

Project 2: Multimodal arguments
English 110C, Autumn 2005
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Project note: I would like to extend an invitation (and strongly encourage you to accept the invitation) to work on Project 2 collaboratively. You may work in pairs, and your team will complete and submit one project (both the print and audio compositions). Project 3 will require you to collaborate; this could help you prepare for that experience.

Part I: Print composition

The Critical Response

Responding to other people's ideas and arguments will play an important part in the writing that you do in college--and beyond. You will be asked to evaluate, assess, examine, explore, judge, criticize, and add to the ideas and arguments of others. Of course, before you can write an effective response, you need to fully understand the texts you are reading. Formulating written responses to the texts you read will force you to think critically, to question rather than simply accept what you see in print.

Assignment:

Write a critical response to an idea or position with which you take issue that is presented in one (1) of the written texts offered to you as a part of this assignment (.pdf files located on the classroom LAN). Your writing should demonstrate your understanding of the author's intent by making clear and specific references to the text to which you are responding. Your writing should exhibit a clear sense of purpose and should be directed toward a specific audience. Above all, your essay must be supported by strong evidence and thoughtful reasoning.

You will need to cite other research in your paper. This assignment requires that you make clear reference to at least three (3) sources in the text of your paper in addition to the text to which you are responding. Your Works Cited page, then, should include four (4) sources. Of those four:

one (1) must come from "print," library-type sources;

one (1) must come from the Web;

one (1) must be some kind of interview (face-to-face, email, phone, chat) that you are able to conduct.

All research must be cited using correct MLA documentation.

Looking at the assignment

"Write a critical response . . .": Whereas this assignment seems prescriptive in what it is asking you to do, there are options available to you. A key phrase in this assignment is "an idea or position with which you take issue." This phrase should indicate that your purpose for writing is to persuade, to take a critical stance, and to convince your readers to see your perspective on the issue. You will note that the assignment does not say "an idea or position with which you disagree." I think that finding an issue with which you disagree is sometimes the easiest way to approach the task before you. You summarize the text early in your paper, and then turn the argument around to your point of view. You would analyze this text, showing its faults. Then, you will offer your own perspective and research material as evidence that supports your argument. Another approach to writing a critical response is to use the text you are responding to as a "point of departure" for your own essay. In this case, you have something that you want to "add to" the arguments and ideas already presented. When you use a text as a point of departure, you make clear reference to the text, summarizing what it says. But your paper "jumps" off of this summary to critically respond to the broader issue that text was discussing or the issue that the text did not cover. You need to be careful with this approach, however. First, it is not fair to criticize someone for not covering an issue that really had nothing to do with his or her topic. Also, you need to make sure that connection between your argument and the author's argument is logical. You do not want to "reach" here.

"Your writing should demonstrate your understanding of the author's intent . . .": Regardless of what approach you choose, your audience wants to know how you came to write your essay. In other words, they want to know what you read that caused you to write your critical response. Both methods will require that you summarize the text you are responding to early in your paper. See this handout on writing an effective summary.
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". . . strong evidence and thoughtful reasoning.": Being able to formulate an effective written response to others' writing requires that you support your own ideas instead of merely asserting them. "Because that's just the way I feel"/"Because that's just the way it is" is not acceptable support. "Research" is loosely defined here. As long as you meet the minimal research requirement, you should feel free to use a wide range of support: carefully formulated opinions, interviews, surveys, library material. You should achieve a balance between your opinions and the information you find in your research.

Part II: Audio composition Re-mixing the Critical Response

In a richly layered audio text, re-imagine, re-fashion, and/or re-purpose your print composition for Project 2. The concepts "re-imagine, re-fashion, and/or re-purpose" are open for interpretation. However, all the rhetorical strategies that you had to consider for

your print composition are still relevant, and you need to consider them carefully: Who is your audience? What is your purpose? What is your role in the construction of this text? What evidence and material will you use to reach your audience and achieve your purpose? You may go in a very different direction with this assignment than in your print composition as long as you stay with the same topic and general argument.

You should create your audio composition using Audacity. Your final composition will be turned in as an .mp3 file. You also need to submit a "credits" list of media assets you used in your audio composition.

Part III: Audio composition Composing an Artist's/Artists' statement

Compose a short text where you describe your work on the audio composition. I am not interested in an exhaustive text where you describe all the rhetorical choices you made throughout the process of creating the text. Instead, I would like you to think of this text as a companion piece addressed to your listeners that will provide some contextual information and that will shape the way they understand your audio composition (as your teacher, I am one of these listeners).

Below is a list of questions you might want to consider as you compose this piece. I am not interested in simply having you answer these questions in list form, and you are not required to answer all of them. Instead, think of them as "generative." In other words, how can your answers to these questions help you generate ideas for this short artist's/artists' statement?

How did you devise your audio composition? How did you come up with the topic and your approach to the topic?

Who is your intended audience for the piece? How do you think your audio composition reaches this audience? What kind of effect do you hope to have on your audience (your purpose)? Where did you imagine this piece being broadcast?

Which specific choices did you make while constructing your audio composition? How and why did you make these choices, and how did they affect your composition?

What struck you as the most meaningful aspect(s) of this assignment in terms of how you think of yourself as a writer/rhetorician/digital media composer? What specifically do you think contributed to your success or lack of success?