



The College of
Arts&Sciences

John S. Knight Institute for
Writing in the Disciplines
M101 McGraw Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14853-3201
607-255-2280
knight_institute@cornell.edu
www.knight.as.cornell.edu

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Author: Kelly Richmond

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Assignment sequences in a writing course are built around a series of essay topics. These sequences probably represent work assigned during a portion of the course rather than all of the essay assignments distributed over an entire semester. Submissions should include a rationale and a description of your plans for eliciting and responding to student drafts and revisions, as well as a description of how you prepare students for each essay assignment, for example by engaging them in preparatory writing exercises, including informal writing designed to help students understand the material on which they subsequently write formal essays. Reflections on what worked well, and why, and what you would change another time, are welcome.

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Submissions are due by Monday, January 3, 2022. No exceptions can be made.

Fall 2021 James F. Slevin Assignment Sequence Prize Application

~Please type or print clearly. Do **not** staple. Use paper clips only~

Instructor's name: Kelly Richmond

Dept & Course # PMA 1162 Course title Burnout Feminism:
The Politics of Writing, Work, and Wellness

Should I win a prize, I give the John S. Knight Institute permission to publish, quote from, and/or distribute copies of the assignment sequence, and to distribute publicity to newspapers and other publications, local and/or national, about my winning the prize. I also grant the Knight Institute permission to deposit the assignment sequence in a web accessible archive and make it available under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. I am prepared to send electronic versions of my text to Amanda Munson (anm94@cornell.edu) in the Knight Institute. I understand that I will receive the award for my prize-winning sequence upon submission of the electronic text.

Close Reading Feminism & Pop Culture Essay Sequence

Title of Assignment Sequence

Instructor's signature

Kelly Richmond

Date

James Slevin Assignment Sequence Prize

Kelly Richmond

PMA 1162 - Burnout Feminism: The Politics of Writing, Work, and Wellness

3 January 2022

Close Reading Feminism & Pop Culture Essay Sequence

Abstract

How can pop culture help us understand feminist politics? How can feminist theory help us understand media as communicating meaning through not only content, but also form? This sequence of writing assignments is designed to build close reading and analytic writing skills in first year students, prompting them to consider how a variety of media use formal devices (not limited to the literary) to construct and communicate meaning.

key words: close reading, criticism, blog, introductions, analysis, media, formal devices, literary devices, filmic devices, feminism

Rationale

Situated at the halfway point of the semester, this writing assignment sequence prompts students to make connections between the political and theoretical questions raised by our classroom readings (feminist theory from writers such as Sara Ahmed, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Audre Lorde focusing on themes of intersectionality, labour, and self-care) and their personal media interests. Throughout this sequence, students are asked to select two media objects they think connect thematically to our course and justify their relevance. They then select one of these two to read closely, first through a critical review, and then as a scholarly close reading essay. Each revision prompts more focused analysis and a more scholarly tone. Over the course of these revisions, close reading and critical analysis skills are modelled through in-class preparatory exercises. These assignments push students to consider how writing and other media communicate political meanings through form as well as content and critique the gendered and sexualized consequences of such messaging. Driven by feminist pedagogy, these assignments encourage students to explore the political resonances within their personal media spheres and share their findings with peers.

Assignment Sequence

Assignment 1: Media Object Proposal & Descriptive Paragraph

How can an intersectional feminist lens affect our understanding of pop culture?

For this week's writing assignment, write a short proposal describing two media objects you would like to shine a feminist spotlight on.

Media may mean any cultural object: a book, a short story, an essay, a poem, a film, an episode of television, a vlog, a play, an opera, an album, a song, a podcast, a photograph, a painting, a sculpture, etc. etc. Being familiar with the form of media will help you in writing the essay, as will selecting a shorter work. (You can also curate a smaller selection of the work yourself, for example, looking to 1 chapter in a book, or 10 minutes of a film).

Applying a feminist lens might mean either of the following:

- Arguing how the work represents a problem in a feminist way; arguing that the work draws its audience's attention to the intersectional forces at play in this problem
- Arguing why the work should be critiqued from a feminist standpoint; arguing how the work fails to recognize or actively represses 'what has not ended'

For each of your two chosen objects, you will write a proposal and a descriptive paragraph:

- Your proposal should include a brief summary of the object's content (no more than 4 sentences) and an explanation of why you want to write about this object - what about this object sparks feminist curiosity? [250 words]
- Your descriptive paragraph should aim to re-create the experience of first encountering the object for your reader - include as much concrete detail as you can about what you see/hear/feel when experiencing this object without quoting from the object directly [250 words]

Because this writing is summarizing and descriptive, you do not need to articulate your argument or analysis yet. However, you do need to convince your reader that this object would be interesting to analyze further from a feminist perspective. Consider including in your proposal one or two "how" questions you want to ask about the object.

Writing Criteria

In this assignment you should aim to demonstrate your ability to:

- Summarize the content of a media object
- Describe the formal qualities of a media object

Formatting Criteria

- 3-4 pages [~1000 words], doubled spaced
- Serif font [not: Sans Serif]
- Microsoft Word Document [.doc or .docx]
- Follow MLA Style for in-text citation, heading & header
- Provide a Works Cited page including both your objects
 - Research the proper citational format for the media-type you are working with here: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html

Assignment 2: Blog Post

How does popular media contribute to political conversations?

You have been invited to write a review of your media object for a popular blog that specializes in that medium (ex. a film review blog; a literary review blog). Your imagined reader is familiar with the medium, but not with feminist theory or politics. Your challenge is to use your review of the object to prompt this reader to think about a political problem from a feminist perspective.

Writing Criteria

In this assignment you should aim to demonstrate your ability to:

- Construct a focused essay question addressing a specific feminist problem (more specific than: sexism/racism has not ended)
- Provide a close reading of a media object; use the medium's formal qualities as evidence
- Analyze your evidence; explain what your evidence means, why it matters, and how it connects to your thesis argument

Formatting Criteria

- 4 pages [~1000 words], doubled spaced
- Serif font [not: Sans Serif]
- Microsoft Word Document [.doc or .docx]
- Follow MLA Style for in-text citation, heading & header
- Provide a Works Cited page
 - If you cite our authors from class or any external sources, include them in proper MLA citation format on the Works Cited page
 - Research the proper citational format for the media-type you are working with here: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html

Assignment 3: Close Reading Essay

How can art help us understand feminist theory?

In this essay, you will use a close reading of your chosen media object to explain one feminist theory from our class readings to your reader. Your essay should only cite the theorist in question in your introduction or first paragraph - focus your evidence on the media object itself. Limit your analysis to a small section of your media object - think less than 1 page of text, or 30 seconds of audio-visual.

Writing Criteria

In this assignment you should aim to demonstrate your ability to:

- Structure a 5-part introduction paragraph
- Summarize and apply the theoretical argument of one of our interlocutors
- Make connections between your object's use of medium, its communication of meaning, and the feminist theory in question

Formatting Criteria

- 5 pages [~1250 words], doubled spaced
- Serif font [not: Sans Serif]
- Microsoft Word Document [.doc or .docx]
- Follow MLA Style for in-text citation, heading & header, and Works Cited page

Preparation for Assignments

Prior to the Media Object Proposal & Descriptive Paragraph assignment, I prepared students through short freewriting activities that would open each seminar session. I prompted them to write about what media forms they were more interested in and familiar with (and therefore could potentially write about using close analysis), and to identify works to which they thought our class readings on intersectional feminist theory were relevant. As the assignment sequence prior to this one had emphasized summary, they were well prepared to write the descriptive paragraphs required.

Once students had selected their media object through the first assignment, I began to work with them on close analysis. The first step of this was the “Power of 3” Handout (see Appendix below) which aided them in breaking down their object both formally and thematically. The reading corresponding to this handout also introduced them to the blog-as-media-criticism format they would be using for this assignment, through Sara Ahmed’s *feministkilljoys* site.

The following class more explicitly modelled close reading analysis, using the trailer for the film *The Hunger Game Catching Fire (2013)*, which was referenced in that day’s reading from Emily & Amelia Nagoski’s *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle*. After watching the three-minute trailer twice, we brainstormed on the board all the non-linguistic ways the trailer could communicate meaning to its audience, to create a list of formal filmic devices. Students then completed a short writing assignment, providing a close reading of 10 seconds of the trailer using one of these devices (see Appendix below). This exercise was very successful in helping students realize how only a small detail from their object could inspire extended analysis.

After submitting their Blog Post, students worked with peer partners to complete a reverse outlining assignment that focused specifically on reworking their introductory paragraph. As a class we read through the template handout, which included example introductions from our class reading (see Appendix below). Students then read aloud their essay to their partner, who answered a sequence of questions on the handout that would draw out the key elements needed for the revised introduction. With remaining time, students were able to use their peer’s feedback to begin to structure their new introduction. In later conferences, multiple students mentioned how the introduction paragraph crafted through this exercise was also helpful as an outline for their final revision.

Because of the variability of media chosen by my students (students chose books, poems, songs, music videos, TikTok trends, Ted Talks, TV shows, films, and paintings), some students more easily identified the formal devices used by their medium than others. Thus, as final preparation for the Close Reading Essay, I also provided a “Close Reading Cheat Sheet” handout (see Appendix) to help those still struggling with formal analysis.

Feedback & Revision Process

Feedback on the Media Object & Descriptive Paragraph was through one-on-one conference conversations in which we discussed what about the objects most sparked students' feminist curiosity. From these conversations I was able to guide students towards which of their two proposed objects might be most productive to write about further, which feminist interlocutor from our class readings might be most relevant to their criticism, and which formal devices they might be most capable of closely analyzing. Because this initial assignment was really designed to stimulate multiple possibilities for the following essays, I found giving feedback conversationally allowed me to provide guidance for the students without being overly directive and kept them actively engaged in planning their future writing sessions.

Feedback on the Blog Post was posted through the Canvas assignments portal. During the previous one-on-one conferences each student and I discussed three individual writing goals they would work towards for this assignment sequence, one each at the essay, paragraph, and sentence level (for example: asking a compelling question, clearly transitioning between paragraphs, using the personal voice). Thus, my feedback centred on how I saw their work on their goals in the Blog Post. Because the assignment emphasized analysis, I was also sure to incorporate reference to where they successfully analyzed their media object and where this analysis might be expanded in the Close Reading Essay. In addition to my feedback, students also received peer feedback before revising the Blog Post into the Close Reading Essay.

Feedback on the Close Reading Essay was again through one-on-one conference conversations, where I discussed with students how I saw their revision reflecting the work on their three personal writing goals, as well as how it incorporated the written feedback from myself and their peers. I began each of these conversations by reading the student's thesis statement aloud to them, and asking what about it they thought was successful, and what about it they might change should they revise this essay again for their final writing portfolio. I also discussed with each student how they found the process of using the 5-Part Introduction template that was required for this draft of the assignment. I found that having students reflect orally on what about writing this assignment was working for them, and what they wanted to change for the next essay sequence kept them focused more on their writing process, skills, and habits, rather than on objective outcomes or grades.

Reflection

Overall, I found this writing assignment sequence to be a very successful way to introduce students to media analysis and close reading. In the final course meeting, multiple students reflected on the sequence as a highlight of the course, as they appreciated the ability to apply our course readings to media that was already of interest to them, rather than to a predetermined bibliography. Our collective close reading of the *Catching Fire* trailer also came up as productively re-scaling what “close” analysis meant, and the Introductions handout was mentioned as one of the most useful handouts from the class. I was also struck by the clear differences in student writing I was able to see between the Blog Post (where I asked them to explain their object using one of the feminist theories) to the Close Reading (where I asked them to explain the theory using the object), which facilitated productive conversations in class and conference about the re-vision of revising.

If I were to revise the sequence to be taught again, I would add in a class day and assignment focused on journalistic media criticism. This would specifically discuss critical reviews, with example of film and literary criticism in popular journalistic outlets as the assigned readings for that day. I would include this class and assignment after the blog entry, but before the close reading essay, to teach students about the formal qualities required when writing professional criticism and differentiate it from their more freeform interpretation of blog.

I would also limit the type of media students could select for their media object. Although both the students and I appreciate the variety that results from allowing any form of media to be chosen for this assignment, it does make teaching formal analysis across the board rather uneven. In the future I would limit their options to selections from a novel, film, or play, and then structure another essay sequence or assignment intentionally around digital media and its affordances.

Appendix of Preparation Materials

PMA 1162 - Burnout Feminism
Kelly Richmond
Close Reading Prewriting: Power of 3
18 October 2021

Close Reading Prewriting: Power of 3

Object Title:
Object Author/Creator:
Object Medium:

Structure: If your object was divided into 3 parts, what would they be?

ex. verse, chorus, interlude

Ahmed: Introduction of Lorde's definition (up to: I want to suggest something), Critique of neoliberal feminism (up to: I think there is something wrong with your model), Critique of the white-male individualist

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Medium: If your object has 3 methods of communication, what would they be?

ex. rhythm, melody, lyrics

Ahmed: quotation, definition, close reading of films (If these Walls Could Talk 2, Bend it Like Beckham)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Theme: If your object has 3 central themes, what would they be?

ex. desire, isolation, control

Ahmed: warfare, self-indulgence, self-preservation

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Interlude: Feminist Representation or Feminist Critique?

Is your essay going to be:

- Arguing how the work represents a problem within a feminist way; arguing that the work draws its audience's attention to the intersectional forces at play in this problem

OR:

- Arguing why the work should be critiqued from a feminist standpoint; arguing how the work fails to recognize or actively represses 'what has not ended'

Problem: If your object explores 3 problems, what are they?

Ahmed: neoliberal model of self-care, dismissal of feminism as individualistic, use of individualism to protect men from feminist critique ("call out culture")

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Key Terms: What 3 key terms might you need to explore these problems?

Ahmed: privilege, neoliberalism, self-care

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Catching Fire Close Reading Exercise (Posted on Canvas Discussion Board)



Trailer: <https://youtu.be/EAzGXqJSDJ8> (Links to an external site.)

Question: How does the Catching Fire trailer suggest who "the real enemy is"?

Step 1: Pick the formal quality of the medium you will analyze.

[ex. use of colour].

Step 2: Narrow your search; pick a short segment of the trailer (~ 10 seconds) that you think uses your formal quality distinctly.

[ex. 0:40-0:45]

Step 3: Describe how your formal quality is used in this clip.

[ex. blue tone on yellow wall looking out window; blue shadows cast in vertical bars; red text "the odds are never in our favour"; cut to: yellow room with white men, white hair, white flowers, black tuxedos]

Step 4: Explain what evidence means.

[ex. blue means cold/confinement, red means blood/revolution, yellow means gold/wealth, white means age/power]

Step 5: Explain why evidence matters

[ex. The unseen people outside who have graffitied the wall are symbolically imprisoned and associated vulnerability/danger; the two men inside the room are invulnerable yet diseased]

Step 6: Connect to thesis

[ex. Through casting the general population and the authority figures in different colour palates, the Catching Fire trailer draws its viewer's attention to the vulnerability to danger of the people and sick indifference of the rulers, suggesting it is these puppet masters who are the enemy.]

PMA 1162 - Burnout Feminism
Kelly Richmond
Introductions: Two Ways*
26 October 2021

*This handout has been adapted from:
Danielle Wu “Reference: Writing an Effective Introduction”
(<http://ecommons.library.cornell.edu/handle/1813/10813>)

Version 1: Little Red Schoolhouse

Stasis/Concession/Destabilization/Consequence/Solution

(example: Nagoski, Emily & Amelia Nagoski, “Introduction,” *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle*, Ballentine Books, 2020)

Stasis:

An intellectually significant belief or theory that (if accepted by readers) would prevent them from accepting your thesis or its importance.

“This is a book for any woman who has felt overwhelmed and exhausted by everything she had to do, and yet still worried she was not doing ‘enough.’ Which is every woman we know – including us. You’ve heard the usual advice over and over: exercise, green, smoothies, self-compassion, coloring books, mindfulness, bubble baths, gratitude...”

Concession:

Some aspect of this stasis that may be right, helpful productive, etc.

“You’ve probably tried a lot of it. So gave we. And sometimes it helps at least for a while.”

De-stabilizing Condition:

Something that makes the stasis inaccurate, wrong, outdated, inappropriate, etc.

“But then the kids are struggling through school, or our partner needs out support through a difficulty or a new work project lands in our laps, and we think, *I’ll do the self-care thing as soon as I finish.*”

Consequences:

Costs of leaving the problem unresolved or benefits to resolving it.

“The problem isn’t that we aren’t trying. The problem isn’t even we don’t know how. The problem is the world has turned ‘wellness’ into yet another goal everyone ‘should’ strive for, but only people with time and money and nannies and yachts and Oprah’s phone number can actually achieve.”

Solution (Thesis)

With these elements present in your introduction, your reader will be ready to perceive your Point of Thesis as a Solution (or the promise of a solution)

“So this book is unlike anything else you’ll read about burnout. We’ll figure out what wellness can look like in your actual real life, and we’ll confront the barrier that stand between you and your own well being. We’ll put those barriers in context, like landmarks on a map, so we can find paths around and over and through them – or sometimes just blow them to smithereens.”

Version 2:

Opening Premise/Insight/Limitation/Implication/Upgrade
(example: Nagoski & Nagoski, “The Game is Rigged,” *Burnout*)

Opening Premise:

A claim (often uncontroversial) that orients your reader to your topic, establishing common ground between you and your reader.

“Nietzsche (ugh) told us, “What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.” You’ve been hearing this for years, in one form of another but let’s get specific.”

Insight:

Why this claim is compelling or useful for interpreting the issue at hand.

“Like, if you’re hit by a car and don’t die, does *the car* make you stronger? No. Does injury or disease make you stronger? No. Does suffering alone build character? No.”

Limitation

How this claim is misleading, e.g. too broad or limited in its scope, in its use of terms, etc.

“These things leave you vulnerable to further injury.”

Implications

How this claim signals something we don’t understand but should, opening a new line of investigation for your specific interest.

“What makes you stronger is whatever happens to you *after* you survive the thing that didn’t kill you.”

Upgrade (Thesis)

Now that your reader has perceived the problem and is motivated to take your claims seriously, you can deploy your Argument as a Solution or at least an Upgrade for this ongoing conversation.

“What makes you stronger is *rest*.”

Peer Review for Introduction

Answer each prompt below with your own words.

THEN locate the sentence in the essay that best summarizes this element.

What is your peer's essay's **ANTITHESIS**? (What perspective do they oppose?)

YOUR WORDS:

QUOTE:

What is your peer's essay **PROBLEM**? (What is at stake in this essay? Why does it matter?)

YOUR WORDS:

QUOTE:

What is your peer's essay's **QUESTION**? (What are they asking that no one has asked before?)

YOUR WORDS:

QUOTE:

What is your peer's essay's **THESIS**? (What solution do they suggest?)

YOUR WORDS:

QUOTE:

Structuring Your Introduction

- 1) **Stasis/Opening Premise:** *What common-sense assumption is in direct opposition to your thesis? Who, what, when, where is directly affected by what your essay will discuss?*
- 2) **Concession/Insight:** *Why has this assumption been useful to others?*
- 3) **Destabilizing Condition/Limitation:** *How have you noticed this assumption must be wrong? What is the problem you are addressing?*
- 4) **Consequences/Implications:** *What is at stake if this perspective is not corrected/modified?*
- 5) **Solution/Upgrade:** *What are you trying to convince your reader of? How does this address the problem?*

PMA 1162 - Burnout Feminism
Kelly Richmond
Close Reading Cheat Sheet
26 October 2021

Quick Questions for Close Analysis

What does my object SAY?

Consider: Visual text, spoken dialogue, marginalia

When does this object use explicitly language to say what it means directly?

What does my object DO?

Consider: Change, transformation, action

How is this object different at its beginning, middle, and end?

What does my object QUESTION?

Consider: Antithesis, juxtaposition, contrast

When does this object manipulate its medium to imply what it means indirectly?

What does my object ARGUE?

Consider: Repetition, affect, allusion

How does my object create patterns to communicate meaning?

Literary Devices Cheat Sheet

- Contrast (playing with oppositions): irony, juxtaposition, oxymoron, paradox
- Citation (referencing other texts): allegory, allusion
- Diction (playing with form): anachronism, hyperbole, colloquialism, malapropism, motif, onomatopoeia, repetition
- Imagery (playing with pattern): anthropomorphism, metaphor, metonym, personification, simile, symbolism, synecdoche
- Affect (playing with atmosphere): tone, mood, satire
- Perspective (playing with identification): dramatic irony, flash-forward, foreshadowing, POV