



CATHERINE PROJECT

Guidelines for writing

- ⊗ We write for our Catherine Project groups in order to enrich and focus our thinking. A piece of writing is not a performance intended to impress others or be used for evaluation. We seek to think seriously rather than to communicate “correct” thoughts or to devise phrases that sound scholarly or artful.
- ⊗ Writing is a work of the mind. In order to write well about a question or idea, one must first spend some time thinking. Reread, think, and take notes. Use writing as a way to think through your questions or ideas, and discover new ones.
- ⊗ In deciding what to write about, no question is too simple or elemental.
- ⊗ Use the text. You might attempt to formulate a question that the text raises for you, or to respond to such a question. You may object to or be puzzled by the way the text presents a topic. You may muse on something that the text brought to mind. In other words, you may write anything you think might help you—and your reader—think about the text.
- ⊗ Write about something you care about. Try to find something that grips you, whether this is the text itself, a particular question or problem raised in the text, or something you love or hate in the text.
- ⊗ Meaningful writing takes time. The more ripe it is, the better it is. Give yourself enough time to write something, set it aside, and return to it. Don’t be anxious if your ideas change in time: this means you learned something through writing.
- ⊗ That said, don’t tarry. The virtue of a short assignment is that it be *done*. It may be useful to start writing even if you don’t know what you’re going to say. A little insight or a short and simple reflection is worth writing. In fact, writing it down may help it to grow into something grander in its own time.
- ⊗ When at a loss, start writing about something else, and eventually inspiration may lead you back to where you lost the thread. Or start writing about why you’re having trouble thinking of what to say. Or set the writing aside for a while and then come back. Don’t stare at the page racking your brain for the perfect next sentence.
- ⊗ Remain flexible. We don’t approach serious conversation about a text as a battle or a debate. Avoid writing about the text from a predetermined position. Consider any side of the question that occurs to you, with openness and candor.
- ⊗ Be generous with your reader. Try first to say what you mean. Then, consider who your reader is and how they will understand you. This can take practice,

as we often think our readers have a much more sophisticated or complex understanding than they do in fact.

- ⊗ Speak plainly. Whenever you cite the text, offer page or line numbers, or any other shared access point, as this allows others to find your place in the text.
- ⊗ Please disregard any of these guidelines if they cause you to do something awful.