

Thought Papers

Version 1 (Fall 2024, Thought Paper #1)

In his “Introduction” to *The Best American Essays 2020*, André Aciman tells us that to think is to drift, that every “essay is the child of uncertainty,” that “[a]n essay is like a story, only with the difference that the author may have no idea where he is headed” (xxxix, xxx, xxix). For your thought paper, your task is to experiment with writing in this drifting, exploratory way, giving yourself permission to change direction, to change your mind. Please give us two double-spaced pages of thinking about something that’s fascinating to you—something you’ve observed, something you’ve been remembering, something you’re reading about—starting from a place of *uncertainty*, so that you have room “to speculate, to explore, to propose, to delay, to reconsider” (Aciman xxix). When you’re done, please print out your work, and practice reading it out loud. Notice if there are changes you need to make to allow the writing to express the voice that you wish to inhabit. Edit your work, print it out again, and bring it to class, where you will read it out loud to your classmates. This assignment counts for 5% of your final grade, you only need to complete the work to earn the full 5%.

Version 2 (Fall 2024, Thought Paper #2)

Remember this: in his “Introduction” to *The Best American Essays 2020*, André Aciman tells us that to think is to drift, that every “essay is the child of uncertainty,” that “[a]n essay is like a story, only with the difference that the author may have no idea where he is headed” (xxxix, xxx, xxix). For your second thought paper, your task is to share with us one of the most difficult and fascinating questions that has come up for you, as you’ve been researching your chosen conversation. What is it that you’re still struggling to understand, or to formulate your own opinion about? In keeping with Aciman’s description of “essaying,” please give yourself permission to speculate, to explore, and to change your mind. You are welcome to bring in some evidence from your research, but the focus here should be on *your own thoughts, your own doubts, your own questions and tentative ideas*. When you’re done, please print out your work, and practice reading it out loud. Notice if there are changes you need to make to allow the writing to express the voice that you wish to inhabit. Edit your work, print it out again, and bring it to class, where you will read it out loud to your classmates. This assignment counts for 5% of your final grade, you only need to complete the work to earn the full 5%.

[Update following the 2024 Presidential Election: If you would like to use this Thought Paper to think through current events (even if these do not feel directly related to the conversation you're writing about), you are welcome to.]