

# A Supplement for Students

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## Abstract

A Supplement for Students – or – Lots of Details Organized Approximately According to the Frequency With Which Students Approach Me About Things I’ve Already Said, And Which, if Precedent Is Any Indication, You Will Probably Ignore, But Which You Should Read Anyways Because Somewhere, Hiding In All of This, The Answer to Your Allegedly Urgent Question is Overwhelmingly Likely to Be Found

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In the following sections, you will find the formatting guidelines for your assignments, as well as the description of standing assignments for the class (i.e. reflection essays, response essays, and theses for seminars). There is also an extended FAQ, and supplements intended to help you with your writing and speaking in class.

## 1 Format For Assignments

Unless otherwise specified, this format applies to all assignments. In order to be accepted, all assignments must be formatted correctly. Improperly formatted assignments will be counted as missing. Because I am exceedingly merciful, I will allow you to correct and re-submit *one* paper that you format incorrectly. You will identify the formatting item(s) that were incorrect, list them on the original paper, and then submit it properly. I will penalize the assignment as though it is late (since you will not have properly turned it in until it is fixed).

1. All assignments will be typed, using 12 point Times New Roman, Garamond, or similar fonts. I wrote all of my undergraduate essays in Courier New. I know the trick, and it isn't necessary, because I don't assign minimum page numbers. If you select a font that I particularly enjoy, I may give you special recognition in class. Papyrus and Comic Sans are *VERBOTEN!*
2. Your last name will appear on every page in the header on the upper right corner.<sup>1</sup>
3. If an assignment goes on for more than one page, you will number your pages in the header of every page after your last name.<sup>2</sup>
4. If an assignment goes on for more than one page, you will staple your pages in the upper left corner (the purpose being that I can still see your page numbers).
5. Every assignment you turn in will be labeled in the top left of the first page. This label will include the course number and section (e.g. PHIL 150-04), the name of the assignment (e.g. Text Response, Partner Review, Discussion Theses, etc.) and the date that it is due (yyyy.mm.dd). This is important because if I put numerous assignments in the same folder, it lets me know which assignment to give you credit for. It will also help you demonstrate what you completed in the event that there is a mistake and you need me to fix your grade.

The label should appear only on the first page, in the left corner of your paper so that it does not interfere with the other required items. It should be single spaced so it does not eat up unnecessary space. An analysis paper for RLST 101, section two that is due on January 3rd, 2019 will be given the following label:

RLST 101-02  
Analysis Paper  
2019.01.03

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<sup>1</sup>The header is in the top margin, **not** the body of the text. Information that belongs in the header should not be typed in the body of the text. You can find directions online for adding a header to your paper. There are lots of different softwares for word processing, and I don't know them all. You will need to thoroughly understand the software you use throughout your career. Now is a good time to learn it.

<sup>2</sup>This means that the upper-right corner of every page will have your last name followed by the page number. So the fifth page of a paper I write will have "Cather 5" in the upper right corner.

6. If you want to give your essay a nice title like, “On Plato’s Concept of Justice,” that’s fine. But the assignment label must appear at the top, on the left.
7. Term papers will be double spaced with one inch margins. All other assignments can be single spaced with one inch margins. If you want to keep them the same, that’s fine (again, there’s no need to stretch out your page length because I don’t assign a minimum number of pages).
8. You are not required to include my name on your paper (I still remember who I am), though you may wish to do so for organizing purposes – for example, including my name may help you identify which paper from your folder full of stuff you are supposed to turn in.<sup>3</sup>
9. Different texts use different conventions for citations. I will cover these in class, and you will be expected to follow the correct format for each text. When I cover this, *write it down*. I prefer in-text, parenthetical citations at the end of a sentence. If you make a mistake, you may not receive full credit for correct citations. This is *vastly* different from a failure to cite the text. Failure to cite a text constitutes plagiarism, which will result in a zero for the assignment.
10. A works cited section is not necessary **unless you use sources outside those listed on the syllabus**. Unless I specify a research requirement to the assignment, there is no need to do this, and I actively discourage the use of outside sources, unless I have specifically noted to you that they are credible. Nevertheless, you will be tempted to use outside sources. If you succumb to this temptation, you must have a works cited section. It doesn’t need to be on its own page, but it should be labeled “Works Cited.” If you have a works cited section, you will use Chicago (Turabian) style, the format for which can be found online. If you are confused about or struggling with how to do this, you should do the following:

First, reconsider your use of outside sources in the future. It’s too late for this paper! If you read a study guide or other source and it gave you an idea, you need to cite it this time. Just because you don’t use the exact words of a source does not mean that you haven’t used it. Any source that influenced the way you understood the text or wrote your paper needs to be cited. Period. If you don’t want to have to deal with the hassle of this, then stick to the trusted sources we have in class.

Second, If you ever look up something (even something seemingly small and insignificant), you should create a citation for it in your files. You don’t want to forget that you used it and then accidentally plagiarize. That’s still plagiarism, and it still means zero credit! Make sure you keep track of *all* of your sources.

Third, look online for things like “Chicago style works cited entry for [the kind of source you need: book, website, etc.]” Find something and copy that. Then...

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<sup>3</sup>Life tip: if you do this for any of your professors, it’s a good idea to find out what their preferred term of address is. I like “Cather” (I’m probably the only Cather you will ever meet. If you find another, let me know!) or “Prof. Cather” (since that means I have a job.) “Dr. Cather” is also acceptable, and technically correct (the best kind of correct!). It feels weird to me though. Sure, I have this title, but it seems awfully self-important or egoistic to insist on you calling me this. Also acceptable is “Mr. Cather.” My graduate program has a tradition of using “Mr.” or “Ms.” rather than “Dr.” to address everyone, and this has kinda rubbed off on me, but if the distinction is important to you, I will happily show you my dissertation or something. I would prefer *not* to have a familiar term of address (my name is “Jason,” but it always seems weird when students call their professors by their first name. If we ever hang out outside of class or something, I guess that’s okay then – but not on a paper, please). I would prefer not to be called by a nickname, with a possible exception of my pirate name (“Redbeard,” obviously). Actually, don’t make a habit of this, but if you do this once on your first paper, I will know that you actually read all of this, and that will probably make me happy.

Fourth, take what you have to the writing center and see if they can help you with it.

Fifth, *anything* is better than nothing. Really. A works cited page that says, “I don’t know how to do this thing, but here’s all the information I can think of to identify my source” will not get full credit for correct citation, but you will get credit for writing the paper. A paper that needs a works cited section and doesn’t have one is plagiarized, and will receive zero credit. If you forget to type it, it’s better to mix saliva and pencil shavings and scratch it on the page by hand with an unbent paper clip than to do nothing. If you don’t have a paper-clip. Let me know what happened, and that you will be turning it in late. I may dock points for a late assignment, but that’s better than going through the process of dealing with a plagiarism charge.

Roughly, for anything online, I want the *full web address*. That’s everything including the “http://” and all the squiggles and symbols in the address bar. I want to be able to paste it into my browser and find exactly what you were looking at. Everything needs the title of the piece and the author. Can’t find the author? See my advice above.

11. Other formatting requirements may be mentioned in class or electronic communication. You are responsible for any such additions. You should take note of any changes or additions. If you miss class before an assignment is due, check with your colleagues. I will not go over it individually.

## 2 Format for E-mailing Assignments

All assignments are due in hard copy (i.e. printed out). You will turn them in before you leave class. On occasion, it is necessary for me to accept e-mailed assignments – e.g., class gets canceled when a paper is due, or your printer spontaneously combusts in the middle of printing the paper (pics or it didn't happen!). If you miss a class when a major assignment is due, you may e-mail it to me to show that it is complete by the time it is due. This does not guarantee that I will accept the assignment (you must still meet with me to discuss your absence). In this case, you will also bring a hard copy to our next meeting. Otherwise, do not e-mail me your assignment unless I ask you to do so.

E-mails containing assignments will use the following format:

1. The document will be formatted as above.
2. The file will be in PDF format. If you are not familiar with how to do this, find instructions for your software online.
3. You will give the file a title as follows: [Your last name] - [the course and section number] [the assignment label].

So, for example, if I wrote my second set of theses for Phil 150, and I'm in section 03, my file's name would be: Cather - Phil 150-03 Theses 2

Note: the section number is *very* important. If you don't include it, the assignment is not formatted properly. Don't call the assignment anything else, or add anything else to the title of the file. Make sure the assignment label is *exactly what it says on the syllabus*. This is how I will find your paper amid my overflowing file folder. If it doesn't follow the format, it is very likely to disappear into the wrong folder and I won't be able to find it because I won't know what it's called. Act like your grade depends on this, because it does.

4. You will send the file as an attachment. Do not share it with me from a cloud drive. I use a forwarding service, which means that I won't be able to open shared files, and then you don't get credit because I don't have an assignment from you.
5. You will send the e-mail to my “.edu” e-mail. Do not send a file through the course website unless otherwise specified. Remember: if you don't follow directions, you haven't done the assignment!
6. The subject of the e-mail will be the course title and assignment title (i.e. what you call the file, but without your last name). Do not add to or use anything else for the subject of the e-mail. This is how I will find the e-mail you send to me. If you do not do this, it is very likely to go to my spam folder where it will be deleted forever. Even if it does not, I won't be able to find your e-mail because it won't be labeled correctly.
7. In the event that I require assignments to be e-mailed, I will send a note to the class which may include further instructions. These instructions must also be followed carefully. They will include a Roth-Van Halen Heuristic.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>A “Roth-Van Halen Heuristic” is a name I made up for a simple, seemingly trivial instruction that will allow me to see immediately whether you read every direction, or merely skimmed them. For example, I might ask you in class what a Roth-Van Halen Heuristic is, or why I decided to call it that. Here's the story that explains why I gave it this name: <https://www.snopes.com/music/artists/vanhallen.asp> (Also, I think it kinda sounds cool.)

8. Deadlines are firm. The cool thing about e-mails is that they have a time stamp on them, which means I will know exactly when you sent them. When I say that the assignment is due at 10:50 on Thursday, I mean that I reserve the right to not accept assignments turned in at 10:51 on Thursday, and to delete the e-mail forever without responding. This has happened. Don't let it happen to you. Remember: Sometimes technical difficulties can cause big problems for you. If you're concerned about this, don't wait until the last moment!
9. Sign the e-mail! Use the closing of your choice (Sincerely, ... Yours truly,... Best regards, etc.). Then provide your name (it doesn't have to be *signed*, which is hard to do in an e-mail. I just mean that you need to make sure your name is somewhere in the e-mail, so that I know who sent it. I don't know who WackyArdvark468@yahoo.com is, so if you send me something from that address, I won't have any idea who it's from).

### **3 Assignment Instructions**

The following pages include instructions for all of the assignments I give. This means that there are instructions for assignments that are not a part of your course as well as for those that are a part of your course. Find the instructions for your specific assignment here, and follow those instructions carefully.

## 4 Text Response Assignment

This will be the first part of each set of your responses.

- Absolutely no more than two pages!
- Label the assignment “Text Response: [assigned passage].” – so an assignment on the first part of Plato’s *Apology* would be labeled:  
Text Response: *Apology* (part one)
- There are three parts to this assignment:
  1. **Identify a thesis** discussed in the text. This is the main idea or claim made by the thinker (the author). You should be able to do this in one or two sentences. Make sure that you are clear about who is endorsing the thesis. Is the author actually endorsing the claim, or merely considering it for rhetorical effect?
  2. **Summarize the argument and evidence** offered for the thesis. Why does the person making the thesis-claim think you should adopt this view? This will probably take at least one or two paragraphs to develop.
  3. **Evaluate the argument and the thesis.** Do you agree with the thesis? This is not simply asking for your opinion about the claim being made, but a question of whether the evidence is convincing, or if something is missing.

## 5 Partner Review Assignment

This will be the second part of each set of your responses.

- Absolutely no more than two pages!
- Label the assignment “Partner Review for [Your partner’s name].” – so an assignment reviewing my paper would be labeled:  
    Partner Review for Jason Cather
- You are to compare your partner’s work to your own essay in the following ways:
  1. Compare your partner’s **position** to your own. Your partner should have given an evaluation of the text you read. That is, your partner presented a thesis from the text, and agreed or disagreed with it based on the evidence offered in the text. Do you agree with the judgment your partner made? **Did you identify different theses?**
  2. Does your partner consider the same **evidence** that you did? What new evidence does your partner consider that you did not? Did you consider evidence that your partner did not?
  3. What have you **learned from reading** your partner’s paper? If you did not agree with your partner’s evaluation of the thesis, have you **changed your mind** after reading your partner’s paper? Has your partner given you new **evidence** to consider, or helped you gain a new **understanding** of the text? (These are not just yes-or-no questions. I want you to explain your answer. Use these questions to get you started on what to write about.)

## 6 Reply to Partner Assignment

This will be the third part of each set of your responses.

- Absolutely no more than two pages!
- Label the assignment “Reply to [Your partner’s name].” – so an assignment replying to my review of your paper would be labeled:

Reply to Jason Cather

- You will reply to your partner’s review of your essay on the following four points:
  1. Did your partner **characterize** your position and argument well? If your partner’s summary of your position was not what you intended, explain this (and explain what you meant to say).
  2. How was your partner’s response *useful* to you in terms of:
    - (a.) Revealing how your writing was **interpreted by another** reader? You should endeavor to read as carefully as possible, and also to write as clearly as possible. Even when your partner has read your paper carefully, you may find that it has been misinterpreted. If this happens use this as an **opportunity to improve** you writing by being more clear and precise.
    - (b.) Suggesting **new evidence**, or a **new interpretation** of that evidence? Part of the purpose of reading other people’s papers is to learn new things. The old saying “two heads are better than one” is appropriate here.
    - (c.) Offering **constructive criticisms**? Having someone read your paper critically will help you to improve, and (hopefully) give you motivation to turn in your best work. Think of this as scrimmaging during practice. What errors or weak points did your partner help you discover in your writing?
  3. Consider what your partner wrote. Has any of this **Changed or refined the view(s)** you initially held? How? If not, explain why not (for example, were you already of the same view, or did your partner’s evidence strike you as less convincing than your own?)
  4. **Respond** to any of the **criticisms** provided by your partner (see 2.c above). This should be respectful. Expect that your partner will get the opportunity to read this, and write your reply accordingly. If your partner brought up evidence that did not persuade you, explain why you are sticking to your original view (that is, offer argument an evidence for it!).

## 7 Commonplace Book

The commonplace book is a traditional tool for keeping notes, collecting one's thoughts, and reflecting upon them. The purpose of this assignment is to give you a method for note-taking outside of class. At the end of the term, you will have a small notebook full of your thoughts and sources about the subject of our course. This will help you in preparing to write your paper.

At the beginning of week two, I will check to see that you have a commonplace book with the following features:

- At least 3" × 5" (you probably don't want to go much bigger, or it becomes too large to fit in your pocket).
- At least 64 pages. More pages will be better. Lines, grids, dots, or blank pages are all okay – as long as it's empty at the beginning of the course.
- Every page will be numbered (you may have to do this by hand).
- A permanent method to contact you in case it gets lost.
- The last four pages will be reserved for the index (label it "index" at the top of each page).

After week two, I will check your commonplace book every other week to see that you have been keeping up with it. You will need at least five page entries per week. Page entries include (but are not limited to):

- Quotations from a text with page numbers for future citations, and a comment on the reason for including the quotation (e.g. it may be a paper topic, or a source of evidence for your paper, or a counterargument you will respond to in your paper).
- A thought that occurs to you in the process of thinking, reading, writing, or talking about the content of the course.
- A remark made in a class meeting (be sure to cite the person who made the remark) that you find useful for one of the above reasons.

## 8 Disputed Question Assignment

In the first weeks of the course, you will sign up for one of the disputations at the end of the term. Each group will be four to six students. Your group will work together to propose a question for the seminar you are signed up for, and you will offer the arguments in our discussion of the question. As a disputant, your assignment has five components:

1. Your group will present at least four questions to me (in person, in writing). I will select one of these for you, and I will announce it to the class in advance of the discussions.
2. You will collect the best evidence and arguments you can on *both sides* of the question. You need to have both pro and contra because,
3. On the day of the disputation, I will draw names from my hat to determine who will be making which argument.
4. I will flip a coin to determine which side presents their answer first. You will have approximately five minutes apiece to present your claims, followed by two minutes to respond to each others' claims.
5. There will then be about twenty minutes of questioning from the moot.

When you are not signed up as a disputant (i.e. for every other seminar), you will participate in the audience. You will receive the questions to be discussed before the disputations begin. Your assignment as an audience member has five components:

1. You will read the question over and consider which answer you would give and why. It may help you to write down your thoughts in your commonplace book. I'm asking you to have reasons in mind for your position.
2. You will think about the conditions under which you would change your mind on the issue. Again, it will help to write down your thoughts in your commonplace book. Think of this as making a checklist – if someone does all of the things on your list, you will switch your answer.
3. You will “vote” on your answer before and at the end of the discussion.
4. You will write down three or four questions you have for the disputants. I will collect these at the end of the discussion as evidence of your participation in the seminar. If you don't write down questions (e.g. you didn't bring your materials), you will not receive credit for participating that day.
5. You will raise those questions – i.e. ask them *out loud* – during the second part of our seminar.

## 9 Discussion Theses Assignment

For this assignment, you will write a set of thesis statements.

- Label the assignment “Theses X” (where “X” is the number of the assignment – the first set will be labeled “Theses 1”, the second set “Theses 2” and so on).
- Each thesis will be numbered.
- They do not need to be in an essay format, but you should treat them like any other academic writing: namely, you must appropriately cite them, you should check your spelling, punctuation and grammar, and each thesis should be one or more complete sentences. Most theses will take at least two or three sentences to successfully express a claim.
- Each successful thesis statement will be worth one point, up to the full five points for that day’s assignment. Note: not every numbered sentence is guaranteed to count as successful. Just because you write five numbered sentences, this does not mean you will get full credit.
- An insufficient or incoherent thesis will not receive credit. It is fine to write more than five if you are concerned about receiving full credit. If you do, I will read up to seven theses per assignment.
- If you are still concerned about receiving full credit, you can write even more than seven, and use the seminar to vet your theses and determine which are the seven best. You can circle the numbers on your seven best theses, cross out the rest, and I will consider the ones you circled for me.

### 9.1 What makes a thesis statement successful?

1. A thesis should have its basis in the text that we will be discussing during the seminar.
2. It should refer to a specific passage or collection of passages found in the text, and should cite those passages accordingly.
3. Failure to cite sources for theses counts as plagiarism. This includes any extra theses beyond the minimum. If you discover that you have a thesis without a citation, and you don’t want to get a zero for plagiarism, there is something you can do. First, draw a line through the thesis so that I know you don’t want me to count it at all. Then, in parentheses, write “citation needed” next to the thesis. This lets me know that you recognize that you need a citation, but don’t have one and so you are not submitting work that has been plagiarized. Failure to follow these directions will result in a zero for the assignment.
4. Each thesis should stake a claim. This claim should interpret or evaluate a part of the text, not merely repeat it. Another way of saying this is that the claim of each thesis can admit of disagreement. For example, the following would not count as a successful thesis:
  - Socrates says, “So you did not answer my question, you surprising man. I did not ask you what same thing is both pious and impious, and it appears that what is loved by the gods is also hated by them” (*Euthyphro* 8.a-b).

However, these would count as a successful theses:

- Socrates’s claim in the *Euthyphro* (8.a-b) is an example of the line of questioning that earned Socrates enemies (see *Apology* 23.c, 24.a-b)
- Socrates’s objection in 8.a-b is that Euthyphro is dodging, rather than answering the question. This is a common objection that Socrates raises. The general form is something like ‘I’ve asked you to give me a definition of a concept, but you merely gave me examples.’ The problem with defining things through example is that it begs the question of whether the examples offered are properly instances of the concept under investigation.

Note how the first (unsuccessful) example is simply a quotation, while the second *compares* the quotation to another passage. The third example *interprets* the quotation. Be careful with this form of thesis that you do not merely have a bunch of paraphrases. Note how this example explains what Socrates means, and offers a generalization about it.

5. A thesis can take the form of a question, or a statement of the form, “I’m not sure I understand *X*.” It’s perfectly okay to not know something (it is, in fact, one of the presumed reasons you are enrolled in this course). But as with an affirmative claim, the question should be specific. It is insufficient to say, “I don’t understand the passage at 23.a-c” – you must show us that you have tried to understand the passage, and how it remains unclear. A good way of doing this is to frame a question around possible interpretations of a passage, and explicitly stating those interpretations. For example, “In this passage, Socrates might mean *X*, but he also could mean *Y*. I am not sure about which he means.”
6. You should care about the response to a thesis. This doesn’t mean that I will be grading your psychological state (because I can’t). But I may ask you *why* this claim matters to you (I will say something like, “What is *at stake* for you in this?”). You should be prepared to talk about the importance of the thesis. For example, maybe the claim you offer is a step in a larger argument you want to make. Or maybe the answer to your question will determine whether you ultimately agree or disagree with a thinker.
7. If you make a claim that turns out to be wrong, it can still count as a successful thesis – but you should take notes about the conversation. Indicate that your original claim was a misunderstanding, and correct it in your notes. If you ask a question, it will help to indicate the answer we arrive at in your notes.

## 10 Frequently Asked Questions (Grades)

### 1. Is there any way I can get [THE GRADE YOU WANT] for this class?

Yes, but first you need to realize that I do not give grades. I report on the quality of the work that students do. I will communicate my assessment of your work with you throughout the term by means of things like comments on your papers and meetings during office hours. At the end of the term, I give an official report to your institution, which is recorded on your transcript. Unfortunately I am required to write this report in a form of shorthand that is usually referred to as a “grade.” By doing work of the quality that I expect, you have control over what that report will reflect.

Many students begin the term with the assumption that they have an “A” for the class, and that they are then “graded down” whenever they make mistakes. This is indicative of something educators call a “fixed mindset.” In addition to being an *unhelpful* way to view your work in class, it is also *inaccurate*. Instead, I want you to adopt what is called a “growth mindset.” In this system, you begin the term without any grade – since you have not done any work on which I can report.

In a related misconception, some students have the expectation that if they successfully complete all of the work I expect of them, they will receive an A. This is also false. Remember: the grade is a *shorthand*. The key for translating it can be found in this syllabus under the heading of “Grading Policies,” in the “Grading Scale” subheading.

To review that scale: if you complete all of the work I expect of you on time at an acceptable level, you have earned a C. This is by no means guaranteed to you, but each of you is capable of doing work at this level. If you not only succeed at the assignments, but the quality of your work surpasses the expected requirements, you have done work at the B-level. B-level work is challenging, and while I would love for all of you to achieve this level (or better), you will need to put in a significant amount of effort to do so. If your work is not only better than acceptable, but excellent, your work might be at the A-level. Excellence is very difficult to achieve. There is no such thing as someone who “is an A student” – only a student who has turned in A-level work. To earn an A for the course, you will need to push yourself to excel, and then do it again and again on each and every assignment. Not everyone will reach this level, and even those who do reach it on one assignment might not do so on the next. Do not lose heart! Excellence is *worth* striving for, even if we do not always attain it. This is the meaning of an *ideal*.

I would love for these to be the only grades we have to discuss, but I should mention that if your work does not meet the standard of acceptability, you will not earn a C. If the quality of your work is low, or if parts of it are unacceptable, it is at the D-level, and if you do not complete your work, or what you submit it is altogether unacceptable, it is at the F-level.

### 2. ...Okay, but I have [YOUR CURRENT GRADE]. Can I still get a [GRADE YOU WANT] for the course?

That depends. As long as you still have work to do, you still have an opportunity to improve. The earlier in the term we are, the more of these opportunities you will have to improve, and the more improvement I will be able to report on when it comes time to report your grades. All of your opportunities are listed under the heading on credit. If you would like suggestions for improvement, feel free to stop by my office. If you wait until the last two or three weeks of the term to do this, you won’t have as much time to take that advice. But I will still be

happy to offer suggestions for the future (including the rest of your time at school). *important note: wanting a particular grade is not the same as an error in calculating your grade. This issue is covered in detail below.*

If you find that I have made an error in grading, please let me know as soon as possible. Be prepared to show me the error, and I will happily correct the issue. However, you should not – not now, not ever – request for me or (any of your professors) to give you a better grade than you have earned for a class. This goes from now until the end of time. It would be unethical for us to do so, and many professors regard such a request to be offensive. But that isn't the worst of it. What would happen if I were to change your grade? If I did, your grade would not be something that belonged to you. Like a medal purchased rather than earned, it would be false honor. The integrity of your character is important to me. As your teacher, I would be happier for you to become women and men of great character than the most famous and brilliant philosophers in the world.

**3. I got [GRADE YOU DON'T LIKE] on [ASSIGNMENT]. Can I get a [GRADE YOU WANT] on the assignment?**

Again, that depends. I will not simply change your grade because you request it. If you feel that a paper you have written for class does not reflect the best work you can do, please meet with me for office hours. With certain stipulations, I reserve the right to accept revised papers on a case-by-case basis. Those stipulations include (but are not necessarily limited to): (A.) A face-to-face meeting with me to determine the terms of the revision. (B.) Initial on-time completion of the assignment. Revisions are not makeup assignments or extensions to the original deadline. (C.) Substantial evidence that revision will more closely reflect your other efforts in class (at my discretion). This is not simply a do-over, but a means to more closely reflect effort that you have made but which the assignment may have failed to evaluate. This is one of the reasons that showing up in class on time, ready to go every single time is so important. *If* I allow you to revise a paper, it will be because I think to myself “hey, this student can do better than this!” If you skip class, don't participate, are unprepared, arrive late, fall asleep, mess around on your computer, etc., I will not think this about you. You want me to think highly of you. This is an important skill called “making a good impression.” It is unbelievably useful in every aspect of your life, personal or professional.

**4. Hey, Prof. Cather, I think you made a mistake on my grade.**

If you find that I have made an error in grading, please let me know as soon as possible. Be prepared to show me the error, and I will happily correct the issue. Please note that your desire for more points is not the same as an error on my part. If I made a mistake, you need to arrange to *meet with me in person* immediately (there are privacy concerns about e-mailing grades, and you will need to be able to show me your materials in person).

In order to correct a mistake in your grade, I will need evidence that there has been an error. You will need to bring all of your graded assignments to our meeting, so that I can make sure you get credit for each of them, and that I don't accidentally count an assignment more than once. You aren't required to hold on to assignments after I return them, but if you choose not to, there will be no way for you to demonstrate that your grade is in error.

**5. Oh... But I'm *sooooo* close to [THE NEXT LETTER GRADE]! Can I *please* have enough points to get [GRADE YOU WANT]?**

No. You should not – not now, not ever – request for me or (any of your professors) to give you a better grade than you have earned for a class. This goes from now until the end of

time. It would be unethical for us to do so, and many professors regard such a request to be offensive. But that isn't the worst of it. What would happen if I were to change your grade? If I did, your grade would not be something that belonged to you. Like a medal purchased rather than earned, it would be false honor. The integrity of your character is important to me. As your teacher, I would be happier for you to become women and men of great character than the most famous and brilliant minds in the world.

**6. I'm doing a revision assignment. Will it hurt my grade if you don't like the changes I make?**

Two things: First, it's not really important whether I *like* your paper. I'm interested in seeing the quality of the work you do. It's very important for the sake of all of your future work that you realize that these are not at all the same. It's overwhelmingly likely that revisions will make your paper better (that's what revisions are for). The only time this would not be the case might be if you include extra material that you fail to cite, or erase your citations, or something odd like that. Also, if I explicitly tell you to change something, you should definitely do that (if you ignore my comments, this will be reflected in my evaluation of your work).

Next, I appreciate your concern about your grade, so I'll review my approach to the matter. You may recall an earlier answer where I spoke about "growth mindset" approach. That is, I want you to think about your grades as earning points rather than losing them. One way of thinking about this is to say that you don't have a standing grade for your paper. You earned your grade for the initial submission, but you haven't completed the assignment of submitting a revision (so you have no points for it). So right now, if you turn in nothing, you would receive zero points, whereas if you turned in a paper at the F level, you would still earn *some* points. In this sense, turning in anything – even a paper that is "worse" than your earlier draft – can't damage your grade, since your current grade for the revision is zero points (because you haven't earned any points for it yet). Get it?

When you turned in the paper initially, I may have given you an "as-is-option" for the revision. When you chose to revise your paper, that was you saying, "I don't want to take that score. I'll turn in a revision, because I think I can do a better job on a revised paper, and so it will earn more points than the as-is-option." This means that if you turn in nothing, that's a zero. But, I gave everyone a bonus: If you let me know by the deadline that you won't be writing a revision after all, I'll give you the points for taking the as-is-option. I won't give you this bonus if you don't tell me before the deadline.

But, wait! It gets even better! Here's an additional bonus: if you turn in a revision, and I deem that it is not going to earn as many points as the original, I will give you the score you would have gotten if you had just turned in the original. If I do this, my decision will be final (I am, after all, the one grading your paper). On my lights, this is incredibly benevolent and accommodating on my part.<sup>5</sup>

## 11 Frequently Asked Questions (Beyond Grades)

**1. Here's the assignment I didn't turn in when I was absent the other day.**

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<sup>5</sup>If it strikes you that this is not the case and you have a positive suggestion for changing my policy, please put your reasons for objecting and suggested alternative in writing (no more than three paragraphs total). Once you have your written proposal, schedule a meeting during regular office hours by week six. Bring your written proposal and we will discuss it in our meeting, where I will decide whether to make the changes you suggested.

Cool. I think the school recycles, so the blue bin is where it should go.

- 2. Professor Cather, I know I missed class, and that as a policy you don't accept late work, but I want you to know that I did the assignment, and I have it here. May I turn it in anyway?** Absolutely, you can *turn it in*. Thanks for asking. It's never too late to make an effort, and even if it doesn't end up the way you hoped, no true effort is in vain. Depending on the assignment, the nature of your absence, etc., *I may or may not grade it* and deduct points for lateness. We'll have to come to an agreement about it, but it's always worth asking about. Plus, even if I don't accept the assignment, the fact that you put in the effort demonstrates something about your work as a student.
- 3. I was absent the other day. What did I miss? (What should I do?, etc.)**

First, whatever your reasons for missing may be, I hope that you are safe and well today. If that isn't the case, this should take precedence over any concerns about the class you may have. If all is well, I'd like to know *why* you missed. I don't need a doctor's note, and you certainly don't need to make up an excuse that sounds more legitimate to me. I don't expect every student to take my class to be their number one priority, and I won't take it personally to find out that it isn't yours. I *will* take it personally if you lie to me about a sick great-aunt-once-removed. If you are honest and tell me that my course is 4th on your list and you don't have to make anything better than a C, so you skipped a day of class to work on a project for your top priority course, I will think that's actually quite mature of you. I will be much more willing to help you make sure you get what you need out of my class if you demonstrate integrity and maturity.

As far as what you missed and making things up, that's something that you should look at the syllabus for. Was it a day when an assignment or an exam was due? If you checked the syllabus, and you still don't know, ask one of the other students in the class. This isn't just me being lazy – it is an occasion for you to practice important life skills called “cooperation” and “communication.” You will need to do this with your co-workers in your job (“I missed the meeting yesterday because I was sick. What did the boss say?”). You will need to do this with other parents when you have children in school (“Do you know of any good after-school programs I could enroll my kids in?”). You will need to do this with your family in order to make your household run smoothly (“Honey, did you pay the rent for this month?”).

So when you miss, check the syllabus and course website, and then check with your classmates. After all that is done, if you're still not sure check with me.

- 4. I was absent the other day. I looked on the syllabus and it said [WHATEVER IT SAYS FOR THAT DAY]. Then I talked with [NAME OF AN OTHER STUDENT IN THE CLASS], and s/he said we did [SOMETHING THE STUDENT TOLD YOU ABOUT]. Is there anything else?**

If you come to my office hours with this question, I will be very happy. It shows me that you put effort into finding out what we did. Because our classes are discussion-based, some of the most important parts of our classes are what your classmates have said or asked about. If something in particular stands out to me, I will mention this, and if you have your own questions about the reading, that's even better – we can talk about that too.

If you e-mail this question to me, it's likely that I won't have as much to say. I don't circulate lecture notes, and answering questions is something I like to do in plenary meetings whenever possible. I have two reasons for this. First, it's very likely that your peers have the same

or similar questions. In this case, I end up writing fifteen e-mails on more or less the same theme. It's way better to just explain it in class whenever possible. This brings us to my second reason. You need to practice asking questions in front of others. Believe it or not, this is something good workers and good leaders do regularly. Practicing this now will help you in your future endeavors. And (as I mentioned), it's likely that others have the same question, or they might not have realized that there was something they didn't understand. By asking your question, you are helping everyone learn, and feel confident to ask their own questions.

All this said, if you initially feel more comfortable e-mailing me than speaking in person, by all means do so. It helps to clarify one's thinking by writing it down. But you should realize that I may call on you to ask your question in class.

**5. I wrote you an e-mail about [TOPIC]. Did you get the e-mail?**

I probably received it. I get lots of e-mails, so I have to prioritize my responses to them, including some to which I cannot or as a matter of policy will not respond. As a rule, I prefer to address individual concerns in person, and reserve e-mail for communicating with groups in cases when it helps to have a written account of the message, or the message cannot wait for the next class meeting. If it is possible, I would prefer that we speak briefly after class or in my office.

Some students find e-mails to be a lower anxiety form of communication, and if you are one of these, that is fine, and it is acceptable to e-mail me to ask most questions or to initiate a conversation. Please realize that face-to-face contact is lower anxiety for me, so I will probably try to respond in person. If you send an e-mail that can be answered in person (or about something that I will only discuss in person), I will approach you after the next class meeting (you should remind me when you see me, just in case I forget). If you e-mail me but never show up to class, I will assume that you do not need a response, and you should not be surprised when you do not receive one. I am concerned for my students as people with lives outside of my class. As such, if you miss and wish to share the reason with me that is fine, though by no means necessary. It may be helpful if the reason is something such as an illness or emergency which might affect your future performance in class, and I may follow up via e-mail or (more likely) in person to see if everything is okay. I will not e-mail assignments to students on an individual basis. This is firm. I reserve the right to return graded assignments via e-mail (I don't like to do this, but sometimes it's necessary). But I will not discuss grades via e-mail (Meaning, if you think that I graded your paper incorrectly, or want to know why it earned the grade it did, you will have to come to office hours). I will not give progress reports (i.e., please don't ask me what your current grade for the course is). You have your graded assignments, and you know their relative worth (because it's on this very syllabus, so if you're reading this, you can find this out). If you wish to discuss your grades during office hours, please use the sign-up sheet outside my office. If you have class during those times, you may e-mail me to schedule a meeting for a different time. I will try my best to accommodate you, but this is not always possible. In this case, we will have to work something out.

**6. URGENT QUESTION: [Literally Any Question You Might Have]?!?!**

Okay, hold on just a moment. Please realize that there are questions that are urgent *for you* and those that are urgent *for me*. It's worth your time to recognize that these are not always the same. If a question is urgent for you, I will do my best to respect your needs and reply promptly. There are a few things you should realize about my responses to questions that are urgent to you.

First, if the answer to your question is in the syllabus, it's not urgent for me at all. This is because I will know that you haven't taken the time to look for the answer to your own question, which means that it actually isn't that important to you. If your question is not important enough for you to look for an answer, it doesn't count as urgent for me. If you send me a question like this, depending on how busy I am, and how much I feel like it will help you to be prepared for the future, I may send an e-mail reminding you to check your syllabus. If you don't get a response from me, try checking your syllabus.

Second, you should realize that if the question is too last minute, I may not be able to respond to it in time to be of use to you. If you have a paper due the next morning, and you e-mail me at 8:00 pm, it's unlikely that I will be able to help you. One of my teachers from middle school liked to tell us that a lack of planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part. It's better to plan ahead so that any question that may come up for you can get answered in time.

**7. How do I cite [anything we haven't covered in class, or that you may have forgotten]**

The long version is to look up the Chicago Manual of Style online, and follow that format. I recognize that this is hard, so here's the easier version: just try. Show me that you recognize that it needs to be cited, and do your best to cite it somehow. Correcting a citation is way easier than dealing with a case of plagiarism. If you use any outside sources, you will need to create a works cited list. If you disregarded my admonition against looking online for other sources, include the *complete* web address in the works cited. You will still need to meet with me to discuss the use of outside sources.

**8. I turned the assignment in, but you didn't accept it and now I got a zero just because I didn't follow directions. That's not fair! [That's mean!, Please can I have another chance? etc.]**

No. If you did not follow directions, you did not do the assignment. The directions are part of the assignment – and, in some ways they are the most important part. In twenty years, you will be in the middle of your career. However important it may actually be, your boss will almost certainly not care what the fundamental question of the *Apology* is. What your boss will care a lot about is whether you can follow directions. You should feel the same way! Imagine you are on an airplane about to take off. Which do you care more about: whether the pilot agrees with Socrates's characterization of Meletus, or whether the pilot has followed every single step of the pre-flight safety checklist? Imagine someone you care about is about to undergo heart surgery. Do you care more about whether the staff at the hospital remembers the accusations against Socrates, or whether they carefully follow every single step of the procedure exactly right? Nowhere in the world will it be partially acceptable to ignore directions. If you do this on your taxes, it's a big problem! If a pharmacist does this with a prescription, it's a big problem! If an engineer designing a nuclear power plant does this, it's a big problem! If an officer in the military ignores directions, it's a big problem! You get the idea.

Start practicing this skill now, and it will serve you for the rest of your life. If there are any directions that you do not understand, speak up. If you feel a little shy about saying something, it may help to imagine that your ability to pass this class depends on it, because it does.

## 12 ACADEMIC SENTENCE FRAMES

- Agreement:

I agree with \_\_\_\_\_ and would like to add \_\_\_\_\_.

I like what \_\_\_\_\_ said because \_\_\_\_\_.

- Disagreement:

I'm not sure I agree with what \_\_\_\_\_ said, because \_\_\_\_\_.

I can see that \_\_\_\_\_. However, I disagree that \_\_\_\_\_.

- Re-Focus:

We're getting off topic. I want to get back to \_\_\_\_\_.

- Clarification:

Could you say that in a different way?

What's your evidence for \_\_\_\_\_?

Could you please repeat what you said?

I'm not familiar with that word, so I'm not sure what you meant by what you just said.

Could you please explain what \_\_\_\_\_ means?

If I understand you correctly, you're saying \_\_\_\_\_. Is that a fair characterization?

- Extension:

This makes me think \_\_\_\_\_.

I was thinking about what \_\_\_\_\_ said, and I think \_\_\_\_\_.

Now I'm wondering \_\_\_\_\_.

- Some Locutions to Avoid:

For me, \_\_\_\_\_.

To me, \_\_\_\_\_.

I feel that \_\_\_\_\_.

I believe \_\_\_\_\_.

In my opinion, \_\_\_\_\_.

Personally, \_\_\_\_\_.

These sound like humility, but they make your claims emotive rather than evidence-based. This prevents productive disagreement. By making statements that are really about yourself rather than an idea or text, counter arguments will seem like personal attacks rather than a cooperative search for truth. It can prevent learning from mistakes, because they can be re-interpreted so that they're never wrong: "Well, the text may say \_\_\_\_\_, but for me, it means \_\_\_\_\_." It may seem great that you could never be wrong about that. But you can't be really right either. If you're making a claim about how you feel, rather than about what the text says, you don't understand the text correctly, you just feel a certain way. Take a stance! If you're correct, or have a strong point, take credit! If you're wrong, or someone shows a problem with your argument, you get to learn something.

- Better Alternatives:

It seems to me that -----.

On my reading, -----.

As far as I can tell, -----.

If I understand correctly, -----; although I am happy to be corrected.

Some of these sound very much like the ones to avoid. But if you look carefully, you will see that these are all statements about ideas, or about texts and your interpretations of them. Someone can offer an argument to each of these locutions: “I can see where it would seem that -----, but [evidence to the contrary].” Or, “I would take exception to your reading, because [evidence to the contrary].” Notice how these alternatives avoid the problems of the other locutions. They commit you to a position. You can’t turn them around with a double meaning, so if you make a mistake, you have to take ownership of it and move on. This means that you may need to change your mind, or to come up with better evidence. I want you to be more concerned with *getting things right in the end* than with *being right to begin with*. Notice also that each of these, especially the last one, frames the possibility that you are mistaken as an opportunity for you to learn and grow. You are welcoming disagreement and objections, rather than protecting yourself from them. These formulations show that you understand that academic argument is a cooperative exercise, not a fight.

- Reconsideration:

My pre-reflective intuition is -----. But I can imagine reasons for thinking ----- instead. For example, -----.

Initially, it seemed to me that -----, but upon further consideration, it looks like -----.