

Engagement Contract

"To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin"

-bell hooks (Teaching to Transgress, 1994)

Overview:

This course invites you to engage meaningfully, not just by completing assignments, but by thinking about how learning happens and what it means to be part of a learning community. Instead of a traditional participation grade, you'll co-create your own Engagement Contract—a set of 3–5 strategies that fit your learning style, goals, and life. By following through on your plan with intentional and thoughtful engagement, you can earn full participation credit for the course.

STEP 1: Understand the Why

To prepare, explore these readings and media that question traditional grading and promote learner-centered classrooms:

Read (by Wednesday ideally):

- ["Why I Don't Grade"](#) – Jesse Stommel
- ["The Case Against Grades"](#) – Alfie Kohn

Listen (by Wednesday ideally):

- [Pedagogue, Episode 74 – Jesse Stommel](#) (6:50–18:30 and 25:26–end)
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STEP 2: Design Your Engagement Plan

Reflect on how *you* learn best and how you want to stay connected in this course. Choose **3–5 methods** you will commit to practicing intentionally.

Sample Engagement Methods:

(Choose from these or write your own)

- Joining and participating in a Slack, Discord, or GroupMe thread with your peers
- Joining and participating in small accountability or check-in group(s) with your peers
- Attendance at optional Zoom hangouts or student hours

- Contributing to a shared resource or note-taking doc with your peers
- Weekly learning reflections (posted on a discussion thread)
- Providing feedback on peers' work once per week
- Sharing insights, questions, or takeaways from course content
- Creating visual summaries (e.g. concept maps, graphics, sketchnotes)
- Curating or designing zines, infographics, digital posters, etc to learn course content
- Reaching out to the instructor when you're confused or stuck

STEP 3: Write & Sign Your Contract

1. What does meaningful participation look like *for you* in a course like this?

(Write a few sentences)

2. List 3–5 engagement methods you will commit to this semester in addition to the required ones I've assigned to everyone:

1. ...
2. ...
3. ...
4. *(optional)* _____
5. *(optional)* _____
6. *(required)* Engagement essays at midterm and final
7. *(required)* Participating with the weekly blog posts & comments
8. *(required)* Submitting assignments by the due date/grace period

3. What will you do if life or challenges get in the way of your plan? Be specific.

(E.g., "I'll reach out to my instructor to revise my plan...")

4. What support do you need to stay engaged and feel connected this semester?

(Optional but encouraged)

Grading Scale: Engagement Grade

Your grade for the Engagement category, worth X percent of your overall grade, will be based on how intentionally and thoughtfully you follow through on the Engagement Contract you create, along with the individual assignments in the Engagement category such as the engagement essays, for example. This grade is not based on perfection — instead, it values **individuality, intention, reflection, and communication**.

How It Works:

At midterm and again at the end of the semester, you will write a short Engagement Essay where you:

1. Describe how you've followed through on your chosen engagement methods
2. Provide photographic evidence (e.g., screenshots, shared docs, comments) showing your participation
3. Reflect honestly on how well your engagement aligns with your contract and the grading scale
4. Argue for a letter grade based on the descriptions below

Example:

Let's say you chose these methods:

- Contributing to a shared class resource
- Posting weekly learning reflections on the discussion board
- Giving feedback on peers' work each week

(Plus the 3 engagement methods required for everyone)

At midterm (and at end of semester), you'll submit:

- A reflection and analysis on how often and how deeply you engaged in these 6 methods
- Screenshots or other evidence showing your contributions
- A self-assigned grade backed by this contract and your argument in the essay

If your evidence shows intentional, meaningful engagement in your chosen methods, you can argue for an A for your midterm (and final) engagement grade based on the description of an A grade in the table below.

Grade	Description
A (90–100%)	Your engagement across assignments, peer interactions, and chosen strategies shows strong intentionality and self-awareness . You participate in ways that feel meaningful, sustainable, and aligned with your needs . When collaborating with peers—through feedback, discussion, shared problem-solving, or community

	support—you do so thoughtfully and in ways that contribute positively to our learning community . Your midterm and final engagement essays demonstrate deep reflection, clear evidence of how you engaged, and honest insight into your learning process. When challenges arise, you communicate promptly and adjust your plan with care.
B (80–89%)	You engage with your assignments, peers, and chosen strategies with general intentionality , though some moments show reduced clarity, presence, or follow-through . Collaborative engagement is present but may feel uneven or less purposeful at times. Your engagement essays show developing awareness of your learning and provide some evidence of how you engaged, though the depth or clarity may vary . Communication about shifting needs may be occasional or delayed .
C (70–79%)	Your engagement across assignments and peer interactions feels limited, uncertain, or difficult to sustain —not because of frequency, but because the intentionality or clarity behind your choices is harder to see . Collaborative engagement may be minimal or feel disconnected from your learning goals. Your engagement essays may be brief, lack evidence, or show limited insight into your learning or needs. Communication about challenges is infrequent or unclear .
D/F (Below 70%)	Engagement across assignments, peer interactions, and chosen strategies is minimal or largely absent . There is little or no communication about obstacles, needs, or shifts in your capacity. Engagement essays, if submitted, do not demonstrate intentional engagement, provide evidence, or show awareness of your learning process.

Your engagement category grade will be comprised of your scores on the following assignments:

- Module based blog posts (90 pts total)
- Module based blog comments (45 pts total)
- Midterm engagement essay (25 pts)
- Final engagement essay (25 pts)
- Midterm engagement grade (argued by you in the essay - 50 pts)
- Final engagement grade (argued by you in the essay - 50 pts)

Note:

- You can revise or renegotiate your engagement plan anytime.
- Unexpected life issues are *expected*—as long as you keep in touch, we'll adapt together.
- Participation is **not about being perfect**—it's about showing up as you can and communicating when things shift.

Final Signature

By signing below, I commit to the plan above and understand how my engagement will be evaluated.

Your Name: _____

Signature (typed is fine): _____

Date: _____

[Click this video to hear me talk about this contract](#) if you're feeling a little confused by this document. Don't hesitate to reach out with questions should you have them!

Engagement Essay(s)

To be completed at midterms & finals

Purpose: This essay asks you to critically reflect on your engagement in the course and to advocate for your own assessment based on the Engagement Contract you created at the start of the semester. Rather than simply describing what you did, your task is to evaluate the quality, intentionality, and growth of your engagement, making a case for your final engagement grade based on your self-assessment. This is your opportunity to ensure your voice is centered in how your participation is understood and assessed.

Content:

1. **Evaluate your engagement:** Reflect honestly and critically on how you engaged with the course—your peers, the materials, the assignments, and the learning community as a whole. **Refer directly to the 3–5 engagement methods you committed to in your contract, along with the required methods.**
2. **Use evidence:** Support your evaluation with photographic evidence of your engagement (e.g., screenshots). **Clearly explain how each piece of evidence demonstrates your engagement and connects to your contract.**
3. **Discuss adaptation & response:** Revisit what you said in your contract about what you'd do if life got in the way or things didn't go as planned. When challenges came up, how did you respond? Did you revise your engagement strategies? Reach out for help? Communicate shifts? What worked and what didn't? **This section should show your ability to reflect, adapt, and stay committed to your learning even when things were hard.**
 - a. If you didn't struggle, address how you implemented your plan successfully. How will you continue this practice for the rest of the semester?
 - b. If you struggled but didn't adjust, discuss how you will adapt and revise per your contract for the rest of the term to increase your engagement.
4. **Argue for a grade:** Based on your reflection, analysis, and evidence, assign yourself a grade for your engagement in the course thus far. **Use the grading scale in your Engagement Contract to support your argument, especially focusing on intentionality in contributions, methods that align with your needs, reflection of the impact of your learning processes, and communication.**

Formatting & Style:

- MLA style, except with 1.5 spacing (not double)
- minimum 2 full pages of text (photos do not count for length)
- italics for specific assignment titles
- cite your photos (in-text & Works Cited)

- This essay is both a reflection and a persuasive argument. It can (and probably should) be narrative, but must also be a critical self-assessment on your engagement.