

J201 – Spring 2018 – Final Exam Essay Prompts

Your in-class essay will be similar to other essays you've written for 201, in that it will have an underlined thesis that makes a clear argument, paragraphs with topic sentences, and introductory and concluding paragraphs. Strong essays will bring together at least three different concepts from the course into one cohesive argument, demonstrating your breadth of knowledge across the course as well as depth of knowledge for a few, selected concepts. You'll support your thesis with evidence from course readings and lectures from Weeks 1-15. No outside material should be used. Please see "Tips for Writing In-Class Essays" on our website in the same place you found these prompts.

The best essays will be both **rich** and **synthetic**. Richness means that an essay contains many different course concepts, accurately described and creatively applied to the examples in your text. Synthesis means that you show how ideas are connected and related to one another: either their commonalities or ways in which they are in tension or conflict.

Remember your work must be your own, original analysis, and keep in mind that these prompts are sufficiently broad to allow you to demonstrate your creative and critical thinking. (Basically, write your own outline! No two essays should be exactly alike.)

While there are no length specifications, you'll have 60 minutes for your in-class essay and should plan to use that whole time.

One of these three essay prompts will appear on your exam:

1. In 1916, John Dewey wrote, "It is easier to start a legend than to prevent its continued circulation." First, interpret what Dewey meant by this. Then, drawing on the lectures and readings from this course, determine whether and in what ways this quote applies to today's mass communication environment. Provide specific examples from both journalism and strategic communication.
2. *In fifteen years, the Internet has revolutionized the information environment.* Drawing on the lectures and readings from this course and providing specific examples from both journalism and strategic communication, write an essay agreeing or disagreeing with the italicized statement and provide an analysis of the consequences. Whether you agree or disagree, a strong essay will incorporate evidence that would support the opposite conclusion and explain why it matters less.
3. Media effects has been a major area of research for mass communication scholars in the last century. Drawing on the lectures and readings from this course and providing specific examples from both journalism and strategic communication, write an essay that argues in what ways, if any, this research is important to the preservation of a democratic nation—meaning a nation in which citizens participate in the political process.

In-Class Essay Grading Guidelines

An **A** essay is one that is good enough to be read aloud in a class. It is clearly written and well-organized. It demonstrates that the writer has conducted a close and critical reading of texts, grappled with the issues raised in the course, synthesized the readings, discussions, and lectures, and formulated a perceptive, compelling, independent argument. The argument shows intellectual originality and creativity and is supported by a well-chosen variety of specific examples.

An **AB** essay demonstrates many aspects of A-level work but falls short of it in either the organization and clarity of its writing, the formulation and presentation of its argument, or the quality of evidence. It incorporates a number of course concepts appropriately and shows accurate understanding but lacks the richness and synthesis of an A essay. Essays in this category are solid works containing flashes of insight into many of the issues raised in the course.

A **B** essay demonstrates a command of course material but provides a less than thorough defense of the writer's independent argument because of weaknesses in writing, argument, organization, or use of evidence. Compared to an AB work, it demonstrates a shallower use of course material (perhaps drawing on only one concept or lecture). There may be evidence of independent thought, but the argument is not presented clearly or convincingly.

A **BC or C** essay offers little more than a mere summary of ideas and information covered in the course, does not respond to the prompt adequately, suffers from frequent factual errors, unclear writing, poor organization, or inadequate evidence, or presents some combination of these problems.

Whereas the grading standards for written work between A and C are concerned with the presentation of argument and evidence, a paper or exam that belongs to the D or F categories demonstrates inadequate command of course material.

A **D** essay demonstrates serious deficiencies or severe flaws in the student's command of course material.

An **F** essay demonstrates no competence in the course material. It indicates a student's neglect or lack of effort in the course.