

ENGL 4388: Writing about Popular Culture



Spring 2019, Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:00 a.m. to 12:15 p.m., Heritage Hall 308

Instructor: Dr. Bruce Bowles Jr.

E-mail: bruce.bowles@tamuct.edu

Office: Warrior Hall 420A or University Writing Center

Office Hours: Walk-in or Email for an Appointment

Course Description: ENGL 4388: Writing about Popular Culture enhances students' critical thinking abilities and composition proficiencies through engagement with a variety of texts prevalent in their everyday lives found throughout advertisement, television, movies, politics, social media, etc. Students practice analyzing these texts in complex and nuanced fashions in order to communicate their interpretations and insights to a variety of audiences across a multitude of genres.

Course Outcomes:

By the end of the semester, students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- Engage with, and critically analyze, a variety of popular culture texts including essays, articles, advertisements, television shows, movies, political propaganda, social media posts, etc.
- Understand the reciprocal relationship between popular culture and ideology, exploring how popular culture is shaped by cultural ideologies but also helps shape cultural ideologies

- Comprehend, and apply to their composition practices, key analytical and rhetorical concepts by composing a variety of texts for different audiences across a multitude of genres
- Locate, evaluate, and synthesize both primary and secondary sources (scholarly journal articles, essays, journalistic sources, books, data, etc.) to support and bolster their claims and arguments
- Integrate multiple modalities to enhance the entertainment value and rhetorical effectiveness of their texts
- Engage with and apply criticism and feedback from both peers and their instructor in order to improve their writing and view writing as a social process
- Develop their writing through multiple drafts by refining their composition practices and employing successful revision and editing strategies

Required Textbooks and Materials:

- *Signs of Life in the USA: Readings on Popular Culture for Writers (9th Edition)*, Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon, ISBN (13) #978-1-319-05663-6
- Various .pdf articles and selections from texts (available through Canvas)
- Access to a Computer (the university provides a number of computer labs)

This course will use the TAMUCT Instructure Canvas learning management system.

Logon to [TAMUCT Canvas \[https://tamuct.instructure.com\]](https://tamuct.instructure.com)

Username: Your MyCT username (xx123 or everything before the "@" in your MyCT e-mail address)

Password: Your MyCT password

Portfolio Evaluation: This class employs a hybrid version of portfolio grading; as a result, you will be assessed on both your individual assignments as well as holistically on the final products you produce for your ePortfolio at the end of the semester. For your major assignments, your 1st drafts will be for peer review, your 2nd drafts will be for me to provide feedback/evaluation, and your final drafts (along with annotated versions) will be posted—along with your other drafts—when your ePortfolio is completed. Your participation in class and topical blog will account for the remainder of your grade.

Participation= 5%

Topical Blog= 5%

“Analyze This (Advertisement)! Conducting a Semiotic Analysis of an Advertisement”= 10%

“The Siskel to my Ebert! Writing an Engaging and Intriguing Review of a Popular Culture Text”= 10%

“Popular Culture Meets the Professoriate! An Academic Essay Pertaining to Popular Culture”= 20%

“On the Cover of the *Rolling Stone*! Composing a Feature Article for a Popular Publication”= 20%

“ePortfolio”= 30%

Participation: The participation portion of your grade will be assessed holistically, drawing upon a few facets of the course. First, you are expected to be prepared for, and contribute to, classroom discussions. While I understand that some people are more outgoing than others, I should have an awareness of your contributions to the class. A second component of your participation grade will be your participation in workshops the class conducts for your various projects. You are expected to bring a viable draft to each workshop, to engage with your classmates' texts in a constructive fashion, and to complete any verbal and/or written activities assigned during the workshop.

Lastly, at the beginning of many classes, I will ask reading questions. Students will be chosen at random for these questions; however, I do ensure that each student is called upon at least twice during the semester. These questions will be evaluated on a pass/fail basis, yet—if you are unable to answer the particular question but did complete the reading—I will award the majority of credit if you can speak to particular concepts, theories, passages, etc. in the text. Essentially, if you are unsure of the answer, discuss the text with me in an intelligent fashion to demonstrate you did complete the reading.

Bonus opportunities are also available in two ways: 1) I will sometimes ask difficult questions that demonstrate in-depth reading practices. If you answer one of these correctly, you will get bonus credit; and 2) When students are unable to answer certain questions, that question will be made available to the class for bonus credit. **Bonuses only impact your participation grade, not your final grade.** Bonus questions can serve to offset class sessions where you failed to answer a question correctly and/or as an indicator to increase your participation grade. Please let me know if you have any questions about your participation grade throughout the semester.

Journals: Almost every class you will write in your journals for the first few minutes. You can either write by hand or type your journal entries. However, for your ePortfolio, you will be required to have samples of your journal entries typed. Most days, I will dictate a topic for you to write about. Think thoroughly about the topic, yet try to write continuously throughout the duration of the exercise. Sometimes, merely writing down your thoughts can help you to gain a better understanding of the topic and your own thought processes.

Topical Blog: Early in the semester, you will choose a popular culture topic for which you wish to create a blog. I am quite open to the potential topics you can write about. You may choose to follow a particular TV show and write updates after key episodes. You could potentially write about a particular societal issue (e.g. race, gender, romance, class issues, politics, etc.) and how it is represented in various popular culture texts. You might even want to write about a particular phenomenon that has arisen around a certain facet of popular culture (e.g. Comic Con, cosplay, viewing parties, spoiling communities, etc.). The possibilities are endless!

Once you have chosen a topic, you will need to determine who your audience is. What types of people do you wish to engage with your blog? What draws them to such a blog? Why will they be interested in reading it? How will you keep them engaged and intrigued?

You will post to your blog at five assigned times throughout the semester. Your blog posts should be at least a page in length, yet feel free to write more if you are so inclined. These blog

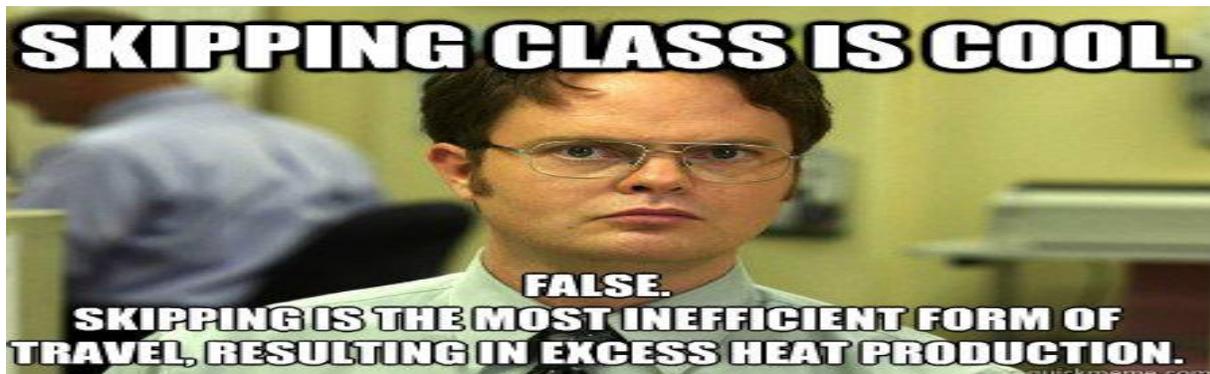
posts need to offer in-depth analysis and insights into the popular culture topic you are writing about as well; they should not merely be ramblings about popular culture. I will keep track of their completion on time throughout the semester as part of your grade. They will also be assessed holistically as part of your ePortfolio at the end of the semester.

Reflective Memos: For each of the four main projects, you will submit a reflective memo with your 2nd draft. This memo is a vital component of your grade; it allows me to understand the audience you are writing for, your rhetorical intentions, and the thought processes behind the decisions you made. When I go to assess your projects, my assessment is heavily influenced by the rationales you articulate in your reflective memo.

These memos should be concise, yet you do need to provide detailed answers for all of the reflective questions. A solid paragraph (three to four sentences) for each response will most likely be sufficient.

Be forewarned, though. If your reflective memo does not provide sufficient detail, it can result in you being asked to resubmit it and/or a reduction in your overall grade. This is your opportunity to make me aware of your rhetorical intentions—take advantage of it!

Class Attendance Policy: Attending class is vital if you are to get the most out of this course. As a result, I do require that you miss **no more than four classes** throughout the semester. If you miss more than four classes, this will be grounds for possible failure.



Additionally, since this class relies on workshops heavily, **leaving class early without permission from your instructor will also count as an absence.** Workshops and structured work time are for your benefit—you need to be participating to gain the most from this course!

Lastly, incompletes should be reserved for unexpected, life altering situations that develop after the drop deadline. Students should drop a course should something happen that prevents them from completing the course ahead of the drop deadline. Failure to do so may result in failing grades on assignments or the course if missing work is not completed and submitted before the last day of the semester. Please let me know immediately if serious health or life issues prevent you from attending class or submitting assignments.

Class Civility Policy: This class will tolerate neither disruptive language nor disruptive behavior. Disruptive language includes, but is not limited to, violent and/or belligerent and/or insulting remarks, including sexist, racist, homophobic or anti-ethnic slurs, bigotry, and disparaging commentary, either spoken or written (offensive slang is included in this category). While each of you have a right to your own opinions, inflammatory language founded in ignorance or hate is unacceptable and will be dealt with immediately.

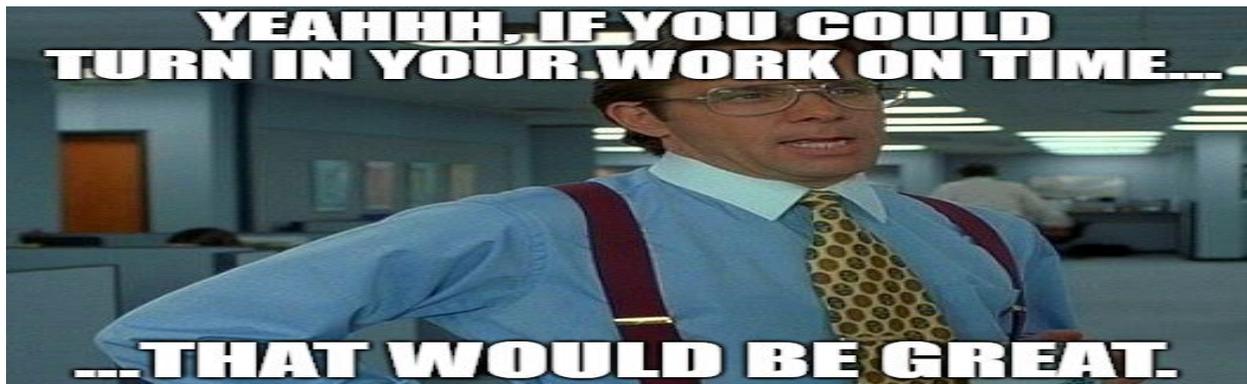


Disruptive behavior includes the use of cell phones, pagers, or any other form of electronic communication during the class session (email, web-browsing, etc.). Disruptive behavior also includes whispering or talking when another member of the class is speaking or engaged in relevant conversation (remember that I am a member of this class as well). This classroom functions on the premise of respect, and you will be asked to leave the classroom if you violate any part of this statement on civility.

However, please do feel free to engage in constructive criticism and debates. This policy is not meant to discourage disagreement or passionate conversation. We will be engaging in discussions and/or debates about a host of potentially controversial topics; it is not my intention to censor your opinions. Yet, I do feel it is important to foster an environment conducive to learning where no one feels threatened and/or not entitled to their opinion.

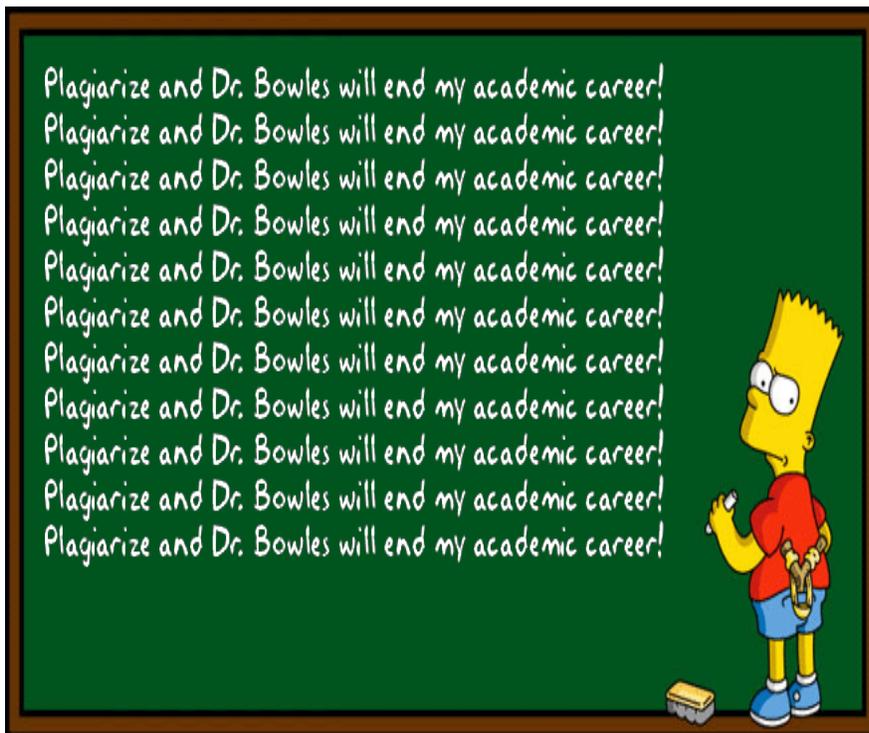
Remember, if you disagree with someone (including myself), always remember to argue against the **IDEA** the person is presenting—not the individual.

Late Work: While I understand that circumstances may arise that could prevent you from turning an assignment in on time, **I do not accept late work—period!** However, I am always willing to discuss extensions **ahead of time or work with you if unforeseen circumstances arise that could prevent you from handing your work in on time.** If you have a reasonable reason why you believe you should be entitled to an extension, or for why you were not able to meet a deadline, either come see me after class, during office hours, or e-mail me.



Academic Integrity: Texas A&M University – Central Texas values the integrity of the academic enterprise and strives for the highest standards of academic conduct. A&M – Central Texas expects its students, faculty, and staff to support the adherence to high standards of personal and scholarly conduct to preserve the honor and integrity of the creative community. Academic integrity is defined as a commitment to honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Any deviation by students from this expectation may result in a failing grade for the assignment and potentially a failing grade for the course. Academic misconduct is any act that improperly affects a true and honest evaluation of a student’s academic performance and includes, but is not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work, plagiarism and improper citation of sources, using another student’s work, collusion, and the abuse of resource materials. All academic misconduct concerns will be reported to the university’s Office of Student Conduct. Ignorance of the university’s standards and expectations is never an excuse to act with a lack of integrity. When in doubt on collaboration, citation, or any issue, please contact your instructor before taking a course of action.

Class Plagiarism Policy: As an instructor, I operate by the WPA (Council of Writing Program Administrators) definition of plagiarism: “In an instructional setting, plagiarism occurs when a writer **deliberately** uses someone else’s language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source.” The key here is deliberate—I do not want you to be so paranoid about plagiarism that it inhibits your creativity.



To that extent, any instance of “plagiarism” that **does not appear to be deliberate in intent** will be dealt with “in house.” You may be asked to revise; I may even deduct from your grade if this was a result of negligence. However, unless intentional, you will not fail merely as a result of plagiarism nor will you be brought up on plagiarism charges.

That being said, deliberate plagiarism will not be tolerated in any manner. If you willfully steal someone else’s language,

ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledgment, or submit an assignment for this class that you submitted for another (without previously discussing it with me), be forewarned—you will receive a 0 for the assignment, and I will pursue plagiarism charges with the utmost zeal! Such behavior hinders your learning, is unfair to your classmates,

is a violation of my trust, and—above all else—is highly unethical. This is your one and only warning—you would be wise to heed it!

911 Cellular: Emergency Warning System for Texas A&M University – Central Texas
911Cellular is an emergency notification service that gives Texas A&M University-Central Texas the ability to communicate health and safety emergency information quickly via email, text message, and social media. All students are automatically enrolled in 911 Cellular through their myCT email account.

Connect at 911Cellular [<https://portal.publicsafetycloud.net/Texas-AM-Central/alert-management>] to change where you receive your alerts or to opt out. By staying enrolled in 911Cellular, university officials can quickly pass on safety-related information, regardless of your location.

Technology Support: For technology issues, students should contact Help Desk Central. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

Email: helpdesk@tamu.edu

Phone: (254) 519-5466

Web Chat: <http://hdc.tamu.edu>

When calling for support please let your support technician know you are a TAMUCT student. For issues related to course content and requirements, contact your instructor.

Drop Policy: If you discover that you need to drop this class, you must complete a Drop Request Form, found through the Registrar's web page:

<https://www.tamuct.edu/departments/business-office/droppolicy.php>

Professors cannot drop students; this is always the responsibility of the student. The Registrar's Office will provide a deadline on the University Calendar for which the form must be completed, signed and returned. Once you return the signed form to the Registrar's Office, you must go into Warrior Web and confirm that you are no longer enrolled. If you still show as enrolled, FOLLOW-UP with the Registrar's Office immediately. You are to attend class until the procedure is complete to avoid penalty for absence. Should you miss the drop deadline or fail to follow the procedure, you will receive an F in the course, which may affect your financial aid and/or VA educational benefits.

Academic Accommodations: At Texas A&M University – Central Texas, we value an inclusive learning environment where every student has an equal chance to succeed and has the right to a barrier free education. The Department of Access and Inclusion is responsible for ensuring that students with a disability receive equal access to the University's programs, services and activities. If you believe you have a disability requiring reasonable accommodations please

contact the Department of Access and Inclusion at (254) 501-5831. Any information you provide is private and confidential and will be treated as such.

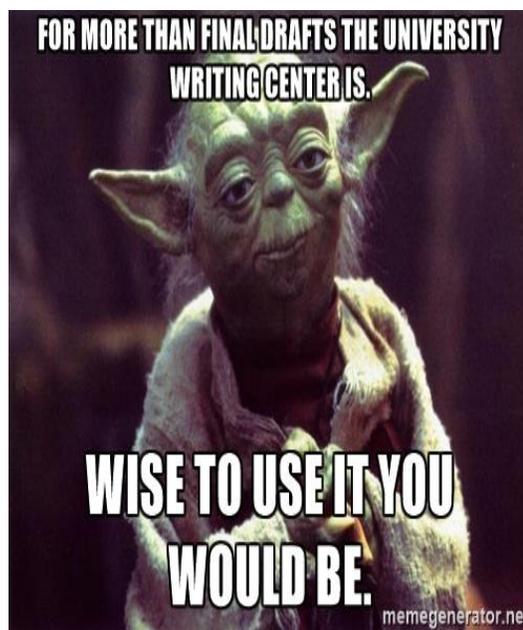
For more information please visit our [Access & Inclusion](https://www.tamuct.edu/student-affairs/access-inclusion.html) webpage [<https://www.tamuct.edu/student-affairs/access-inclusion.html>].

Texas A&M University – Central Texas supports students who are pregnant and/or parenting. In accordance with requirements of Title IX and guidance from US Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights, the Dean of Student Affairs’ Office can assist students who are pregnant and/or parenting in seeking accommodations related to pregnancy and/or parenting. For more information, please visit <https://www.tamuct.departments/index.php>. Students may also contact the institution’s Title IX Coordinator. If you would like to read more about these requirements and guidelines online, please visit the website: [<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/pregnancy.pdf>].

Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex and gender – including pregnancy, parenting, and all related conditions. A&M-Central Texas is able to provide flexible and individualized reasonable accommodation to pregnant and parenting students. All pregnant and parenting students should contact the Division of Student Affairs at 254-501-5909 to seek out assistance. Students may also contact the University’s Title IX Coordinator.

University Writing Center: Located in Warrior Hall 416, the University Writing Center (UWC) at Texas A&M University–Central Texas (TAMUCT) is a free workspace open to all TAMUCT students from 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Monday thru Thursday with satellite hours in the University Library Monday thru Thursday from 6:00-9:00 p.m. This semester, the UWC is also offering online only hours from 12:00-3:00 p.m. on Saturdays.

Tutors are prepared to help writers of all levels and abilities at any stage of the writing process. While tutors will not write, edit, or grade papers, they will assist students in developing more effective composing practices. By providing a practice audience for students’ ideas and writing, our tutors highlight the ways in which they read and interpret students’ texts, offering guidance and support throughout the various stages of the writing process. In addition, students may work independently in the UWC by checking out a laptop that runs the Microsoft Office suite and connects to WIFI, or by consulting our resources on writing, including all of the relevant style guides. Whether you need help brainstorming ideas, organizing an essay, proofreading, understanding proper citation practices, or just want a quiet place to work, the UWC is here to help!



Students may arrange a one-on-one session with a trained and experienced writing tutor by visiting the UWC during normal operating hours (both half-hour and hour sessions are available) or by making an appointment via WConline at <https://tamuct.mywconline.com/>. In addition, you can email Dr. Bruce Bowles Jr. at bruce.bowles@tamuct.edu if you have any questions about the UWC and/or need any assistance with scheduling.

Tutoring: Tutoring is available to all A&M-Central Texas students, both on-campus and online. On-campus subjects tutored include Accounting, Advanced Math, Biology, Finance, Statistics, Mathematics, and Study Skills. Tutors are available at the Tutoring Center in Warrior Hall, Suite 111.

If you have a question regarding tutor schedules, need to schedule a tutoring session, are interested in becoming a tutor, or any other question, contact Academic Support Programs at 254-519-5796, or by emailing Dr. DeEadra Albert-Green at deeadra.albertgreen@tamuct.edu.

Chat live with a tutor 24/7 for almost any subject on your computer! Tutor.com is an online tutoring platform that enables A&M-Central Texas students to log-in and receive FREE online tutoring and writing support. This tool provides tutoring in over forty subject areas. Access Tutor.com through Canvas.

University Library: The University Library provides many services in support of research across campus and at a distance. We offer over 200 electronic databases containing approximately 250,000 eBooks and 82,000 journals, in addition to the 72,000 items in our print collection, which can be mailed to students who live more than 50 miles from campus. Research guides for each subject taught at A&M-Central Texas are available through our website to help students navigate these resources. On-campus, the library offers technology including cameras, laptops, microphones, webcams, and digital sound recorders.

Research assistance from a librarian is also available twenty-four hours a day through our online chat service, and at the reference desk when the library is open. Research sessions can be scheduled for more comprehensive assistance, and may take place on Skype or in-person at the library. Assistance may cover many topics, including how to find articles in peer-reviewed journals, how to cite resources, and how to piece together research for written assignments.

Our 27,000-square-foot facility on the A&M-Central Texas main campus includes student lounges, private study rooms, group work spaces, computer labs, family areas suitable for all ages, and many other features. Services such as interlibrary loan, TexShare, binding, and laminating are available. The library frequently offers workshops, tours, readings, and other events. For more information, please visit our [Library website](https://tamuct.libguides.com/) [<https://tamuct.libguides.com/>].

Artifact Collection: To ensure the learning outcomes are met in the English Department, there is a program-wide artifact collection process. To that end, artifacts from your final ePortfolio for ENGL 4388: Writing about Popular Culture this semester may be used for programmatic assessment. Please note that all efforts will be made to keep your identity anonymous; as such, all identifying markers will be removed from your work if used for programmatic assessment. If

you have any questions or concerns, please contact Dr. Bruce Bowles Jr. at bruce.bowles@tamuct.edu.

Syllabus Change Policy: Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

ENGL 4388: Writing about Popular Culture

Major Projects

“Analyze This (Advertisement)! Conducting a Semiotic Analysis of an Advertisement” (equivalent to 2-3 pages double-spaced)

As we have read, advertising is a rather ubiquitous practice in our culture that relies on signs to attach emotions to various products and associate them with the mythology and values that the targeted audience holds as significant. In short, advertisements are highly ideological and contain a lot of hidden meanings that are not always apparent, no matter how “sophisticated” we believe we are as consumers. For your first assignment, you will conduct a semiotic analysis of an advertisement, whether it be a print advertisement, a television commercial, an internet pop-up, clever product placement, etc. You will want to choose an advertisement that you believe has special significance worthy of analysis.

Once you have chosen your advertisement, you will want to begin your analysis. Start with the advertisement's denotation, what it is objectively referring to. Depict the advertisement for your audience; in this instance, it will be quite beneficial to take advantage of the affordances of multimodality. You can use a textual narrative of the advertisement along with an image from



the advertisement, a video of the commercial, a link to the advertisement, etc. Overall, your main goal will be to ensure that your audience has a thorough understanding of the advertisement you are analyzing.

Next, you will examine the connotation of the advertisement. What are the meanings suggested by the advertisement? To answer this question, you will want to ask yourself questions about a variety of elements related to the advertisement. Who is the target audience for this advertisement? What features, characteristics, personality traits, etc. of this target audience is the advertisement trying to appeal to? How does the advertisement appeal to the audience's emotions? What types of associations does it attempt to create? What values and ideologies does it attempt to associate with? Take the time to analyze your advertisement from a multitude of angles.

When you compose this section of your analysis, you will not only want to answer these questions; you will also want to provide evidence from the text and from outside the text in order to support your claims. What about the advertisement suggests to you that it is targeting the specific audience you have described? Why do you believe it appeals to the emotions it does? What evidence do you have of how it draws upon systems of association and difference? Etc. Make sure that you do not merely just tell your readers what you believe—show them why this is a plausible interpretation of this advertisement.

Your semiotic analysis of an advertisement should be equivalent to two to three pages double-spaced. This can include multiple modalities, yet—remember—the goal is to analyze the advertisement, not just show it. Your analysis should use other modalities in a rhetorically strategic fashion. While you are not required to have outside sources, you are allowed to use them if you so desire. If you do so, please cite them using MLA style and provide an appropriate works cited page.

When I assess your semiotic analysis of an advertisement, my assessment will focus heavily on your ability to apply the various semiotic theories we learned in class to your analysis, the sophistication and depth of your analysis, the relevance and persuasiveness of the evidence you provide, the logic of the organizational strategy you use to make your argument, and the polish of your prose, both stylistically and grammatically. The main question I will ask myself is: *How well does this analysis apply the concepts of semiotics we learned in class to provide a cogent argument regarding the meaning behind this advertisement?*



Reflective Memo:

1. Why did you choose the particular advertisement you analyzed? What, specifically, appealed to you about this advertisement?
2. What is the rationale behind the manner in which you structured your argument? Essentially, why have you organized your argument in the fashion you chose?
3. How did you select the evidence you used to support your argument? Why do you believe it will be effective and persuasive for your readers?
4. Overall, what did you want your readers to take away from this semiotic analysis?
5. What are the biggest strengths of your semiotic analysis? What are some weaknesses you might wish to address during revision?
6. How would you like me to focus my response to your semiotic analysis? What areas could you use the most assistance with?

“The Siskel to my Ebert! Writing an Engaging and Intriguing Review of a Popular Culture Text”
(equivalent to 2-3 pages double-spaced)

Although a review might seem like a rather static genre, reviews are anything but. They come in a variety of types and styles. Some reviews will merely indicate a preference for whether a movie, television show, musical, etc. is worthy of viewing; other reviews will provide more in-depth analysis about the content and societal value of the particular text in question. Certain reviews operate as if the intended audience has not engaged with the text in question; other reviews operate on the assumption that the audience has engaged with the text and wants an in-depth discussion of its contents. At times, reviews will focus on the text primarily; in other instances, reviews will place the text in conversation with other texts and/or larger societal, political, and/or ideological issues. In short, there are various approaches a writer can take when composing a review that are highly predicated on where they are publishing the review and the audience for whom they are writing the review.



Your first step for this assignment will be to choose a popular culture text you wish to review. This could range from a movie (a rather traditional approach), to a television episode, to a new popular book that was published, etc. Your review can also range in scope; for example, you might review a single television episode or an entire season of a television show. You will need to choose the text and scope that most interests you.



After you have chosen your text to review, you will need to choose a venue for publication and identify the intended audience for whom you will be writing. Who reads this publication? What types of reviews do they favor? How do they like to engage with these reviews (i.e. primarily via print, with multiple modalities including video and images, etc.)? What is their level of involvement with the text you are reviewing? Have they seen it? If they have, are they passive consumers of this text or die-hard fans? Take the time to target your review towards a publication and an audience that you believe will benefit from this review and consider how you will tailor your writing to this publication and intended audience.

You will also want to consider your approach for this review. Do you want to provide an over-arching review of the text, or do you want to focus on one particular facet of the text? Are you interested more in reviewing the text in isolation or do you want to place it in conversation with other texts and/or larger societal, political, and ideological issues? Will you be avoiding

spoilers, or do you want to write to an audience who has engaged with the text and desires to discuss it thoroughly? Choose an approach that you believe will allow you to write an engaging and intriguing review that will satisfy the expectations and inclinations of your intended audience.

As you compose your review, keep in mind your focus, scope, and audience. Make decisions about how you organize your review, the arguments you make, the modalities you use, etc. predicated on these aspects of the rhetorical situation. Your review will only be as impactful as the manner in which it suits the context for which it is written.

Your review should be the equivalent of two to three pages double-spaced. Once again, you are free and encouraged to employ multiple modalities, but do so in an effective manner. If you do choose to use outside sources (which you are not required to do), you will credit them in a fashion traditional to journalism. In essence, make it clear in your prose how you obtained the quote and/or information you draw upon.

Assessment of your review will be predicated upon how well you tailor your review to the publication venue and intended audience you are writing for, the manner in which you make your review engaging and intriguing for such an audience, the strength of the organizational structure you employ, your use of the affordances of multimodality to convey your meaning, and the overall polish of your review (e.g. avoiding factual mistakes, grammatical appropriateness for the intended audience, etc.). As I assess your review, I will ask myself: *If I were a typical reader of this publication and interested in this particular text, how satisfied would I be with this review and how likely would I be to read future work by this author?*

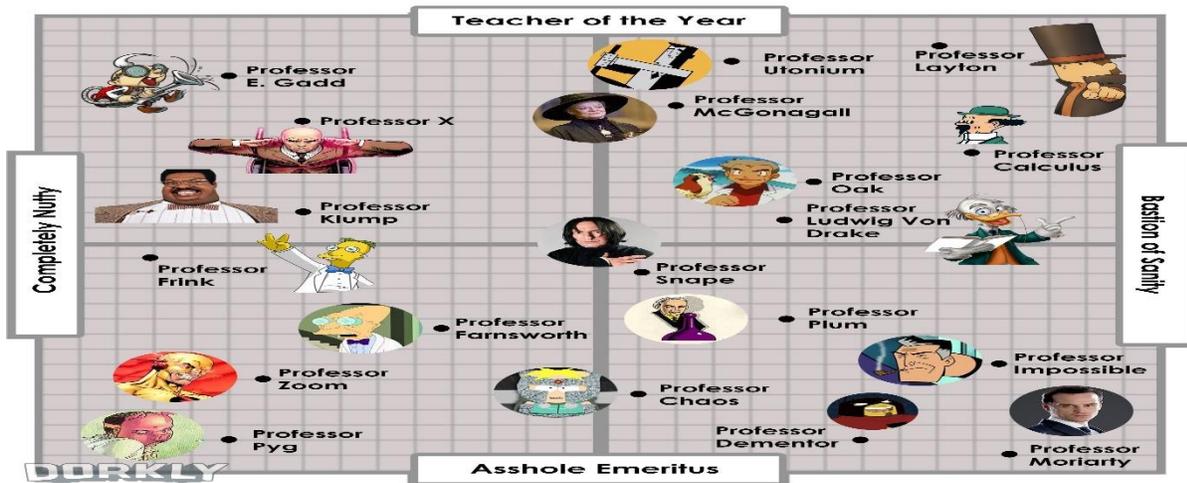
Reflective Memo:

1. Why did you choose to review the popular culture text you reviewed? What about the text made it apt for such a review?
2. For what publication venue did you compose this review? Who is your intended audience? How did you tailor your review to this intended audience?
3. How did you approach this review in regard to content, scope, and the audience's assumed interactions with this particular text? In what ways do you believe this approach benefitted the review?
4. In your estimation, what is most impressive about your review? Where do you believe your review could be improved upon? How might you improve it during revision?
5. How would you prefer I respond to your review? Essentially, what can I do to make this review the best it can possibly be come ePortfolio time?

**“Popular Culture Meets the Professoriate! An Academic Essay Pertaining to Popular Culture”
(equivalent to 4-5 pages double-spaced)**

Popular culture studies was not always appreciated among intellectuals, yet—over the years—it has found a prominent place in academia. With time, academics began to appreciate the value of studying the significance of such texts. However, popular culture studies is not merely a fangirl/fanboy endeavor. It is a sophisticated form of academic inquiry that strives to apply critical theory and analysis to the texts that permeate popular culture.

The Ultimate Professor Showdown



For this assignment, you are going to compose an academic essay that addresses a particular text, theme, facet, etc. of popular culture. This assignment is—both fortunately and potentially unfortunately—rather wide open. You may choose to explore a particular popular culture text through a Marxist lens. You could conduct a rhetorical analysis of a particular moment from your favorite television show. Gender and/or race issues could be explored in a single popular culture text or across a multitude of popular culture texts. You might even analyze certain popular culture texts (e.g. *The Ides of March*, *The West Wing*, *House of Cards*, *Game of Thrones*, etc.) for their political implications. The choice is yours but make it wisely. Remember, your essay should be a scholarly endeavor, not merely a celebration of popular culture.

Once you have chosen your topic, you will need to conduct thorough academic research. Investigate what top scholars have to say about your particular text and/or theme. Immerse yourself in the scholarly conversations surrounding it. Ask yourself—how do you wish to contribute to this conversation?

Next, you’ll want to identify a particular audience for your essay. Do you want to write to other popular culture studies scholars? Are you more interested, perhaps, in using popular culture

to speak to a conversation in a particular discipline (e.g. criminal justice, history, political science, psychology, rhetoric, sociology, etc.)? What types of evidence and argumentation are valued by this audience? How can you structure and compose your essay accordingly? Make sure you focus on who you are writing to as much as you focus on what you are writing about.

After you have identified your audience, you will compose your academic essay. As with any academic essay, your academic essay pertaining to popular culture should have a clear thesis, a logical organization structure, provide appropriate evidence and argumentation for the audience you are writing to, and integrate sources in a cohesive and rhetorically effective fashion to advance your argument. In the end, this essay should be worthy of presenting at a conference and/or of publication (albeit it is somewhat smaller in scope).

Your academic essay should be equivalent to four to five pages double-spaced. Although you may take advantage of the affordances of multimodality, remember that academic genres are only beginning to embrace this trend. Thus, you will want to be particularly attentive to the rhetorical rationale behind using other modalities outside of alpha-numeric text. You will also need to have six sources for this assignment, four of which need to be peer-reviewed. You should employ MLA, APA, or Chicago style depending on your audience's expectations.

My assessment of your academic essay will concentrate on the clarity and strength of your thesis, the rhetorical effectiveness and cohesion of your arguments, the pertinence and persuasiveness of the evidence you provide, the quality of your organizational structure, the manner in which you engage in a scholarly conversation pertaining to the popular culture aspect(s) you chose to address, the manner in which you skillfully integrate sources, and the overall polish of your work (e.g. grammatical correctness, appropriate citation, etc.). The main question that will drive my assessment will be: *If I were on a review and/or editorial board, would I deem this essay worthy of being presented at an academic conference for undergraduate students and/or published in a journal for undergraduate student work?*

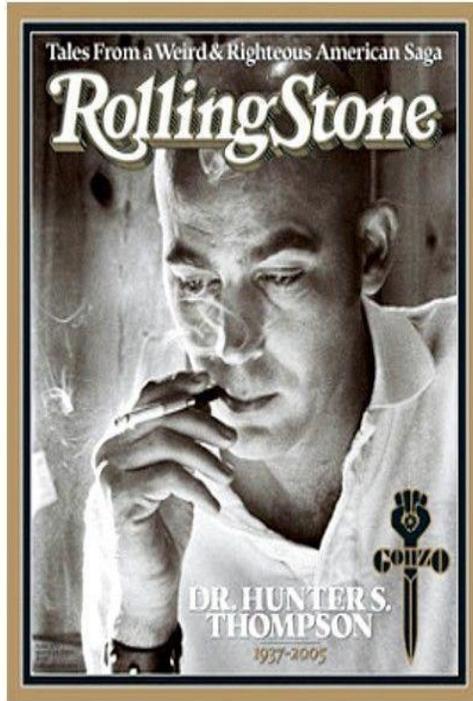
Reflective Memo:

1. Who is your intended audience for this academic essay? Are you trying to enter into a popular culture studies conversation or are you attempting to use popular culture to make an argument in a particular discipline (e.g. criminal justice, history, political science, psychology, rhetoric, sociology, etc.)?
2. What is the overall argument you are trying to make? How did you tailor your rhetorical strategies, evidence, etc. to aid that argument?
3. Why did you organize your academic essay in the manner that you chose? In essence, what is the logic behind your organizational structure?
4. Where do you believe you were successful in your academic essay? What areas were not as strong in your estimation? How might you improve upon them during revision?
5. As I respond to your academic essay, what would you like me to pay particular attention to?

“On the Cover of the *Rolling Stone*! Composing a Feature Article for a Popular Publication”
(equivalent to 4-5 pages double-spaced)

So, you have made it to the big time, hotshot! [*Insert your favorite publication here*] has asked you to write the feature article for an upcoming issue. As a result of your brilliance as a

writer, you have been given full editorial power. You can choose to write about any popular culture text, topic, and/or issue you wish. Wow, I’m impressed—they really trust you!



For your final assignment, you are going to write a feature article for a popular publication. You can choose any publication you desire, from more serious, intellectual venues such as *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, or *Newsweek* to more entertainment-oriented venues such as *Rolling Stone*, *Entertainment Weekly*, or *Vanity Fair*. This choice will be important, though. You will want to cater your feature article to the audience and editorial standards of that publication.

After you have chosen your publication and popular culture text, topic, and/or issue to write about, you should read various articles from your publication. What types of articles do they publish, especially pertaining to popular culture? How do they organize and layout these articles? Do they rely on a multitude of modes, or do they merely focus on alpha-numeric text and images? Who reads this publication? What are they intrigued by and what do they value? Take time to acquaint yourself further with this publication unless you happen to already be a religious reader.

You will then want to research your topic. However, remember that this is a different genre from an academic essay. Your research will not necessarily be scholarly (although you can include scholarly research if you believe it suits your publication, audience, and rhetorical intentions). You will want to draw upon a variety of sources and be able to speak about your topic expertly.

When you compose your feature article, you will want to focus on entertainment as much as persuasion. Remember, a key step toward persuading and providing knowledge for your audience will be to entice them to read the article and value your insights. Your feature article should catch your readers’ attention and offer cogent observations and insights into your topic while also being aesthetically pleasing from a visual and layout perspective. Entertainment is key here!

Your feature article should be equivalent to four to five pages double-spaced and is expected to take advantage of the affordances of multimodality. You are expected to have

researched your topic thoroughly, yet you will present your research in accordance with the conventions of your publication and the genre you are composing in. As a result, you will probably rely more on indicating your sources through your actual prose and/or captions rather than traditional citation methods.

As I assess your feature article, I will primarily base my assessment upon how well you tailor your feature article to the publication and audience for whom you chose to write, the rhetorical effectiveness of your arguments, the manner in which you made your feature article engaging and intriguing to read, the success of your use of the affordances of multimodality, the aesthetic appeal of your article from a visual and layout standpoint, and the polish of your piece (e.g. grammatical appropriateness for the intended audience, proper layout and alignment, appropriate attribution of sources, etc.). In the end, the main question that will determine my overall assessment of your work will be: *If I were a frequent reader of this publication, how impressed would I be by this writer's feature article?*



Reflective Memo:

1. What publication did you compose your feature article for? Who reads this publication? What is the audience looking for in a feature article?
2. When a reader is finished with your feature article, what do you want them to take away? Overall, what is the main message you are trying to convey to your readers?
3. How did you tailor your writing style, rhetoric, visuals, and layout for this publication/audience? Why did you make some of the choices you made in relation to the publication/audience for whom you were writing?
4. Why do you believe this feature article will be intriguing and persuasive for your readers?
5. How did you succeed with this article? Where might you have faltered? How can you improve on these weaker areas?
6. Where would you like me to pay particular attention when I respond to your feature article? How can I be of best assistance to you as a writer when I respond?

“ePortfolio”
(approximately four pages of reflection and all relevant components detailed in the description)

The primary purpose of an ePortfolio is not a matter of simply collecting your work for the semester and providing some cathartic reflection about how this class changed your life. Honestly, I am not that great of an instructor, and I highly doubt that you finally “saw the light,” so to speak. You might laugh; however, trust me—this tends to be a rather generic approach to portfolios that is more common than you might expect.

When you construct your ePortfolio, I want you to dig deeper and examine what you have truly learned in this class, ways in which your writing has developed, concepts and ideas you may have been introduced to (and their value or lack thereof), areas of weakness that persist, etc.

For starters, your ePortfolio should contain the following items:

-eight of your journal entries (typed, not scanned, please)

-your Topical Blog or a link to your Topical Blog

-your 1st and 2nd, and final drafts (one annotated, one clean) of each of the four major assignments (“Analyze This (Advertisement)! Conducting a Semiotic Analysis of an Advertisement”; “The Siskel to my Ebert! Writing an Engaging and Intriguing Review of a Popular Culture Text”; “Popular Culture Meets the Professoriate! An Academic Essay Pertaining to Popular Culture”; and “On the Cover of the *Rolling Stone*! Composing a Feature Article for a Popular Publication”)

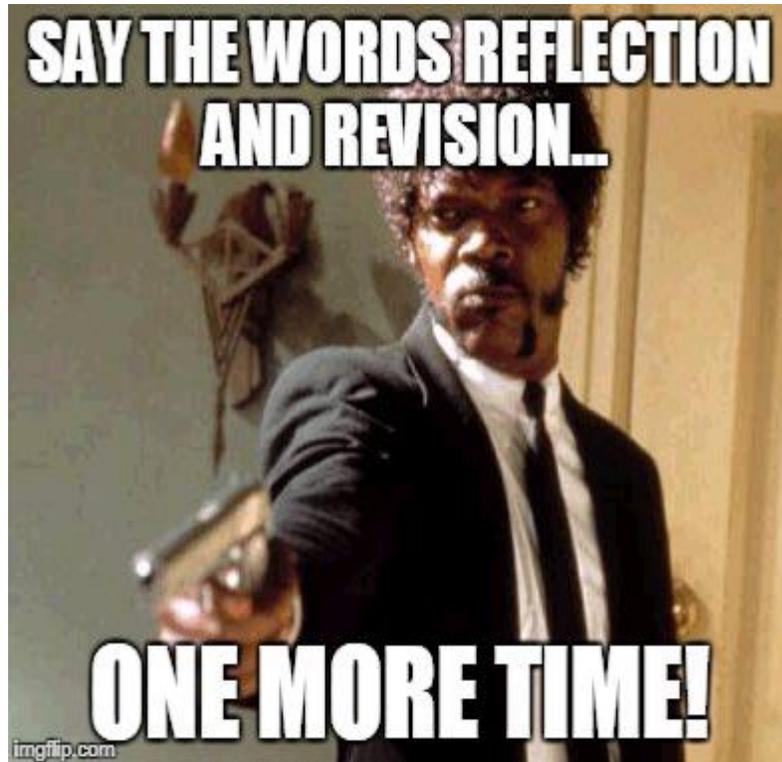
-visual representation of any major revisionary changes (not just minor grammatical corrections) you made in your annotated final drafts as well as discussion of any large scale structural and/or organizational changes (those that cannot be represented visually) in your reflection

-approximately four pages of reflective writing arranged in any fashion you deem to be the most effective

You may choose to design your ePortfolio in any manner you choose and organize it using any logical method. From a design standpoint, I want your ePortfolio to be aesthetically pleasing and intriguing for a reader; remember—you are representing your work as a writer with this website. Additionally, I want to be able to navigate your work in an accessible manner. Your ePortfolio should have an appealing design and a logical navigational structure.

The main objective of this e-Portfolio is the reflection—it will also serve as one of the most crucial elements in my grading. As with the design element, you are free to reflect in any manner you choose. I require four to five pages double-spaced worth of reflection, yet you can fulfill this requirement in a variety of different ways. You could write a four page reflective

letter; you could compose a brief reflective letter as an introduction and have individual reflections for each element of the ePortfolio; you could even have reflection within the work itself! The choice is yours, but make it wisely.



Although I do not want to give you detailed instructions as to how to accomplish your reflection, use these guidelines as a heuristic:

-Use the contents of your ePortfolio to generate your reflection. Truly examine your work before you begin your reflection.

-Tie specific assertions to specific examples from your ePortfolio. For example, do not just tell me that you catered the rhetoric of your featured article to an intellectual, politically knowledgeable audience—show me this in your work. I am encouraging you to quote and/or comment on yourself.

-Contemplate how your thinking and writing about popular culture evolved over the course of the semester. Did you begin to see popular culture in a different light? Were you exposed to ideas you had never contemplated before? What did you find most compelling and/or challenging in regard to writing about popular culture?

-Once again, I reiterate, do not turn the reflective portion of your ePortfolio into an overly dramatic chronicle of your journey in the class. Be analytical and descriptive. Examine your work and your learning.

-In class, we discussed how I consider a primary goal of this course to be the development of rhetorical awareness. This is your opportunity to demonstrate this. Discuss the thought processes behind various decisions you made throughout your writing for this class. Explain the rationales behind your choices. How did genre considerations influence your writing? Who was your audience? What rhetorical strategies did you employ? Why? What motivated the decisions you made during revision?

Please use these guidelines merely as guidelines. Do not take them as the authoritative instructions for your ePortfolio and merely address the questions I have asked. Experiment and be creative. Formulate your own questions for yourself and answer them.

Primarily, the reflection for your ePortfolio should address both **global considerations** (e.g. What did you learn in the class overall? Where has your writing improved? How do you believe you have become a better writer? What weaknesses still persist? Etc.) and **local considerations** (e.g. Who was your audience for certain projects? Why did you organize, design, format, etc. your texts in the manner that you did? What are the rationales behind some of the revisions you made? Etc.). Exceptional ePortfolio reflections tend to be able to **place the global and the local considerations in conversation with one another**.

A great heuristic for how to approach your reflective writing is to **view your reflective writing as an argument and your drafts—especially your final drafts (both clean and annotated)—as the evidence**. Essentially, your reflection makes an argument for what you have learned and accomplished in the class, and your drafts serve as the evidence of this learning and accomplishment.

In the end, I will be evaluating your ePortfolio on the progress you made as a writer, the diligence you spent in revision (your final drafts should not merely be the drafts you submitted to me with minor punctuation changes), the polished nature and overall quality of your final drafts, the design and ease of the navigation of your portfolio, and the strength of your reflection. The ePortfolio is 30% of your grade—do not “mail-in” the reflective aspect or your revisions. Take the time to truly reflect: you might be surprised by what you find out about yourself as a writer and as a person!