

■ Participation

A. Discussion Questions

When discussion questions are handed out with a reading assignment, the intention is to help you read carefully, understand the reading, think critically, and form opinions about it as you go. You will submit your answers and receive full participation credit for any clear, thoughtful, thorough written answers, regardless of content. Then, you can edit and add to these notes later during class discussion if you choose to, in preparation for tests.

B. Discussion Board Comments

Think of discussion board work as group discussion and brainstorming. Write in your own “voice” and project your own personality. Get creative with your ideas; “think outside the box.” Be lively and thought-provoking, but reflect understanding of the article or work viewed. Read your other classmates’ comments that have come before you and move beyond them. Do not merely duplicate someone else’s response. If you agree with someone else, then indicate that, amplify it, and move beyond it. Interact with one another, help one another, inspire one another. Each entry should include:

- 1) Explanation: briefly explain what you believe the author is saying
- 2) Association: Can you relate this to your own life? The world around you?
Other media you’ve read and viewed? Other things your classmates have said?
- 3) links / graphics of related interest
- 4) Interaction with other posts your classmates have made

Only discussion board posts that have been completed on time will count toward the participation grade, so please do not create late posts unless I allow you to make up the post because of illness or emergency.

C. Class Discussions

Students receive participation credit for in-class discussions. The way to participate effectively in class discussion is to come to class prepared, with homework complete.

■ Take-home Tests

Tests consist of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. They require knowledge, synthesis, application, and interpretation of course material. The essay questions require a thesis statement and traditional essay structure. Formal citations are acceptable but not necessary; journalistic attribution can be used instead. Examples:

In Mary Gatskill’s *The Girl On The Plane*, the main character “
In the meme “David After the Dentist” (insert YouTube links here) . . .

■ Short Essays

These essays (approx. 3-5 pages, typed) are written after full class discussion. They should reflect a clear understanding of and response to the material. Write for a college-educated audience, but assume the audience has not already read or viewed the material in the depth that you have. While you may write in first-person, avoid unnecessary first-person statements such as “I think” or “My paper is about . . .”). Only insert yourself when your personal experience is relevant to the discussion.

The “safe” way to write the response essay is to use traditional essay-writing form (see checklist), including thesis statement, body paragraphs, etc. However, more experienced writers may opt for creative approaches—some have opted for multimedia, blogging, even poetry. Most importantly, the work should reflect an understanding of the main ideas of the article(s)/media, put forth original ideas of your own, and critically relate the work to your own life, the world around you, other media you have viewed, etc. The response may include linked or embedded media and resources. I am looking for thought-provoking, insightful, complex ideas communicated with clarity, whether through traditional or alternative formats. It should also be clear why this work is not only important to the you, but also would be important to readers and society at large. For citations, use MLA, APA, or CMS format.

Essay Topic #1: Cultural Critique

We have read critiques of cultural practices, from varying perspectives, in a range of writing styles. Now it’s your turn to offer a critique of an aspect of culture in the writing style of your choice. Include in your work a description of this aspect of culture, along with clear examples, and a discussion of visual/linguistic/textual codes involved. What are some of the key signifiers, and how might they be interpreted? Does this aspect of culture privilege some and marginalize others? If so, how? What economic or other structures reinforce it? Cite at least one outside resource.

Approach:

Students approach this assignment many different ways. For example, Barthes’ *Mythologies* is inspirational to some students who have chosen similar topics or have chosen to update/Americanized one of the topics Barthes has used, offering new/original insights. Some topics have included professional wrestling; nail salon treatments; car models; carnivores and vegetarians; bullying; gender-specific baby clothes; courtship rituals; weddings; tattoos; front lawns, status and sustainability; and many other topics. Another approach students sometimes take is inspired by Foucault’s *The Order of Things*, in which they reveal absurdities in culturally constructed categories—for example, school grade levels based on age instead of learning progress. A third common approach is to deconstruct and debunk a commonly held stereotype.

Process:

Begin this assignment by brainstorming the largest possible list of topic ideas that come to you. Then, narrow the list down to two or three and think about the possibilities for each until you can choose one idea with the most potential. Sleep on it. When you’re confident about your chosen topic, freely list ideas associated with the topic you have chosen. Let the ideas flow. Next, consider how these ideas might be organized in an essay. What will your main idea be? How will other items on your list support it? Form a thesis statement and create a rough thumbnail sketch of an outline. Whenever the spirit moves you to start freewriting, let loose and allow the ideas to flow. Then, start to shape the ideas into a rough draft.

The biggest writing mistake students tend to make is to believe that a first or second draft of a paper is the final draft, but you’re only maybe a third to half the way there. Most of writing is rewriting—and it takes time. A lot of time. It includes cutting content that’s not really supporting your thesis; developing other areas that are stronger; rearranging content

so that the paper is more effectively structured; and rewriting sentences for style and grammar. Rewriting a short paper usually takes place over a period of days. The last step is proofreading the paper for spelling, grammar, and style. Proofreading is best done aloud, so that you can "hear" the language and recognize areas that could be corrected or made stronger.

Essay Topic #2: Writing About Media

Choose a media work or series of works to critique in the context of at least one area of cultural studies we have explored. The work(s) may lie the area of film, art, theatre, music, news, advertising, public relations, or other area. I do not have any preferences about the kinds of work you choose to write about, except that it needs to be complex enough for you to have something interesting to say about it; it needs to be related to cultural studies; and it needs to be of potential interest to a wide college-educated audience. Cite at least two outside resources.

While you will probably want to include some factual information and description, we are looking primarily for unusual and insightful ideas supported by clear explanations and examples. Move beyond ideas that are cliché, obvious, or simplistic. Consider theme(s) of the work and their cultural significance.

Process:

Utilize the same steps you did for essay #1 (brainstorming, freewriting, organizing, drafting, rewriting, editing), but this time you will brainstorm possible media works of interest to you and develop a topic from there.

■ Final Project [see cover page template]

The final project is exploratory and allows students to combine traditional research with a “real-world” field experience on the topic of their choice relating to cultural studies. You may undertake this project by yourself, with a partner, or in a triad. You may choose any “voice,” format, or medium you believe will be effective, so long as deliverables are submitted (see below). Develop a project that shows your creativity and critical thinking skills and allows you to apply and extend knowledge you have acquired in the class. Final project deliverables are:

1) Writing (approximately 6-12 pages in length)

The writing should describe the field experience, include personal perspective, and apply theory to the analysis of the experience (with citations).

2) Oral Presentation (approximately 10 minutes)

Your oral presentation will discuss your project and employ visual elements of some kind (e.g., PowerPoint; video).

3) CD or DVD with the digital files for items 1 and 2 if you have used a PowerPoint presentation, video, or other digital media that cannot be submitted online (remember to write your name, the name of the project, and the name of the class on the CD itself and attach it to your research paper so that it cannot fly around separately).

Writing Structure

This project will openly combine personal experience (first person) with traditional research. There is no single “right” strategy for writing the paper. Some students have broken it down into three sections (first-person experience, third-person formal research, and conclusions), while others combine first-person point of view with formal research throughout. Some have used blog formats, incorporated video, or created web sites; others have employed hands-on activities and classroom experiments. As with the essay responses, we are looking for thought-provoking, insightful, complex ideas written with clarity and organization.

Sample Approaches

Some students choose to approach this project by exposing themselves to a subculture that stimulates their curiosity or interest and relates to cultural studies (e.g., people of an ethnic group, sexual orientation, gender, profession, belief system, practice, etc.). Others choose to critique what they perceive to be “dominant culture.” Some focus on a particular piece of media (a film; a web site) and create a field experience inspired by it. Still others focus on a person (e.g., a media maker, community leader, or role model) who inspires them to explore new experiences. Some students have also been inspired by particular scholarly articles or studies, around which they plan their field explorations. There is no right or wrong way to approach the assignment.

Sample Activities

Activities might involve attending meetings of an organization, a place of worship, a club or event; joining an online forum or social network; shadowing and/or interviewing a person or persons; contacting key representative(s) of a group; etc. At the same time, it’s important to conduct scholarly research on your topic and document your personal experiences with a critical perspective.

Essay Rubric | Juliet Davis

Criteria	Excellent/Outstanding	Average	Below Average
Content	The paper demonstrates originality and complexity, exceptional understanding of subject matter, insightful critical analysis, highly effective rhetoric. The paper pushes dialogue beyond predictable fare and could be interesting to larger audiences.	The paper demonstrates strong understanding of subject matter, fairly insightful critical analysis, and some complexity in ideas and rhetoric. The paper is fairly predictable in its points, but solid.	The paper may reflect misconceptions about the subject matter, lack critical analysis in favor of overly simplistic summaries/descriptions, and/or be overly simplistic in its ideas and rhetoric.
Structure, Organization	The paper is strongly structured. For example, conventionally structured essays contain an engaging introduction and clear thesis statement. Each body paragraph presents a main idea that supports the thesis statement and is well supported by evidence/examples. The paper's conclusion is not merely redundant but reflects thoughtfully on the topic that has unfolded. Unconventionally structured essays utilize creative alternatives to advance a main idea, but the ideas can be clearly followed.	The paper is fairly well structured but shows some weaknesses. For example, the introduction and/or conclusion may be perfunctory rather than particularly engaging. A thesis statement is clear. Body paragraphs are fairly well organized and supported but perhaps could be more so. Unconventionally structured essays may appear to be a bit disorganized rather than easy to follow.	The paper needs structure. For example, there may be no clear thesis—or the thesis may be hard to find. Body paragraph(s) may not have clear main ideas or be strategically organized to advance the thesis statement. A conclusion may need more substantive ideas or may not be present. Unconventionally structured essays may be hard to follow.
Clarity, Coherency	Ideas are clearly developed and thoroughly explained. One idea flows eloquently to the next, with clear transitions as needed. The paper stays on topic.	Most ideas are clearly developed and thoroughly explained. Some could be more so. Ideas may be a bit disjointed or need transitions to eloquently flow.	More clarity and/or coherency is needed. For example, a substantial number of ideas need to be more clearly explained and/or need to flow much more clearly and smoothly into others. The paper may stray from topic.
Language, Style, Grammar, Mechanics, Spelling	The writing is flawless in its grammar, mechanics--and adept in its use of language and vocabulary. Language is precise, concise, vivid, engaging. Sentence structures are varied and eloquent.	The paper is fairly solid in language, grammar, mechanics, and spelling. Vocabulary may be average rather than particularly adept. Language may demonstrate some redundancy, unfounded generalizations, and/or vagueness. Sentence structures may be somewhat redundant and/or inellegant.	The paper reflects substantial need for improvement in style, grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling.
Format	MLA, APA, or CMS format is used. Outside resources (if assigned/referenced) are properly cited and effectively incorporated to advance the student's own ideas. See http://owl.english.purdue.edu .	MLA, APA, or CMS format is used. Outside resources (if assigned/referenced) are properly cited; however, they could be utilized more appropriately/effectively.	Errors in MLA format impede readability. Outside resources may not be properly cited and/or need to be incorporated into the text more effectively.

Essay Checklist

- MLA, APA, or CMS style format and documentation: see <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>.
- Are outside resources (if any) properly cited and incorporated to support your ideas?

Content

- Does the paper reflect accurate knowledge of the readings/media/topic assigned, or do there seem to be misunderstandings about the subject matter?
- Does the paper demonstrate insightful critical analysis, or is it limited to simple summaries and obvious descriptions?
- Does the paper demonstrate college-level complexity in rhetoric, analysis, and language? Or are the language and ideas simplistic?
- Do these ideas push this dialogue outside of the expected realm? Would they be interesting to a larger audience? Or is this predictable fare?
- Does the paper reflect an understanding of the lessons featured in class?

Structure and Organization

- Is there a clear thesis statement or main idea that serves as central focus of the essay? (In conventional essays, the thesis statement appears at the end of the introduction.)
- Does each body paragraph have a clear main idea? (Usually, the first sentence of the paragraph contains it.)
- Is each idea supported (e.g., by evidence, examples, description)?
- Is there an appropriate introduction and conclusion?

Clarity and Coherency

- Are the ideas fully developed and explained, or are they vague or confusing?
- Are supporting points explained thoroughly, or is there important information missing?
- Does one idea flow to the next, or do the ideas seem disjointed?
- Did the paper stay on topic, or did it stray at points?

Language, Style, Grammar, Mechanics

- Have you used standard English, or do you find slang/vernacular that might not be appropriate? Are you utilizing sophisticated vocabulary when it could be effective?
- Have you used precise, careful language, or do you find hyperbole, connotative language, unfounded generalizations?
- Is your language vivid and specific or do you see words that might be vague or bland?
- Is your writing concise (economical), or do you need to edit/cut words? Have you checked your work for redundancy?
- Have you varied your sentence structure, or do you find that many sentences are similar? (Avoid redundant subject-verb beginnings to sentences.)
- Have you run spell-check? Have you checked your grammar? Proofread ALOUD, slowly?

Visual Analysis Language Tips

Before: I think the mood of this film is depressing. (Avoid first person; describe.)

After: The dimly lit rooms and overcast skies evoke a depressing mood.

Before: The man in the painting is happy. (We can't know thoughts and feelings.)

After: The man's brightly colored face suggests a happy character.

Before: There is water at the bottom of the abstract painting. (Avoid "there is;" describe)

After: Thick blue lines at the bottom of the painting allude to water.

Before: You might think that this abstract painting is about war. (Avoid "you;" describe)

After: The clashing lines and colors of this painting seem to express conflict. The artist's military history might suggest the theme is war.

Helpful Verbs	Helpful Nouns
Seems	Image
Appears	Composition
Suggests	Frame
Implies	Figure
Represents	Mood
Evokes	Tone
Alludes to	Feeling
References	Sense
Expresses	Perception
Indicates	Impression
Depicts	
Projects	
Communicates	
Conveys	
Connotes	
Embodies	
Manifests	
Points to	
Hints	
Intimates	
Conjures	

Also, see the class presentations on visual elements and principles, camera terminology, and *mise-en-scène*.

Group Performance Report

[FOR PROJECT] All group members must agree to this report.

Name _____

Describe the work this group member contributed. Did this member contribute equally to meetings, and to the production of the pieces, in time, effort, and skill? Yes No Explain.

Percentage of time, effort, and skill devoted

Name _____

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