

First-Year Writing, Fall 2017 -- Unit Four guidelines

Working draft due Friday, 12/1, before class

In-class peer reviews due Friday, 12/1, at the end of class

Final draft due Wednesday, 12/6, before class

Genres are essentially literary *institutions*, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact. The speech acts of daily life are themselves marked with indications and signals (intonation, gesturality, contextual deictics and pragmatics) which ensure their appropriate reception. In the mediated situations of a more complicated social life—and the emergence of writing has often been taken as paradigmatic of such situations—perceptual signals must be replaced by conventions if the text in question is not to be abandoned to a drifting multiplicity of uses (as *meanings* must, according to Wittgenstein, be described). Still, as texts free themselves more and more from an immediate performance situation, it becomes ever more difficult to enforce a given generic rule on their readers. No small part of the art of writing, indeed, is absorbed by this (impossible) attempt to devise a foolproof mechanism for the automatic exclusion of undesirable responses to a given literary utterance. (106-7)

—Fredric Jameson, from *The Political Unconscious*

This semester, we have examined how writing emerges from particular circumstances and how, through conventions of tone, syntax, and structure, genres indicate sets of uses to which writing can be put. In researching, analyzing, discussing, and performing several genres, you have participated in what Jameson names “literary *institutions*, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact.”

For Unit Four, you will assemble a digital portfolio of “particular cultural artifact[s]” that work together to answer the question “Who am I, as a writer?” Or, using Jameson’s terms, we could rephrase this question as “What is my role in the ‘social contract[s]’ that my writing produces between me and ‘specific public[s]’?”

The digital portfolio should feature an introductory essay (1000-word minimum) that answers this question and helps to orient readers as they prepare to explore the portfolio. Additional explanatory blurbs may accompany individual artifacts that the portfolio contains. You do not need to limit your artifacts to the work from this course. Indeed, as our discussions during the first week of class revealed, some of our most important writing occurs outside of academia. Nor, for that matter, do you need to limit your artifacts to alphabetic, “written” texts. Cultural production takes many modes, as your portfolio can openly acknowledge.

In class on Friday, November 17, we shall explore a number of digital platforms, and you should select one suitable to the materials you wish to present. Use MLA or APA format for all citations.