The “Difficulty Paper”: A Metacognitive Synthesis of Your Learning  
English 102

AT A GLANCE

**Metacognition** is, put simply, thinking about one’s thinking. More precisely, it refers to the processes used to plan, monitor, and assess one’s understanding and performance. Metacognition includes a critical awareness of a) one’s thinking and learning and b) oneself as a thinker and learner. In this first assignment, you will assess and monitor your thinking processes through a particular question about *The New Jim Crow*.

**Description:** Your “Difficulty Essay” will present a personal account of the challenges and processes you faced while thinking through a particular concept, problem, and/or idea in Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*. You will practice asking not only “What am I learning?” but “How am I learning?” in order to confront yourself with the effectiveness (and ineffectiveness) of your approaches. The essay’s introduction should set-up the context for a specific question that you pose for further investigation and/or clarification. Then Part I of your analysis will describe the challenges, points of clarification, and/or conceptual obstacles in detail. Part II of your analysis will describe the steps you took to overcome those difficulties and challenges—including doing some additional research and offering multiple perspectives on the concept, problem, and/or idea to clear up your conceptual confusions. The conclusion of your analysis will describe the results, positive and negative, of these efforts. Note that your page-one introduction and thesis will present a brief comprehensive overview of all parts of this analysis before plunging the reader into an in-depth discussion of each one sequentially in the body of the essay. Ultimately, this assignment focuses on raising awareness of the processes one goes through as readers, writers, and researchers (metacognitive awareness).

LOGISTICS

**Topic:** Topic, question, and list of potential sources associated with course theme due **Friday, Oct. 7**.

**Outline:** A tentative outline of your Difficulty Paper is due **Monday, Oct. 10**.

**Peer Review Part I:** A peer review of your Part I will be held **Thursday, Oct. 13**.

**Peer Review Part II:** A peer review of your Part II will be held **Friday, Oct. 14**.

**Final draft:** The final “Difficulty Paper” is due **Saturday, Oct. 15 by 11:59 PM via Canvas’ TurnItIn**.

**Task:** To present an in-depth analysis of your thinking through at least one question within the broader context of Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*.

**Purpose:** To assess your roadblocks and thinking processes, and to create an Action Plan or roadmap for addressing your issues, what you learn, and how you learn.

**Audience:** Other intellectuals grappling with questions inspired by *The New Jim Crow* and who are interested in your thinking process; those predisposed to enjoy the topic immensely. Consider the needs of your readers. What do readers need to know about you? What do they need to be told in order to understand your thinking?

**Tone:** Should be confident, authentic, and appropriate to your task (style and tone built on word choice). It need not be strictly formal (may use first person). Invite a spirited dialogue with your own curious mind and engaged audience.
**Paper length:** 4-6 pages long.

**Formatting:** Use MLA for format and source citation.

**Process:** Drafts and notes must be turned in and include required steps (i.e., outline) culminating in a workshop draft (must be typed), workshop rubric, and final draft (must be typed). You will be guided in class with these steps.

**Integrate:** A minimum of 10 quotes, passages, and/or references from *The New Jim Crow* and/or 1-2 other secondary sources (bold the sources that you integrate). Additional secondary sources are not required for this first assignment. However, you may choose to use them if your thinking process requires it.