Russian Revolution

HIST 1313: History of Russian Revolution
Spring 2027

When	Tuesday/Thursday, 1:00–2:15 pm
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Course Format and Materials

The assignments in this course come in many formats: **audio, video, and reading** (primary sources, textbook excerpts, and historical scholarship).

All materials are available in a shared folder, linked on Canvas. **Important:** you can download the entire folder, but I will update it throughout the semester, so check it frequently.

A Partially Flipped Classroom

Some of the lecture in this course is pre-recorded, so that class time can go to what is best done together: discussion, interactive lecture, exercises, and *evaluation*.

The readings and recorded lectures are due *before* the class session they are associated with on the syllabus. With few exceptions, preparation (reading, listening, taking notes) is work you do on your own, outside class. The vast majority of graded work in this course, in both *evaluation* and *engagement*, consists of in-class assignments that rely on that preparation (see Grading Policies).

A Typical Cycle

Before class:

1. **Listen to the audio lecture,** casually: on the bus, or while waiting in line for your latte. It sets the stage.
2. **Watch the video lecture,** actively, and take notes. This is where I lay out what you truly need to know to make sense of the readings.
3. **Do the readings.**

In class:

4. **A quick quiz.** Low-stress and low-consequence, for *engagement* points. If you did the reading and listened carefully, it should be easy.
5. **Interactive lecture.** I revisit some of the same material, but this time I expect you to participate. Some kinds of participation earn *engagement* points: see Participation in Interactive Lecture.
6. **Exercises and *evaluation*,** which take up more than half of a typical class session.

AI can be a useful study aid while you prepare, if you use it well (see AI in This Course).

Pre-Recorded Audio Lectures

I use audio lectures to get across general ideas and big thematic points. Any important details you might want to take notes on, I save for the video lectures.

Low-key is not the same as optional, though. The audio lectures are required, and their content is fair game on quizzes.

Pre-Recorded Video Lectures

The video lectures are the workhorses of the course. They include visuals, and they carry the details worth taking notes on. The readings for a given session come from many different places (primary sources, textbook excerpts, historical scholarship), and the video lecture is what knits them together.

The quizzes at the start of class, which count toward *engagement*, draw on the recorded lectures.

Readings

Most class sessions have assigned **primary sources**, and some also have **secondary overviews** (for example, textbook excerpts or historical scholarship).

The primary sources are especially important: expect to reference them directly in oral and written in-class exercises. For how to cite them when you are writing by hand in class, see Writing by Hand in Class. Questions about a reading? Bring them to office hours.

Note-Taking

Developing your own, personalized note-taking system is an essential skill for your academic career. *How* you take notes will vary widely from person to person. That is fine, and expected.

From time to time, I will offer *engagement* points for evidence that you have put thought into your note-taking and are actively maintaining your notes. In other words, I may ask to see them in class.

For more on approaches to note-taking, see Note-Taking.

What to Bring

- **A pen** (dark ink scans best)
- **A blank spiral notebook** of your choice
- **A smartphone with a scanning app, installed in advance:** Adobe Scan (Android / iPhone) or a similar app for quickly producing PDFs. The Notes app on iPhone and the Google Drive app on Android also have built-in document scanners.

Many assignments will ask you to write by hand in your notebook, scan the pages to a PDF, and upload the PDF to Canvas. **The scan is your submission;** the notebook itself stays with you. Unless instructed otherwise, upload your scan before you leave class. If you have a technical problem (dead battery, app trouble), hand me the page and I will scan it.

For other rules about phones, laptops, and recording in class, see Devices in Class.

History of the Russian Revolution (HIST 1313)

How do you pull off a revolution? How do you stage a coup, and how does power actually change hands? What makes a change of regime *revolutionary* in the first place? Is any new government enough, or does it take something more? This course puts those questions to one of the defining upheavals of the modern world. We start by asking when the Russian Revolution really began. Some trace it all the way back to the Great Reforms of the 1860s. We'll move briskly through that background, pick up speed with the Revolution of 1905, and then slow way down for the pivotal years of 1917 and 1918. World War I and the Civil War get equal billing, carrying us through 1920. And when did it end? By some measures, only with the destruction of the peasantry in the collectivization drives of the 1930s, so we'll close with a quick run through the 1920s and beyond. You'll have to decide for yourself. Throughout the course, beginnings, endings, and the balance of continuity and change stay open questions for you to argue.

What sets this course apart is where it looks. Petrograd, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin and company all make their appearances, but they share the stage. We'll treat 1917 as a pan-Eurasian story of total imperial collapse: a whole cluster of revolutions, unfolding from Central Asia and the Caucasus to Ukraine, Mongolia, and northern Iran, and spilling past the old empire's borders into short-lived soviet republics in Hungary and Bavaria. Along the way you'll meet anarchist peasant armies, Muslim reformers turned Bolsheviks, a Menshevik republic in Georgia, and a Baltic German baron who dreamed of restoring the empire of Chinggis Khan. We'll also take up the people the capital-centered story tends to sideline, especially women and the peasants, and approach this as a peasant revolution first and foremost. Finally, we'll place 1917 in a longer arc that runs from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, through the world the communist twentieth century built, to the present, where the revolution's legacy is still a live political argument.

Syllabus

Everything listed under a session is due **before** that session (see Course Format and Materials).

Part One: Backdrop and Background

Core questions: When did the Russian Revolution begin? What kind of empire was the Russian Empire on the eve of revolution?

Session 1 — Tue, Jan 12: Course Overview

In class:

- Policies and expectations
- Mini-lecture: *title TBD*

Session 2 — Thu, Jan 14: Northwestern Eurasia up to the Great Reforms

Listen and watch:

- Audio lecture: *title TBD*
- Video lecture: *title TBD*

Read:

1. Reading TBD (00 pages).

In class:

- Interactive lecture: *title TBD*
- Exercise: *TBD*

Session 3 — Tue, Jan 19: Prologue to Revolution? The Great Reforms

Listen and watch:

- Audio lecture: *title TBD*
- Video lecture: *title TBD*

Read:

1. Kotkin, *Stalin*, vol. 1, pp. 11–14: the nature of the Russian Empire.

In class:

- Interactive lecture: *title TBD*
- Exercise: *TBD*

Session 4 — Thu, Jan 21: Speed Run: The Revolutionary Narrative in One Session

Listen and watch:

- Audio lecture: *title TBD*

- Video lecture: *title TBD*

Read:

1. Reading TBD (00 pages).

In class:

- Interactive lecture: *title TBD*
- Exercise: *TBD*

Part Two: The Revolution of 1905 and the Duma Monarchy

Core questions: *TBD*

Session 5 — Tue, Jan 26: Industrialization and the Revolution of 1905

Listen and watch:

- Audio lecture: *title TBD*
- Video lecture: *title TBD*

Read:

1. Kotkin, *Stalin*, vol. 1, pp. 56–87: the Revolution of 1905, the Russo-Japanese War, the Okhrana.
2. Steinberg, pp. 47–67: narrative of 1905, with attention to the tenor of the primary sources.

In class:

- Interactive lecture: *title TBD*
- Exercise: *TBD*

Session 6 — Thu, Jan 28: Marxism and Russia

Listen and watch:

- Audio lecture: *title TBD*
- Video lecture: *title TBD*

Read:

1. Kotkin, *Stalin*, vol. 1, pp. 39–45: Marxism and how it came to Russia.
2. Figes, pp. 139–154: the reception of Marx in Russia, through Lenin.

In class:

- Interactive lecture: *title TBD*
- Exercise: *TBD*

Session 7 — Tue, Feb 2: Russia Invents Fascism

Listen and watch:

- Audio lecture: *title TBD*
- Video lecture: *title TBD*

Read:

1. Kotkin, *Stalin*, vol. 1, pp. 98–102: the Union of the Russian People and the Black Hundreds.

In class:

- Interactive lecture: *title TBD*
- Exercise: *TBD*

Session 8 — Thu, Feb 4: Title TBD

To be announced.

Part Three: World War I

Core questions: *TBD*

Session 9 — Tue, Feb 9: World War I and Abdication

Listen and watch:

- Audio lecture: *title TBD*
- Video lecture: *title TBD*

Read:

1. Figes, pp. 55–61: the imperial army.
2. Kotkin, *Stalin*, vol. 1, pp. 164–173: the abdication of the tsar, forced by the generals.

In class:

- Interactive lecture: *title TBD*
- Exercise: *TBD*

Session 10 — Thu, Feb 11: The Western Borderlands under German Rule

Listen and watch:

- Audio lecture: *title TBD*
- Video lecture: *title TBD*

Read:

1. Reading TBD (00 pages).

In class:

- Interactive lecture: *title TBD*
- Exercise: *TBD*

Session 11 — Tue, Feb 16: The Uprisings of 1916 in Central Asia

Listen and watch:

- Audio lecture: *title TBD*
- Video lecture: *title TBD*

Read:

1. Reading TBD (00 pages).

In class:

- Interactive lecture: *title TBD*
- Exercise: *TBD*

Part Four: The February Revolution

Core questions: *TBD*

Session 12 — Thu, Feb 18: Women and the February Revolution

Listen and watch:

- Audio lecture: *title TBD*
- Video lecture: *title TBD*

Read:

1. Steinberg, pp. 170–222.

In class:

- Interactive lecture: *title TBD*
- Exercise: *TBD*

Session 13 — Tue, Feb 23: Title TBD

To be announced.

Session 14 — Thu, Feb 25: Title TBD

To be announced.

Session 15 — Tue, Mar 2: Title TBD

To be announced.

Session 16 — Thu, Mar 4: Title TBD

To be announced.

Spring Recess (March 7–14): no class

Part Five: Pan-Eurasian Imperial Collapse

Core questions: *TBD*

Session 17 — Tue, Mar 16: The Menshevik Alternative in the Caucasus

Listen and watch:

- Audio lecture: *title TBD*
- Video lecture: *title TBD*

Read:

1. Reading TBD (00 pages).

In class:

- Interactive lecture: *title TBD*
- Exercise: *TBD*

Session 18 — Thu, Mar 18: Central Asia

Listen and watch:

- Audio lecture: *title TBD*
- Video lecture: *title TBD*

Read:

1. Reading TBD (00 pages).

In class:

- Interactive lecture: *title TBD*
- Exercise: *TBD*

Session 19 — Tue, Mar 23: The Mad Baron and the First Soviet Satellite State

Listen and watch:

- Audio lecture: *title TBD*
- Video lecture: *title TBD*

Read:

1. Reading TBD (00 pages).

In class:

- Interactive lecture: *title TBD*
- Exercise: *TBD*

Session 20 — Thu, Mar 25: Red Iran

Listen and watch:

- Audio lecture: *title TBD*
- Video lecture: *title TBD*

Read:

1. Reading TBD (00 pages).

In class:

- Interactive lecture: *title TBD*
- Exercise: *TBD*

Session 21 — Tue, Mar 30: Finland

Listen and watch:

- Audio lecture: *title TBD*
- Video lecture: *title TBD*

Read:

1. Reading TBD (00 pages).

In class:

- Interactive lecture: *title TBD*
- Exercise: *TBD*

Session 22 — Thu, Apr 1: The Bavarian Soviet Republic

Listen and watch:

- Audio lecture: *title TBD*
- Video lecture: *title TBD*

Read:

1. Reading TBD (00 pages).

In class:

- Interactive lecture: *title TBD*
- Exercise: *TBD*

Part Six: Ukraine and the Creation of the Soviet Union

Core questions: *TBD*

Session 23 — Tue, Apr 6: Anarchism

Listen and watch:

- Audio lecture: *title TBD*
- Video lecture: *title TBD*

Read:

1. Reading TBD (00 pages).

In class:

- Interactive lecture: *title TBD*
- Exercise: *TBD*

Session 24 — Thu, Apr 8: Title TBD

To be announced.

Part Seven: The Soviet Union

Core questions: *TBD*

Session 25 — Tue, Apr 13: Dream Shattered: Kronstadt

Listen and watch:

- Audio lecture: *title TBD*
- Video lecture: *title TBD*

Read:

1. Reading TBD (00 pages).

In class:

- Interactive lecture: *title TBD*
- Exercise: *TBD*

Session 26 — Thu, Apr 15: Collectivization and the Destruction of the Peasantry

Listen and watch:

- Audio lecture: *title TBD*
- Video lecture: *title TBD*

Read:

1. Reading TBD (00 pages).

In class:

- Interactive lecture: *title TBD*
- Exercise: *TBD*

Session 27 — Tue, Apr 20: Title TBD

To be announced.

Session 28 — Thu, Apr 22: Title TBD

To be announced.

I reserve the right to amend and update this syllabus throughout the semester.

Learning Outcomes

The ultimate goal of this course is to develop *critical thinking skills* and *habits of mind* for evaluating the relationship between primary sources (data), fact, and analytical implications: How do we know what we think we know? What is a fact? Everyone has an opinion: what is the difference between a more compelling and less compelling argument?

This may seem vague, and to some degree this is what all humanities courses purport to do. What about the "hard skills" you can put on your résumé?

Reading Primary Sources

A primary source is a piece of evidence from the past: a chronicle, a decree, a letter, a travel account. Reading one competently means asking who wrote it, for whom, and why; what it can tell us; and, just as important, what it cannot.

The same skill applies to any document you will ever need to evaluate, from a news story to a contract to a viral post: who made this, for whom, and why should I believe it?

Analytical Writing

Reports of the demise of analytical writing are greatly exaggerated: for all the ways AI is reshaping the way we write (see AI in This Course), your ability to draw upon facts to advance an argument-driven interpretation of those facts (in print or out loud; in an academic essay or on social media; to a friend or to your supervisor) is more valuable than ever before.

In this course, you will practice that skill mostly by hand, in class: short responses and mini-essays that ask you to make an argument quickly, clearly, and with evidence, without a safety net (see Writing by Hand in Class).

Arguing Out Loud

Much of the reasoning you will do in your career will happen in conversation: in meetings, interviews, and arguments with people who disagree with you. We will practice this in a structured way: moderated discussions and presentations in this course ask you to state an interpretation, support it with evidence, respond to counterarguments, and disagree productively.

"Knowing Stuff"

Can you name all of the US state capitals, or recite any of Shakespeare's sonnets? Your ~~parents~~ grandparents probably could, or memorized them in school. As more and more information is at our disposal on our smartphones, less and less of it is readily available in our heads. For the most part, that is as it should be: pedagogy evolves along with our tools.

However… it is still important to have some baseline of knowledge in your active memory. Even though you can look up a fact in a matter of seconds, in practice much of the time you will not

do so: when you are chatting on the phone, as you quickly peruse an article, when you don't know what you don't know. The facts at your immediate disposal in your active memory shape your understanding of the world around you even when you don't realize it.

Therefore, you will be expected to learn some stuff — even (gasp) memorize a few big-picture facts — relevant to the subject matter of this course. That is one reason so many *evaluations* in this course happen in class, by hand (see Grading Policies).

Managing Information

Readings, audio lectures, video lectures, live discussion: this course gives you a lot of information in a lot of formats. Building your own system for capturing and organizing it in a way that will be "legible to your future self" is a skill that will outlast any single course (see Note-Taking).

Judging AI Output

Which came first, the chicken or the egg? Strong writers use AI effectively in part because they first learned to write the old-fashioned way. So how do you learn to ride without training wheels when training wheels are always within reach? Part of the answer is simply to take them off for a while, which is what the handwritten, in-class work in this course is for.

Everything above makes you a better user of AI. Knowing some facts lets you notice when a confident answer is wrong. Reading sources critically lets you notice when evidence has been invented. Writing and arguing for yourself gives you the standards to tell substantive prose from empty prose. AI is most useful to people who could, in a pinch, do without it. For how this course puts that into practice, see AI in This Course.

Grading Policies

Many of the policies in this course may differ significantly from what you expect from other classes, so please read this page carefully.

The design has three goals:

1. **Flexibility.** You will get sick, have family obligations, oversleep, or simply have a bad week. The grading system accounts for all of that automatically, without you having to explain anything to anyone.
2. **Variety of evaluation.** You will be evaluated in several different formats, so that no single format, and no single bad day, decides your grade.
3. **No need for individual exceptions.** I am not in a position to judge whether a reason for missing class is a good one, and I do not want to be. I can only assess what you actually do. The rules are the same for everyone, and they are built so that you never need to ask for an exception.

These policies are designed to be *challenging, but not difficult*. The *evaluations* are serious: they ask you to show, in person and in real time, that you know the material and can reason with it. But the structure around them gives your final grade plenty of cushion, with generous *engagement* credit, more *evaluation* opportunities than you need, and only your best work counting.

The course also uses a partially flipped format, with some lecture material pre-recorded (see Course Format and Materials for how a typical class cycle works).

The Short Version

- Do the readings and listen to or watch the recorded lectures **before** class, and bring the right materials (see Course Format and Materials). Nearly everything graded happens in class and depends on that preparation.
- Your grade has two categories, each worth **50%**: *evaluation* and *engagement*.
- If you prepare for class and come to most sessions, **you do not need to worry about the mechanics on this page.** The system takes care of you.
- If you are having a rough semester, you will still have **plenty of opportunities** to do well, without requesting absences, extensions, or exceptions.
- **Please do not email me about absences or missed work.** You do not need to, and doing so will cost you points (see *Reading These Guidelines*, below).

Evaluation (50%)

Evaluation measures how well you have mastered the course material: both what you know and how well you reason with it (see Learning Outcomes).

How It Works

- **All *evaluation* assignments take place in class,** many of them by hand. (Why? See AI in This Course.)
- **They are not announced in advance.** Come prepared every time. (Do not stress, though: there are many opportunities, such that the stakes for any single *evaluation* are low.)
- **Anything assigned up to that day is fair game:** recorded lectures, readings, primary sources, and live lecture.
- **Formats vary:** handwritten mini-essays, short-response questions, moderated discussions, and presentations. For written work, see Writing by Hand in Class.
- **Only your best two *evaluation* grades count.** All others are dropped.

Because only your best two grades count, a missed *evaluation* requires no action from you. If you are absent on an *evaluation* day, or you are present but would rather not complete that day's *evaluation*, that is your call. There is nothing to report and nothing to make up.

Rotations

Every student is assigned to one of eight **rotations**, labeled "blue," "green," etc. A rotation is not a group project or a team. It is simply a scheduling device that determines who is evaluated on which day. Not all sorts of *evaluations* can feasibly involve the entire class: the purpose of this system is to equitably stagger them throughout the semester.

You are always evaluated and graded individually, and your grade never depends on anyone else's work.

On a given day, I might evaluate the whole class, a single rotation, two rotations, or half the class. Students who are not being evaluated that day work on something else, which counts toward *engagement*.

Rotations are called in a strict cycle, so **every rotation receives the same number of opportunities.** If you come to most classes, you will have many more chances to complete an *evaluation* than the two that count. Each additional *evaluation* is a chance to replace a weaker grade with a better one, so you can miss several and still be in good shape.

Rotation assignments are final. There is no switching rotations for any reason, and rotations are not rebalanced if students drop the course.

Rules

- **No make-ups, early, or late *evaluations*.** Ever. Rest assured that if you miss an *evaluation* you will soon have another opportunity (with only the highest two grades counting when the dust settles).
- **Scanned submissions:** many *evaluations* are handwritten, scanned, and uploaded to Canvas (see *What to Bring* in Course Format and Materials).

- **Closed notes.** *Evaluations* are completed without notes, readings, or devices. What you bring to one is what you have already learned. For how to write well under those conditions, see Writing by Hand in Class.
- **Late arrival:** if you arrive after an *evaluation* has begun, you cannot take part in it. No exceptions.
- **Grading:** every *evaluation* is graded against clear criteria, which I will explain in class. Grades are not open to negotiation. If you are unhappy with a grade, the best remedy is to come to class: your next *evaluation* will probably replace it.
- **A benefit of regular attendance:** students who come to class consistently will have more opportunities than they need, so in practice they can let their two best formats count. Students who miss many sessions lose that leeway, regardless of the reason for the absence (except in unusual circumstances: see below).
- **Fewer than two grades:** if you end the semester with fewer than two *evaluation* grades, each missing grade counts as a zero. This happens only if you miss a very large share of the semester (see *Do Absences Ever Matter?*, below).

Engagement (50%)

Engagement is a participation category with a finish line. **Reach 100 points and you have full credit (100%).** Many more than 100 points will be available over the semester, roughly twice as many, so you can miss a substantial number of sessions or activities and still reach 100. If you come to class regularly, you will reach 100% well before the end of the semester, which means this entire grade category is likely to serve as a cushion offsetting the *evaluation* category.

Ways to Earn Engagement Points

- **In-class quizzes** based on the recorded lectures (see Course Format and Materials).
- **In-class activities and exercises**, including the activities that run while other rotations are being evaluated.
- **Contributions** to live discussion, in-class polls, and the in-class question forum. For which kinds of contribution to interactive lecture earn points, see Participation in Interactive Lecture.
- **Notes checks:** occasionally I will ask to see your notes in class (see Note-Taking).
- **Office hours** visits to discuss course content (a limited number of visits count).

Rules

- **Points cannot be earned after the fact.** A quiz that has closed stays closed; an activity that has passed is gone. There will be many others.
- ***Engagement* points stop accruing at the last class meeting.**
- **On days when your rotation is being evaluated,** you will not do that day's *engagement* activity. Because every rotation is called equally often, this evens out for everyone.

Going Past the Finish Line

For every **10 *engagement* points beyond 100**, I add **1 point to your *evaluation* score**, up to a maximum of 10 points. If you engage thoroughly all semester, hard work can raise your *evaluation* score.

This is the only extra credit in the course. Please do not ask about other extra credit.

> **Example: Jeff's semester**
>
> Jeff Winger is a busy guy. He works about twenty hours a week at a law office, loses a week in October to the man-flu, and is, by his own account, "pacing himself." He misses roughly a third of class sessions, including one for reasons he describes only as "a Greendale thing." He never emails me about any of it, so he keeps his 10 guidelines points.
>
> ***Evaluation.*** Jeff is in the green rotation (go Human Beings). Between absences, and one day when he decides to sit an *evaluation* out, he completes four *evaluations*, scoring 64, 71, 58, and 77. Only his best two count: $(77 + 71) \div 2 = \mathbf{74}$.
>
> ***Engagement.*** By mid-November, Jeff has 104 *engagement* points (including his 10 guidelines points), which is already full credit. Then, sensing an opportunity, he spends the last few weeks doing everything on offer and finishes with **127**.
>
> **Going past the finish line.** 127 is 27 points past 100. Each full 10 points adds 1 point to *evaluation*, so Jeff earns **2** bonus points (the leftover 7 don't count). His *evaluation* score rises from 74 to **76**.
>
> **Final grade:** $(50\% \times 76) + (50\% \times 100) = \mathbf{88}$.
>
> Jeff missed a third of the semester, skipped an *evaluation* on purpose, and never explained himself to anyone. None of that required an exception. His grade reflects the work he actually did, including the extra push at the end.

Reading These Guidelines: 10 Points

Every student automatically receives **10 *engagement* points** for reading and understanding these guidelines.

You keep them as long as you do not email me about absences, missed work, extensions, exceptions, make-ups, regrades, extra credit, or rotation changes. If you send such an email, you forfeit these points.

None of this applies when there is something fundamentally more serious to discuss: a disability accommodation through Disability Resources and Services (DRS), or circumstances serious enough to affect your semester as a whole (see *Unusual Circumstances*, below). And questions about course content, or about arranging an office hours meeting, are always welcome.

If something on this page is unclear, ask in class or in office hours.

Does This Mean I Don't Want to Hear from You?

Absolutely not. Quite the contrary, in fact. I want to talk with you about the ideas, sources, and arguments of this course; I just don't want our conversations to be about absences and exceptions. Visits to office hours to discuss course content also earn *engagement* points (see *Ways to Earn Engagement Points*, above).

Email

Email is always welcome for questions about course content, ideas, and readings; for arranging office hours; and for passing along an opportunity the whole class might enjoy, such as a lecture, an event, or an exhibit.

Emails about absences, missed work, extensions, exceptions, make-ups, regrades, extra credit, or rotation changes aren't necessary: the rules on this page already handle all of them. I will still read and answer them, but sending one costs the 10 guidelines points (see above). Think of it as a small fee for a service you don't need.

When you do email, see Email Etiquette.

Do Absences Ever Matter?

Missing a few classes, or even quite a few, requires no action from you. Even ending the semester with only three *evaluation* grades would be nothing to worry about, since only two count. To be in real danger of falling below two, you would have to miss something like half the semester.

If you find yourself there, then yes, please get in touch with me. But the conversation will not be about individual absences: it will be about *Unusual Circumstances* (below). Contacting me in that situation never costs you the 10 guidelines points.

Unusual Circumstances

The rules on this page are built to absorb ordinary disruptions. Some situations go beyond that. Communication about any of the following never affects the 10 guidelines points.

Disability Accommodations

If you have accommodations through Disability Resources and Services (DRS), follow the DRS process for sharing your accommodation letter. Depending on your accommodations, your arrangements may differ substantially from those described on this page. The course's Alternative Grading Option is likely to apply, though no single arrangement can anticipate every need.

Serious Disruptions

If something serious, such as an extended illness or a family emergency, keeps you away from a large part of the semester, get in touch with me. Also contact your academic advisor or the Dean of Students office, who coordinate with instructors in these situations and through whom the Alternative Grading Option is arranged. That option is likely to apply; other arrangements under university policy (for example, an incomplete or a withdrawal) are also possible.

How Your Final Grade Is Calculated

- ***Evaluation* score** = the average of your best two *evaluation* grades, plus any *engagement* bonus (maximum 100).
- ***Engagement* score** = your *engagement* points, up to 100.
- **Final grade** = 50% *evaluation* + 50% *engagement*.

Letter grades follow Canvas's standard cutoffs, with no rounding up or down: your final percentage determines your letter grade.

Official category totals are posted in Canvas periodically throughout the semester.

Frequently Asked Questions

I missed class. What should I do?
Watch any recorded lectures you missed, compare notes with colleagues, and come to the next class prepared. You should *not* inform the instructor: the system already has you covered.

My rotation was called on a day I was absent. Is that fair?
Every rotation receives the same number of opportunities, and only your best two grades count.

Is this group work?
No. Rotations only determine scheduling. Some *evaluations*, such as moderated discussions, involve talking with other students, but you are always graded individually.

What if you can't read my handwriting?
Unlikely: I decipher historical handwriting for a living. But not to worry. If I can't make out your handwriting, I will invite you to office hours to read it out loud for me.

Can I switch rotations?
No.

Can I use my notes during an *evaluation*?
No. *Evaluations* are closed-notes. Notes checks are a separate thing entirely: those earn *engagement* points for keeping a system going (see Note-Taking).

How do I earn *engagement* points for speaking up in class?
See Participation in Interactive Lecture, which sets out what kind of contribution earns points and what doesn't.

Can I make up a quiz or an in-class activity?
No. Many more are available than you need.

I'm unhappy with an *evaluation* grade. Can we discuss it?
I'm glad to talk in office hours about how to do better next time. The grade itself stands, and if you keep coming to class, it will probably be dropped.

Is there extra credit?
Only the *engagement* bonus described above.

I'm having a really hard semester. What are my options?
If you are missing a few classes here and there, the system already accounts for it. If you are missing a large part of the semester, see *Unusual Circumstances*.

University-Required Syllabus Policies

The University of Pittsburgh's required syllabus statements apply to this course and are part of this syllabus. They are available at https://teaching.pitt.edu/resources/syllabus-checklist/.

Appendix: Devices in Class

Devices are the enemy of in-class engagement: distractions that cover our eyes, plug our ears, and dominate our field of vision. Devices are also absolutely central to learning and research: we use them to look up historical facts, organize notes, and navigate texts. What to do, what to do?

The "default" policy for this is that you are welcome to use your devices to take and reference notes unless otherwise specified. However, the instructor will frequently designate "no screens at all" exercises, and reserves the right to ask you individually to put away your devices.

Always

- **No recording** of any kind (audio, video, photos of slides or classmates).
- **No headphones or earbuds in** during class.

Sometimes: Screens-Down Time

From time to time, I will designate **no screens or devices** for part of a class session (for example, during discussions or handwritten *evaluations*). When that happens, put everything away until I say otherwise.

Laptops, Tablets, and Phones

Unless I say otherwise, you are welcome to use a laptop, tablet, or phone in class to:

- Take and consult your notes
- Consult the readings
- Look up a name, date, place, or term that comes up in class
- Take part in in-class polls, the live question forum, and other interactive exercises
- Scan and upload handwritten work at the end of an assignment (see *What to Bring* in Course Format and Materials)

Devices are **not** for texting, social media, email, shopping, checking the latest scores, or work for other classes. The test is simple: is what's on your screen part of this class session? Keep in mind that your screen is also in the field of vision of everyone sitting behind you.

If your device use becomes a distraction, I may ask you to put it away.

Fine Print

The no-recording rule follows the University of Pittsburgh's recommended policy: students may not record classroom lectures, discussions, or activities without the instructor's advance written permission, and any approved recording is for the student's own private use only.

Accommodations through Disability Resources and Services (DRS), such as approved recording, assistive listening devices, or other assistive technology, take precedence over this page.

Appendix: Email Etiquette

First, a note: in this course, many emails are unnecessary (even though I am otherwise delighted to hear from you). See the Email section of Grading Policies for what email is (and isn't) for.

From your perspective, email probably feels boring and antiquated. But most of your instructors are GenX and Millennials, which means they can (*almost*) remember when email was new and exciting. In any case, Pitt gave you each @pitt.edu email accounts for a reason: promptly responding to communication from your official account is a *course requirement*, not just a courtesy.

And it is important to give *good* email. At a bare minimum:

- Write a clear subject line.
  - For instance, it is helpful to include course number and topic (e.g., "HIST 0753: Question about Assignment 2")
- Open with a stodgy, formal greeting: "Dear Professor Professorson"
  - "Hello Professor Professorson," "Greetings," etc., is probably okay… but avoid "Hey dude."
  - *Pro-tip*: if your instructor (or boss) responds to your salutation with their first name, you can address them that way going forward. (Remember: your instructors are ~~insecure and vain~~ justifiably proud of the achievements that earned them that doctorate, so err on the side of caution until they indicate otherwise.)
- Remind your instructor who you are: e.g., "I'm Abed Nadir from your Tuesday/Thursday HIST 0753 'Conspiracy Theories & Interior Design' class."
  - Your instructors are interacting with hundreds of students each day. Plus they are old and broken and their backs hurt. Do them this kindness.
- State your purpose clearly, getting to the point immediately.
  - It should be clear just from scanning through the email what the "ask" is, what the associated deadlines are, whether this is a time-sensitive email or one that can wait until the weekend.
- Wrap it up professionally: "Best regards," "Thank you," "Sincerely."

Other considerations:

- Always, *always* acknowledge an email sent to you by an instructor, especially if it addressed you directly.
  - This can be a quick "understood!"; but if you do not respond, you've added a new item to your instructor's already very full to-do list.
- Responding within 24 hours is "delightfully prompt"; within 48 hours is "on time"; and 72 hours or more is "delinquent."
- Use proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
  - Don't email the way you text: these are different mediums. No emails that are all lower case, no emojis, and, for the love of god, no gifs.

Sample Email

```
Subject: HIST 1287: "Nicolas Cage: Good or Bad?" - Extra Credit Opportunity Question

Dear [Professor Duncan](https://community-sitcom.fandom.com/wiki/Ian_Duncan),

My name is [Annie Edison](https://community-sitcom.fandom.com/wiki/Annie_Edison),
and I'm in your Monday/Wednesday []"Nicolas Cage:
Good or Bad?" seminar](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYFohmB_VLQ). I'm preparing
my final argumentative essay (currently
at 47 pages, but I can trim it down), and I wanted to ask: does citing
National Treasure 2 count as a primary or secondary source?

Also, I noticed the syllabus mentions a possible extra credit opportunity for
attending a Nic Cage film festival. I've already purchased tickets to all
seven screenings and prepared comparative viewing notes. Should I submit
those separately, or incorporate them into my final thesis defense?

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to our class debate on Thursday!

Best regards,
Annie Edison
Sophomore, Pre-Law
```

Additional Resources

- Purdue OWL: Email Etiquette for Students
- UW-Madison Writing Center
- Boston University Email Guide

Appendix: AI in This Course

AI is a cutting-edge research technology, and I *want* you to be using cutting-edge research technologies. So the question in this course is not whether AI is good or bad. The question is how to use it well, and when not to use it at all.

Principles

Responsibility

Maybe you wrote something entirely yourself. More likely a co-author, an editor, or an assistant (human or machine) had a hand in it: whether hidden or open, authorship is always a collective enterprise. Either way, when you submit something, in this class or anywhere else in life, **you are taking responsibility for it**: for its claims, its evidence, and its mistakes.

You Have Touched Every Word

Does that mean there was zero AI involved? No. AI drives spellcheckers and grammar checkers, internet searches and e-readers: these are good tools and you should be using them. It means that **you have read, considered, and stand behind every single word** of what you submit.

AI Can Help You Think, but the Claims and Evidence Must Be Yours

Use AI to test ideas, find gaps, and push back on your reasoning. But the claims you make, and the evidence you use to support them, must be your own, and you must have verified them.

How These Principles Apply to the Instructor

I hold myself to the same standards.

- **Course content:** I will not use AI to draft the prose in course content. Every word that I present to you, in writing or in audio, comes from me. Even when the voice you hear in a recording is AI-generated, the script behind it is mine.
- **Grading:** I will never, ever use AI for grading. Not as a first pass, not as a suggestion, not at all.
- **Your work:** I will never put student work into any tool, AI or otherwise, that Pitt has not approved for use with University data.
- **Where I do use AI:** to produce engaging lecture videos and clear audio; to design websites like the one you are reading now; and constantly, in my own research and work. AI as an editorial and exploratory aid, never as the source of claims or historical evidence.

How These Principles Apply to Students

I design my courses to harness AI in some places and to take it out of the equation in others, depending on the purpose of each exercise. (Pitt's Teaching Center describes a range of approaches to generative AI in courses; this course uses several of them, assignment by assignment.) The upshot: **if you can (or cannot) use AI on something, that is by design.**

That is why you will see a lot of "old-fashioned" exercises in this course, many of them handwritten. That is not an aversion to AI. These exercises are valuable in their own right, and some of them will make you *better* at using AI: learning to tell good AI-produced prose from bad, and finding your own voice and your own standards, so that you can then use AI to help you meet them.

A quite reasonable reaction to hand-written, in-class assignments might well be: "I will never have to do this in Real Life, why on earth are we being tormented this way?" The invention of the calculator rendered long division obsolete… and yet you still memorize multiplication tables and carry out those decimals by hand in grade school. The calculator changed the purpose of those activities, making them mostly a means to the end of learning mathematical reasoning rather than an end in themselves. Writing is no different: if you want to tell AI what is good writing, rather than the other way around, you need to spend some alone time with pen, paper, and your own intellect.

AI as a Study Aid

AI can be an excellent aid while you prepare for class, depending on how you use it. For example:

- **Self-quizzing** on readings and recorded lectures before class
- **Background and context:** who is this person, where is this place, what does this term mean?
- **Summaries and literature reviews** to orient yourself before (not instead of) a close reading
- **Devil's advocate, or "Reviewer 2":** ask AI to attack your reading of a primary source, then decide whether the criticism holds up
- **Untangling a difficult passage,** then checking the explanation against the source itself

In every case, the principles above still apply: you are responsible for the content and the analysis. Pitt's own standard for AI use makes the same point: you are accountable for anything you produce with AI, and for verifying its accuracy.

Assignments

Any assignment that involves AI can be completed with the tools Pitt provides to students. No paid subscription is ever required.

The Alternative Grading Option has its own, stricter rule: no AI at all.

Appendix: Note-Taking

Most advice about note-taking is advice about *procedure*: draw this line down the page, use these abbreviations, follow this method. I am not going to tell you any of that, because I do not think it is the useful question.

The useful question is about *outcomes*. Your notes are not the point. What you can do with them later is the point. A system that works beautifully in the moment and leaves you with nothing usable in April is a bad system, however tidy it looked in January.

So: build whatever system you like. Here is what it has to be able to do.

Three Things Your Notes Have to Do

1. You can find things again

By the end of the semester you will have notes on several hundred pages of reading, a few dozen recorded lectures, and every class session. The test is not whether you wrote something down. The test is whether you can put your hand on it two months later without re-reading everything.

That means some kind of consistent structure: dates, session numbers, source names, headings — whatever lets you scan rather than hunt. It does not matter which. It matters that it is consistent, because an inconsistent system is one you have to read in full to search.

2. You can say where something came from

When you use a fact or an argument in an exercise, you need to be able to say where you got it: which source, and ideally where in it. A note that says *peasants resisted conscription* is worth much less than one that says *peasants resisted conscription — Figes 61.*

Build this in as you go. Reconstructing it afterwards is miserable, and it is the single most common reason a good point goes uncited (see Writing by Hand in Class).

While you are at it, keep a visible line between **what a source says** and **the exact words it uses**. Mark direct quotations as quotations when you write them down, not later. Notes that blur the two are how accidental plagiarism happens, to careful people, years after the fact.

3. You can still open them in four years

This one sounds paranoid until it happens to you. Notes locked inside an app you stopped paying for, a platform that shut down, or an account you lost access to when you graduated are notes you no longer have.

Favor formats and places you control: a notebook you keep, plain text files, anything that exports. Be wary of scattering notes across half a dozen apps, which fails the first test as well as this one.

Choosing How to Capture

Different material deserves different treatment, and part of developing judgment is noticing which is which.

- **Memory alone.** Genuinely fine for some things. Not for primary sources, numbers, or anything you will need to cite.
- **Handwriting**, in a notebook or in the margins. Slower, which is the point: writing by hand forces you to compress and decide what matters, and that act of deciding is most of the learning. The trade-off is real, though — handwritten notes are not searchable, so lean harder on structure and dates to make up for it.
- **Typing.** Fast and searchable, which makes it easy to transcribe instead of think. If you type, make yourself summarize rather than capture everything.
- **A mix**, which is what most people land on: by hand in class, typed for readings, or the reverse.

There is no right answer here. There is only whether the result passes the three tests above.

A Note on Where Notes Live

A word-processing document is a reasonable place to *write* something and a poor place to *keep* things. Formatting matters enormously when you sit down to write an essay and not at all when you are taking notes, and searching across a pile of separate documents is harder than it should be.

If you want a system that will outlast this course, look into plain text or Markdown files: they are searchable by anything, open on any machine, and will still be readable long after this semester. That is a suggestion, not a requirement. For this course, a spiral notebook you actually use beats an elegant system you abandon in week three.

AI and Notes

Asking AI to summarize a reading is a legitimate way to orient yourself, and this course has no objection to it (see AI in This Course). But a summary you did not write is not a note. It records what a machine found salient, not what you noticed, and the noticing is the part that shows up in your work.

Use it to get your bearings before a close reading. Do not let it replace the reading.

Notes Checks

From time to time I will ask to see your notes in class, and doing so earns *engagement* points (see Grading Policies).

Notes checks have nothing to do with *evaluations*, which are closed-notes. Your notes are never something you lean on during a graded exercise; they are how the material got into your head beforehand. Take them for that reason, not as exam insurance.

To be clear about what I am looking for: **evidence that you have a system and are keeping it up.** Not a particular format, not neatness, not volume. A messy notebook that is clearly being used every week is exactly what I want to see. Ten immaculate pages produced the night before are not.

This is also, frankly, a nudge. Developing a note-taking system you trust is one of the more durable things you will take out of a history course, and it is the sort of thing nobody gets around to without a reason.

Appendix: Office Hours

What are 'office hours'? The best way to understand what office hours are really all about is to watch this explanatory video:

When and where: Mondays 10:30-11:30am; Tuesdays 2:30-3:30pm, 3908 Posvar

Office hours are *your* time! You do not need to email me in advance to let me know you are coming: just show up at my office door whenever you like during the time slot. You do not need to have a specific, or even course-related question: we can gossip about Pitt or debate the historicity of the latest Assassin's Creed game.

Please try to make the designated time work for your schedule. But, if you can't fit it in, send me an email (pickettj@pitt.edu) and we will figure something out.

Visits to discuss course content can also earn *engagement* points (see Grading Policies).