

# The Examined Life

“The life which is unexamined is not worth living.” – Socrates

“But this is the central question of personhood: Is there anything more important than being whoever you actually are?” – Chuck Klosterman

What do you think of that quote from Socrates? He said that something like 2500 years ago, and it’s still something that people find to be an important idea. We should get to know ourselves. Have you ever had anyone tell you just to “be yourself”? I’ve definitely heard that a few times. But I have to admit something: I did not know myself well when I was a freshman in high school, and it has taken a long time to get to the point where I was able to feel like I really know who I am and to feel comfortable in my own skin. Some of you may be much further along in this process than I was at that point. But for some of you, this might be a first step in that process of getting to know yourself. We’re going to be spending time doing some deep thinking (and writing, of course) about some important questions/topics, and we’ll be learning a bit about the writing process as we do this. Fair warning: these questions/topics that we’ll be thinking about will be a bit more challenging and deserve a bit more thought than the average ask.fm question.

Our plan for this unit is to spend a day or two learning a skill and then a day or two thinking and writing about a question/topic while applying that skill. We’ll repeat this pattern five times, so by the end of the unit you will have finished four mini-essays and one that will be closer to a regular-sized essay. You’ll also get to learn about something called the UNICORN writing process, which we use in this class.

Here’s our **calendar** of what we’re up to, but be warned: things can change. Due dates are **bolded**.

<b>SEPTEMBER</b>	<b>9</b> - Introduction to the unit and to the UNICORN writing process	<b>10</b> - Learn about the UN of UNICORN and how to take notes.	<b>11</b> - Read, think, watch, and write about school.	<b>12</b> - Read, think, watch, and write about school.	<b>13 - School Reflection Due</b> and we’ll do a self-evaluation in class before handing it.
<b>SEPTEMBER</b>	<b>16</b> - Learn about the I in UNICORN and internet search skills.	<b>17</b> - Learn about quoting, paraphrasing, and avoiding plagiarism.	<b>18</b> - Read, think, watch, and write about personality.	<b>19</b> - Read, think, watch, and write about personality.	<b>20 - Personality Reflection Due</b> - and we’ll do a self-evaluation in class before handing it.
<b>SEPTEMBER</b>	<b>23</b> - Learn about the CO in UNICORN and about how to write a paragraph	<b>24</b> - Learn about the CO in UNICORN and about how to write a paragraph	<b>25</b> - Read, think, watch, and write about teenage brains.	<b>26</b> - Read, think, watch, and write about teenage brains.	<b>27 - Teen Brains Reflection Due</b> - and we’ll do a self-evaluation in class before handing it.
<b>SEPTEMBER + OCTOBER</b>	<b>30</b> - Learn about the RN in UNICORN and the top 20 most common errors	<b>1</b> - Learn about the RN in UNICORN and the top 20 most common errors	<b>2</b> - Read, think, watch, and write about getting things done, organization, and task management.	<b>3</b> - Read, think, watch, and write about getting things done, organization, and task management.	<b>4 - Getting Things Done Reflection Due</b> - and we’ll do a self-evaluation in class before handing it.
<b>OCTOBER</b>	<b>7</b> - Weak vs. Strong Reflective Writing and an explanation of the final assignment for this unit.	<b>8</b> - in computer lab to work on final assignment	<b>9</b> - in computer lab to work on final assignment	<b>10</b> - in computer lab to work on final assignment. <b>Final Assignment Due</b>	<b>11 - NO SCHOOL</b> , but if you really needed this day to finish the assignment, I’d accept it digitally on this day.

## THE SEQUENCE:

On second thought, I am so convinced that this schedule will not work out [for instance, I think we will be thrown off on day one by picture day], that I'm just going to approach it as a list in sequence. We will do these things in this order, and you will hear about due dates in plenty of time to meet them:

1. Introduction to the unit and to the UNICORN writing process
2. Learn about the UN of UNICORN and how to take notes.
3. Read, think, watch, and write about school.
4. Finish School Reflection, do a self-evaluation, hand these in.
5. Learn about the I in UNICORN and internet search skills.
6. Learn about quoting, paraphrasing, and avoiding plagiarism.
7. Read, think, watch, and write about personality.
8. Finish Personality Reflection, do a self-evaluation, hand these in.
9. Learn about the CO in UNICORN and about how to write a paragraph
10. Read, think, watch, and write about teenage brains.
11. Teen Brains Reflection Due - and we'll do a self-evaluation in class before handing it.
12. Learn about the RN in UNICORN and the top 20 most common errors
13. Read, think, watch, and write about getting things done, organization, and task management.
14. Getting Things Done Reflection Due - and we'll do a self-evaluation in class before handing it.
15. Weak vs. Strong Reflective Writing and an explanation of the final assignment for this unit.
16. Time in computer lab to work on final assignment
17. Final Assignment Due

## WRITING & LANGUAGE STANDARDS

Ok, so what standards from the Common Core does this unit focus on? Well, we won't just be working with these, but these are some of the most important ones that we will be spending time learning. I put them in the general order in which we will focus on them and be assessed on them.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9.8 Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.1 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.2 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

**So, what are the big questions or ideas that we will be thinking about?**

Question 1: What do you think of school?

Question 2: Who are you? What's your personality like?

Question 3: What is your brain like?

Question 4: How efficient are you? How good are you at getting things done?

Question 5: You get to answer a question of your choice that has to do with personhood. They're listed below.

So there will be five big questions, each with a number of subquestions that you can decide whether or not to include in your reflection. For each of the questions, you will learn a certain skill that has to do with writing, research, or the writing process. You will then take that skill and apply it by writing a mini-essay with your thoughts and reflections on the question. And we will spend quite a bit of time in class discussing, reflecting, and thinking about these questions.

**How long will these reflective essays need to be?**

For questions 1-4, you will need to write one handwritten page minimum. Exceptions will be granted for people with very, very tiny handwriting. If you decide to type it, which you do not need to do, it should be 250 words. For the final essay, question 5, which will be the culminating activity in this unit, you will need to double that, so two handwritten pages minimum, or 500 words. So, all told, for this unit, you will need to write 1500 words. That's not too bad considering that as I'm typing this, there are already over 1500 words on this handout. Reminder though, these are the minimum requirements. Should a student choose to write more, that's acceptable.

**So, what can I do to be successful at this unit?**

Pay attention in class, take notes, use the time well that is given to you to do work, write the essays, and get them in on time. The grade you get will be on on the proficiency scale below. The standards that will be considered are the ones that were listed above. Each of the first four questions will be assessed solely on the skill that we are learning and practicing for that assignment. The fifth and final essay will be assessed on all of the standards.

Proficiency Level	Score
<b>Mastery</b> - The student demonstrated proficiency at the standard(s) that substantially exceeded the requirements.	100%
<b>Proficient</b> - The student demonstrated proficiency at the standard(s) that adequately met the requirements.	85%
<b>Basic Proficiency</b> - The student demonstrated basic proficiency at the standard(s) that met the requirements with a few minor errors.	75%
<b>Below Basic</b> - Even with help, the student did not yet meet the requirements for basic proficiency at the standard(s).	(50% if attempted)

**What are my options for the fifth question?**

You can pick from any of the questions below, or if you have a question about personhood or and idea for a different question, please let me know. I'd be interested to hear your idea.

"What is needed for happiness... a quiet, secluded life in the country, with the possibility of being useful to people to whom it is easy to do good, and who are not accustomed to have it done to them; then work which one hopes may be of some use; then rest, nature, books, music, love for ones neighbor – such is my idea of happiness. And then, on top of all that ... a mate, and children perhaps – what more can the heart of man desire?" – Leo Tolstoy.

What do you think that you need to be happy in life? When you are an adult, what do you think you want or need to have to be happy then? What's your dream for what your life will be like? Is it similar to Tolstoy's? What does this say about who you are as a person?

"The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water." - Ernest Hemingway

"All these kids are icebergs, we only see the tip." a - character in the show Castle

How are you like an iceberg? How much of you is seen above the surface? How much remains below? How does this explain your friends, those you are around, and/or those who are in charge of you?

"Everybody has a secret world inside of them. All of the people of the world. I mean everybody. No matter how dull and boring they are on the outside, inside them they've all got unimaginable, magnificent, wonderful, stupid, amazing worlds. Not just one world. Hundreds of them. Thousands maybe." What's the secret world inside of you like? Describe your secret world. What does this say about who you are as a person?

"The worst thing about you is not the most true." – John Dickerson, a writer who covers politics  
What do you think of this idea? Do you agree? Is the worst thing about you the most true thing about you? Does this idea help you? If you lived your life with this quotation as your motto, how would it change your life? How would it change the way you viewed other people? What does this say about who you are as a person?

What worries you? What worries you now? What do you think you will be worrying about five years from now? Ten years? Twenty years? Thirty years? How do you think the things you worry about will change over the years of your life? How do you handle your worries? What do your worries reveal about who you are as a person?

"In our lives, we're many people." – George Saunders  
What do you think of this idea? Do you think this is true in some sense? Does this help explain who you are? Do you have examples of this idea from your life? In your life, what different people have you been? Can you explain how you have changed over time, from one person to another to another... and so on?

"Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" – Mary Oliver  
Mary Oliver is a poet, and in one of her poems she asks that question of what you're going to do with "your one wild and precious life." How would you answer her? Here's a hint: I don't think she's asking about a career. I think she's asking about the kinds of things that she finds a lot more important than what kind of work you might do ...

Daryl Scroggins asks, "Which three people from the wide world, living or dead, would you name as collectively representing your hopeful view of yourself?" In other words, when you think about who you think you are, or who you really want to be, what combination of three people, represents that person? Who would you choose? Why those three? What about them represents your ideal view of yourself? What do they reveal about who you are as a person?

"Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive." – Gil Bailie  
What makes you come alive? How could you rearrange your life to focus on that one thing? How much better would your life be if you made those changes?

"I could write a long list of things about myself that could probably be fixed. But even if I fixed them all, another list would probably crop up in no time at all. And where would it end? How would I know when I was all fixed?" – Jami Attenberg  
Do you want to fix anything about yourself? What would you fix about yourself if you could? What do you think about what Jami Attenberg says? Should you even try to fix the things on your list? Is it possible to be "all fixed"?

"A person's success in life can usually be measured by the number of uncomfortable conversations he or she is willing to have." – Timothy Ferriss  
Do you think this is true? How willing are you to have uncomfortable conversations? What was the last uncomfortable conversation that you had? What's the next uncomfortable conversation you need to have?

"It's like everyone tells a story about themselves inside their own head. Always. All the time. That story makes you what you are. We build ourselves out of that story." – from *The Name of the Wind* by Pat Rothfuss  
What is the story that you tell yourself about yourself in your own head? Do you think that story makes you what you are? Do you think that "we build ourselves out of that story"? If that is true, that we become the story we tell ourselves, do you need to start telling yourself a better story? What story are you going to start telling yourself?

"But this is the central question of personhood: Is there anything more important than being whoever you actually are?" – Chuck Klosterman  
Are you who you really are? Do you pretend to be someone else? How often? Does who you are change from situation to situation? When is it acceptable to pretend to be someone you are not? "Is there anything more important than being whoever you actually are?"