Multimedia Writing: Reading Journals

A Note On The Readings

Throughout the course of the semester, you will be assigned a number of readings from the two texts required for this course. The purpose of these readings is directly tied to the overall goal of the course, which is to **give you content and opportunity to engage with principles that connect directly to your lives outside of this classroom and indeed this institution**. The connections between what you read and what you produce in this course may not seem readily apparent, and there may be content in these readings that you find challenging for a number of reasons. I have thus assigned these readings for the following reasons:

1. **To familiarize you with complex theoretical concepts and practices**. As noted in the syllabus, college is a time for expanding our horizons and learning new concepts and perspectives. The chapters and articles in the two texts you have been assigned are often dense and complex and may require you to read them more than once to fully absorb the material. In a digital cultural climate where information is often presented in quick soundbites, this class gives you the opportunity to practice the skill of engaging with a theoretically dense and intense text and extract the most important points of that text. This will give you the opportunity to engage in other facets of media literacy that are essential in a multimedia culture where information that is reduced to soundbites is significantly more complex once you read past the headlines.

2. **To get you comfortable with 'sitting with' difficult readings.** Most of the readings will address unfamiliar concepts or topics that result in the need to interrogate the text on multiple levels. Rather than skimming and gleaning brief impressions of the readings, I encourage you to sit with the readings, looking them over more than once and making notes of the things that stand out to you as difficult to parse, emotionally challenging, or just plain contrary to what you know. Highlight and make note of specific things that stand out to you, and use the journal prompts as jumping off points for asking questions and considering answers. Knowledge-making requires us to push past a knee-jerk resistance to information that contradicts our personal views, and reflecting on why our reactions to new information are what they are is one valuable part of reading and 'sitting with' a difficult text.

3. **To address and acknowledge the current socio-political climate**. We are living through a high-stakes and stressful socio-political situation in the current United States. In support of the Black Lives Matter movement and all other moves towards equity and justice, it is essential to address and implement anti-racist measures across multiple disciplines, particularly digital spaces in the case of this course. Questions surrounding equality and equity in matters of race, class, and minority status are interspersed with current events that upset the status quo in a necessary way. By reading texts that encourage us to interrogate the status quo and our views, I encourage all of us to reflect on the role we play in society, how our identity shapes us, and how we can participate in a culture of justice and accountability that actively condemns racism and violence against minorities. The readings we will engage with are not new, but they are still extremely timely, and they provide perspectives from voices that need to be heard. Reflect on them in the context of our current socio-political climate and what they can show us about how our complex personal identities interplay with the current state of the world.

4. **To emphasize that multimedia experiences cannot be neutral or apolitical.** All technology was made by human hands, and this means the media we engage with exists within the context of its human creators. The systems we engage with across multiple media platforms are influenced by the people who create and maintain them, and as a result one of the major principles we will explore in this course is that nothing in multimedia is truly neutral, nor should it be. We will address the significance of context and bias in media, and will also interrogate more fully what this means for our media experiences. We will challenge assumptions about neutrality and bias and look at what it means to examine multimedia from varying audiences, viewpoints, and perspectives.

As noted on the syllabus, I expect you to engage with the texts and concepts we engage with in this course with respect and an open mind. I am **NOT** asking you to agree with everything you read over the course of this semester, or with me. Far from it. My views are shaped by my personal experiences and position and will therefore be very different from yours. What I **AM** encouraging you to do is to engage with complex concepts beyond initial impressions and reflect upon your reactions. The connections between course content and readings may not be readily apparent. This is by design. As with all things in this course, you choose how you involve yourself in the content, and the way you construct your reading journals will reflect this. What you get out of this course is, ultimately, up to you.

Reading Journal Expectations

Reading Journals should concern the specific readings assigned within the established timeframe. For example, Reading Journal 1 will concern all of the readings provided to you before it is due, while Reading Journal 2 will concern all readings given between the period of time after Journal 1 is turned in and the period of time Journal 2 is due.

You will be assigned 5 reading journals over the course of the semester, and each journal will be worth 20 points. How you earn this 20 points will depend on your fulfillment of the following criteria:

1. **Do you engage with the material beyond the surface?** Do you provide evidence that you have read the text, processed and acknowledged its key points, and reflected on its deeper context?

2. **Do you interrogate your reactions to the material?** Do you acknowledge the feelings the text gives you? Do you reflect on those feelings and reactions and consider WHY the text has given you the feelings it has? Do you consider how your positionality in the world impacts what you perceive from the text?

3. **Do you reflect on the connection between the text and the overall course theme of multimedia writing?** Do you draw connections from the work we do on our projects and our discussions and infer connections that may not be readily apparent? Have you asked yourself why I would assign this text in the context of the current content we're engaging with during the rest of the course?

While I have no concrete requirements for page length or word count, I believe that you would be hard pressed to properly engage with these three points in anything less than 300 words. So, I encourage you to aim for writing a journal that is between 300 and 500 words.

Please note that, as stated above, I am not interested in how much or little you agree with me on the content of the texts, and you will not be graded based on how much or how little your views align with my own or the views of the authors of the texts. I encourage you to always **explain and justify your thoughts** as thoroughly as possible, however, and the more you can share with me **why** you feel or think a certain way about a text, the more likely you will be to fulfill the three criteria listed above, and gain something from this experience.

Journal Prompts

At the beginning of each week that a Reading Journal is due, I will provide a brief prompt to help get you started as you compose your journal. These prompts will take the form of **questions** about the readings that fall under the scope of that Journal, and are designed as helpful tools, not hard requirements. If you don't want to use them in your response, you need not do so. However, I know that guidance can be useful, especially as you interrogate difficult concepts, and thus provide some scaffolding you can choose to use to fuel your responses. These prompts will also specify the readings that fall under the particular Journal to avoid any confusion about what texts you should be addressing in the contents of that Journal.

Final Journal

As part of the Final Portfolio project, you will be assigned a final journal that encourages you to sum up your thoughts and experiences engaging with all of the reading material over the course of the semester. You will be encouraged to draw from your past reading journals and share what the experience of reading the material has been like. Criteria for this journal is present in the Final Portfolio Assignment.

Readings Schedule

Week 1:

No Readings.

Week 2:

'Introduction' -- Safiya Umoja Noble and Brendesha M. Tynes. In *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class, and Culture Online*, pgs. 1-18.

Week 3:

'Signifyin', Bitching, and Blogging: Black Women and Resistance Discourse Online' -- Catherine Knight Steele. In *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class, and Culture Online*, pgs. 73-93

Reading Journal 1: Due Friday, Sept 11, 11:59pm.

Week 4:

'The Epidemiology of Digital Infrastructure' -- Robert Mejia. In *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class, and Culture Online*, pgs. 229-241.

Week 5:

'Commercial Content Moderation: Digital Laborers' Dirty Work' -- Sarah T. Roberts. In *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class, and Culture Online*, pgs.147-159.

Reading Journal 2: Due Friday, Sept 25, 11:59pm.

Week 6:

'Video Stars: Marketing Queer Performance in Networked Television' -- Aymar Jean Christian. In *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class, and Culture Online*, pgs. 95-113.

Week 7:

'Grand Theft Auto V: Post-Racial Fantasies and Ferguson Realities' -- David J. Leonard. In *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class, and Culture Online*, pgs. 129-144.

Reading Journal 3: Due Friday, October 9, 11:59pm.

Week 8:
'Love, Inc.: Toward Structural Intersectional Analysis of Online Dating Sites and Applications'
-- Molly Niesen. In *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class, and Culture Online*, pgs. 161-178.

Week 9:
'The Intersectional Interface' -- Miriam E. Sweeney. In *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class, and Culture Online*, pgs. 215-228.

Week 10:
'Introduction: The Power of Algorithms', 'Chapter 1: A Society, Searching' -- Safiya Umoja Noble. In *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*, pgs. 1-63.

Week 11:
'Chapter 2: Searching For Black Girls,' 'Chapter 3: Searching For People and Communities' -- Safiya Umoja Noble. In *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*, pgs. 64-118.

Reading Journal 4: Due Friday, November 6th, 11:59pm.

Week 12:
'Chapter 4: Searching for Protections from Search Engines', 'Chapter 5 : The Future of KNowledge in the Public' -- Safiya Umoja Noble. In *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*, pgs. 119-152.

Week 13:
'Chapter 6: The Future of Information Culture', 'Conclusion: Algorithms of Oppression', 'Epilogue' -- Safiya Umoja Noble. In *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*, pgs. 153-186.

Reading Journal 5: Due Friday, November 20th, 11:59pm.

Week 14:
No readings.

Week 15:

No Readings.

Week 16:

Final Journal: Due Friday, December 11th, with Final Portfolio