to thinking of the humanities as *separate* from but *related* to the social sciences. In some other countries, they are all considered “human sciences.”

The humanities disciplines involve **the study and understanding of things human**: “the human experience,” “the products of human culture,” “expressions of the human mind,” or something like that. These “expressions” include languages, literature, poetry, music, the visual and performing arts, religion, architecture, law, and much more. And the disciplines that study them include history, philosophy, philology (or linguistics), literary studies, media and cultural studies, religious studies, and various combinations and branches of these such as classical studies, art history, or political philosophy. (Whether psychology, the study of the human mind, should be included, or if it is instead a behavioural and therefore “natural” science, is a debate best left to psychologists. Something similar can be said of cultural anthropology, human geography, archaeology, and a range of other fields that make use of humanistic *and* scientific methods.)

What do the humanities offer? As one assessment describes it, “The humanities provide an education that enables an ability to understand and interpret, to judge and appreciate, to argue and agree and to speak and write well. Through engaging with them, students learn to inhabit multiple worlds and viewpoints, to analyse with precision, to communicate with grace and eloquence. The humanities encourage ways of thinking that are not defined by hard and fast rules; they encourage development of innovative solutions; they encourage intuition and creativity and they place a deep value on both imagination and empathy. What the humanities offer is a way of thinking about the world. The humanities and art are about human conditions and experiences beyond numbers and policies” (Davis, “Humanities: The unexpected success story of the twenty-first century,” *London Review of Education*, 10.2 (2012), 310).

Is there something that unifies and underpins *all* of the humanities disciplines? As the above suggests, two recurrent features are (1) a focus on **understanding** and **interpretation** – that is, a concern with how to interpret human cultural expressions, the intentions behind them, and the meanings people ascribe to them, and (2) **critical** and **multiperspectival** thinking, which recognizes that humans do not always agree on everything, but that many perspectives on the world have arisen over time, and that these are best understood by considering the specifics of time, place, belief, and circumstance. In other words, humanities scholars study things **contextually** – within their cultural and historical contexts – and **critically**, using the tools of “critical thinking.” To do so does not mean that one is “critical” or “dismissive” toward that which one is studying. Quite the opposite: it means that one is aware of its contexts, its historical conditions, and the features that

make it comparable to but also different from other phenomena. If this provides a certain *distance* from the object of study (say, a work of art or a style of architecture), it also requires an *intimacy* with that object.

The study of interpretation is sometimes called **hermeneutics** – a reference to the Greek god Hermes, who was said to deliver messages whose meanings were never obvious; they had to be made sense of and interpreted. Interpreting them may require both becoming “close to” the object *and* getting some “distance” from it, and perhaps a roundabout movement between the two. Interpretation is therefore both an art and a science; it takes skill that can be developed through practice. And practice in the humanities builds insight into the human condition.

So, to get back to our question, **why study the humanities?**, here are three reasons:

- Studying the humanities makes us better communicators and better interpreters of human behaviour and communication in a diverse world. This diversity is a reason why the humanities department at SFU is called the Department of *Global* Humanities. Studying the humanities helps us understand what *other* people value, what motivates them, and how we might cooperate with them more productively.
- Studying the humanities helps us reflect on the questions, concerns, and values that humans have always reflected on and been motivated by. An education in the humanities, broadly speaking, helps us understand what people are capable of – both the “best” and the “worst” of human behaviour, culture, and experience – so it equips us better to decide for ourselves how we should live.
- Finally, studying the humanities is especially important *today* when we have developed machines – so-called artificial intelligence – that replicate some of the things we have traditionally considered most characteristic of humanity: our capacities to think, read, write, and amass and interpret information. AI is a product of human intelligence and, as such, tells us what it is that its creators consider to be “intelligence”—which may not cover everything all of us would include in that category. But it is limited by what machines are capable of. Machines are not social, emotional, embodied participants in a world of beings and relationships that define us, constrain us, and shape us over lifetimes. So what is it that is *unique* to humans that machines cannot replicate? How do we cultivate *those* qualities and enable them to guide our lives, including our relations with each other and the rest of the world? Studying the humanities can help us answer these questions at a time when the questions are all the more important.

## Guidelines for scholarly writing

One of the goals of a university education is to equip students to successfully navigate the informational and communicational terrain of contemporary society. Successful communication today, while media-driven, remains grounded in verbal and writing skills. Reading and writing have for

centuries constituted the core of education in the humanities, and so it remains central to success in Humanities courses. In today’s world, multiple kinds of writing skill are valued and may be essential for a range of professions. These can include reflective writing, analytical writing, the crafting of persuasive arguments, descriptive reportage, literary narrative, technical report writing, observational journaling, and other forms. They can also range from the generic – as with writing in a “neutral” or “objective” voice following the expectations of a specific medium or profession (e.g., in journalism, law, or medical reports) – to the reflective and deeply personal. The latter may require developing your unique “writer’s voice,” one that articulates your personal identity, life experience, values and commitments, and so on.

This course will offer opportunities to write in different styles, from the reflective and creative to the scholarly, analytical, and argument-based. Specific assignments may carry different expectations; please note what is expected of any assignment. The requirements for scholarly writing, more specifically, can be boiled down to two: clarity of expression, and detailed documentation of any sources consulted. (For guidance on reflective writing, see this handout:

[https://www.lib.sfu.ca/system/files/28863/strategies\\_for\\_reflective\\_writing.pdf](https://www.lib.sfu.ca/system/files/28863/strategies_for_reflective_writing.pdf).)

## 1) Clarity of expression

There are several questions you should ask yourself when writing a scholarly essay or paper:

- What is your **argument** or **thesis statement**? Every work of scholarship contributes something – an argument, a developed hypothesis or theory, a summary of research observations or of reviewed literature, etc. – to a field or set of fields within which its contribution is relevant. While writing an essay for an undergraduate course is not the same as writing for an academic journal, it requires the same considerations of contribution and relevance. You should be able to boil your contribution into a **thesis statement of one or two sentences**. This is normally presented at the very beginning (e.g., the first paragraph) of an essay or paper.
- How are you **supporting** your argument? What is the data on which you are basing your argument or thesis? How did you arrive at your conclusion? How does this compare with other data, rival arguments or theories, or other perspectives on your topic? Your argument is stronger and more convincing if it accurately and fairly presents any potential counter-arguments or weaknesses. An argument is typically “developed,” with the structure of your essay or paper reflecting a certain trajectory of its development (e.g., step 1, step 2, etc., with the steps being organized according to some set of parameters, such as chronology, movement from general questions to specific details, etc.).
- Why or to whom is this **relevant**? Typically, a scholarly argument or thesis contributes to a debate or conversation that is already ongoing. Even if you do not discuss it directly, it is important to frame your argument

within that debate or conversation (or the field in which it is taking place) so that your own contribution to it is clear. This is where reference to other literature, or documentation, is especially important.

## 2) Documentation

Your scholarship will never be entirely original; it always builds on knowledge established through the prior scholarship of many others. **Scholarly writing requires full documentation of the sources of any ideas or content that is not originally yours** (or that is not “common knowledge”). This is because academic work can only be useful if it is clear, honest, and open about its own making, providing maximal credit for sources so that they can be properly verified, evaluated, and added to. When it hides its sources, it is deceptive; this makes it unreliable and a kind of “pollution” for the scholarly endeavor. Passing off other people’s ideas or work as your own is called “academic dishonesty” and more specifically “plagiarism.” Academic dishonesty and plagiarism have ruined the careers of those who cheat or plagiarize; it can also ruin entire collaborative research efforts, which are the core of scientific and scholarly progress.

To avoid academic dishonesty, scholarly writing should include **proper citation** of sources for all ideas or content that are not yours or that aren’t common knowledge. This includes books, journals, online articles, e-mails, classroom materials, live presentations, relevant conversations with other people, or any digitally generated (AI) sources. See SFU’s citation and style guide for how to do this: <https://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/cite-write/citation-style-guides>.

## On artificial intelligence

The use of so-called artificial intelligence – which can range from Google’s “AI Overview” search results to content generators like ChatGPT, Gemini, DeepSeek, Rytr, Simplified, and others – may be allowed for specific purposes in this course, but it also falls under the same rules of academic honesty as outlined above (see Appendix I). AI content today can be both immensely helpful and notoriously unreliable. AI can create perfectly coherent sentences, paragraphs, and essays, which can help you structure your own thinking and writing. Its factual capacities, however, are dependent on the training data found in online sources that are far from reliable.

If you use AI for any assignments in this class, you will be required to **provide details about how your data was generated**: what web site, app, or content generator you used; what **search terms or queries** you provided; how you **cross-checked** this data (against what web sites or other sources); and so on.

AI generated materials should be considered in the same way as other authors’ materials, with reliability being assessed through scholarly methods, by asking:

- Do they cite their sources and can those sources, in turn, be reliably traced to expert-reviewed scholarship? (Have you checked them?)

- If so, are the forms of expertise from which this knowledge is derived appropriate to the question at hand? If not, why should any claims from these sources be considered credible or useful?

Aside from the usefulness of AI-generated content, however, your writing and thinking skills will only develop if you do your own research and draft, edit, and improve your own writing. The skill of communicating clearly and coherently across multiple contexts is a skill that cannot be outsourced to other people or to content providers. In the end, your ability to excel as a writer, communicator, and scholar will depend on you developing these skills for yourself.

## The essay writing process

Writing an essay is not a matter of simply sitting down and writing. It can include multiple stages (some of which overlap):

- **Brainstorming**, i.e., freely generating or collecting ideas without judging them, jotting down whatever comes to you;
- **Discovery/investigation**: looking into your topics, researching them by searching in multiple kinds of sources (see my “Guide to reliable sources” for this course);
- **Prewriting/Free writing**, i.e., developing an idea by writing freely, allowing your thoughts to take you where they will (with your “pen” following);
- **Creating a structure** for your paper;
- **Drafting**, following your structure and filling in details as you go;
- **Collecting citations** – which should occur throughout the process as you find relevant sources;
- **Reviewing, revising, editing**... and then some more: reviewing, revising, editing...
- **Formatting**, completing citations/bibliographies, etc.

At some point it is always useful to have someone else read your work, since you can be so “close to it” that you will not notice basic errors, leaps of logic, et al. We will aim to provide opportunities for peer review on any extended writing assignments in this class.

There are a number of places where you can find helpful guides to the essay writing process. SFU’s Student Learning Commons provides excellent places to start:

- <https://www.lib.sfu.ca/about/branches-depts/slc>
- <https://www.lib.sfu.ca/about/branches-depts/slc/writing>
- <https://www.lib.sfu.ca/about/branches-depts/slc/writing/academic-writing>

For help with academic writing (and learning and studying), you are encouraged to refer to the Student Learning Commons: <https://www.lib.sfu.ca/about/branches-depts/slc>. On the essay writing process, see <https://www.lib.sfu.ca/about/branches-depts/slc/writing> and <https://www.lib.sfu.ca/about/branches-depts/slc/writing/academic-writing>.