

Assignment: Comparative Analysis Essay (timed, in-course)
Resources: 2 selections from the unit readings (These will be randomly assigned to you once you begin the actual essay exam below)
Essay Length: 6 paragraphs (8-10 sentences each) (minimum)
Due date: Week 12: Saturday, Apr 16 by 11:55 pm
Time limit: 2 1/2 hours (150 minutes)
Points: 20 (Essay category)
Essay revisable? Yes, provided it's completed on time and meets all minimum assignment criteria at the original time of submission

The Assignment:

Once you begin the exam you will be randomly assigned 2 readings from this unit's assigned selections that you've already read, studied and discussed in the forum spaces. Your task, **in 2 1/2 hours and 6-8 paragraphs**, will be to develop a thesis evaluation of how and how well the writing works in those two selections, and mount a comparative analysis of both to support, illustrate and defend that thesis formulation.

This assignment is really about making connections. Your challenge will be to find key features or strategies or styles that are in some fashion comparable in both pieces, and build an argument driven analysis of form around them. Keep in mind that the things you compare don't have to be the same. Compare just means talk about two things together - it doesn't mean find two things that are the same. Both of your readings are already doing something the same: they're talking about gender identity. But they're doing it in both similar and different ways. You need to find a few of those ways in each piece, and then talk about how and why those ways ultimately allow one or both pieces to succeed or fail, or something in between.

Choose a suitably narrow set of **rhetorical elements** and then use those as your "lens" with which to examine the two selections. Remember: the goal is to examine the structure of the writing: evaluate the effectiveness of the communication based on the strategies you isolate. Don't turn the discussion into a comparison of ideas or a critique of them.

* * *

You'll need to be very focused in how you structure this essay. Choose a comparable set of elements in both readings, then choose an analytical structure for your discussion (**point-by-point** or **subject block** – see below). Provide lots of textual references and analysis to explain how those elements you decided to focus on are articulated similarly and differently in each reading, and include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the writing in each piece.

Once again: Remember that "comparable" does not mean "the same." You should be looking for ways to find each reading as unique and different while at the same time still sharing common features or emphases. As always, cite lots of specific examples from the readings to support your analysis — this essay will collapse very quickly if you do not support your conclusions with textual references.

* * *

Some questions to consider as you formulate your thesis and compare the rhetorical strategies and effectiveness of each reading:

- What is each writer's purpose, and what audience is she/he addressing, and how do you know?
- To what extent and how does each author appeal to readers' reason and emotions?
- What kind of persona does each writer project?
- What kinds of evidence does each writer rely on? How persuasive or compelling do you find each selection, and why?
- How does each writer approach the general concept of "gender" as it is laid out in the chapter introduction?
- What kinds of parallels do you see between how each constructs his/her positions?
- What is the tone of the argument in each?

Some tips: don't write an essay comparing everything in the readings: choose only 2 or 3 rhetorical elements, and discuss only those. You're not expected to say everything about these two readings. Far from it, actually. Just say a few things - but say them well and support them well. Keep your focus very narrow and specific, and make sure to take a clear position in your thesis statement: **do not just present a neutral compare & contrast discussion – you must argue a clear, subjective thesis position** that seeks to explain and justify your particular evaluation of the two readings in a comparative way. Argue that one writer is more or less effective than the other in making his/her argument, or that one piece does "A" better while the other piece does "B" better, or that something looks one way in the first and another way in the second and one ends up working better than the other, etc.

* * *

There are two principal patterns of comparative analysis you should be looking to for your overall essay structure:

"point by point"

(in which you examine one rhetorical element as it appears in each reading, then likewise with the second rhetorical element, then again with a third, and so on)

OR

"subject block"

(in which you examine 2 or 3 rhetorical elements altogether in one reading, then the same or similar 2 or 3 rhetorical elements altogether in the second reading)

I recommend using the latter approach ("subject block") for this assignment because a point by point approach can become a little difficult to manage in a fast moving four to five page discussion. Take one reading, turn it around and about, examining two or three different elements, and then do the same thing with your other reading, turning it around and examining it, looking at the same two or three elements. Whichever method you choose, it must be absolutely clear to your reader: Do not produce an undifferentiated mash of vaguely comparable discussion points all mixed together. Pick a discussion method and follow it religiously throughout your analysis.

* * *

As always, I'll be looking for you to show competence in these areas:

- 1 **Good grammatical control of your sentences and A narrow, focused thesis argument**
- 2 **Body paragraphs that offer lots of discussion and Textual examples that support each paragraph's main point**
- 3 **A clear description of the similarities and differences between the two pieces you have chosen to focus on**
- 4 **An evaluation of the effectiveness of the writing in each selection based on your assessment of the writer's specific rhetorical methods**

Remember:

- Fully introduce and summarize the readings you're analyzing - *briefly* - before you begin your analysis
- Be specific in your argumentation: Develop a sound main argument in your first paragraph that revolves around a single big point you wish to make about the selections
- Use lots of textual evidence to support your discussion – body paragraphs that do not offer direct or paraphrased textual support will not be credited toward your required paragraph minimum (6)
- Develop your body paragraphs by announcing a single topic evaluation, then by introducing and inserting 1-2 textual references to provide evidence of your evaluation, then by explaining and discussing that evidence and tying it back to the main evaluation that started off your paragraph
- Cite your textual quotations with a page number in parentheses after the quotation, and follow all other formatting guidelines outlined in the [Proofreading Notes](#) sheet
- Use academic language: Write only in the present tense, even when speaking of a text that has been written

in the past: write “the author says,” NOT “the author said”

- Use academic language: Write only in the 3rd person (use: he, she, it, they, the authors, the reader, etc.). DO NOT use me, I, you, or your anywhere in your essay

Submissions that do not follow these guidelines will be returned ungraded and marked down a full letter grade.

* * *

How to handle this in-class writing challenge:

Study the resources I've placed in the unit on in-class / timed essay writing - those sheets will help you focus on exactly what your task is in this assignment.

Make sure to spend adequate time proofreading for clarity, spelling, and sentence construction. Read your work aloud to yourself in a quiet place – this is a good method of catching mistakes that your eye can easily miss when rereading your draft work silently on the computer screen. Make sure that your language has been edited so that it does not make any sentence structure errors. Remember to use the [Sample Student Essay](#) as a model to help you build your own essay.

Your essay must be a minimum of 6 fully developed paragraphs in length, though you'll likely need more than that to accomplish all the goals of this assignment. **The essay cannot be made up, submitted late, revised or rewritten for credit** this time unfortunately - it's a one-shot deal.

As you compose your essay, you can (and should) use any and all of the resources within the unit to help you create your essay. You may also use discussion work you've created during the unit you think is applicable to the work at hand.

You will have 2 hours and 30 minutes to complete the exam. It cannot be paused once you begin, and it may only be taken once for credit. The essay is worth 20 points and will be factored into your cumulative Essay component score. You may use any materials you wish to help you with this exam but all writing that is not cited with appropriate reference and parenthetical information must be your own. Submissions will be filtered for plagiarized language.

Do not be overly concerned about paragraph and document formatting: since you'll be typing your essay directly into the submission window instead of attaching a pre-formatted document, I am not going to be evaluating your work based on things like paragraph spacing, for example. Create fully developed paragraphs - that's what I'm looking for here.

Allow time to proofread your essay carefully before submission as I'll be grading your work at the sentence level too - I **still need to see error-free work**. I recommend that you look back at your graded Summary & Analysis essays to review the kinds of error patterns you need to pay attention to in your work so that your proofread of this midterm essay will be an effective one.

The exam tool will close and become unavailable after 11:55 pm on the due date listed above. Please plan on submitting your work a few minutes *before* the deadline to avoid technical glitches that may prevent timely submission, as you will not be able to save or submit your work if you attempt to post it after the deadline. I suggest copying your completed essay text and pasting it into a separate word document on your machine before you submit your final work so as to have a back up copy available should there be any problems with the submission process. **Please understand that I do not have the ability to recover partial, unsaved or late work in this exam tool.**

* * *

That's it. Off you go. Good luck!