

Dear Seniors,

Writing

In this class, you will make decisions as an author of your own work. I'll ask you to submit a piece of writing every two weeks for most of each semester—a draft of a brand-new piece of writing or a thoroughly revised version of one of those drafts (you'll end up revising some, not all, of your drafts). These won't be five-paragraph essays but authentic writing experiences you might encounter in the real world or writing experiences that allow you to be creative and take risks. We'll spend time each week discussing together to help you find things to write about that matter to you.

Reading

I'm going to help you find the joy in reading again. You'll choose your books, independently and in book clubs. When you finish a book, you'll start another one. If you start a book and hate it, please choose something else. We will have many conferences together about your reading life. We will read every. single. day. We will start class with at least 10 minutes of silent reading. There is no need to wait for me to tell you to start reading. Just settle in, open your book, and start. For this reason, it's best just to get on board and work with me to find something you actually enjoy reading.

Community

You cannot accomplish all of this alone. We will build an intentional community to support each other in this work. Writers need to talk about their work with readers who care about it, and readers need to talk about their reading process with others to make better sense of it. The cornerstone of our community will be your response groups. These will be mini reading/writing communities. You'll sit together in class. You'll talk with each other about your reading. You'll help each other find writing topics. You'll read each other's work and respond to it. We will work toward these groups carefully. This is *our* class. I alone cannot guarantee the success of every person in the room, but *we* can.

The Messy Process of Reading and Writing

The most important part of becoming a good writer is *not* the sparkling, perfect end product in MLA format, clear of mechanical errors and typos. Great writers are completely, totally, undeniably engaged and immersed in the messy, complex, frustrating process of writing.

You *will* be prepared for what life throws at you after high school if you are able to engage in this messy process. The process of writing essentially mirrors the process of navigating life as you write your own future and navigate through all the complexities that come with being a human being. And because the process of writing is inextricably linked with reading—think of the reading you do in this class as practice in reading, reflecting upon, and interrogating your world. Successful human beings thoughtfully read the world to write their lives. Through the focus on the processes of writing and reading, you will be getting ready for that. There is no more important work for you in school. I invite you to truly engage in this messy process.

Writer's notebook

Over the course of the year, you will use and maintain your own writer's notebook. Notebooks will act as playgrounds, work benches, and collection bins. This is the place where you can experiment, play, and practice without the worry of being graded. You will hone your author's craft through weekly work in your notebook. This notebook is for *you*, so write in it freely.

Hard work

Perhaps the most important tool for the success of our approach to writing and reading in this class is your hard work. Doing this work meaningfully and with purpose is not easy, and I will expect you to work hard at it, every day. That means that every moment of class given over to writing means you are struggling with the written word, not chillaxing with your peers and waiting until you get home to do the work. The time I expect you to do the work will always be now. Another really important reason for this is that the best instruction I can offer to you will need to be individualized toward your particular needs as a reader and writer. If you are not doing this work during class, I can't help you. I will work tirelessly to read your work and respond to it; I expect you to work tirelessly along with me. The work of reading and writing is never done. We will keep working, every day.

Our Essential Question

How will you impact our world and your community? This is the question that drives our work this year. You are nearly done with high school. You need to be ready for your world beyond these walls. You'll need to "develop [your] capacity to see the world from the viewpoint of others, to understand human weaknesses and injustices, and to work towards developing cooperation and working with others. [You'll need to] develop . . . a genuine concern for self and others, to [learn] the importance of evidence to counter stereotypes and closed thinking, to promote accountability of the person as responsible agent, and to vigorously promote critical thinking and the importance of dissenting voices" (Hattie 2012, 4). This work is more important than you know. We will work toward this together.

Grades

Your focus this year will be on learning, not just gaining points in the grade book. Becoming a better reader and writer is an ongoing process that is never truly mastered. It must always be worked on. My role is to guide you on your journey through feedback and support. Your role is to take that feedback and support to improve your reading and writing lives.

That being said, I must provide a letter grade for every student. This is how I will do it:

50% of your grade will be composed of the work you complete in class. Work will be graded on a 4 point scale. Due to the fact that writing is never truly finished and is an ongoing process, work can be revised and resubmitted. It is strongly recommended that any work assessed lower than a 3 should be revised based on teacher feedback. This will lead to more learning. If you wish to receive an A for the course, work should be revised until it is assessed as a 4.

0 - Insufficient	2.4 out of 4 Beginner / Novice	3 out of 4 Developing/ Emerging	3.3 out of 4 Proficient	4 out of 4 Advanced
Too little or no work submitted to show evidence of the assessed standard.	Significant gaps in understanding the assessed standard. Guidance and practice necessary in order to progress.	Able to communicate an emergent understanding of the assessed standard, with some gaps in understanding.	Proficient work by communicating a meaningful understanding of the assessed standard.	Complete and masterful work by effectively communicating and flexibly applying understanding of the assessed standard.

50% of your grade will be composed of learning goals that you have committed to and selected with my guidance. You will continuously reflect on your work alongside a set of learning goals for reading and writing and collect evidence of your learning toward those goals. At the end of each semester, you will compose a letter to me about your journey as learners to determine your final grade. This process will be made transparent through modeling and continuous reflection.

*Do note that to receive credit for this class, you must complete all of the major assignments, and you must make progress on your learning goals.

My Vision

Here is my vision for each of you in this class:

This class provides the opportunity for you to develop excitement about your writing. What you write can mean something to each of you personally. You want others to read your work. Our writing time is never enough—you use every second of it and clamor for more. You read and respond to each other's work with energy, thought, and care. You revise pieces until they are polished—but you know a piece of writing is never done. Your work builds over the course of the year. You use digital tools with confidence and these tools truly enhance your work. You take risks with your writing. You care less about the grade than getting a piece of writing just right, communicating your ideas to the reader just as you want to. You read several books this year, books that challenge your ideas about the world, books that have affected you in meaningful ways, books that you discuss with your classmates eagerly. You gain confidence as a reader; you see yourself as more of a reader than you did before. Your reading drives your writing and your writing drives your reading—the two are inseparable. You are proud of your work. You write about your lives and our course content simultaneously so that you end up understanding both our course content and your lives more significantly.

Thank you for reading my letter. I am beyond excited to work with each and every one of you! Just remember that I am *always* here to help you (you only need to ask), to listen to you, to read, write, and laugh with you.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Neal

Your Task

Write me a brief letter in response to my letter. I'm your audience so feel free to use a conversational tone. Format your response as a letter, not an assignment. Answer the following questions but feel free to add additional information.

You As A Learner

- How do you think this approach to a language arts class will work for you?
- How is it similar to or different from what you have done before?
- What do I need to know about *you* as a student/learner/person in order to be your teacher?

Literacy Experiences

- What does your current reading/writing life look like?
- What are the ways in which you read/write on your own? How does this compare with reading/writing in school?
- How would you describe your relationship with reading/writing? Are you currently "in a relationship"? "Seeking a relationship"? "On again, off again"? OR "Not interested"? Share your reasoning.
- What keeps your relationship with reading alive? What are you looking for in a reading relationship? What pushes you away from reading?

Challenges and Sparks - Reading

- What are the challenges, both small and significant, that have affected your abilities and confidence as a reader?
- What topics, genres, and authors excite you?
- Recall and reflect on your reading sparks: What pulls you into reading?
- How might what you read impact how/what you write?

Challenges and Sparks - Writing

- What are the challenges, both small and significant, that have affected your abilities and confidence as a writer?
- What topics, genres, and authors excite you?
- Recall and reflect on your writing sparks: What pulls you into writing?
- How might what you write impact how/what you read?