

# History of Core Texts Project

In the spring of 2002, The City University of New York initiated the massive undertaking of re-examining general education throughout CUNY. Led by Judith Summerfield, Dean of Undergraduate Education and Professor of English at Queens College, our goal—faculty and administrators—was to develop a common idea, or set of ideas and practices, that expresses general education for the largest, urban university in America while at the same time acknowledging the unique character and mission of each CUNY College.

The initial question was posed; a description of our first liberal education moment. Unlike the terms general education or core curriculum, which find their place within the university, it was generally agreed that liberal education moments could thrive within or without the university. What was the decisive moment that finally drew us into the field of learning, teaching and scholarship? The responses were surprisingly similar; a sense of wonder, curiosity—even awe—over the material that influence our lives. It was exactly this initial impression that the committee on general education wanted faculty to share with students.

This anthology results from City Tech faculty having selected brief excerpts from great works or Core Texts, works that have conveyed the liberal education experience and that can be shared with students. The basic idea was to select a set of core works that have relevance for the schools of Technology and Design, Liberal Arts and Sciences and Professional Studies. Here was a point where the Humanities and the Liberal Arts could play an informative and vital role by entering into the specific practices of the professions and technologies. We chose core rather than classics or canonical to suggest that works were not limited to the Ancient Near East, Greece or Rome and texts rather than readings to suggest that works need not be limited to the written word but could include any number of genres. Core Text is to be broadly construed, what we ourselves take to be a great text. The contents of the anthology move through time arbitrarily. No attempt has been made to provide an historical sequence of thoughts or events. Instead, the contents are roughly divided into the schools of City Tech; Arts and Science, Professional Studies and Technology and Design. Again, no attempt was made to carve out discrete areas of inquiry. Naturally, overlap can be found, exactly what general education seeks to discover.

The excerpts can be used as springboards for an array of brief, low-stakes, reading and writing assignments for students. Initially, we suggested a minimalist model where we keep to the excerpt rather than go to Project Gutenberg where the complete works can be found (unless otherwise stated, excerpts were taken from [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org) - the **Project Gutenberg website**). Mathematics students, for example, might learn more about possible spatial dimensions by reading from E.A. Abbotts Flatland and writing a brief reaction paper to the selection. The excerpt can be cited several times over the course of a semester and the writing assignment can be written in drafts with an eye toward City Tech Writer for student publications.

The core text component of a course may count for 10% of a final grade or decide borderline cases or might simply be an extra-credit assignment. The overall intention, however, was to provide a manageable and workable collection of great works that can easily be integrated into a wide array of courses.

## City Tech Committee on General Education

Walter Brand, Department of Social Science

Candido Cabo, Department of Computer Systems Technology

Mary Sue Donsky, Department of Law and Paralegal Studies

Jonathan Natov, Department of Mathematics

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# Grading Guidelines

## A

**Content:** The paper responds to the entire assignment. It clearly states and explores an argument or thesis with specific support for ideas. The paper is written with coherence and clarity; it develops connections (either among texts or the students own ideas), and summarizes events, ideas, or sources only to advance the argument, not to provide filler.

**Structure:** The papers structure reflects logical thinking. Paragraphs are well developed with precise use of detail and appropriate transitions. Quotations, if included, are selected to advance the argument and support the thesis, not simply to provide filler. They are introduced smoothly, enclosed in quotation marks, and properly cited according to the requirements of the discipline. The paper adheres to the assignment's length requirements.

**Sophistication of Language:** The paper shows excellent control of the English language, appropriate use of vocabulary, and a variety of sentence structure.

**Mechanics:** Errors, if any, are typographical and not indications of problems with grammar, so the paper is virtually error-free. The paper is in the required format, follows the proper system of documentation when required, and is handed in on time.

## B

**Content:** The paper responds to the entire assignment, but needs more thorough development. Connections among ideas, aspects of a topic, or texts are stated and explained. The paper does not overemphasize retelling of plots or sequences of events, but describes a sequence of thoughts or events or presents brief summaries where necessary to develop and advance a thesis.

**Structure:** The paper is mostly logical and clear, but at times a transition may be missing or a connection may not be clear. Paragraphs are developed, but could use more elaboration or explanation. Appropriate quotations are introduced and discussed as support for ideas already expressed. The paper meets the length requirements.

**Sophistication of Language:** The writer expresses thoughts clearly in standard English. Vocabulary is largely appropriate to the subject matter, and sentence structure is varied in effective ways.

**Mechanics:** The paper contains very few grammatical or sentence-level errors (or patterns of error). The paper is in the required format and follows the appropriate system of documentation.

## C

**Content:** The thesis of the paper is an acceptable response to the basic assignment, but is presented in too general and vague a manner, and more detail and clarity are needed. The paper relies mostly on brief assertions or a summary of texts without much explanation or commentary, but the assertions make sense or the summaries are essentially clear and accurate. Connections among ideas or texts are stated, but not discussed in much detail.

**Structure:** The supporting ideas are related to the thesis but are not presented in a logical order or developed with adequate specifics. Lack of transitions and other disjunctions force the reader to infer what the writer means. Paragraphs set up ideas, but are not developed adequately. Quotations are dropped into the text without introduction or discussion, are often not the best evidence for the points they are used to support, and are too long. The paper meets the length requirements, but the writer does not really establish his or her own voice, or demonstrate real engagement with the ideas expressed. The thesis itself is self-evident rather than thoughtful or perceptive.

**Sophistication of Language:** Sentences and phrases express the thesis and supporting ideas but are repetitive in pattern. Occasional run-ons and fragments show problems with sentence boundaries. Vocabulary is usually appropriate to the subject matter, but not precise enough to express complex thoughts.

**Mechanics:** The paper follows format and documentation requirements overall, but shows grammatical or sentence-level errors (or patterns of error).

## D

**Content:** The paper only responds to some parts of the assignment, or asserts a thesis that is so self-evident or superficial that it is hardly worthy of development. The paper makes no connections to other texts. Texts are summarized and re-told in simple terms.

**Structure:** The supporting ideas are not logically ordered, and an absence of transitions makes it more of a list than an organized essay or academic paper. Paragraphs are not developed at all. Quotations are not introduced, do not relate to the ideas they are supposed to support, and are not discussed. The writer seems to be making a point, but repeats one or two ideas without elaborating or moving on. The paper may not meet the length requirements.

**Sophistication of Language:** Sentences and phrases are often unclear and may prevent the expression of coherent ideas, making the paper illogical at times. Vocabulary is limited, often inappropriate to the subject, and inadequate for expression of complex ideas.

**Mechanics:** The many grammatical or sentence-level errors (or patterns of error) interfere with clarity and coherence. Format or citation requirements are ignored.

## F

**Content:** The paper does not fulfill the assignment, but rather for the most part ignores directions, or responds only to a part of the assignment, without showing much thought or detail on even that part.

**Structure:** The paper is a list of limited ideas in no logical order. Sometimes one or two ideas will result in paragraphs, but they are not developed. Quotations are missing or do not support the ideas, and are not introduced or discussed. The essay does not meet the length requirements, or does so only by padding.

**Sophistication of Language:** Sentences and phrases are generally illogical or simple and repetitive, and the thinking is difficult to follow. Vocabulary is simple or inappropriate, and ideas are not explored.

**Mechanics:** There are many grammatical and sentence-level errors (or patterns of error) that impede understanding. Format and citation requirements are ignored. Key words, phrases, or sentences from the reading or from other sources are copied without quotation marks or are plagiarized outright from other sources. Plagiarism may have additional consequences as well as the failure of the paper in which it occurs. See the Colleges Intellectual Integrity Policy for details.

# Creating a Core Text Assignment

We hope that you will find the procedure below helpful in creating an assignment.

## To begin the process:

- a. Think about a central question that you want to ask about the issues presented in the text or other creative work.
- b. Based on the evidence in the text or other creative work, how would you begin to answer this question?
- c. What is the author's central argument? Or artist's theme? What evidence can you give to support your claim?
- d. Locate a term or idea that is central to the piece and explain how it is defined, or how it is being used.
- e. What is the relevance of the text or other creative work to your class?

## When writing your syllabus:

- f. Identify the intended audience for the text or other creative work. Support your answer.
- g. Think of an argument as a **"hypothesis"** and the evidence you cite to support this hypothesis as your **"data."**  
Ask a student to write an essay that formulates an argument about what they have read or observed.
- h. Decide how the core text assignment figures into the final grade for the course:
  - Use as up to 10% of the final grade
  - Use as a tie-breaker in borderline cases
  - Use as extra-credit
- i. Develop or use a rubric that distinguishes Grade of A, B, C, D, F.  
Go to AIR website for sample rubrics under Assessment Toolbox <http://facultycommons.citytech.cuny.edu/>