

English 342: The Contemporary Novel

Presentation Assignment and Guidelines

Assignment and Goals

Students will work together in groups of two or three to create a 15- to 20-minute lecture that draws connections between a course novel and an article from the reading packet, Viking critical edition, or reserve texts. Along with offering an overview of the article, the group will critique the reading, apply the writer's insights to a course novel, or extend the article's arguments to novel passages the writer does not discuss. Presenters will use visual aids (PowerPoint, transparencies, handouts) to structure their remarks and underscore key points. Groups should conclude their presentations with two or three questions for class discussion. Because packet readings and other critical analyses are quite challenging, groups should meet with me to discuss their articles before the presentation date.

The presentation assignment has several goals. It requires groups to work in depth on a single article and thus to develop their understanding of postmodernism and course texts. Because many groups will address articles not assigned to the entire class, presentations will contribute additional critical perspectives to class discussion. Participating in a presentation allows you to learn by teaching others. Presenters and audience alike will draw on insights from group presentations as they speak in class, compose postings, and write formal essays or exams.

Guidelines

- ❖ **All members of the group must take an equal role in the presentation.** Each group member must be actively involved in discussing the article and developing the presentation. Each group member must also speak for roughly the same amount of time during the presentation.
- ❖ **Coordinate the presentation with your partners.** Each group member should know what the others will cover and when they will cover it.
- ❖ **Remember your audience.** Which points are they likely to understand immediately? Which will you have to explain in more depth? What issues, discussions, and texts will be fresh in their minds? What issues or questions will interest them?
- ❖ **Make the presentation easy to follow.** The article the group discusses has its own organizational format, but the group need not replicate the author's ordering. While you should summarize the critic's thesis before turning to sub-arguments, you may divide the presentation into points you agree with and points you disagree with or arguments you feel apply to the novel and arguments you feel do not. You may weave critique or application throughout your overview of the article, or you may begin with a complete summary before turning to critique or application. Regardless of how you structure your discussion of the article, you should lead with basic information: whose

article you will discuss, what you plan to cover, who will cover each topic, and what overall argument you will make about the article. Throughout the presentation, use transition phrases to signal the shift from one point to the next.

- ❖ **Cite references clearly.** When you summarize, paraphrase, or quote from the article, use signal phrases such as "Baudrillard persuasively argues." Make sure the audience knows when you're shifting from the article to the novel. Give page numbers when you quote from a course text so that the audience may take notes.
- ❖ **Speak slowly and loudly.** Your audience only has one chance to hear your presentation.
- ❖ **Speak from notes.** Although you may worry that nervousness will erase your memory, do not write out everything you plan to say on paper or on your PowerPoint slides. Speakers who do so tend to look only at their papers or visual aids instead of their audience.
- ❖ **Avoid lacing your speech with "um," "uh," "like," and "you know."** Do not perform the shifty-footed, hand-wringing dance of the terrified orator.
- ❖ **Incorporate visual aids effectively.** Whether you use PowerPoint, transparencies, or a handout, your visual aids should be readable and have a clear connection to the presentation. If you use a presentation outline, be sure that the outline matches your points. If you distribute a handout with key points and quotations, let the audience know when to look at the handout. Remember that visual aids help the audience to follow your points; they do not represent a transcript of your remarks. You want the audience to listen to you, not read the visual aid and ignore the presenters.
- ❖ **Do your homework and have a backup if you plan to use technology.** Our classroom comes equipped with multiple bells and whistles, but you must learn how the equipment works before you use the computer and data projector. Save presentation files in at least two formats (floppy, uploaded to Dante) and bring a transparency or prepare to write on the board if the equipment fails. Most of the time, you won't need to use your backup plan, but having one decreases your stress.
- ❖ **Conclude effectively.** Before turning to questions, end the lecture with a statement that lets the audience know how the article advances or fails to advance our thinking about postmodernism or the novel. Do not say, "that's all" or "we're done." These statements diminish everything you have said.
- ❖ **Ask and answer questions.** Formulate discussion questions that allow the class to expand upon points introduced in the presentation. Before posing your own questions, remember to take questions from the audience. To prepare for Q & A, write a list of questions your audience will likely ask. Better yet, practice in front of friends and have them ask you questions.