

# 191CICS1 Freshman Year Seminar

## Writing Assignment

October 9, 2019

### 1 Submission

Email your response in *PDF* or *Word* format only with subject line *191CICS1 Writing Assignment* to the 305 student whose response you have evaluated, using the email information provided on your letter. Additionally, upload your response to Moodle. The due date for the assignment is *October 15th by midnight*. However, if you submitted your response by October 14th, the 305 students would greatly appreciate it.

### 2 Your Task

Each of you have received one or two explanations of current computing threats/risks. These letters will be addressing a scenario from the 305 assignment sheet. The 305 students are intentionally trying to explain their chosen risk topic to you – a first year CICS student – in order to help you decide how much you should worry about that particular risk.

By indicating what you understood, and what you found perplexing in their letter, you will be helping our writers learn a valuable lesson on writing for a specific audience. **The 305 writers may expect you to have read the background links provided in the scenario descriptions. So, read the appropriate links provided to ensure that you have enough background to respond to your letter.**

Please use the email information provided on the explanations to respond to the 305 students, and then submit the text as an assignment. Please give our 305 writers specific feedback on your experience reading their letters by writing a reply that includes the following types of information:

- Point to what part of their letter is clear to you and what is not;
- Let them know if they made assumptions about you (the reader) that are incorrect/problematic;
- Let your writer know if you believe them about the riskiness of the scenario they chose;
- Be specific by indicating words, phrases, terms, and/or entire sentences that you do not understand or that are unfamiliar;
- The length of your response should be 200 words (a little over or under is fine).

Please do not spend time commenting on typos or simple sentence errors as the 305 letters are still in the draft stage.

### 3 Prompt Given to CMPSCI 305 Students

The 305 students received the following instructions in order to complete their letters:

### 3.1 Overview:

This assignment provides an opportunity for you to focus on the concept of audience — a key consideration in responding to any rhetorical situation. In this case, you will be constructing a response to a UMass first year student who is either in or hoping to join the computer science major. Read the scenarios below, and then select one of them for your response. Your reader(s) will then reply to your letter via email. In their replies, they will evaluate your explanation, providing you with valuable feedback for your revisions. You may have to do additional reading or research in order to fully answer the prompts. The articles provided are intended to be starting points of common understanding between you and the reader, but not comprehensive nor will all the terminology in the articles be familiar to your first year CS or ET student readers. The topics provided are derived from the recent discussions of risks and exploits on the ACM Risks Digest.

### 3.2 Specifications:

Length: 400 words, single-spaced (a little over or under is fine).

Format: these scenarios invite you to write in an email format to someone you haven't met, and so you should plan on fleshing your message out like you would a real conversation. This means an adequate introduction and closing as well as carefully constructed paragraphs. Also be mindful of how you are constructing this reader in your mind. Ask yourself what assumptions you are making about what they know, care about, and/or may experience in relation to this scenario.

### 3.3 Scenarios:

**Election Hacking?** Many in the United States are aware of allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 election cycle. Last year a family friend sent you this link after learning that you were studying computer science: <https://www.wired.com/story/russia-election-hacking-playbook/>. Since then, you've noticed that both experts and novices have expressed concern about the United States 2020 elections being vulnerable to electronic tampering. The subfield of cybersecurity has become quite popular within CS; in fact, a new first year student considering specializing in security shares the following article with you, a friend from their dorm: <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/614148/16-million-americans-will-vote-on-hackable-paperless-voting-machines/>.

Your friend suggests that the push toward paper in election voting is really based on people not understanding how technology works. They believe that this article's worries over electronic voting are being exaggerated as a way to generate clicks. Meanwhile, you find and send to your friend an article suggesting that some of the 2020 elections might be using blockchain, supposedly a very secure technology. The article suggests that blockchain isn't going to help: <https://www.computerworld.com/article/3430697/why-blockchain-could-be-a-threat-to-democracy.html>.

As you've read more, you've started to wonder if electronic solutions to election security might not be the way to go, and you've started to become concerned by the number of states using vulnerable voting methods: <https://www.politico.com/interactives/2019/election-security-americas-voting-machines/index.html>. You decide that your friend needs some help making sense of this issue so you **write an email in which you explain the science behind what makes electronic voting risky (or not), evaluating its level of risk in the process. Be sure to help the reader decide if they should worry and/or if there is anything that they can do about the issue.**

**How much does my roommate's digital assistant know about me?** You are asked to help out at an orientation event for first year CS and ET majors. When asked what brought you to CS, you mention your interest in AI, in particular your interest in designing virtual assistants like J.A.R.V.I.S. from Iron Man. After the event, some students with similar interests come to chat with you, looking for advice about getting acclimated to being a student at UMass. One in particular wants

to know what they should do about their roommate who has several devices in your shared room (Amazon echo or Google Home devices). They mention this article: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/05/06/alexa-has-been-eavesdropping-you-this-whole-time/> and you tell them that as far as you know, any recording is done to improve the device, and not to spy. You exchange contact info with the student and agree to research the issue a bit more, promising to email them back in a week. Your research uncovers this article about SIRI listening in on Apple devices: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/jul/26/apple-contractors-regularly-hear-confidential-details-on-siri-recordings> and this article about Google that came out about the same time: <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/en/2019/07/10/google-employees-are-eavesdropping-even-in-flemish-living-rooms/>

After thinking about the issue for a while you try to put yourself in the shoes of this first year student whose roommate is using these technologies in their shared space. Then, you **write a follow-up email where you explain how the recordings are happening, and what the student can do about it. Be sure to take a position that helps the reader decide if it is reasonable for them to be concerned about having these devices in their room.**

### 3.4 Submission instructions:

In the header, you must include the following:

- Your name;
- Your email address;
- Your section of 305;
- The scenario number (1, 2 or 3) that you selected for your response.