

Integrated Business and Humanities Program

DeGroote School of Business & Faculty of Humanities

McMaster University

IBH 4AA3

Critical Seeing

Fall 2025



Instructor Information

Instructor: Dr. Lalai Abbas

Email: abbasl6@mcmaster.ca

Office Hours: by Appointment

Course Information

Course Dates: 09/02/2025 - 12/04/2025

Units: 3.00

Course Delivery Mode: In Person

Lecture: Tuesdays – 12:30 – 1:30 PM

Tutorial: Tuesdays – 2:30 – 4:30 PM

Course Description: This course on **Critical Seeing** is designed to enable students to recognize and analyze the impact of the multi-faceted/multimodal visual environment they will work in by providing them with the necessary skills of visual literacy to ‘read’, critically evaluate, manage and produce a wide variety of visual messages adequately in different socio-cultural settings with a global perspective. While students will become proficient in ‘critical seeing’, they will also further develop their critical thinking, self and global awareness, ethical considerations of storytelling, and verbal expression. Field studies of visual aspects of the McMaster campus and McMaster’s visual marketing devices will provide experiential learning and confidence in project design and realization.

Important Links

- [Mosaic](#)
- [Avenue to Learn](#)
- [Student Accessibility Services - Accommodations](#)
- [McMaster University Library](#)
- [eReserves](#)

Course Elements

Credit Value: 3	Leadership: Yes	IT Skills: No	Global View: Yes
Avenue to Learn: Yes	Ethics: Yes	Numeracy: No	Written Skills: Yes
Participation: Yes	Innovation: Yes	Group Work: Yes	Oral Skills: Yes
Evidence-Based: Yes	Experiential: Yes	Final Exam: No	Guest Speaker(s): No

Course Description

This course combines theoretical teaching and learning with experiential learning through hands-on activities and field studies on campus. Theories, assigned readings, artifacts and field study results will be presented and discussed in lectures and active learning/tutorial sessions. Students will learn visual literacy and acquire practice in multimodal inquiry and ethical storytelling. Eight themes will be focused on: 1: Lived experience, narrative/story and the multimodal/multifaceted world. 2: Two-Eyed Seeing/Visual Communication (paralanguage and staging). 3: Lived relationality (self-in-relation to human and non-human others (objects, artifacts, etc.). 4: Place learning (work environments, physical space, physical McMaster Campus). 5: Nature at McMaster. 6: Social media, the virtual and the actual. 7: The local and the global (the ethics of storytelling/seeing the other/enhancing global awareness). 8: Creativity and innovation. These eight themes will be approached exercising ‘critical seeing’ to make evident that positive leadership requires proficiency in appreciating, recognizing, and managing the multifaceted/multimodal world using the visual (ocular/image, text, etc.) to enhance both self and global awareness and to open pathways to creativity and innovation.

Course Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students will be equipped with skills and qualities for their future leadership roles:

- Introduce you to a multifaceted/multimodal understanding of the world
- Encourage you to explore and re/negotiate your relationships with human and non-human others (e.g., objects/artifacts, places, nature, etc.)
- Equip you with critical seeing, reading, thinking, and multimodal inquiry skills
- Involve you in conversations about self and global awareness

- Introduce you to the ethics of storytelling to enhance self and global awareness and to hone your verbal expression
- Help you recognize the impact of physical environments (human-made and natural) on community life
- Increase your visual awareness and sensitivity for social interaction and context
- Challenge you to exercise curiosity and provide you opportunities to hone your creativity

Required Course Materials and Readings

Avenue registration for course content <http://avenue.mcmaster.ca>

Required readings will be posted on lecture slides (A2L) and will be electronic without cost.

Additional Course Materials and Readings

Additional, optional readings may be suggested in lectures and on lecture slides.

Evaluation

Oral participation in lecture classes and tutorials is an important component of this course and includes the reporting of results of field research, which through experiential learning enhances students' skills in critical observation and visual analysis. This report will be an oral group presentation. A reflection is included to give students the opportunity to reflect on their learning. The ongoing submittables (5 in total) will help students in honing their writing and creative skills in different formats. The final project will help them conceptualize and present their multimodal inquiry. The balance of the learning results from the lectures, from related readings, and from continual reflexivity.

Components and Weights

Oral participation in lectures and tutorials	20% (Ongoing)
5 Submittables	20% (4% each) (Ongoing)
Reflection	10% (due Oct 21st at 11:59 PM)
Oral group presentation	15% November 11- 18, 2025)
Final Project	35% (Due date: December 11, 2025, 11:59PM)

Course Deliverables

Oral participation in lectures and tutorials

Learning Objective: Ensuring you get the most out of this course by regularly attending class as often as possible, reviewing the assigned readings, engaging in hands-on creative tasks, and reflecting on course material and discussions.

Actively engaging in the class is critical to gaining the most out of the course content and experience and succeeding academically in the overall course.

Ongoing assignment # Weekly in-class Submittables

Learning Objective: In class activities and related submittables will cultivate and enhance your creative skills.

Task: The submittables will showcase your multiple creative outputs, allowing you to express your ideas and demonstrate your knowledge in various modes of representation.

Students will be responsible for submitting weekly submittables on A2L (250-500 words max) and this will serve as evidence of your engagement in the course. In these entries, you will leverage multiple modes of creation (e.g., written text, visual art, image, video, artifact, etc.) to express your ideas about the concepts discussed in the lectures that stood out to you, challenged you, surprised you, sparked a particular emotion, and/or expanded your thinking from that week's lecture, discussions and/or readings. The writing in the submittables does not have to be polished, and point form is fine as long as your thoughts are fully articulated.

Your grade will be based on the completion of the 5 out of 8 weekly submittables within the class/tutorial time. You are required to submit your work the same day, no later than 11:59 PM. Late submissions will not be accepted.

(Ongoing)

Assignment 1# Reflection on Relationality (500 – 1000 words)

Learning objective: To reflect on your identity as a 'self-in-relation to others'.

This assignment provides an opportunity for self-reflexivity and recognizing our responsibility to both human and non-human others around us. Students will use concepts taught in the course (e.g., two-eyed seeing, multimodal view of the world, etc.) to reflect on their place in the world and their impact on it. They will engage in critical seeing and choose an element/component from their natural or man-made environment as a basis/anchor for their reflection piece. The reflection paper should be coherent and well thought out. It should not read as a random collection of topics, but rather a genuine reflection depicting self and global awareness.

Reflection/500-1000 words (due Oct 21st at 11:59 PM)

Assignment 2 # Oral group presentation – Report by each field research group on their findings ref. architecture on McMaster Campus

Learning objective: Enhancing your place learning, critical seeing, attunement to your visual environments, and your verbal expression.

Task: Group work (3 students per group)

Students will work in groups and choose a building (or multiple buildings) from McMaster campus to explore and note its characteristics/unique features (e.g., architecture style, accessibility, hierarchy, focus, view, etc.). The list of buildings will be provided in the class, and the students will be required to physically visit and explore these places. They will prepare an oral presentation (9 minutes max/ 3 min per student) on their findings. No written submission is necessary. Students may use a slide deck, photos/images, artifacts, or video for their presentation if they so prefer.

Oral presentation:

1. Every single student has 3 minutes to speak. Discuss together in your group how to present and explain your findings and which portion of it to allocate to which group member, then leave each individual to prepare their own 3 minutes of speaking.
2. Q&A

Evaluation:

The evaluation will be based on the oral presentation alone (no documentation needs to be submitted to the instructor). It will consist in two components:

1. The group receives a mark for coherence of the presentation and fair distribution of speaking tasks.

For every group member, this mark will be 50% of their total mark for the oral presentation.

2. Every individual group member receives a mark for their own speaking part during the oral presentation.

This mark will be the second 50% of their total mark for the oral presentation.

(Group Presentation dates: November 11- 18, 2025)

Assignment #3 – Multimodal Concept Project – Written component (1500- 2000 words max) in combination with two other modes of representation.

Multimodal Concept Project

Learning objective: Ensuring that the students follow the ethical considerations of telling the story of the *Other*. Students will acquire cultural responsiveness, self and global awareness and will learn to conduct a multimodal inquiry into other cultures.

Task: Students will engage in a holistic and multimodal inquiry of a chosen cultural concept (preferably from an unfamiliar culture). You will choose a cultural concept (e.g., Wabi-Sabi, Ubuntu, Métissage, etc.) and will collect multiple modes/types of data/information (e.g., image, video, text, artifact, etc.) explaining different facets of the concept. You will be encouraged to interview someone who belongs to the culture and include their input into your inquiry. You will create a multimodal representation of the cultural concept/construct using at least three different modes – e.g., written text/story, poetry, photo/image, infographic, visual art, collage, artifact, podcast, audio-clip, etc.

- You will be required to include a writing piece (500 -1000 words max) on your understanding of the concept. They will be required to reference one of the readings from the course and cite two other external sources.
- Should you choose to include an image or video or any other element, you will provide a brief description and explanation (250 - 500 words max) of your chosen mode of representation.
- You will include a reflection piece (500-750 words) on your process of inquiry (let the reader into your thought process) and the subsequent transformation in your own thinking of self and others.
- Critical analysis will be a key factor for success in this assignment. That means that you are going beyond just describing the concept and your experiences and actually engaging with them. Connect your ideas to wider global issues and ideas.
- Demonstrate self and global awareness.
- Full instructions and an evaluation rubric will be provided before the assignment release date.

(Due date: December 11, 2025, 11:59 PM)

Final Exam n/a

Undergraduate Grading Scale

Grade	Equivalent Grade Point	Equivalent Percentages
A+	12	90-100
A	11	85-89
A-	10	80-84
B+	9	77-79

Grade	Equivalent Grade Point	Equivalent Percentages
B	8	73-76
B-	7	70-72
C+	6	67-69
C	5	63-66
C-	4	60-62
D+	3	57-59
D	2	53-56
D-	1	50-52
F	0	0-49

Academic Integrity

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Authenticity/Plagiarism

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. Avenue to Learn, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line

search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Courses with an On-line Element

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn, LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Online Proctoring

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the "Code"). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students' access to these platforms.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University's [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

Requests for Relief of Missed Academic Term Work

When students miss regularly scheduled term work which contributes 10% or more to the final grade, for legitimate reasons as determined by the Student Experience – Academic Office (SEAO), the assignment will be rescheduled. Documentation explaining such missed work must be provided to the SEAO within five (5) working days of the scheduled date for completion of the work (SAS accommodations will be implemented as specified by SAS.) There is no alternate form of delivery for missed Class Participation. Absence from class caused by force majeure will not reduce a student's participation mark.

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar "[Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work](#)" and the link below;

<http://ug.degroote.mcmaster.ca/forms-and-resources/missed-course-work-policy/>

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous, or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office *normally within 10 working days* of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors.

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

Potential Modification of the Course

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

Research Using Human Subjects

ONLY IF APPLICABLE

Research involving human participants is premised on a fundamental moral commitment to advancing human welfare, knowledge, and understanding. As a research intensive institution, McMaster University shares this commitment in its promotion of responsible research. The fundamental imperative of research involving human participation is respect for human dignity and well-being. To this end, the University endorses the ethical principles cited in the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans:

<http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca>

McMaster University has mandated its Research Ethics Boards to ensure that all research investigations involving human participants are in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement. The University is committed, through its Research Ethics Boards, to assisting the research community in identifying and addressing ethical issues inherent in research, recognizing that all members of the University share a commitment to maintaining the highest possible standards in research involving humans.

In this course, original research will be conducted in public areas on campus. It is vital that students during their field studies behave in an ethical manner when making observations. The anonymity of those who are not members of the class must be guaranteed. If asked about their activity, students are to present a prepared explanation sheet (provided by the instructor).

Acknowledgement of Course Policies

Your registration and continuous participation (e.g. on A2L, in the classroom, etc.) to the various learning activities of IBH 4AA3 will be considered to be an implicit acknowledgement of the course policies outlined above, or of any other that may be announced during lecture and/or on A2L. **It is your responsibility to read this course outline, to familiarize yourself with the course policies and to act accordingly.**

Lack of awareness of the course policies **cannot be invoked** at any point during this course for failure to meet them. It is your responsibility to ask for clarification on any policies that you do not understand.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, Avenue to Learn and/or McMaster email.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction. Theme 1: Lived Experience and Multimodal/Multifaceted Reality

Sept. 2: Lecture. Introduction to the concept of lived experience, narrative and the theory of multimodality/multifaceted seeing

Sept. 2: N/A

Week 2: Theme 1 (Lived Experience and Multimodal/Multifaceted Reality & Theme 2: Two-Eyed Seeing

Sept. 9: Lecture. Two-Eyed Seeing: Seeing the world with both Indigenous and Western lens.

Sept. 9: Tutorial: Discussion on paralanguage and staging. Visual artmaking for self and global awareness

Submittable 1: Art piece (submit a photo/image of the art piece in the assigned A2L drop box)

Week 3: Theme 3: Lived Relationality (relationships with human and non-human others)

Sep 16: Lecture. Seeing, reading, negotiating, and re-negotiating our relationships with human and non-human others

Sep 16: Using artifacts to enhance self and global awareness

Submittable 2: Submit a photo of your artifact along with a short written piece (250 words max) describing your relationship with the artifact and its significance to you and in a broader context.

Week 4: Theme 4 & 5: Place Learning (work environments, physical space, physical McMaster Campus).

Sep 23: Lecture. Exploring places from around the world and how they shape and impact our understanding. Analyze McMaster Campus' layout and building styles.

Sep 23: Discussion: Where do you encounter nature on or around campus, and do you benefit from it? Role and meaning of the Indigenous Circle (in Mohawk: Karahakon Kateweienstha [Learning in the Forest]; in Ojibway: Nibwaajkaawin Teg [Place of Wisdom]) on campus

Homework for oral report: Field research: In groups of 3 students, study plans of buildings for all building floors (will be provided). Find out where offices, classrooms, and other functional spaces are located (walking around will be necessary). Prepare oral presentation.

Submittable 3: Think of your classroom as a physical place and a dialogical space. How do the physical and spatial characteristics of your classroom affect you? (250-500 words)

Sep 30: No Class – National Day of Truth and Reconciliation

Week 5: Theme 4 & 5: Nature at McMaster (continues)

Oct. 7: Lecture: Human impact on nature and vice versa. What is our relationship with the nature around us?

Oct 7: Reflection on private nature-seeking: Do you have house plants? A garden? Do you go on walks in the park or on nature hikes? How does any (or all) of this improve / enhance your well-being, and why?

Submittable 4: Visual artmaking to describe the sensory experience of walking through nature. Submit a photo/image of your visual or digital art.

Reflection/500-1000 words (due Oct 21st at 11:59 PM)

Reading Week (Oct 13-19)

Week 6 : Theme 6: Social media, the virtual and the actual (authentic versus fake reality: assessments with visual literacy)

Oct 21: Lecture

Oct 21: Exercises in recognizing fakes.

Submittable 5: In class inquiry into real and fake reality (submit a fake photo/still or moving image, and the techniques you used to identify it as a fake).

Week 7: Theme 7: The local and the global (the ethics of storytelling/seeing the other/enhancing global awareness).

Oct 28: Lecture

Oct 28: Visit the Museum of Art's exhibition (**What of the eternal harm lurking all around?**) on McMaster campus.

Submittable 6: Describe your lived experience of the exhibition with the focus on the affective.(250-500 words max)

Week 8: Theme 7: Continues

Nov 4: Lecture

Nov 4: View various cultural artifacts. Bring your own if you prefer. Use a cultural artifact to tell an ethical story.

Submittable 7: Write a short story (250-500 words) on your chosen artifact. Include the photo/image of the artifact.

Nov 5: The final project (Multimodal Concept Project) will be tasked

Week 9: Oral Presentations by student groups

Nov 11: 1:00 PM to 3:30 PM in (DSB 505)

Nov 11: 4:00 PM (Movie screening at Westdale/Beyond Zero)

Week 10: Theme Creativity and innovation

Nov 18: Lecture on creativity/Bringing it all together (critical seeing, self and global awareness)

Nov 18: Oral presentations by student groups

Week 11: Creativity and innovation

Nov 25: Lecture – Métissage

Nov 25: Creating using various modes (digital or physical collage)

Submittable 8: Create a collage to express an idea or concept.

Week 12: Summaries

Dec 2: Lecture and tutorial summaries

Dec 2: Work period (students work on their projects)

Dec 11 (Multimodal Concept Project due on Dec 11 at 11:59 pm)