

## **English 9009 Essential Skills & Methods**

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### **Course Description and Aims**

What is literary studies today and where do your interests fit? In academic research we develop some spark or insight in the process of reading and then read more deeply to enter into scholarly conversations in a field. This exchange between you and the work of scholars is a relationship that guides you toward an original contribution in a thesis, be it a course essay, independent project, or PhD dissertation. It also has many non-academic uses (grant proposals for arts/non-profits; government and NGO projects; private sector research & development, etc). This course takes you through the process and practice of research including: conducting searches using scholarly methods and tools; assembling, refining, and reflecting on research questions; literature reviews, and finally, a detailed, informed proposal for a research project.

The course has two components: 1.) readings that consider some of the many recent conversations in literary studies about what we do and how. I hope these readings situate your interests in the field and prompt reflection on your own values behind your inquiry. 2) sessions with the humanities librarian, along with readings that provide tips for the skill-set we are developing. Class time is divided along these two tracks. Outcomes will include:

- Ability to identify, locate, cite, and evaluate scholarly/ critical resources
- Practice in succinctly and accurately summarizing and then synthesizing a corpus of criticism
- Develop ways to enter existing critical conversations through a research-based, scholarly argument
- Draft a proposal for work that will help advance that conversation

### **Expectations and Assignments**

Attendance is expected at every class except in the case of illness or other extenuating circumstances.

Library sessions will be held in our classroom with A&H graduate students in Hispanic Studies and Comparative Literature

Laptops permitted in class for activities that require them. For seminar discussions of readings, we will use printed handouts.

Evaluation: shorter assignments lead to a final research proposal. See below for details.

Search Strategies Exercise Handout 5%

Quick takes: 5 minutes max. oral only, no write-up 5 %

Class participation 15%

Journals Assignment and Research Questions Reflection 10%

Literature Review 15% and Revised and Expanded Literature Review 20%

Research Proposal 15% and Revised Research Proposal 15%

Deadlines for assignments are firm. If there are extenuating circumstances, contact me about flexibility.

Please convert all submissions of assignments to Word instead of PDF. It's much easier for me to comment in Word.

### **Course Materials**

All the course materials will be provided on our OWL Brightspace site and I will make photocopies of the readings for you.

### **Schedule (subject to change)**

#### **Sept 9**

Introduction to course. Reading to do before class (I will bring copies):

Thomas Mullaney and Christopher Rea, *Where Research Begins: Choosing a Research Project That Matters to You* (U Chicago, 2022), Chapter 2 “What’s Your Problem?”

*Optional reading:* Margaret Walshaw, *Planning Your Postgraduate Research* (Palgrave, 2015), Chapter 2 “Making Early Decisions”

10:45-11:45 am SSHRC proposal workshop (required for PhDs; optional for MAs)

**Submit on OWL by Sept 13 at 11 pm:** Write a brief account of your academic research experience; write up goals for yourself this course; add a rubric of at least three criteria on which you would like to be evaluated in this course that reflect those goals (3 double-spaced pages, ungraded)

#### **Sept 16**

#### **9:30-10:45 am Library Skills Workshop I with Jason Dyck, PhD**

\*Note: all library sessions will be in conjunction with a similar graduate class in Hispanic Studies/Comp Lit

#### **11 - 12:20 pm**

3 Quick Takes & Discussion: What is literary criticism as a kind of reading?

1. Eve Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading” in *Touching Feeling* (Duke UP, 2002)

2 Quick Takes

2. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, “What Was Close Reading? A Century of Method in Literary Studies” *Minnesota Review* 87 (2016)

3. Derek Walcott “Love After Love” and Louise Glück “The Red Poppy”

1 Quick Takes on Smith and Walcott or Glück

#### **Submit on OWL by Sept 21 by 5 pm**

1. Search Strategies Handout attached to the assignment in OWL: fill in.

2. Find approx. 15-20 books, chapters, articles, and reference works on your topic of interest using scholarly databases and the library catalog. Maximum of 3 primary sources; minimum 12 secondary sources. Compile in **MLA Works Cited format** as a *preliminary* bibliography.

3. Academic Peer-Reviewed Journals in literary studies, cultural studies and theory (general) 2017-2025: Read the Tables of Contents and abstracts; then, identify any trends in topics, approaches, and themes over the past 7-8 years; list in point form or describe these trends.

*Search the journals through Weldon*

Required: *PMLA* (Publications of the Modern Language Association)

Choose any 2 more from this list:

*Critical Inquiry*

*Cultural Critique*

*Representations*

*English Studies in Canada*

*New Literary History*

*boundary 2*

*Review of English Studies*

*Genre*

*Signs: a journal of women, culture and society*

*differences*

*Novel*

*Modern Language Quarterly*

Put all exercises into a single, double-spaced document to upload.

**Sept 23**

**9:30-10:45 am Library Skills Workshop 2**

**11-12:20 pm** Share results of journal trends and discuss research questions

2 Quick Takes and Discussion: Theory and Close Reading

1. Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory A Very short Introduction* chapters 1,3,7,8

2. Lauren Berlant, "Cruel Optimism" *differences*

**Sept 30 National Day of Truth and Reconciliation: Designated Non-instructional Day**

**Submit on OWL by Oct 5 by 5 pm:** Literature Review: course readings

Using at least two of our class readings on literary study, criticism, and theory write a reflective and comparative review. The goal is to thoroughly summarize the arguments, method or approach, and indicate the contributions of the two critics; to put them in relation to each other; to reflect on and analyze some common thread that strikes you as important. Be sure to quote from the essay to support your summary.

A good literature review does not simply follow each author point by point, but synthesizes the development of their argument as a whole, which shows reflection. Think about: how they make the argument (why this argument this way and not another point or another way?); the context for this argument (where is it coming from?); the stakes of the main point (what is the author's 'so-what')?

Univ of Toronto tips on Literature Reviews:

<https://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/types-of-writing/literature-review/>

Western-Weldon Literature Reviews <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/tutorials/typesofliteraturereviews/index.html>

Use MLA style for page set up and for Works Cited.

For info on how to format in MLA style see:

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/mla\\_style/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/index.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/index.html)

**Oct 7**

**9:30-10:45 am Library Skills Workshop 3**

**11-12:20 pm** 2 Quick Takes and Discussion:

Thomas Mullaney and Christopher Rea, *Where Research Begins: Choosing a Research Project That Matters to You* (U Chicago, 2022), Chapter 3 “Designing a Problem That Works”

Meaghan O’Rourke, “The Seductions of AI for the Writer’s Mind” *New York Times* opinion July 18, 2025

American Historical Association: AI in History Education

Share your research questions.

Interview each other in pairs: what questions or ideas are raised for you by the other person’s research questions? What would you be interested to know?

**Submit on OWL by Oct 11 by 5 pm:** Academic trends in your subfield and topic; Reflection

Find 6 academic journal titles in the subfield(s) of your topic. Use the Weldon catalog to access the journal issues by year. Survey the table of contents for every issue from 2015 to 2024. Describe trends you see in the topics or methods. Add evidence such as article titles and quotations from abstracts or introductions. Be specific about what you call a trend, but this can be informally written. 1-2 pages double-spaced. List all the journal titles in an appendix.

Submit revised research questions and reflection: 1-2 pages. Explain where these questions came from—what did you discover in searches that led you these questions? what conversations are you finding?

Put both exercises into a single, double-spaced document to upload.

**Oct 14**

**9:30-10:45 am Library Workshop 4**

**Meet in Weldon Library**

**11:00-12:20** Discussion:

Steven Johnson, *Where Good Ideas Come From* (Riverhead, 2010), “Reef, City, Web” and “Liquid Networks”

**Submit on OWL by Oct 17 by 5 pm:** Literature Review on your research question/problem

Refine and add to your bibliography using results and using sources you found in the notes and bibliographies of the results on your list. Read **at least 4** of what look to be the most relevant articles or book chapters for your interest (read 4 if all are 25 pgs or more; read 5 or 6 if one or two are a bit shorter say, 10-18 pgs). Write a literature review that connects them with transitions from one to the next and identifies common threads.

Add bibliography in MLA format.

Append a 1-page double-spaced statement of how the readings inform a more refined research questions or direction for research. Where you think this research could lead? Where might your work intervene-- in what conversation and contexts?

Put both exercises into a single, double-spaced document to upload.

## **Oct 21**

**9:30-10:45** Discussion:

Research Project Proposal tips McGill:

<https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/students/progress-tracking/proposals>

SSHRC proposals (collected from Graduate Development Coordinator)

## **11:00-12:15 Library Skills Workshop**

**Meet in Weldon at the ARCC**

[General overview; Austen at 250 exhibit; works topics]

## **Oct 28**

2 Quick Takes and Discussion:

1. Eric Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style* (Columbia UP, 2014) Chapter 8 “The Uneven U”
2. Verlyn Klinkenborg, *Several Short Sentences About Writing* (Knopf, 2012) excerpt

## **Nov 4** Reading Week

**Submit on OWL by Nov 9 by 5 pm:** Literature review.

Read at least 5 works on your bibliography. Take notes and compare all the sources you have read so far. Append updated bibliography. 8-10 double spaced pages not including bibliography.

## **Nov 11**

Discussion:

Wendy Belcher, *Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks* (Sage 2009) “Common Reasons Why Journals Reject Articles”

**Submit on OWL by Nov 16 by 5 pm:**

Research Proposal: Turn your research questions and literature review into a proposal for a project. 3-6 pages double-spaced. Include Works Cited.

**Nov 18****Visitor: Prof. Allan Pero, Editor, English Studies in Canada**

<https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/esc/index>

Group discussion

**Nov 25**

Colloquium: share work-in-progress proposal 3 minutes each + designated questioners

Individual meetings on proposals.

**Dec 2**

Colloquium: share work-in-progress proposal 3 minutes each + designated questioners

Individual meetings on proposals.

**Dec 9**

10:45-12:20 pm Videographic essay workshop

**Submit on OWL by Dec 12**

Revised research proposal

**Policies:****Statement on Academic Offences**

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)

AI (generative AI): any use that falls under offences of academic integrity is prohibited; other uses discuss and define policy in class.

Western University resources:

<https://ai.uwo.ca/Guidance/Policy.html>

[https://grad.uwo.ca/about\\_us/policies\\_procedures\\_regulations/ai.html](https://grad.uwo.ca/about_us/policies_procedures_regulations/ai.html)

**Statement on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence**

“Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

[https://www.uwo.ca/health/student\\_support/survivor\\_support/get-help.html](https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html) To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact [support@uwo.ca](mailto:support@uwo.ca) .”

**Graduate Course Health and Wellness**

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western’s Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. For example,

please check out the Faculty of Music web page <http://www.music.uwo.ca/>, and our own McIntosh Gallery <http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>. Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at <http://www.health.uwo.ca/>. Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found <https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html>.

**Western's health, wellness and student support offices and contacts can also be found here:**  
[Gradlife.uwo.ca](http://gradlife.uwo.ca)