

Assignment #1 (Due September 1ST @ 4pm)

Assignment Text:

Consider the following quote from George Bernard Shaw:

“When something is funny, search it carefully for a hidden truth.”

George is onto something here! (but perhaps I’m biased: this quote is partially what inspired me to design and teach this course). Regardless, Shaw’s quote serves as an excellent starting point for thinking about our {past, current, future} course material.¹

For this assignment, you will compose a **2-3 page reflection** which considers the following questions, as inspired by Shaw:

1. What does {language, humor} tell us about {ourselves, society}?
2. How do language and humor interact, and to what effect(s)?

Additionally for this reflection, you will select a humorous piece –a piece of writing, a song, a clip from a stand-up comedy special, a skit, a meme, etc. -- and briefly analyze it. What’s going on in the piece? As an experiencer, what do you find funny about it, and why? Please include a link or transcription of whatever piece you select at the end of your essay so that I can check it out too. **This analysis should be around ½ page (of your 2-3 total pages)** and can appear anywhere in your essay.

Some desiderata:

- Given this is a reflection, you are welcome to reference yourself in the first-person, and there are no requirements (or expectations) surrounding the inclusion of outside sources. However, the writing should still maintain an appropriate level of formality for a college course: complete sentences, proper punctuation, etc.
- The analysis of the humorous piece should *not* be chunked into your essay (aka I’m not looking for random insertions of your analysis like “Now, I will analyze a joke that I selected.”). Rather, try to incorporate the piece into your thinking around the questions – it can be a jumping-off point, an example, a resounding conclusion, some combination of those things, or something entirely new! I encourage you to be creative 😊
- Avoid making broad statements like “Humor tells us a lot about ourselves!” Instead, focus on precision and clarity: “Humor has helped me with X, likely because of Y.”, “Humor unpacks A to tell us about B, as shown in C.”

¹ Throughout this course, I will use curly brackets {} to denote a set, meaning you should consider all possible unique completions of the sentence using the words in the curly brackets. For example: “The {dog, cat} walked.” should be read as “The dog walked” AND/OR “The cat walked.” This notation is especially helpful when there are larger sets {dog, cat, fish, snake}, or when there are multiple levels of combination: “The {dog, cat} {walked, danced}” can be read as “The dog walked”, “The dog danced”, “The cat walked”, “The cat danced”.