

SHORT ASSIGNMENT 4: PODCAST CRITICAL REVIEW

Due: Thursday, Oct. 17

This will be a 2-3 page document.

Writing Task

For this essay, you will select and critically analyze a podcast from the archives of *This American Life*. As you listen (and re-listen) to segments, you will identify the application of informational literacy skills, many of which we will have discussed and utilized in class. Through careful listening skills and note-taking, you will develop details to write a critical review of this podcast. Your writing will include elements of expository and analytic writing. In other words, you will explain the content of the piece, how it was constructed, and whether or not you found it successful.

Choosing a Topic

For this assignment, you may choose any podcast from *This American Life* archives, except for any we have previewed in class. The show spans a variety of topics and interesting accounts, so take your time exploring to find a story you find interesting. You might even “sample” a few podcasts before committing to the one you want to use for this assignment.

Getting Started

Once you have selected a podcast, here are some steps to follow:

1. Begin by listening to the podcast in its entirety. This will give you an understanding of the topic, format, findings, and potential controversies covered in the episode. Then, you will want to “re-listen” to segments in order to explain and analyze the review objectives below.
2. The first section of your review is expository--informational. Your objective is to summarize and clearly present the key points and ideas of the podcast. In order to do so, you will need to consider the elements of informational writing we have worked with in class.
 - a. What are the guiding research questions?
 - b. What background information is needed to understand this story?
 - c. Who are the sources included in this piece? What is their authority or credibility on the topic? Might they have other agendas influencing their responses?
 - d. What are the main findings of this story? What evidence/details support and shape this understanding?
 - e. Was there any “pushback” or controversy surrounding these findings, and if so, from where?
 - f. Is there any intended action or outcome for the audience to take in response to this piece?
3. The second section of your review is focused on rhetorical analysis. Your objective is to analyze the structure and presentation of information in order to later determine whether or not you found the piece successful in its aims.
 - a. What is the author’s/narrator’s purpose for publishing this piece? What does he/she hope to accomplish, and what is at stake?

- b. Is the author entering into a conversation (debate) already ongoing? Is the objective to provide insights into another dimension of that conversation? To uncover the “truth?” Or to highlight a conversation that *should* be taking place?
 - c. Who is the audience for this piece and what are their values? What credibility does the author/narrator have with this audience and how is it established? You might consider both the journalist presenting your story, This American Life more generally, and even the radio stations on which this show airs.
 - d. What language and stylistic choices does the author/narrator make in order to appeal to this audience? What is the tone of the episode, and how is it established?
 - e. What mood is the author/narrator hoping to convey through this piece? Consider intonation, incorporation of music, and arrangement of commentary.
4. The final section of this review is focused on the conclusions you’ve drawn after listening and analyzing this piece.
- a. Do you find that it was ultimately successful in its aims?
 - b. Where do you see the most effective moments? Where do you see the shortcomings? How might the narrator address these shortcomings in order to construct a more effective piece?
 - c. What is your “takeaway” after listening to this episode? How has it successfully or unsuccessfully impacted you?
 - d. Is there any lasting image or message it has impressed upon you?
 - e. Do you feel yourself wanting to share this story, take action, or follow-up on some of the research presented?
 - f. Has it changed your attitude or perspective regarding the topic, or reconfirmed your prior opinions? Or did you learn something new for which you held few prior opinions?

Please do not respond to this series of questions one by one or as a list of statements. The purpose of the questions is to provide guidance to jumpstart your writing and clearly explain what each section of your review should include. Most of these points should be covered in your essay, though they do not all need to be covered (or covered in this order). If you are unsure of how to move forward, please speak with me.

Submitting Your Work

Be sure to review the English standards for formatting essays. Also, please include the title of the podcast and a link to it on your essay. **This review should be submitted to the online dropbox by 2:30 on Thursday, October 17.**