

English 100/101A

Assignment: Chapter 4 Comparative Essay

Text: *Rereading America*, Chapter 4 “True Women and Real Men: Myths of Gender”

Essay Length: 5 full pages (minimum) (not including the Works Cited List also required with this assignment)

Choose **two** of the four readings from this unit’s assigned selections in *Rereading America* and write a comparative analysis of them. This assignment is about making connections. Your task is to pick readings that share key features even though those features may look different in each reading, or that approach their topics in unique but still comparable ways. Choose a suitably narrow set of rhetorical elements and then use those as your “lens” with which to examine the two selections. Do this by selecting specific elements you believe are comparable or contrastable in both readings and then by *showing* your audience how those elements work better, worse, or differently in each reading. You may want to use the discussion questions at the end of each reading to help you focus your topic choices and find textual elements that are comparable. Remember: the goal is to examine the *structure* of the writing: evaluate the success or failure, effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the communication – 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.

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 points 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. 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 *specific* thesis position that seeks to explain and justify your particular comparison of the two readings. 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, etc.

There are two principal patterns of comparative analysis:

“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 essay you’re analyzing before you begin your analysis
- Be specific in your argumentation: Develop a sound main argument in your first paragraph that revolves around a single point you wish to make about the selection
- 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 essay page total
- Develop your body paragraphs by announcing a single supporting point, then by introducing and inserting a textual quotation to provide evidence of your point, then by explaining and discussing that evidence and tying it back to the main point of your paragraph
- Cite your textual quotations with a page number in parentheses after the quotation, and follow all other formatting guidelines outlined in the **The Rules: An MLA Primer**
- **Do a Works Cited List for this assignment** – use the template and sample Works Cited List documents provided within the course to help you format your own
- 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 this rule will be returned ungraded and marked down a full letter grade**

Type up your summary in Microsoft Word or a similar word processing program. Make sure to spend adequate time proofreading for clarity, spelling, and sentence construction. Read your work aloud to yourself in a quiet place, or have someone else you trust read it to you – this is a good method of catching mistakes that your eye can easily miss when rereading your draft work on the computer or on the page. Format your essay so that it matches exactly the model I have provided in the **Sample Format Page rules** sheet. Make sure that your language has been edited so that it does not make any of the sentence structure errors covered in the **Proofreading Notes** sheet. Remember to use the **Sample Student Essays** as a model to help you build your own essay.

Start on this assignment early, come to me with questions, and remember that I am always happy to review drafts at whatever stage they're in.