# Essay Topics

Technical Requirements for homework essays (1, 3 and 4):

Minimum 4 pages (1200 words) and engagement with two sources **from our reading** on the assigned topic. Do not use outside sources without consulting me. You can use personal experience examples, but the essay must also use the reading in a sustained and serious way. Quote and paraphrase from your sources and use parenthetical citations. Include a works-cited page in MLA format.

You can find details on page set-up for MLA format here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP56cox1_II>

**Essay #1: Knowledge versus Pleasure**

**Argument Essay**

Topic:

Some people believe that understanding the self, cultivating knowledge and wisdom are the path to true happiness because of both the intrinsic value of understanding the world and our lives and also because of the improvement in judgment that can come with better information. However, many consider positive emotions like elation, joy, and euphoria as the true markers of happiness. Based on our reading and your own analysis and experience, which do you believe contributes more to people’s happiness, knowledge or pleasure?

**Essay #2: In-class**

**Challenge versus Security**

**Definition and Evaluation Essay**

Topic:

Many people feel a sense of urgency about achieving financial security. We may also wish for greater emotional security, sense of control and confidence that can come with knowing you can do what’s required in a predictable life. Yet over time, a life without challenges, where we achieve nothing and have no goals tends to be unsatisfying, and hedonistic pleasures usually don’t compensate for long. What kinds of choices have you made to balance these sometimes competing needs? How well do you think you are succeeding in this balancing act?

In your essay, you must use Seligman (and one more essay if you choose) to define and support the need for both security and challenge, and to show what tends to happen when these needs get out of balance. Then turn to your own experiences to assess with honesty and humor where you have succeeded and where you have not. End with a prediction or recommendation for change—both for yourself and for readers of your essay.

**Essay #3: Work and Justice**

**Synthesis and Evaluation**

Topics:

1. Apply McCoy’s ideas about institutional ethics to a company, school, church or any organized group of more than 10 people that you belong to. Explain the challenge McCoy outlines in his essay and apply those principles to the kind of ethical dilemmas or challenges you might find in your own group or institution. What should change, and what could you, with your own set of strengths and virtues, best contribute to this endeavor?

This question focuses on McCoy’s essay and your own experience, but you should also **use Seligman to define “signature strengths.”**

1. What makes work meaningful? Is gratification possible in any form of work or are some jobs too awful or limited to find any value in them? Is meaningful work critical to finding happiness? Using Seligman, your own experience and one more essay from our reader, explore the relationship between happiness, gratification and meaning in work. How and why do some people succeed (or fail) in terms of Seligman’s approach to finding meaning and fulfillment in a job and in life? In your conclusion, consider how you and readers of your essay should use these insights to shape a career.

**Essay #4: Love and Connection**

**Definition and analysis**

Topic:

Write an essay exploring the definition of love and human nature that we see in Sherman Alexie’s story “Do You Know Where I Am?” or Kazuo Ishiguro’s

novel *Never Let Me Go*. Focus on the following questions: What is the implied definition of love in the story or novel? Do you agree with it? To what extent are love, happiness and human nature connected?

Feel free to also include a quote or two from a poem we read as a way to open or close your essay, and if you need to include background defining love or its role in happiness, you can use *Authentic Happiness*, as well. But the body of your essay should focus entirely on the definition of love you find in “Do You Know Where I Am?” or *Never Let me Go*.