

Materials from “Old Dog, Neat Tricks: Seven Small Ways to Not Kill Your Joy” Nicole Klein, 4/16/2026

Two Suggested Syllabus Sections:

Communicating with me

If you have questions:

1. When you face challenges with an assignment or technology, spend 30 minutes trying to solve it independently. Here's how:
 - a. Reread the assignment or instructions carefully.
 - b. Check Blackboard for additional details or announcements.
 - c. Post your question on CircleIn or search online (e.g., Google).
 - d. If you're still stuck, contact me. Be sure to include what steps you've already tried. This approach helps build your independence and professionalism.
2. If it's a personal concern, email or talk to me directly. I have many resources to connect you with and I'm happy to do it. You are a whole human, not just a brain in my class.
3. Electronic communications can be prone to misinterpretation. Thus, professional e-mail etiquette should be practiced (e.g., do not use all caps, do not use texting formats). Other email etiquette and communication guidelines include:
 - a. Include the course (e.g. PBHE 490) in the subject line to help filter class messages in my inbox.
 - b. My goal is to respond to emails within 24 hours on weekdays. Feel free to email me a professional “nudge” if it has been over that time and you haven't heard back.
 - c. To support your professional growth, I will happily discuss class issues with you (grades, assignments, feedback, conflicts, etc.), but not with your parent(s), relatives, partner, roommate, or others unless you have a medical crisis and are unable to advocate for yourself.
4. Finally, please remember that **it is my job and my pleasure to be your instructor. Your questions are not “bothering” me—they are important for you to master essential knowledge and skills.** Your understanding is our shared goal. 😊

Feedback, Grading, & Appeals

Class announcements or e-mails will be provided when grades are/will be posted, and it is your responsibility to check your grades on Blackboard. Some assignments may take longer than others to grade, but I generally try to return feedback within a week. You can find your grade by clicking the My Grades link on the left menu of the Blackboard course. If there is a rubric attached to the assignment, you can click your score to see my feedback on the rubric. Questions or concerns regarding grades can be discussed during scheduled appointments only (e.g. not in the classroom where there is little privacy). If you feel your grade is incorrect or does not reflect what you should have earned, it may be appealed through the following process:

- 1) Compose your appeal in writing—e-mail is acceptable.
- 2) The appeal must be accompanied by specific and appropriate evidence in support of the appeal.
- 3) The appeal must be submitted within 2 weeks of the posted grade and no grade appeals will be considered after that date.

Letter of Recommendation Request Form

Please fill out a copy of this form for the letters you are requesting. Please give me AT LEAST 10 days, preferably 14-28, to write your letter. When filling out the form, please do not delete the questions or other text. Please return this via email nklein@siue.edu. Please do not share via Google docs, 365, or any other drives.

Save the file with YourName_Klein_Letter_Request_Form

Before we start: Most application websites allow you, as the applicant, to check a box saying you waive your rights to see your letters – I recommend you do this. If you choose not to waive your rights it sends up a red flag to the committee and looks weird. *If you are not sure if your writer can provide a good letter for you, pick another letter writer.* Only choose letter writers that know you well enough to write a good, *personal* letter as generic letters can be the “kiss of death” for your application.

I am happy to write letters for students, but I want to make sure that I can write a strong letter. I do not want to hurt a student’s application with a generic or bland letter. I will never write anything negative (it is a letter of recommendation, not an evaluation), but if I cannot say anything more than “Person W was my student in Class X during Semester Y and earned a grade of Z” then I am not a good writer for you. In addition to the actual letter, many places ask a series of questions for me to answer about the student. Almost all applications ask me to compare you to all other students that I’ve taught over the years. Others are very specific: “Describe a specific situation where you have observed the applicant using critical thinking skills or applied a new skill” or “How would you describe the applicant’s leadership skills?” or “Rate this student’s originality and intellectual creativity.” If I don’t know you well enough to speak to these questions, you probably should find someone who does to write a letter for you.

If you feel I know you well enough to provide a good letter, please fill out all the below info and return to me. If the question does not apply, just write NA. It may be a good idea for us to meet in person to chat about your application.

Just for your own peace of mind, I am aware of bias in letters of recommendation and make it a point to continually check myself when writing (see:

https://csw.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/avoiding_gender_bias_in_letter_of_reference_writing.pdf and <https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2018/10/22/do-recommendation-letters-insert-bias-college-admissions-decisions> and <https://www.sciencemag.org/careers/2016/10/recommendation-letters-reflect-gender-bias> and <https://aaberhe.files.wordpress.com/2019/03/avoiding-racial-bias-in-reference-writing.pdf>).

Also, please note, I do not write letters that are given directly to the student. I will submit letters to websites/management sites, send them to email addresses, and mail them via snail mail, but I will not provide the letter directly to the student to take on interviews or to turn in themselves.

Questions to answer:

1. Your name and your pronouns you use and would like me to use in your letter.
2. Name of scholarship/program/etc. to which you are applying with submission due dates/deadlines. If you are applying to multiple places, list them all in order of due date (earlier deadlines first).

3. Method for submission – include website, address, etc. so I know where to send the letter. Please let me know if I should be looking for a system-generated email and let me know who it should be from – sometimes these go to the trash folder. Include this information for each program/scholarship/etc.
4. A few sentences about each program/scholarship to which you're applying. Please provide the link to the program/scholarship/internship/etc. and provide a few sentences about each.
 - a. If you are applying to a graduate/professional program – please add a few sentences about your career goals and why you have chosen that career.
 - b. If you are re-applying – please let me know if the program name has changed or if your career goals have changed.
5. Your GPA and/or an unofficial copy of your college transcripts.
 - a. Is it okay for me to include information about your grades in the letter of recommendation? (FERPA issue)
6. An up-to-date resume
 - a. If you need help making a good resume, access the services of the SIUE Career Development Center. See example here: https://www.siu.edu/career-development-center/pdf/Public_Health_Resume_Sample20.pdf
7. How do I know you?
 - a. Please list when we first met, include the semester and year.
 - b. Describe the capacity in which I know you (e.g., which classes did you take of mine and when? Other ways I know you?)
 - c. If it has been over a year since we've interacted, please fill me in on what you've been up to in that time (only include things that are relevant for the application/letter).
8. How well do I know you? A good recommendation letter will have vivid details that show what an excellent student you are. I want to be able to brag about you in the letter, but to do so I need to have examples of demonstrated excellence.
 - a. Please tell me at least two examples of your demonstrated excellence in my classroom. For example, describe a class discussion that you led. Or explain how a paper or assignment for my class opened your eyes to a particular topic or area of study.
 - b. Then please tell me how many times we met in office hours (or via scheduled appointment).
 - c. Describe how your behavior or performance in my course highlights positive aspects of your character and/or personality.
 - d. What skills did you learn in my course that are directly transferable to your future plans? (these do not necessarily need to be course-content based and could be things like time management, team work, organization, etc.)
9. Communication – many recommendation sites ask me to rate your oral and written communication.
 - a. Have I listened to you present orally? If so, refresh my memory and give me some highlights of that experience/situation.

- b. Have I read your writing? If so, refresh my memory and give me some highlights of that writing assignment.
10. Think back to when you and I worked together or interacted. Can you think of any concerns about our interactions or can you think of any mistakes or missteps? I'm not concerned if students make mistakes, but I am concerned about how they handle them and what they learn from the experience. Mistakes are a part of life, we all make them, and mistakes/missteps are expected when we push ourselves to learn and do new things.
 - a. List any concerns/mistakes/missteps and then address what has changed and/or what you learned from that experience.
11. The more information I have, the stronger letter I can write. I need to know what specifically I can add to your overall application, why did you pick me as a writer?
 - a. Are you hoping for me to provide some information that other letter writers cannot? If there are particular details about our interactions that you want me to highlight, remind me of them.
 - b. Any additional information you would like me to highlight or add, if possible.
 - c. Or, is there anything you'd like me not to mention? (e.g., if you don't want me to mention the fact that you have children or something else you may have shared in class).

In case you need to input my information into your application or the letter-generating system:

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Adapted from Breanna N. Harris, Texas Tech University. Some of this information is directly from the website of Dr. Katy Pearce (<http://www.katypearce.net/>). Some inspired by Twitter of Dr. Cindy Veldhuis.

Dear [Student],

I hope this email finds you well. I wanted to follow up on our recent conversation/your email about the possibility of me writing a letter of recommendation for you. After careful consideration, I have come to the realization that I am unable to write a glowing letter of recommendation for you at this time.

While I do believe that you possess certain abilities and talents, I have noticed during our interactions that you struggle with [concerning issues]. This is something that I believe needs to be addressed before you are ready to undertake an internship/job/opportunity.

I understand that it can be difficult to take constructive criticism, but I believe it is important for you to develop a greater sense of independence and self-assurance before embarking on new challenges. I

encourage you to work on these skills and to seek out opportunities that will help you build confidence in your abilities.

I hope that this feedback is helpful to you and that you can use it as a stepping stone towards personal growth. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me if you have any questions or would like to discuss this further. Sincerely, [Faculty]