

Sci-Fi Project Guidelines

Science Fiction and Philosophy | Brendan Shea, Ph.D. (Brendan.Shea@rtc.edu)

Here are the guidelines for the first essay project.

1. The questions are listed below. You should only answer **ONE** of them (not all of them!).
2. Each essay should be, in total, between **750** and **1250 words** (about 3 to 5 pages; the visual art option below requires slightly less). I won't penalize you for going over, though you should consider whether you *need* the extra words.
3. Direct quotes from the course reader can be **cited** simply as (page number or handout name). If you choose to use outside resources, please use a standard citation style (such as APA, MLA, or Chicago), and provide a full citation. In general, **no more than 15%** of your paper should be quotes.
4. Please don't use the words or ideas of others without proper attribution. Please see the syllabus for details on the plagiarism and academic integrity policy. I regularly use www.turnitin.com to check for plagiarism or related issues.
5. Please submit your exam as a SINGLE MS WORD file to the D2L assignment folder. I will grade projects in the order submitted.
6. As part of the writing process, you'll need to submit a **ROUGH DRAFT** of your project and participate in a **WORKSHOP** with your peers. You can find details on D2L.
 - Failure to either (a) submit a satisfactory rough draft OR (b) provide good comments for your peers will result in a deduction of 10% from your final grade.

Project Options

For this project, you can interpret "science fiction" broadly (to include related genres such as fantasy or horror). You'll have the chance to complete THREE projects over the semester. Please choose a DIFFERENT option for each of the projects.

1. **Philosophy of X.** Choose a science fiction short story or novel we haven't covered in class. (I'm excluding movies for the purposes of this assignment). Now, write a "lesson plan" in which you teach about the philosophical issues that arise in it. Your lesson plan should include:
 - a. Begin with a SHORT summary of the plot, characters, and setting. This should take up no more than 1/3 of the document.
 - b. Discuss at least THREE philosophical issues that arise in the story's context. Note relevant comparisons/contrasts with material we've covered in class.
 - c. Include some "review questions" or "activities" related to your chosen source.
2. **Creative Writing: "Flash" Fiction.** Write a short science fiction short story in response to one of the following prompts.
 - a. A character discovers that their world's "real nature" is utterly different from what they had thought.
 - b. A character is the first person to communicate with an intelligent species (of alien, monster, alien, etc.). Alternatively, you might write a story from the perspective of one of these beings (making their first contact with humans).
 - c. A character lives in a world where a pivotal historical event goes much differently than in "our world."
3. **Creative Writing: Lyric Poetry.** Write a series of lyric poems in response to the material we've covered in class. The guidelines are as follows:

- a. You should write at least THREE different poems exploring the philosophical themes/ideas in science fiction you've read/watched.
 - b. At least TWO of these poems should relate to the material we've covered in class.
 - c. Each poem should be at least 20 lines. You should have a total of at least 75 lines of poetry.
 - d. A 50-to-100-word explanation of your poem (and how it relates to course material) should accompany each poem.
4. **Creative Writing: Personal Essay.** Write an essay answering the question, "What has science fiction meant to me?" In the essay, you should discuss at least THREE different science fiction books/movies/shows that have affected your own "philosophical" development.
 - a. **Note:** The focus here should be on *your* life experience rather than on providing "summaries" of things you've read/watched.
5. **Ethical Interview of a Fictional Character.** Choose a character from a science fiction short story, novel, or movie. Now write an "interview" with the character in which they answer the following questions:
 - a. How does your world compare to the "real world"? What sorts of things does your world have that our world does not?
 - b. What are the ethical principles that you live by? What are your most important "goals"? Are there certain things you would never do? Why?
 - c. What do you think a just/fair society would look like? To what extent does the world you "live in" fall short of this?
 - d. Does your world have intelligent non-humans (such as aliens, robots, etc.)? Do you believe that these beings are morally equal to humans? Why or why not?
 - e. Another 1-2 questions of your choosing.
6. **Visual Art Option.** Create an original piece of visual art (painting, drawing, etc.) based on something we've read or watched in class. Now, write a 600- to 900-word explanation of why you made the design choices you did, and how this relates to what we've been studying in class.
7. **In Defense of Disney (or Not).** Many of the most popular science fiction and fantasy franchises (Marvel, Star Wars, Pixar, Disney Princesses) are owned by Disney. There have long been debates over whether "Disney" is good for children from both the "right" (e.g., religious conservatives) and the "left" (e.g., feminists). Concerns range from the use of violence and the portrayal of women to the way Disney "crowds out" smaller creators. In this essay, I'd like to write an argumentative, philosophical essay in response to the question, "Is Disney good for children?". You should do the following:
 - a. Identify a *particular* type of Disney material you want to talk about ("Princesses" or "Spiderman" or "Star Wars").
 - b. Find at least ONE source that argues that this material is bad for children. Make sure to cite it.
 - c. Explain the arguments "against" this material as clearly and sympathetically as you can. Your goal should be to make the *strongest possible* case.
 - d. Now, do your best to *answer* these arguments and give the case "for" Disney.
 - e. In your conclusion, state what you think the "right answer" is (which might be a compromise of some type).

Project Grading Rubric

The project is worth 20 points. Your grade will depend on how well you do each of the following:

To what extent does your submission demonstrate knowledge of relevant course material (10 points)?

1-4

There are few meaningful references to course material (e.g., it doesn't really touch on "philosophical" issues of the sort of we've discussed at all).

5-6	There are some brief references to course material, but they are superficial, and don't show in-depth knowledge of the content.
7-8	The submission engages with course material, and shows some knowledge. However, at least SOME significant and relevant details are either omitted or are described inaccurately.
9-10	The submission shows in-depth knowledge of the ideas we've been discussing in class, and the ability to extend on them.

To what extent does your essay/project offer a complete, coherent, and creative response to the prompt (10 points)?

1-4	The submission does not answer/respond to the question in a meaningful way. (Projects that very short/off-topic may receive this grade).
5-6	The submission does not fully meet the minimal requirements of the question. (For example, falling below the word count, or not responding to certain parts of the prompt).
7-8	The submission meets the minimal requirements. However, the response lacks clarity, completeness, or creativity in comparison to a 9-10. In argumentative essay, there are some gaps in the argument. In a creative project, more details may be needed, or some details/components don't cohere well with the whole.
9-10	The submission exceeds the minimal requirements, and offers a complete, coherent, and creative response to the prompt.