



The College of  
**Arts&Sciences**

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Document Title: Anticipating Counterarguments to Deepen Comprehension

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## Spring 2021 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

The Knight Award for Writing Exercises recognizes excellence in short exercises and/or handouts designed by graduate student instructors to improve student writing. Appropriate topics may be drawn from the whole range of writing issues, large scale to small scale, such as development of theses, use of secondary sources, organization of evidence, awareness of audience, attention to sentence patterns (e.g., passive/active voice; coordination/ subordination), attention to diction, uses of punctuation, attention to mechanics (e.g., manuscript formats, apostrophes). Exercises and handouts may be developed for use in or out of class.

Submissions should comprise three parts: (1) A copy of the handouts or instructions that go to students. (2) An explanation of the exercise/ handout and of the principles behind it, addressed to future instructors who may use the material. (3) If possible, an example of a student response.

Submissions may range in length from one to four or five pages.

Winning entries will be deposited in a web accessible archive and made available to other instructors under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. (See [creativecommons.org](http://creativecommons.org) for more information about cc licensing.) **No undergraduate student's writing will ever be published in this archive.**

To facilitate future searching of the Institute's archive, we ask that you provide a brief descriptive abstract (about 75 words) of your document, and a short list of appropriate keywords that might not appear in the text. Examples might include terms like "rhetorical situation," "style," "citation," etc. **Any borrowings such as quotations from course texts or handbooks must be cited properly in the document itself.**

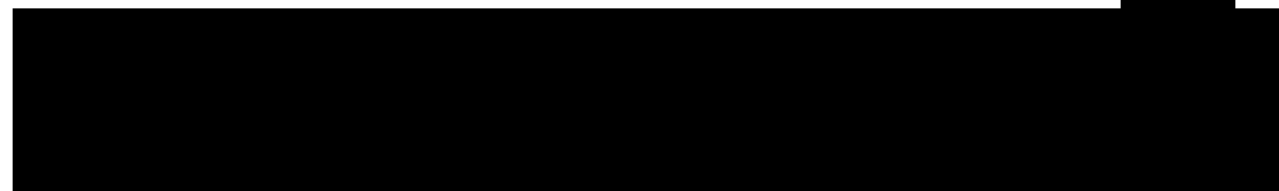
The two winning entries will receive \$350; second place winners (if any) will receive \$125.

**Submissions are due by Tuesday, May 25.**

## Spring 2021 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

Instr name Ariel Estrella Form of Address (circle): Mr. Ms.  Mx. Other \_\_\_\_\_

Dept & Course # ENGL 1183 Course title Word and Image



Should I win a prize, I give the John S. Knight Institute permission to publish, quote from, and/or distribute copies of the writing exercises, and to distribute publicity to newspapers and other publications, local and/or national, about my winning the prize. I also grant the Knight Institute permission to deposit the writing exercises in a web accessible archive and make them available under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. I am prepared to send electronic versions of my text to Donna Newton ([dlo1@cornell.edu](mailto:dlo1@cornell.edu)) in the Knight Institute. I understand that I will receive the award for my prize-winning essay upon submission of the electronic text.

Anticipating Counterarguments to Deepen Comprehension

Title of Writing Exercises

Instructor's signature  Date May 24, 2021

## Activity Rationale

This activity promotes a deeper reading comprehension by arguing for both sides of a dialectic. Before I describe the activity and utilization, **I want to emphasize that is that this activity is very flexible to replacing readings and altering the question prompt to fit into your course.** I include my activity as-is to demonstrate implementation, but it should not be taken as a necessity to use it in your own class.

**Difficulty:** This assignment is a response paper, which in my class means that it does not go through a round of editing. They function similarly to a high stakes homework assignment, or a take-home quiz. I assigned a lighter reading load (20 pages of poetry and one 1:12 minute video) so they can delve deep into the writing process.

**Writing Prompt:** This response asks students to select one text out of a selection. With it, they argue for and against a provided prompt that appears simple on the surface; for my class, I asked: “Why is this text about futurity?” and “Why is this text *not* about futurity?” Afterwards, I gave directed questions for a reflection on the process. Through their writing, students can put to use the argumentative tactics we develop in class. And most importantly, they learn how to read a text deeper by reading it in two different but (ultimately) correlated ways.

**Text Selection Considerations:** For this response, students interact with a selection of texts that I’ve included in the activity directions. The specific texts I selected responded to motifs in readings for adjacent homework assignments (in this case, “nostalgia”), as well as larger themes from the class—specifically, “futures/futurity.” By this point in the semester, we had discussed futurity in many ways and as such, the students were equipped with some language on the topic but were still fleshing out their own interpretations.

For the poems and short film themselves, something to note is that I chose works that showed a variety of connections to “futures/futurity.” Meaning, some on first glance were much more relevant to being about the future; some were barely emblematic of the future; and others included futurity in some way, but it was not central to the work. This diversity generated a lot of truly inspired responses by the students who gravitated to different works depending on their preference and reading comprehension ability.

**Outcome:** This activity really inspired my students even as it challenged them. It enlivened our discussion because students could see the depth of the activity. Without prompting from me, my students arrived at the conclusion I had hoped to invoke; that to understand the future, we must also live in the present and honor the past. This realization demonstrates a deeper reading comprehension in two ways. First, for their selected text, they unveiled contradictions, wordplay, and ambiguities. Second, they deepened their understanding of a major theme of the course.

I found this activity very generative for classroom discussion. My students were excited to talk about craft, and they particularly found it novel to them to have an opportunity to reflect on their writing right after producing it. I believe this response paper is a strong example of how to develop students’ analytical skills in a unique way.

## Anticipating Counterarguments to Deepen Comprehension Activity

*Reference Text:* Selection of Texts

*Total Pages:* 2.5 – 4 pages double-spaced, 1-inch margins, Times New Roman 12pt or similarly sized font

*Grade Weight:* 5% of total grade

For the unit, you have been strengthening your argumentative skills by anticipating counterpoints to your arguments. This assignment aims to reinforce the habit of expecting counterarguments to your ideas by asking you to answer the same prompt from two different perspectives.

### *Texts*

- **16** (2019), by Kristal Chan (she/her) – Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/322372275>
- **Be Recorder** (2019), by Carmen Giménez Smith (she/her): WATCH WHAT HAPPENS; I WILL BE MY MOTHER’S APPRENTICE; BE RECORDER section: "I became American each time"; BE RECORDER section: "how long I yearned"; BE RECORDER section: "They work their fingers"
- **Bodymap** (2015), by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (she/her) : gratitude; crip sex moments 1 – 10; crip sex moments; what kind of ancestor do you want to be?

### *PROMPT*

Choose one of the texts assigned for the day’s reading: *16* (short video), one poem from the *Be Recorder* selection, **or** one poem from the *Bodymap* selection. (And to reiterate, do not use the entire poetry excerpt packets! Just select one poem.) First, answer the following two questions in whichever order you prefer:

- Why is this text about futurity?
- Why is this text *not* about futurity?

After you have answered both questions, write a short reflection on the choices you made for the writing process. Three questions to consider are: which did you write first? was it hard to argue against yourself? and, did you go back to edit your answer to the first question after you wrote the counterargument (why/why not)?

How much space you give to each distinct section (the two answers and the reflection) is up to you but aim to have the two answers about the same length. While you do not have to use a formal structure for each section, remember to break your responses into paragraphs as needed. (Meaning, it might not be the best idea to have a 1.5-page long paragraph.)

Note that you might think a text is *clearly* not about the future, or *clearly* is about the future. It’s good to have a strong opinion; that’s something to bring up in class discussion. But for this response, I am not looking for a “right” answer. Instead, this is a light meditation encouraging

you to see the text in very different ways. **The only “wrong” answer is to be ambiguous when answering the questions.**

## ***CITATIONS***

In your paper, you can use our collective definition of futures as a reference you can quote from, or you can offer your own perspective on what “futures” mean. Do not copy and paste the entire definition into your essay.

I will not dictate how you much you need to cite from the text, but it is important you use the text in your answers to support your argument. Make sure your citations are consistent and that direct quotations are placed in quotation marks. I strongly recommend never leaving a quote by itself in a sentence.

## ***SUBMISSION DETAILS***

*There will be no drafts for this assignment.* Response papers do not go through a formal revision process. The response paper should be 2.5 – 4 pages, with 1-inch margins, in Times New Roman 12pt or similarly sized font. Submit to Canvas.

## ***GRADING***

A successful response paper will:

- Discuss only one poem *or* one short film.
- Meet the requirements included in the submission details.
- Include answers to the two questions listed in the prompt plus a reflection on the writing process.
- Breaks responses into paragraphs as needed.
- Utilize moments from the text to support the argument.
- Have distinct arguments for why the text is and is not about the future.
- Have been looked over for typos. (I highly suggest reading your paper aloud; it really helps!)

This response will count towards 5% of your total grade.

## ***MENTIONED TEXTS***

Chan, Kristal. *16*. Short Film, 2019. <https://vimeo.com/322372275>.

Giménez Smith, Carmen. *Be Recorder: Poems*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2019.

Piepzna-Samarasinha, Leah Lakshmi. *Bodymap Poems*. Toronto, Ontario: Mawenzi House, 2015.

## Summary and Key Words

Students strengthen their argumentative skills by answering the same prompt from two different perspectives. Students are then provided questions for a guided reflection on the process. This activity promotes a deeper reading comprehension by arguing for both sides of a dialectic. In doing so, students unveil a text's contradictions, wordplay, and ambiguities. This assignment can be used to develop a habit of expecting counterarguments and/or to generate an in-class discussion about craft.

#dialectic #counterargument #argument #reading comprehension