

The logo for Bowdoin College, featuring the word "Bowdoin" in a white serif font inside a black rectangular box.

BALDWIN CENTER FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

What to Expect from First-Year Writing Seminar - Fall 2023

As you prepare for your first semester at Bowdoin, the one course all students take in their first semester will be a First-Year Writing Seminar (FYWS). The 33 faculty teaching FYWS this fall are excited for the opportunity to welcome you to campus, to engage with you in small seminars, and to build practices of close reading, revised writing, and engaged discussion with you. Here are some things that you can expect from your First-Year Writing Seminar:

Close Reading

You should expect to read frequently and carefully in your First-Year Writing Seminar. Through shared texts, you and your classmates will build discussions and develop new ways of understanding the topic. Some of the readings will serve as models for the sort of evidence-based writing you will create throughout the course. Intentional reading, as taught in your First-Year Writing Seminar, is a skill you will take with you into your other coursework at Bowdoin.

Writing to Learn

The First-Year Writing Seminar helps transition students to the expectations of college-level writing through a deep engagement in disciplinary content. Faculty craft courses around important questions, historical texts, and complex issues. As you make your way through complex texts and writing assignments, you will receive frequent feedback from faculty. Rather than seeing writing solely as a product or a performance, the focus is on writing as a process. This “write to learn” approach rewards the hard work of writing your way through difficult questions and challenging content.

Focus on Revision

You can expect to write frequently and for your writing to improve as you engage in consistent and deep revision throughout the semester. Writing is revised with input from faculty and fellow writers in your course. You will also work directly with Writing Assistants through the Baldwin Center for Learning and Teaching. When you finish the course, you should have effective strategies for revision to apply to other writing throughout your Bowdoin career and beyond Bowdoin.

Engaged Discussion

These courses depend upon the active and engaged participation of all students. Guided by the professor, you will discuss the questions that shape the course, wrestle with complex ideas, and engage in a collaborative experience of meaning making.

Academic Integrity and Information Literacy

Your First-Year Writing Seminar will introduce you to Library resources and you will engage in reflections on academic integrity. You’ll be supported in your transition from student to scholar by developing skills citing sources in your academic communication and enhancing your understanding about *why* it matters to cite and what it means to be a part of an ethical academic community.

FAQs

Who teaches FYWS?

This fall, we have faculty from a number of departments teaching First-Year Writing Seminars. Faculty chose to offer a FYWS and look forward to working with you in this course and throughout your time at Bowdoin.

How many students are in a FYWS?

Each seminar has a maximum of 16 students. This allows community-building as well as student-faculty connection.

What are some examples of FYWS this fall?

- Becoming a Modern Artist: Matisse, Picasso, Valadon (Art History)
- How to Read a Million Books (Digital Computational Studies)
- Approaches to Neuroscience (Biology)
- Personal Identity (Philosophy)
- Politics of Climate Change (Government)
- Unhappy Queers (Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies)
- The Science of Solving Crime (History)
- Deconstructing Racism (Sociology)
- Performing Violence (Theater and Dance)
- Dangerous Enchantments (English)

How do I select a FYWS?

Your academic advisor will talk to you about selecting a FYWS during your first meeting in August, asking about your interests and preferences. You are encouraged you to follow your curiosity and select a few courses that seem interesting to you even if you have never taken a course in that field. Bring three or four courses of interest to your meeting. You will select one course, and will have additional opportunities in following rounds of registration if you are not placed in your top choice. Selection for FYWS is a lottery system among all First-year students.