Document Title: Written Approaches to Festival, Ritual, and Carnival
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Course: MUSIC 1701
Course Title: Sound, Sense, and Ideas: On Display—Carnival, Festival, and Ritual

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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, May 22, 2023. No exceptions can be made.

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**Spring 2023 James F. Slevin Assignment Sequence Prize Application**

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

**Instructor’s name**  
Rachel Horner

**Dept & Course #**  
MUSIC 1701  
**Course title**  
Sound, Sense, and Ideas: On Display—Carnival, Festival, and Ritual

**Phone/Cell**  

**Address (to mail stipend if applicable)**

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**Written Approaches to Festival, Ritual, and Carnival**

**Title of Assignment Sequence**

**Instructor’s signature**  
Rachel Horner

**Date**  
May 15, 2023
Written Approaches to Festival, Ritual, and Carnival

Abstract:

This sequence of three assignments encourages students to approach the class topic of festivals, rituals, and carnivals through three distinct, yet interrelated, written media: an ethnographic narrative, an interview write-up, and a podcast script. Each assignment offers clear parameters in the form of preparatory activities, required readings, and peer and instructor feedback to help students channel their creative instincts toward refined pieces of writing that facilitate the development of their voices as authors.

Keywords: assignment sequence, public display, ethnography, interview, podcast, festival, ritual, carnival

Rationale and Description of Application Contents:

Comprising the bulk of the course, this sequence of three assignments encourages students to approach the class topic of festivals, rituals, and carnivals through three distinct, yet interrelated, written media: an ethnographic narrative, an interview write-up, and a podcast script. In each assignment, students are tasked with using the required written genre as a prompt to broaden their skillsets as writers, complicate their assumptions about different forms of public display, and break down their preconceptions of what different writing styles and techniques can communicate. These assignments allowed for creativity while offering students clear parameters for channeling these creative instincts toward a polished piece of writing.

Each assignment supports student learning through a variety of preparatory activities, review processes, and reading assignments. The specific exercises used with each assignment are included below, along with the assignment prompt and reflections on the overall efficacy of the assignment. A guiding principle for these exercises was my approach to grading—or, rather, ungrading—that I adopted throughout the semester. Because students’ final grades were determined through a series of student self-reflections with my written feedback instead of scores on individual assignments, students’ essay submissions do not represent the culmination of their learning on a particular topic or aspect of writing. Rather, each essay submission represents one opportunity among many for students to refine their writing skills and hone their voices as authors.
Assignment Sequence

Assignment 2 Prompt:

Ethnography is an essential methodology for the study of present-day festivals of all kinds. Direct observation of and participation in a festival gives the researcher access to information about and experiences within the festival that they otherwise would only understand from the ‘outside.’ To try out this skill yourself, in this assignment, you will conduct an ethnography of Ithaca’s Chili Cook-Off.

Assignment 2.1:

On March 4th, you will attend a portion of Ithaca’s Chili Cook-Off. When you do so, take jottings of what you see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and experience. These written notes (whether on a notepad, your phone, or other device) should be short, concise descriptors (a few words or drawings each) of something you observe. These are intended to aid your memory later on when you are writing about the festival after the fact. Your jottings should be attentive to the following:

- Notes about your arrival into the festival space
  - For example, this could include the mode of transportation you use and your experience parking/arriving on the bus/etc., what you first see/hear/smell upon entry, who you attend with, or anything else relevant to your first few moments at the festival.
- Details about your own behaviors/activities and those of others
  - Be attentive to your own mannerisms, interactions, and behaviors, as well as those of others. What do these tell you about the festival overall?
- Details about the physical space
  - Is it crowded? Are the booths organized according to a specific standard? How did you navigate the space or decide which direction to pursue first? How did the festival alter how the Commons and its surrounding streets usually look?
- Notes about a conversation with someone ‘in the field’
  - You should speak to at least one person you don't know at the Chili Cook-Off (a vendor, a performer, an organizer, etc.) and use jottings to capture as much as you can about the conversation.
- Notes about leaving the space
  - You might note what made you leave the space (end of the required hour? a friend wanted to leave? weather change?) and how easy or difficult it is for you to access your transportation to get back home (or wherever you go next), among other things.

Your assignment should include:

- The date and your times of arrival and departure (you should plan to attend for at least an hour)
• Details about sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, as well as other relevant senses (time, kinesthesia, etc.)
• At least one drawing or doodle of the space
• At least one snippet of dialogue between you and someone else (you can also write down conversations that you overhear, but this is in addition to speaking to someone participating in the festival)

Assignment 2.2:

With your Chili Cook-Off jottings in hand, it is now time to write up your field notes. As Ghodsee describes, these notes should transform your jottings into thorough prose descriptions of your observations and experiences. The writing style of your fieldnotes does not have to be that of a polished narrative (that is the next step!). Rather, these are full-sentences descriptions that flesh out the kernels of your jottings into notes that you can reference when writing your narrative.

Your assignment should be:

• At least 500 words in length (about 2 pages)
• Double-spaced with 1” margins and 12-point font

Assignment 2.3:

You have returned home from ‘the field,’ and now you are ready to turn your notes into a narrative that someone else can read to understand both your individual experience at the Chili Cook-Off and the general characteristics of the festival and Ithaca that you have gleaned from your own observations. Using your fieldnotes, you will now craft a narrative that includes the following:

• An arrival narrative
  o Using the details of your own arrival into the space, what can you tell the reader about the Chili Cook-Off and Ithaca more broadly?
• A detailed description of your observations and experiences
  o This section will be the bulk of your narrative. Using the technique of ‘showing’ (instead of telling), describe the Chili Cook-Off to your reader, incorporating both specific sensory details and generalizations about the festival and about Ithaca that you can infer from personal experience. The reader should come away from your narrative knowing exactly what you saw, heard, smelled, tasted, touched, and did at the festival, but—and, perhaps, more importantly—they should also understand something about the community where the festival takes place because of your personal experiences.
• An interpretation of your observations and experiences, based on other scholars’ work
  o You should draw on works we've read thus far in this course not only as examples of effective ethnographic writing, but as sources of ideas that can influence your
own. You should cite at least three authors in your narrative, at least two from readings we've done in class or for homework (see list below), and at least one outside scholarly source.

- A departure narrative
  - Similarly to your arrival, what can your departure tell the reader about the festival and about Ithaca?

Your assignment should be:

- At least 1000 words in length (about 4 pages at minimum)
- Double-spaced with 1” margins and 12-point font

Possible class readings to utilize:


Assignment 2 Preparatory Activities:

Keeping in mind that students were unlikely to have encountered ethnography prior to the course, this unit prioritized introducing essential concepts and techniques of ethnographic fieldwork and writing while continuing to develop more widely applicable writing skills. Students first learned the distinctions between ‘showing’ and ‘telling’ (or active and passive description, respectively), completing a worksheet that introduced these concepts and then applying this knowledge by partnering up and ‘translating’ a paragraph their peer had written from passive to active language.

With this introduction to the basic inquiries of ethnography, the unit introduced more practical approaches to ethnography to prepare students to enter the ‘field’ and conduct an ethnography of Ithaca’s Chili Cook-Off. With how-to chapters from Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw’s Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes (2011), Harry Wolcott’s Ethnography: A Way of Seeing (2002), and Kristen Ghodsee’s From Notes to Narrative (2016), students became familiar with the process of taking jottings, writing fieldnotes, and crafting an ethnographic narrative. Students further engaged with these readings through free-writes and small- and large-group discussions, though perhaps more importantly with a hands-on practice ethnography of Lincoln Hall. Important to understandings of the implications of ethnographic bias was students’ discussion of James Clifford’s “Partial Truths” (1986), reinforced through frequent discussion about how to identify and account for bias in all types of research.

Having returned from the field, I offered students examples from my own fieldwork and from relevant ethnographic texts so they could begin transforming their work from jottings, to field notes, to a final narrative. I paired two texts that engage with ethnographic conventions in distinct ways: Robert Gardner’s The Portable Community (2020) offers a ‘textbook’ example of the building blocks of ethnographic narrative, while Eileen Hayes’s Songs in Black and Lavender (2010) breaks from anthropological convention in compelling and effective ways.

The final set of activities that prepared students to submit their ethnographic narrative were two sessions of peer review—one for students’ fieldnotes from the Chili Cook-Off (Assignment 2.2)
and one for their final narratives (Assignment 2.3)—and an individual conference with me. For the peer review sessions, I provided students with clear guidelines and questions, allowing them to express their reviews in written form before discussing their thoughts with the author aloud. In individual conferences, I talked with students to evaluate their progress in the course thus far, discuss their ideas for Assignment 2, and identify the areas where they could improve their writing based on my feedback from previous assignments. These reviews proved crucial for students to gain a sense of the important aspects of the narratives (based on the questions that I provided) and to begin the writing process earlier than they might have on their own. Once students submitted their final assignments, I provided detailed written feedback (in lieu of a grade) to underscore students’ successes and stumbling blocks in their writing.

**Assignment 2 Reflection:**

Based on my own observations and reflections from students, I am confident that this sequence of work was effective in introducing students to ethnography in a thorough and exciting way. I was also quite satisfied to have incorporated a local event into my class, one that did not require monetary investment from the students but nonetheless encouraged them to discover and support local businesses. The ethnography unit was successful in showing students a form of research that combines the ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ (to put it simply) which, hopefully, will encourage them to think more carefully about how these inhere in other forms of research as well.

Although I was pleasantly surprised with students’ abilities to learn the conventions of ethnography, I do wish that I had facilitated this growth even further with more intervention from me (in addition to their peers) at earlier stages of the drafting process. A snow day in the middle of this unit proved fairly detrimental in this regard, as I lost the necessary class time to explore how to weave theoretical and descriptive aspects together as mutually reinforcing elements of ethnography. Many students struggled with this aspect of the assignment and instead sectioned these aspects off from one another. I still waver on my decision to make ethnography a single unit of the course instead of the basic underpinning of the class; nevertheless, I do think I successfully tied skills and lessons from this unit into the next.
Assignment 3 Prompt:

Assignment 3.1:

In class, we talked about the traits that constitute rituals and the ways these types of activities might appear in our own lives. With this in mind, choose an activity from your life that you consider to be a ritual. Write about this practice for someone who is completely unfamiliar with it. Be sure to evaluate the activity against the criteria we discussed in class to demonstrate why the practice is ritualistic. A reader should understand what the ritual involves, who participates in it, when and where it takes place, and how it relates to its broader social context. This ritual must involve music or sound in some way, although these do not have to be the central focus of the ritual. You should also bear in mind that you will be interviewed about this ritual. To prepare for this, identify the essential elements of the ritual that someone else should know about in order to understand it.

Your assignment should be:
- At least 250 words in length (about 1 page at minimum)
- Double-spaced with 1” margins and 12-point font

Assignment 3.2:

You will interview a peer about the ritual they chose to write about in Assignment 3.1. In the interview, you will ask them about the essential elements of the ritual—where and when it takes place, who participates, etc.—and, importantly, how music and/or sound are present in the ritual. You should come away from the interview knowing enough about the ritual to complete a report about it, or to be able to know what you will have to research later to fully understand the ritual.

Based on our discussion of Briggs's chapter on interviews, you will generate at least ten interview questions for your ‘informant.’ These should be thoughtfully crafted, with sensitivity to the ways that word choice will affect the answer you're able to elicit from your interlocutor.

Your assignment should include:
- The ten (or more) questions you asked during the interview
- The fieldnotes you took after the interview
- Any other relevant notes you took during the interview

Assignment 3.3:

You will complete a write-up of your interlocutor's ritual that thinks beyond the interview itself; you should think through how your conversation with the interviewee allows you to understand the community of practice of which they are part. Your write-up will contain five core aspects:

- The information about the ritual that you learned from your interview interlocutor
A reflection on the interview process (what you think was [in]effective in your interview, how a different mode of learning from your interviewee could have been more or less productive, how you felt about occupying the role of interviewer/interviewee, etc.)

Your own perspective on this information, based on your interaction with your peer (for instance, how does this ritual seem to make them feel? How does it fit into their life?)

Whether this ritual fits Van Gennep’s preliminal–liminal–postliminal framework, and why you think this (choose and explain at least one meaningful quote from Van Gennep’s chapter to support your claim)

How Santino's ideas about the transformative effects of the ritualesque apply to your interlocutor's ritual (choose and explain at least one meaningful quote from Santino's chapter to support your claim)

Your assignment should be:

- At least 750 words in length (about 3 pages at minimum)
- Double-spaced with 1” margins and 12-point font

Assignment 3 Preparatory Activities:

Unit 3 built on the ethnographic foundations laid in unit 2, applying certain ethnographic principles to the interview process and encouraging students to combine seemingly subjective information with rigorous secondary scholarship. I opened the unit with a lecture addressing the role of music in rituals, using a variety of musical examples to demonstrate the musical elements that help to facilitate ritual processes. Based on this introduction and the first chapter of Arnold Van Gennep’s *The Rites of Passage* (1909), students chose a ritual as the basis for Assignment 3.1, using the criteria Van Gennep outlines to choose an appropriately structured example from their own lives.

From the essential concepts established in this first stage, students then read the introduction to Charles L. Briggs’s *Learning How to Ask* (1986) to begin thinking about and problematizing the interview as a speech act. They practiced crafting interview questions in a mock interview with me, using our discussion about this activity to then formulate a list of ten questions to inquire about a peer’s ritual for Assignment 3.2. After conducting and taking fieldnotes on these interviews (with examples from my own field notes to understand the utility of taking field notes on interviews), students then read Jack Santino’s “The Carnivalesque and the Ritualesque” (2011) to learn about the distinctions between ritual and other forms of (non-socially-engaged) public display. At this stage in the unit, I offered students several examples from previous students’ writing of this same assignment so they could evaluate what successful and effective integration of quotations looks like in writing, since direct quotation from both Van Gennep’s and Santino’s chapters were a required part of the final assignment.

Interview results and major theories in hand, students set about outlining and drafting their write-ups for Assignment 3.3. Students were again guided through a peer review activity, but instead of only working with peers, I reserved a segment of the peer review for small groups of students to meet with me and workshop their thesis statements together. This proved a valuable and necessary improvement on the Assignment 2 peer reviews, as students were able to workshop
their drafts at the small and large scale with intervention from both their peers and me. Once students submitted their final assignments, students met with me to discuss their work and take note of where they had progressed or continued to struggle from earlier assignments. Essential to this was that instead of providing written feedback, I ‘graded’ the assignments in a one-on-one meeting with students. I asked students to read their work aloud to me, and, paragraph by paragraph, students would give their initial impressions of the paragraph, which I then followed up with my own thoughts. This allowed students to work through their writing alongside me and for them to gain insight into the parameters that I consider when reading their work. It also showed students that reading their work aloud is a valuable proofreading tool that can often show run-ons, typographical errors, or other sentence-level missteps more easily than simply skimming their work.

**Assignment 3 Reflection:**

Assignment 3 brought about some rather surprising advantages that I had not foreseen when designing the sequence. Because students wrote about rituals from their peers—not only ‘real people,’ but real people that they knew personally and would have to see again and again—they were encouraged to write sensitively about their peers’ lives. Therefore, students paid necessary attention to the balance between broad claims about rituals in general and specific details about their peer and their ritual. Improving interpersonal relationships between students was an added benefit to this aspect of the assignment.

In addition to increased care for the subject of their writing, Assignment 3 also allowed students to workshop different elements of their writing with peers and with me at different stages of the unit. Ritual descriptions were tested against a peer’s ability to understand it; interview questions had to stand up to interviewee’s comprehension and willingness to answer; write-ups needed to remain true to interviewee’s descriptions while meeting my standards for academic rigor. At each of these junctures, students were pushed to ensure that their accounts were thorough and thoughtful.

Students also benefitted greatly from previous students having taken this course last semester. I noticed a stark difference in students’ abilities to select and integrate quotations from Assignment 2 to Assignment 3 because we walked through this process step-by-step in class. I will definitely continue to use group activities where the entire class is involved in unpacking the specific writing moves of sample pieces of writing.
Assignment 4 Prompt:

Ithaca’s local radio station has just announced that they will be broadcasting a series of podcast segments to promote the upcoming Carnival season. In the posting, they clarify that they want to highlight three major celebrations of Carnival: Carnaval in Brazil, Fasnacht in Switzerland, and Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago. You thrill at the chance to apply and start preparing your comprehensive and engaging application.

In addition to showcasing these three carnival celebrations for Ithaca’s listening public, the station wants to ensure that these podcast segments are a means for you to demonstrate your abilities to:

- Describe and analyze music and sound in writing
- Use evocative and engaging language to entice your listener
- Integrate historical, social, and cultural context into your understanding and discussion of music and sound

The radio station has stipulated the following requirements for the segment:

- Focus on ONE of the three possible cases (i.e., choose either Brazilian Carnaval, Swiss Fasnacht, or Trinidadian Carnival)
- Prepare a recorded segment 10–15 minutes in length (NOT including musical examples; i.e., you will speak for 10–15 minutes)
- Read from a prepared script (that is, do not improvise and then later transcribe what you said) with 12-point font and 1” margins
- Develop a catchy and relevant title
- Include introductory and concluding sections, as well as a section that briefly describes the carnival’s history and/or cultural context
- Discuss and cite at least three scholarly sources on the carnival (a reading from November 22 and at least two more)
- Discuss and cite at least two popular sources (newspaper articles about the festival, posts on social media, etc.)
- Discuss and cite at least two musical examples
- Submit your script as a Word document and your podcast as an mp3 or m4a file

You are welcome to use any audio software you wish to record your podcast, but a free and easy option is Audacity. We will talk about how to use this software in class.

Citations for this project should come in two forms:

- In your written script, musical examples and scholarly sources should be cited according to the Chicago Manual of Style.
- In your recorded podcast, citations should take the form of verbal acknowledgement of the source. You should tell your listeners when the ideas you talk about are not your own and give basic information (title and names of performer(s), at minimum) for each musical example.
Assignment 4 Preparatory Activities:

Though topically related to units 2 and 3, unit 4 introduced a much stronger focus on listening and musical analysis than any previous unit. Such a focus began with a ‘listen, learn, infer’ activity, wherein students listened to a series of musical examples, learned about these examples, and then made inferences about the song or genre based on what they heard and what they learned. This exercise allowed students to listen more carefully for context clues, especially in the “Music of Carnival” podcast episode assigned for the following class. Though the obvious benefit of this episode was giving students a real-world example topically similar to the scripts they would write for Assignment 4, it also gave students the chance to reverse-outline a podcast so that they could begin crafting outlines for their own podcast episode. Following a presentation from music librarian Tracey Snyder, students began compiling bibliographies based on the criteria from Assignment 4. This began with chapters that I selected which served as primers for the carnival celebration students wanted to study.

With some of the research completed for their final assignments, students then focused on ‘writing about music’ from two separate, yet interrelated angles. First, students engaged in a group discussion about Elvis Costello’s famous quote, “Writing about music is like dancing about architecture.” After unpacking the nuances of this phrase, students came up with a list of writing moves that are usually involved in writing about music. They then engaged in the ‘listen, learn, infer’ activity, this time with the added requirement of a 200-word blurb about the song in question. Students worked in small groups to draft these short descriptions, which allowed them to pull from each other’s musical knowledge and notice their peers’ approaches to writing about music.

The following class approached a similar topic from the point of view of using music and silence in podcast writing. After reading segments from Tanya K. Rodrigue and Kyle D. Stedman’s Soundwriting (2023), students developed outlines for their final assignments that sketched not only the content but also the ways students planned to use musical examples to support their writing. I also provided students a tutorial for Audacity, a free audio software, so they could begin recording segments of their podcast.

Following a class devoted to reflecting on the semester as a whole in which students developed a list of core takeaways from the course, students participated in a final peer review wherein they had the opportunity to work one-on-one with peers who had chosen a carnival different from their own, and then in a small group with me and all the peers who’d chosen the same carnival celebration as they had. This allowed students to receive feedback from those with closer familiarity of the carnival’s history and associated practices while also hearing from an ‘outsider’ who knew little to nothing about the carnival.

Assignment 4 Reflection:

One of the greatest successes of Assignment 4 was its direct engagement with the review process for Assignment 3. Because students were required to read Assignment 3 aloud to me in one-on-one conferences, they were primed to do the same for Assignment 4. This, of course, was
especially important for the podcast medium, as students’ podcast recordings not only forced them to read their work aloud for a general (albeit, imaginary) audience, but it also required a captivating reading of their own words, a difficult task when a script is not strong. The quality of work students submitted for Assignment 4 was impressive and showed clearly the growth they had achieved throughout the semester.

I was impressed with the way that I addressed issues I’d encountered in this unit in the previous semester. Because of the course calendar, I had fewer days to devote to this unit, which meant less time in class to address the finer details of how to write about music and how to integrate musical examples such that they are integral elements of the script’s analysis, not trimmings on an otherwise straightforward essay. In addition to remedying this, I was also quite pleased with the second iteration of the ‘listen, learn, infer’ activity. Students demonstrated their understanding of musical description and analysis in these short practice blurbs but also had the opportunity to lean on one another before having to tackle this task alone in their final assignments.

I had considered adjusting this assignment to include only one country’s carnival celebration for the final assignment, but I am so glad I didn’t. This proved particularly useful in the final peer review. As I mention above, the fact that students were able to receive feedback both from students who’d chosen the same country as them and from students who could offer an outsider’s perspective really gave students a well-rounded set of comments as they went on to revise their podcast scripts.