

# MERCER STREET

2017 - 2018

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EXPOSITORY WRITING PROGRAM  
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCE



# MERCER STREET

To the Class of 2021:

**W**elcome to New York University!

An NYU education begins, in part, with writing. This practice reflects the University's longstanding commitment to the centrality of written inquiry to undergraduate education.

It's a bit of a cliché to say that reading and writing are connected, but in 2017 it seems important to say it nonetheless. As information circulates more and more quickly—moving ever farther from its origin—we have to read critically and for context: *Who was the author? What were they trying to achieve? What is their evidence?* This is all the more urgent when we take up what we read, re-posting it or relying on it for insight or opinions of our own.

Over the course of the next four years, you have a wide range of courses open to you; alphabetically, they range from accounting to history to mechanical engineering to woodwind studies. No matter what field you choose, during your time here you will find yourself using writing to think, analyze, investigate, and create. And no matter what path or career you choose after you graduate (as a scholar, educator, health practitioner, entrepreneur, artist, performer, lawyer, engineer, or activist), you will find yourself using writing for those purposes and others: to propose, to investigate, to analyze, and to represent yourself and your work. Recent research shows that work in the twenty-first century involves more writing than ever before, regardless of the specific occupation. This writing ranges across genres (email, proposals, essays, reports, and more), and encompasses prose that is creative, technical, reflective, and persuasive. It's writing that seeks to make an impact on its readers, that seeks not only to make audiences see the questions and challenges that face us today in new ways but also to help them imagine new possibilities and perspectives.

The essays collected in this volume represent some of the best work written for Expository Writing Program or CAS First-Year Seminar courses over the course of 2016-17; most were written by first-year students. These essays are smart, moving, funny, analytic, imaginative, and—like us all, and like all written work—incomplete. They open up questions, problems, and puzzles that are not entirely solvable. The faculty of EWP hope that you will both enjoy and learn from them.

Take heart! College is a time to challenge yourself and to nurture your mind both in and out of the classroom. Your most surprising encounters—your most creative or insightful moments—may happen when you least expect them. Be interested. That is always the best way to begin.

With all best wishes,

Dara Rossman Regaignon  
Director of the Expository Writing Program  
Associate Professor of English

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Last year at this time the essayists published in this volume were reading, as you are now: with a purpose. What was it? Somehow, it was to build confidence and mastery in the writing of essays that explain, question, and engage sources thoughtfully and with a view to contending with them. Within the respectful environment of your expository writing course, guided by your writing teacher and through many productive encounters with your peers, giving and receiving equally, you'll have your turn at deepening an inheritance of writing practices that your predecessors have left for you.

By reading these essays with a technical or builder's eye, you and your instructor will often be talking about how to make essays worthy of serious thinkers. The structure of this kind of essay is not formulaic, but will become apparent each time out. Essays come in many forms, after all—an essay adapts itself to the questions and problems and evidence its author has chosen.

This work will help to prepare you for the writing you do in other classes, this semester and over the course of the next several years. To write well one must know how to size up the situation: *What community or audience am I writing to? What kinds of questions interest them? What kinds of evidence will surprise or persuade them?* Professors across the University recognize and honor writing that can reason closely with sources. For writers, the progress of our thought process will also bring an additional, unexpected pleasure, the pleasure of discovering what we ourselves had not known or thought or imagined before. Here, then, are twenty-seven essays that actually managed to surprise their own authors! Now you can study them for the way they draw you in.

Yes, the writers published here are going to show you a lot in a powerful way. It's true that the topics they have chosen are interesting in themselves: gender rights; environmental emergencies; empathy; the cinema. The fundamental lessons in your writing course will always be more mobile and not as fixed to a particular topical concern. These lessons are basic not because they are easy, but because they are foundational. Our concern is with certain deep denominational values

such as how to structure arguments sensibly, how to project the character of your own mind, and how to keep an argument moving by continuing to feed hard questions to it, as your reader is going to be doing.

We hope that the essays presented here will help you to engage with some fundamental writerly practices, practices moreover in which your own peers have succeeded.

Readers may also find a short statement at the head of each text. Each of these snapshots captures a term or a practice that can then be followed into the essay proper.

Stephen Donatelli  
Editor  
Director of Writing in the Disciplines

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