This intensive six-week course focuses on the strategies and techniques behind great persuasive writing in both politics and policy. We will explore and address every element of the writing process, paying special attention to the challenges you will face as a writer in the public, discursive world of emails, memos, articles, editorials, blogs, arguments, recommendations, refutations and explanations. Weekly writing assignments, along with focused exercises, will hone your skills and provide ample opportunity for feedback. Students whose goals include longer-form writing and writing for publication, whether journalistic, academic, policy-review, or personal, should strongly consider taking this course in a sequence with DPI-811M, Advanced Writing for Politics and Policy.

A note on experience: Intensive Writing for Policy and Politics is intended for both novice and experienced writers. It is not, however, designed to help with basic issues of grammar and usage, and not recommended for students who are new to English. Instead, DPI-810M teaches you the strategies, techniques, and habits of skilled writers, and provides a rigorous, immersive environment in which to internalize them.

The class is grounded in:
1. Constant writing. At nearly every class meeting you will turn in a piece of writing—sometimes a short exercise, other times a longer essay, article, editorial, or memo. You will be constantly creating, revising, and improving your ideas in writing.
2. Constant reading. DPI-810M challenges you with some of the best writing about policy and politics from a variety of contexts and genres. You will be asked to contribute to the opus of readings with works you admire or find provocative. You will discuss, analyze, evaluate, and occasionally edit what you read.
3. Constant feedback. For some assignments you will receive written feedback. For others, you and I will have an editorial meeting during which we go over your writing in detail.
4. Group work and workshops. Throughout the term you will be working in groups to read, discuss, and edit the work of your colleagues.
5. Finally, lectures and class discussions about the reading material, the writing assignments, and the craft of writing.

Assignments and grading: You will write, on the subject of your choice (1) a blog post responding to an op-ed, (2) an op-ed, (3) a letter of advocacy, and (4) a critical review/analysis such as a short journal article, book review, response essay, or memo. The first assignment is worth 10% of your grade; the second, third and fourth 25% each. Class participation accounts for the balance, 15%. You will often be collaborating with your colleagues in and out of class, though your written work must be original.

Texts: Adam Garfinkle, Political Writing (ISBN 9780765631244)
Arthur Plotnik, Spunk & Bite (ISBN 9780375722271)
(Recommended): Theodore Rees Cheney, Getting the Words Right. (ISBN 1582973586)
Monday, January 25:  Introduction

How does a piece of writing succeed? What causes it to fail—or, worse, to never be produced?

Wednesday, January 27: Arguing in Communities

Writing for today: Please write a one page (250-300 word) essay connecting your background and aspirations, your goals at HKS, and 2-3 topics you feel motivated to write about for an audience beyond the academic classroom. Also devote a paragraph to your strengths and weaknesses as a writer, and what advances in writing you hope to make in this class and at HKS generally. Bring printed copy to class.

Reading for today: Read New York Times, “And Now a Word from Op-Ed” as well as at least two Op-Eds each from this week’s New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Boston Globe, Boston Herald, and Dawn. (all are available through Harvard Libraries if you don’t have a subscription). Also read any response pieces assigned in class. Be prepared to discuss what you find persuasive, readable, memorable—or problematic.

Topics: What makes a piece of writing persuasive? What does it mean to have a strong argument? A sound analysis? How can you explain complicated problems simply and forcefully? General topic: learning to relate rhetorical approach to purpose and audience.

Monday, February 1:  Purpose, Politics, Prose

Writing for today: Brainstorm 2-3 topics for both your “response to an op-ed” and your own Op-Ed (assignment 2). Come prepared to discuss in terms of writing and research strategies, timeliness, style, and audience.

Reading for today: Ann Lamott, “Shitty First Drafts”
Emily Hiesand, “On Style”
Susan Orlean, “On Voice”
Jan Winburn, “Finding Good Topics: An Editor’s Questions”
The Op-Ed Project, “How to Pitch” and “Questions for Op-Ed Writers”
Garfinkle, Political Writing, chapter 2, 6.

Topics: Design in writing; how purpose, audience, and prose relate. Editing for voice, clarity, and impact. The value of the writing group.

Wednesday, February 3:  Editing Workshop I

Writing for today: First draft of blog post due (bring 2 printed copies to class for editing);

Reading for today: Joseph M. Williams: Style, chapters 1-6.
George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language”

Topics: What is style? How can style be evaluated and improved? What are the consequences of bad style and the advantages of stylistic excellence? How can you realistically work towards stylistic excellence in your own everyday writing?
**First Assignment Due:**  
- By Friday at midnight: Post your op-ed response on the course blog.  
- By Sunday at midnight: Comment on 5 other students’ blog posts.

**Monday, February 8: Words, Frames, World-Views –Meeting your Audience**

*Preparation for today’s class:* Prepare to present in class a term from your field of interest which you feel is inadequate. Be able to explain why it’s inadequate and to suggest an alternate term. Also refresh your list of 2-3 topics for possible op-eds.

*Topics:* What makes a word useful? What makes a word useless, vague, cheap, or distracting? How do you deal with difficult or controversial words or terms? How do you ‘coin’ a term? // What underlying metaphors, assumptions, and arguments ‘frame’ your choice of words? // General topic: the relationship between writing, assumptions, and persuasion

*Reading for today:* George Lakoff, *Don’t Think of an Elephant*, Chapter 1 (in the coursepack)  
Frank Luntz, *Words that Work*, Chapter 1 (in the coursepack)  
The Pew Research Center for People and the Press, “Red and Blue” typography; please read the Overview and Typology Group Profiles (pp. 1-18) and any other sections that look interesting to you. Take the Typology Questionnaire.  
Raymond Williams, “Culture” from *Key Words*.

**Wednesday, February 10: Editing Workshop 2**

Arthur Plotnik, *Spunk and Bite*, Chapters 2, 17, 18, 27  

*Writing for today:* Bring in 2 printed copies of your op-ed for editing.

*Workshop today:* Editing op-eds.

*Topics:* Editing as a way of strengthening thought. How do you build in time for editing? How do you establish priorities when cutting text? How do you edit an argument to make it more convincing and comprehensive?

**2nd Assignment due:** OP-ED due Monday via Canvas.

<CONFERENCES> this week

**Monday, February 15: PRESIDENT’S DAY- class does not meet**

**Wednesday, February 17: Letters of Persuasion**

*Reading for today:* Garfinkle, *Political Writing*, chapter 8.  
Canadian Brownfields Network: letter to *The Premier of Ontario*  
Open Letter, Pregnant Mothers’ Appeal: (find in Canvas)  
ArtsEd Washington, *Sample Advocacy Letters*

*Topics:* What sorts of audience do you face? How do you learn who an audience is, and what an audience knows and needs to know? How much can you realistically expect from your audience in terms of knowledge, attention, and empathy? How does great writing adapt itself to its audience? // General topic: the way audience traits influence style, structure, subject, and ideas.
Monday, February 22: Style and Letters 2: Message and Metaphor

Reading for today: Martin Luther King, Jr. “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”
Lakoff, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chapters 1-6.

Writing for today: Bring in 2-3 ideas for your letter of advocacy.

Wednesday, February 24: Editing Workshop 3

Reading for today: Chesney, *Getting the Words Right*, selected chapters TBD

Writing for today: Bring in 2 printed copies of your draft letter for editing.

Workshop today: Editing letters.

3rd assignment due. LETTER due Sunday via Canvas

<CONFERENCES this week>

Monday, February 29: Critical Reviews I: Review Essays and Memos

Reading for today: "Strangers Drowning." [NYTimes](https://www.nytimes.com/)
"Inside the American Injustice System" [Bookforum](https://bookforum.org/)
"The Martian and the Cult of Science" [Slate.com](https://slate.com/)
Wendy Belcher, *Writing the Academic Book Review* (Links to an external site.)
Economist, “Casino Capitalism”
Cass Sunstein, “It Captures Your Mind”
optional/for fun: "The Boorito"

Topics: What does it mean to 'review'? How can you turn your reading habits into research habits? How does critical analysis translate into persuasion? //

Wednesday, March 2: Critical Reviews II: Personal Essays and Leadership—Working with Difficult Material, Developing a Public Voice

Reading for today: George Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant”
Stewart O’Nan, “Not Stopping”
Selected material on query letters, publication (dist. in class)

Writing for today: Come in prepared to discuss your idea for a critical review in terms of writing and research strategies, timeliness, and audience. Context, suspense, character, and values. Also:
How do you anticipate the publishing world and interest an editor in your writing?

Assignment 4 due: First draft due for group conferences March 7-11 (sign up via Canvas)
Final draft due Monday, March 21 (anytime)