When you enrolled this semester in English 114, you automatically joined an exciting course that will integrate reading and writing at every turn. What this means is that you will learn how to write better through your reading and how to read better through your writing. We will focus not only on the processes and practices of reading and writing, but also on the ways that reading and writing interact and complement one another.

In addition to assigned class readings, our second type of primary text will be your writing and the writing of your classmates. This is a class where your writing—and how you can continue to develop and hone your writing skills—will be taken seriously. We will therefore make use of a writing workshop on a regular basis; here, it is your writing that we will be reading, valuing and exploring. At regular intervals throughout the course, I will reproduce essays (or portions of essays) written by members of our class for us to consider. This is an essential part of learning to “read” your own writing and beginning to create a language for talking about writing. You will also, throughout the term, be responsible for reading and responding to the work of your peers in written format, and thus helping each other to write more engaging, complex, precise, and reflexive essays. This class’s success depends a great deal on the community we are able to build as readers and writers who respect and are interested in carefully reading the work that individual writers are doing.

Here then are the instructional goals for this course, built around my teaching philosophy:

• I’ll start with what you already know. Each of you brings to this classroom your own life experience, wisdom, and insights. This is called your schema (pronounced “skeema”). It’s the information and the structures your brain already holds before you even walk into this classroom. And this schema will be the foundation upon which we build.

• You’ll always know what’s going on in the class and why: there should be nothing mysterious about the process of learning. You should never have to wonder, “Why in the world is the teacher asking me to do that?” I’ll do my best to make your learning processes very visible and explicit so that you can get familiar with the processes and use them throughout your life—in school and beyond.

• We’ll have a community in this classroom. I’ll do my part to ensure that the classroom is always respectful, safe, friendly, interesting, interactive and (I hope) a lot of fun. People learn better in an environment with these characteristics, so let’s make sure this is the environment we create and support.

• The goal is not to get the answer or paper “right,” but to arrive at your own interpretation and persuasive analysis. We’ll help and encourage each other to do intellectual work in this class. We will be reading texts and discussing ideas that aren’t black and white. Our work is to practice looking at words, sentences, and ideas closely and critically—others and our own.