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Structural Analysis And Assessment Of Scholarly Style

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Communication Project 1 – Structural Analysis and Assessment of Scholarly Style

Project Description

Does academia encourage an effective academic writing style? Do writers across the disciplines communicate in ways that uphold the values and purposes of liberal arts education? Has the turn in higher ed and scholarship to more public-facing audiences affected how scholars try to reach readers? What stylistic adjustments or improvements would you like to see in the texts you read—and are asked to write—in college? This project asks you to delve into these questions, among others, in relation to a sample of scholarly writing of your choice.

Typically, peer-reviewed articles, academic monographs, course textbooks, and related genres aim to convey information and promote arguments to an educated audience. This kind of writing has a reputation for being dry, wordy, and confusingly dense. Yet it can be engaging, concise, and clear while still successfully, even memorably, presenting complex material. For our first Communication Project, you will put a passage of scholarly text under the microscope and study how a series of local writing choices has global effects—for better or for worse, or somewhere in-between.

To start, you will need to select an excerpt from a scholarly work, broadly defined. This means you can draw from a journal article, critical essay in an edited collection, textbook, “serious” magazine/newspaper piece, or monograph pitched at an academic or other well-informed readership. If the author has scholarly credentials and the piece does not fall under creative writing, it will likely serve (if you’re unsure, please check with me). From the full text, pick out a passage that seems productive to work with, making sure the length fits the scope of this paper. In most cases, two consecutive paragraphs will be enough! *Note:* You may refer to other parts of the text that support your style claims, but the bulk of your analysis and evidence should come from the chosen excerpt.

Developing your paper will require multiple stages of critical thinking via prewriting. As you read the passage, first record your impressions of not just *what* the text says—its meaning, content—but also *how* the text says things—its manner, form. Then use analytical techniques, such as those we explore in class (e.g. sentence diagramming, parse trees, slow and layered reading) to break down and identify the arrangement of basic parts that create meaning in individual sentences, sentence sequences, and paragraphs. Next, describe the style the author is developing, or performing, by explaining how the structured relationships between words at the local level add up to create a global impact on the reader. Consider “the reader” in the abstract—the target audience—and in particular—you, as a unique liberal arts college student. Finally, to move into critical evaluation, step away from the microscope and look at this passage within the larger picture. When considered in its textual and rhetorical contexts, do you deem the writer successful in reaching their intended reader? Which aspects of their scholarly style strike you as especially effective or ineffective? Why? As you move from all this prewriting into drafting your paper, decide what organization of your analysis and assessment will best communicate your interpretation of the scholarly text’s style.

Diction and other influential style components of sentences—punctuation, prosody, etc.—can all figure in your analysis. Remember, though, that your main goal is to analyze and assess how grammatical structures, both in individual sentences and successive sentences in a paragraph, help build a scholar’s style. And whether the passage you examine proves to be an example of convoluted *academese* or lucid liberal arts scholarship, you will want to try in your own paper to communicate logical, precise, well supported ideas and insights about written style as effectively as possible. How can your own scholarly style uphold your values and purpose here?

Learning Objectives:

This assignment gives you the opportunity to

- Practice expository and analytical writing for an academic audience in 21st-century higher education
- Demonstrate understanding of terms and concepts related to the construction/creation of written style
- Dissect a passage of scholarly text and evaluate its formal elements through a rhetorical approach
 - Attend closely to grammatical, lexical, and other technical features of sentences/paragraphs
 - Identify style features and evaluate their effectiveness within textual/sociocultural contexts
- Engage reflectively in the writing process, responding to peer/instructor feedback via revision
- Provide helpful written and oral feedback on peers' drafts in a constructive, supportive workshop

Due Dates+

Outline or Mind map: Week 4 Thurs., 2/9

Rough Draft: **Week 5 Tues., 2/14**

Final Draft of Communication Project 1: **Week 5 Thurs., 2/16**

N.B. On due dates, submit your work electronically on Moodle before class and bring a hard copy to class. For the final submission, you must hand in a Progress Folder that includes the final, clean hard copy along with material documenting your process for this assignment (prewriting, marked-up drafts, etc.).

Length: **Full 4 to 6 pages** (i.e., about 1,000-1,500 words)

Important: Include a photocopy of the passage you have selected as an **Appendix**. This supplementary document will let the reader see the material you are working with in its entirety. However, you still need to quote words, phrases, and/or lines in the body of the paper to support your analysis and assessment with textual evidence. Please note the Appendix does not count toward the page length.

Sources: This is not a research paper, so no sources should be used beyond the primary scholarly text whose sample passage you analyze. To cite this source, you can use **APA- or MLA-style** in-text citations along with a **References or Works Cited entry** at the end of your paper. Alternatively, you can just give the full bibliographic information for the scholarly text you are working with and cite page numbers in-text, as needed (the Appendix copy of your chosen excerpt must come from this edition of the text). Again, no further sources are required, but if you really want to allude to principles of style from authors we have read, do not let this take up much space.

Formatting: Your final essay should be double-spaced, with 1" margins, and in Times New Roman 12-point font. Place the essay title and your information on the first page, with only page numbers (or a succinct header that includes #s) on subsequent pages. If possible, print on both sides.