

Carleton University
Fall 2025/Winter 2026 Preliminary Course Outline
Department of English

FYSM 1004A: Reading Literatures & Cultures
Topic: *Why Read, Why Write, Why Now?*

Precludes additional credit for ENGL 1000 (no longer offered) ENGL 1100, ENGL 1200, ENGL 1300, ENGL 1400, ENGL 1600, ENGL 1700. You cannot get credit for (and should not register in) both our course and one of these courses.

Prerequisite(s): Normally restricted to students entering the first year of a B.A., B.Cog.Sc., C.Co.M.S., B.Econ. or B.G.In.S. program.

Format: in-person, not suitable for online students. The course format emphasizes peer learning and requires committed in-person attendance)

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Carleton University is located on the traditional, unceded and un-surrendered Territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation, the customary keepers and defenders of the Kichi Sibi (Ottawa River) watershed. Carleton occupies this land as a settler institution, a result of an economy of property and allocation of public space facilitated by the nation-state of Canada. As a settler whose ancestors came as uninvited visitors, my responsibility is to work to develop right relationship to this land, including the earth, water, and non-human plants and animals, and to the Indigenous peoples who are the original and ongoing stewards of this land.

***** Preliminary outline only—texts and assignments are subject to change. A complete version will be available closer to the start of the term. *****

Course Description

Reading & Writing. Stories & Books. Obsolete & outmoded or more important than ever?

As a course that studies diverse literatures in English at the university level, FYSM 1004 *presumes* the inherent value of reading and writing. Our specific class section, however, will *actively explore* questions about the role and relevance of reading and writing, books and story, to human experience, not only in the past but also—and perhaps more pressingly—in our volatile present and uncertain future. We will approach these broad questions by centring work that has been historically marginalized by dominant cultures and English literary traditions, as these voices bring a closely observed understanding of how reading, writing, story, and books shape culture. As such, our readings and discussion will attend to a range of embodied experiences and social positionings, including intersections of gender, sexuality, racialization, systemic white supremacy, colonialism, slavery and its legacies, migration and immigration, Indigeneity, the Black Diaspora, 2SLGBTQIA+ experience, war, psychiatry, trauma, historical memory, and more. Our primary literary readings will draw from work of the last 100 years. **Topics for discussion may include, but are not limited to:**

The Storytelling Brain: The Neuroscience of Narrative

Our Stories, Ourselves: Indigenous Knowledges, Relationality, & Storywork

Single Stories and Other Dangers

Close Reading, Slow Looking, & the Arts of Noticing

Mind Your Grammar: Your Brain on Sentences

We Can Read Hard Things

Reading and Writing as Practices of Survival & Freedom

Reading, Feeling, Writing, Healing

Literary Ancestors & Community Formation

Ink & Paper: Book Arts & Technologies of Thinking

Writing as Revision, Reading as Resistance

Class time will be dedicated to sharing, exploring, and learning from our responses to the literature; developing skills in analysis, close reading, critical thinking, and self-reflection; acquiring a vocabulary of terms for literary analysis; developing research skills; considering the historical, social, and intellectual contexts in which the literary works were produced while reflecting on their relevance now; developing strategies for effective writing; honing your own writing voice; and self-reflecting on processes of reading and writing. These practices will help you read, think, and write more effectively about anything. The seminar emphasizes class discussion and peer learning, student participation, regular writing and reflection (including in-class writing), and the value and pleasures of learning in community.

As much as possible, our section will also introduce first-year students to cool things on campus through field trips and special guests, including the Book Arts Lab, Carleton University Art Gallery, Mental Health supports, learning support services, literary events, extracurricular opportunities and more!

Course Intentions & Learning Outcomes

FYSM 1004 as a Writing Attentive English Course:

A FYSM is intended to develop writing skills for a university context. This course is also recommended for English majors and is designated a writing attentive course by the English Department. As such, students will spend a significant amount of class time learning and improving university-level forms of thinking and writing, particularly essay-writing skills. These skills concentrate on the following:

- establishment of university-level expectations for grammar and syntax
- establishment and refinement of literary-critical skills through close analysis of texts from a variety of genres
- generation and proof of an argumentative thesis across an essay
- establishment and refinement of arguments and opinions using persuasive, clear and grammatically correct English
- use and citation of primary literary texts in appropriate and convincing ways
- introduction to the fundamentals of secondary research (including critical evaluation, use, and citation of academic sources)
- completion of a number of writing assignments, including at least one formal scholarly essay
- writing at least one formally scheduled examination or a culminating reflective assignment

FYSM 1004 Section A Learning Outcomes:

In addition to the standard FYSM outcomes above, our course section has its own (related) outcomes. This course aims to help you:

Read literary texts slowly and closely, respond emotionally, and think critically and creatively: you will **pay attention** to primary literary texts in order to analyze and interpret the text in a sophisticated way that is meaningful, convincing, subtle, and insightful. This requires being open to your own experience of reading (including emotional and visceral responses), and practicing careful observation and self-reflection to develop thoughtful, clear and complex ideas about the course materials. We will consistently attend to the relationships among content (what a text is about), form (how it is written), and context (when/where/by and for whom a text is written).

Communicate effectively: you will practice formulating clear, grammatically correct, expressive, well-structured writing that conveys thoughtful ideas with good style, to achieve university-level academic writing while developing your own writing voice and gaining strategies that will improve any kind of writing you do. You will also engage regularly in small group discussions, peer workshops, informal presentations, and individual conferences, to practice oral communication in low-stress contexts.

Make connections: we will relate, compare/contrast, and connect ideas, points of view, and texts. You will have the chance to explore connections within a text (between parts, or between parts and the whole), across texts, between the literature and your world, between different historical and social contexts, between primary and secondary materials (putting your ideas in conversation with other scholars), and between different points of view in the seminar. You will be encouraged to connect small details with big ideas, consider multiple perspectives, and challenge your own ideas, assumptions, first impressions, and comfort level.

Reflect on your own thinking and learning so that you can keep growing as a student.

Enjoy and benefit from being part of a learning community. We are living in difficult times and first-year university is a huge adjustment. This course aims to co-create a supportive environment for interaction, learning, and meaningful connection among all members of the class. This includes active participation and thoughtful listening.

Evaluation

Assignments, Activities, and Assessments will include timed writing (exams), in-class informal writing, process-based formal writing, critical engagement with secondary research, reading quizzes, peer-exchange, individual consultations, and more!