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Writing for the Humanities

Pamela Jean Stenberg
CUNY City College

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Home

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is concerned with understanding, describing, and responding to the various ways we share and express ourselves and encounter the world. The word “Humanities,” as an academic term, encompasses multiple genres, such as Music, History, Philosophy, and the Arts. In this class, we will creatively and critically explore the world of creativity, learning how to respond to and write about multiple genres. We will read rigorously, from fiction to non-fiction to poetry. Studying specific aspects of each of these types of work will hone our abilities of looking and responding. We will learn how to discuss language and dissect it, how to employ it to analyze subject matter across genres in ways that both effective and creative. We will take the conclusions we come to and broaden them, establishing worldviews. This course is about slowing down in a world that moves quickly.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

- acknowledge your and others’ range of linguistic differences as resources, and draw on those resources to develop rhetorical sensibility
- enhance strategies for reading, drafting, revising, editing, and self-assessment
- negotiate your own writing goals and audience expectations regarding conventions of genre, medium, and rhetorical situation
- develop and engage in the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes
- engage in genre analysis and multimodal composing to explore effective writing across disciplinary contexts and beyond
- formulate and articulate a stance through and in your writing
- practice using various library resources, online databases, and the Internet to locate sources appropriate to your writing projects
- strengthen your source use practices (including evaluating, integrating, quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing, synthesizing, analyzing, and citing sources)

REQUIRED MATERIAL

Handouts & readings provided by instructor & uploaded onto Website

Please Note: You must use your CCNY email address in Bb (log in to the CCNY Portal, click Blackboard, then Update Email in the Tools menu). If you add a non-CCNY domain email address in this window, you will not receive important course announcements

GRADE WEIGHTS

Participation: 20%

Short Responses: 20%

Extended Essays: 40%

Portfolio: 20%

ASSIGNMENTS

Sonnet

Using 2-4 poems that we have read in class, analyze each poem's use of language.

Length: 1000 words

Book Review

Length: 1200- 1500 words pages

Formal Analysis

Length: 1000 - 1200 words

Visual Essay

Length: 1200 - 1500 words

INFORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Blogs

In the class blog (located here), we'll be required to write a brief analysis of the current topic in class. Each month there will be a prompt at the top of the blog and we'll be required to write three to five paragraphs and to comment on one other writer's work.

Length: 3 - 5 paragraphs Due Dates TBA

COURSE POLICIES

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is copying and using other people's words without proper acknowledgment or citation as indicated in the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity. All writing submitted for this course is understood to be your original work. Plagiarism is unacceptable and has serious consequences that can include a failing grade. In cases where I detect academic dishonesty (the fraudulent submission of another's work, in whole or part, as your own), you may be subject to a failing grade for the project or the course, and, in the worst case, to academic probation or expulsion. You are expected to read, understand, and adhere to CCNY's Policy on Academic Integrity, which is available here: [http:// www1. ccny.cun y.edu/](http://www1.cuny.edu/)

current/upload/Academic Integrity-Policy .pdf

Student Code of Conduct

All student members of the College community are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that demonstrates mutual respect for the rights and personal/academic wellbeing of others, preserves the integrity of the social and academic environment, and supports the mission of the College. The College has an inherent right to address behavior that impedes, obstructs, or threatens the maintenance of order and attainment of the aforementioned goals by violating the standards of conduct set forth in the University student conduct policies noted below as well as other policies that may be established by the respective Schools, Global Sites, and administrative offices of the University. The goals of the CCNY Community Standards are:

- To promote a campus environment that supports the overall educational mission of the University
- To protect the University community from disruption and harm
- To encourage appropriate standards of individual and group behavior
- To foster ethical values and civic virtues
- To foster personal learning and growth while at the same time holding individuals and groups accountable to the standards of expectations established by the Code of Conduct: [http:// www.ccnycuny.edu/studentaffairs/community-standards.cfm](http://www.ccnycuny.edu/studentaffairs/community-standards.cfm)

CCNY's Statement on Community Standards

[https:// www.ccnycuny.edu/studentaffairs/community-standards](https://www.ccnycuny.edu/studentaffairs/community-standards)

Attendance

Students are expected to attend every class session of this course and to be on time. If you miss five classes, your final grade will be dropped by one – half of one letter (a 90 to an 85, for example). If you miss six classes, your final grade will be dropped one full letter. If you miss seven classes, you will not be able to pass the course. Consistent late arrivals and early departures will have a negative impact on your grade. I will notify you by email if course absences (for full or partial classes) are having an impact on your grade. If you have special circumstances, please see me. I'm happy to work with you to help you complete this course.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Gateway Advising Center, NAC 1/220 <http://www.ccnycuny.edu/gateway/>

Students without a declared major can receive academic advising, especially if you have questions about your course of study, core requirements, etc.

Access Ability Center Tutoring Services, NAC 1/218 <http://www.ccnycuny.edu/accessibility/>

Provides one-on-one tutoring and workshops to all registered students with learning or physical

disabilities.

SEEK Peer Academic Learning Center, NAC 4/224 Phone: 212-650-5786; email:
seekpals@ccny.cuny.edu

Offers counseling and peer tutoring for students in need of academic and financial support who have registered for the SEEK Program.

Book Review Assignment

Book Review Assignment

Length 4 – 5 pages

In this class, we have looked at several books both fiction and non-fiction. For this assignment, we will be writing a review of one of the books discussed in class.

Your review should have an introduction that gives the reader a sense of the purpose of the book and the basic details and a brief synopsis. The conclusion should be impartial and support your endorsement or rejection of the text. Some questions to answer for your review:

For non-fiction:

The primary focus of a nonfiction review is the clarity of the text's communication. Nonfiction books are typically written to convey information to the reader. As you build your review of such a text, you need to note a variety of important items:

- Evaluate the author's intentions. What is the author's primary purpose? What does he or she hope to communicate to the reader? Your estimation of the author's success in this endeavor informs much of your final evaluation of the text's worth.
- Consider the text's organization. Does it progress in a logical fashion that is easily followed? Did you have any problems following the author's train of thought?
- Identify its place in the larger body of scholarship. How well does your selected text match up to others like it in the field? What are its shortcomings and limitations?
- Take note of its support sections. Does the author provide substantive footnotes throughout? Is the index or the preface particularly useful? Features such as these contribute to a text's overall clarity and effectiveness, and they can help it to stand out and earn favorable reviews when compared to similar nonfiction texts.

For fiction:

The primary focus of a fiction review is the author's skill in crafting a compelling story. The success of a novel or short story can be measured, in part, by how well the text draws the reader into the plot and the characters. When writing a fiction review, you will need to answer the following questions:

- What was the story about? Typically, the events in the story are referred to as the plot. Your discussion of it should include the main developments without revealing the end to the readers of your review. You will also want to provide evaluative commentary on the plot. Was it engaging? If so, explain what made it so. If not, share that in your review.
- Who were the characters? Take some time to identify the main characters and what made them memorable. Were they believable? Did the author's portrayal of them evoke sympathy? You may want to even identify your favorite character and explain why.

- What is the author's style like? You will want to talk about the author's tone, use of language, and quality of imagery. Works of fiction with perfectly serviceable plots can be ruined by a clumsy use of language or tone-deaf writing. If you encounter this in your selected text, be sure to identify this shortcoming in your review.

[Book Review Assignment](#)

Formal Analysis Assignment

Formal Analysis:

Description: A formal analysis includes an analysis of the forms appearing in the work you have chosen. These forms give the work its expression, message, or meaning. A formal analysis assumes a work of art is (1) a constructed object (2) that has been created with a stable meaning (even though it might not be clear to the viewer) (3) that can be ascertained by studying the relationships between the elements of the work. To aid in writing a formal analysis, you should think as if you were describing the work of art to someone who has never seen it before. When your reader finishes reading your analysis, she/he should have a complete mental picture of what the work looks like. Yet, the formal analysis is more than just a description of the work. It should also include a **thesis statement** that reflects your conclusions about the work. The thesis statement may, in general, answer a question like these: What do I think is the meaning of this work? What is the message that this work or artist sends to the viewer? What is this work all about? The thesis statement is an important element. It sets the tone for the entire paper, and sets it apart from being a merely descriptive paper.

It is important to remember that your interest here is strictly formal; **NO RESEARCH IS TO BE USED IN THIS PAPER**. In other words, you are strictly relying on your ability to visually 'read' a work of art and make interpretations about it based on your analysis of it. Remember too that your analysis should not be just a mechanical, physical description. Please use descriptive language and adjectives to describe your work. Begin with a general description of the work, and then move on to the more specific elements.

Things to consider when writing a formal analysis (in no particular order):

1. Record your first impression(s) of the artwork. What stands out? Is there a focal point (an area to which the artist wants your eye to be drawn)? If so, what formal elements led you to this conclusion? Your impressions can help you reach your thesis.
2. What is the subject of the artwork?
3. Composition: How are the parts of the work arranged? Is there a stable or unstable composition? Is it dynamic? Full of movement? Or is it static?
4. Pose: If the work has figures, are the proportions believable? Realistic? Describe the pose(s). Is the figure active, calm, graceful, stiff, tense, or relaxed? Does the figure convey a mood? If there are several figures, how do they relate to each other (do they interact? not?)?
5. Proportions: Does the whole or even individual parts of the figure(s) or natural objects in the work look natural? Why did you come to this conclusion?
6. Line: Are the outlines (whether perceived or actual) smooth, fuzzy, clear? Are the main lines vertical, horizontal, diagonal, or curved, or a combination of any of these? Are the lines jagged and full of energy? Sketchy? Geometric? Curvilinear? Bold? Subtle?
7. Space: If the artist conveys space, what type of space is used? What is the relation of the main figure to the space around it? Are the main figures entirely within the space (if the artwork is a painting), or are parts of the bodies cut off by the edge of the artwork? Is

the setting illusionistic, as if one could enter the space of the painting, or is it flat and two-dimensional, a space that one could not possibly enter?

8. Texture: If a sculpture, is the surface smooth and polished or rough? Are there several textures conveyed? Where and How? If a painting, is there any texture to the paint surface? Are the brushstrokes invisible? Brushy? Sketchy? Loose and flowing? Or tight and controlled?
9. Light and Shadow: Are shadows visible? Where? Are there dark shadows, light shadows, or both? How do the shadows affect the work?
10. Size: How big is the artwork? Are the figures or objects in the work life-sized, larger or smaller than life? How does the size affect the work?
11. Color: What type of colors are used in the work? Bright? Dull? Complimentary? Does the artist use colors to draw your attention to specific areas of the work? How? If a sculpture, examine the color(s) of the medium and how it affects the work.
12. Mood: Do you sense an overall mood in the artwork? Perhaps several different moods? If so, describe them. How does the mood interpret how you view the work?

Once you have spent some time analyzing your work, notice if your first impression of the work has changed, now that you have taken a closer look? How? If you came up with a thesis statement before doing this in-depth analysis, you may want to change it if your impression of the work has changed. Your thesis statement should reflect your view of the object.

History Engine Assignment

Group work:

Creating a History episode

Each group will be assigned a historical period that coincides with a particular text we have read in class. The group will use one of the online tools that we have reviewed in class to create a “story” time line that reviews important events that were associated with that work. So for example, Burckhardt’s *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, discusses Italy during the 14th and 15th Century. The group will decide on an appropriate time period and create a historical timeline with stories and visuals on a blog, map, or infographic.

Each group member will create three entries of about 300 words each.

Sonnet Assignment

Sonnet Explication

This assignment has two parts:

Part 1.

A line-by-line paraphrase of the poem. So you will copy the poem and then underneath each line, there will be your paraphrase of the preceding line.

For example:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Should I compare you to the mildest and sunniest days on the English calendar?

Part 2:

You'll write an essay that looks at the following questions.

1. what does it say? (what do the words, phrases, sentences mean?)
2. what does it do? (try to put it into what you know of the traditions that he was embracing or abandoning; articulate the ways it functions in establishing character or tone, setting up an action, invoking other works and events, evoking political/philosophical resonances, etc.)
3. how does it work at the level of language? (structurally, poetics, word choice, metrics, etc.)
4. how does your close look at this sonnet deepen your appreciation and understanding of this poet's work?

Your actual 3-4 page essay begins with part 2), as you briefly indicate what the passage does--how it works with respect to imagery, "plot," theme, characterization, poetic convention, and/or dramatic effect, as appropriate)--and discuss how it works at the level of language. Quickly walk your reader through the passage, commenting and highlighting as you go, and delve more deeply where indicated. Do use the Dictionary, smoothly integrating linguistic insights into your analysis. Do work hard to untangle inverted syntax and unexpected idioms. What insights does your analysis furnish into the themes, images, and patterns the poet is pursuing?

Does it tell us something particularly significant about a character or event or interaction--or about the sonneteer himself, or his relation to sonneteering? If you like, you may deftly make connections to other literary works you have read, to other resonances it sets up, but you must maintain your focus on the poem itself, and you should avoid the critical or analytical sources. Let me repeat: DO NOT use others' interpretations—

Above all, your essay must promote a clear thesis, exhibit good organization, and feature solid development--it has to hang together as a coherent and well-written essay, with concrete evidence and precise word choice. Proofread for strong constructions (see Resources).

[Sonnet Explication - Assignment](#)

Visual Essay Assignment

The visual essay

What is it?

A visual essay is a sequence of photographs or other images which are either:

- original, taken and/or created by yourself, or
- found, and processed (e.g. using Photoshop, Illustrator, MS Image, Irfan View)

Taken together, the images provide a critical commentary of some kind on a defined topic, working as a kind of argument, explanation, discussion. The “thesis” for the topic will be one of the

Usually the ‘reading’ of the images in a visual essay is directed by such elements as:

- the sequence of images and how they relate to each other, the juxtaposition of one to the next and how it stands in a series
- the layout of the page in which the image(s) is placed, and the layout of following and preceding pages
- captions, including brief analyses, quotations, key words, provocative questions or statements;
- text integrated within the image or as part of the image (e.g. playing with typographic elements, the visual aspects of text);
- a short text at the beginning (prologue, scene setting) and/or end (epilogue, codicil, reflection).

Apart from anything else, the traditional essay – love it or loathe it – is ‘the devil you know’. A visual essay is always something of a risk – but also an exciting possibility, rich with potential. Think carefully about how you will approach it and what you want it to say, do, achieve.

What form should it take?

The visual essay will usually take the form on your Wordpress site as series/sequence of images/pictures/graphics that are related to the thesis and your rhetorical choices. It may possibly take the form of a PowerPoint slideshow that runs automatically, a layered gif, a series of memes, or some other form not yet mentioned. The essay will combine image and text in a meaningful, essay-style sequence.

Remember, visual design and communication are key to the success (or otherwise) of a visual essay: they work as the equivalents of correct layout, accurate spelling, clear sentence construction, and so on, in a traditional academic essay.

How many images should I include? And how many words?

A visual essay needs to be equivalent in study effort, time, and so on, to a piece of traditional academic writing at the same level. This means that there is no 'cutting corners' on research/enquiry, organization, thinking, drafting, 'writing up' and managing references and citation.

- Typically, to be equivalent to a 1500 word written essay, a visual essay should comprise 10-12 images, with around 500-700 words of text.
- To be equivalent to a 2000 word written essay, it should include 12-15 images, with around 600-800 words of text.
- To be equivalent to a 4000 word written essay, think in terms of 15-20 images, with 1200-1500 words of text.

Reflection:

The visual essay will include a 300 - 500 word reflection answering the following questions:

- How did composing a visual essay differ from writing a traditional essay?
- Which writing skills did you use when composing the essay?
- What skills did you need to learn to compose a visual essay?
- On what skill did you rely when constructing the essay?

Does a visual essay need to be referenced? Does it need a bibliography?

The visual essay must include – or be accompanied by – an annotated bibliography which uses Modern Language Association's citation guidelines 'annotation' means 'added notes of comment, evaluation or explanation'.

A visual essay – depending on overall design and how you are using the textual elements – might not formally cite sources, so the annotated bibliography is an absolutely vital part of the academic apparatus.

The annotated bibliography will have two short commentaries:

- How and why this text was useful to you in carrying out the assignment, what it contributed to your understanding and knowledge,
- How you used it, where in the work it belongs or is used (indicate this in some way)