Writing for the Public

Project Proposals (in two parts)

Due via CourseWeb at 10:59 am on Tuesday, Jan. 28

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Cover Page. This should include your name, your proposed issue (1-50 words), and a block quote (50-200 words, with appropriate attribution) that is relevant to either your issue in particular or an idea that your (our) work helps explore/illustrate. For example, your quote might come from an interview with someone impacted by your issue, or it might come from a sociologist, anthropologist, geographer, or philosopher who studies the relationship between history and memory, circulation of ideals and/or material artifacts, the intertwining of public and private life, etc.

Part 1 (draft due Jan. 21). In her introduction to the collection Evocative Objects: Things We Think With, Sherry Turkle says, “We find it familiar to consider objects as useful or aesthetic, as necessities or vain indulgences. We are on less familiar ground when we consider objects as companions to our emotional lives or as provocations to thought. The notion of evocative objects brings together these two less familiar ideas, underscoring the inseparability of thought and feeling in our relationship to things” (5). Your job in this section of the proposal is to tell the story of an evocative object of your own. Select an object that helps you say (at least) one interesting, idiosyncratic thing about why you’ve selected the issue that you’ve selected to work with this semester.

This isn’t the place to say, “I want to help people” (as true and noble as that may be), or “This issue is important for everyone” (I’m willing to go out on a limb and say that no issue is equally important to or for everyone). The relationship between your topic and your object may be seemingly obvious (in the collection Turkle edited, a cello leads to a career as a composer and cellist) or it may be seemingly tangential (the strong emotions elicited by memories of a particular rolling pin lead a psychologist to articulate her interest in other people’s memories and memory objects).

Some Additional Guidelines for Composing Part 1:

☐ Describe the object itself in detail. Appeal to the senses. Describe its relationships: to you as a person, to others, to other objects. Use it to remember a particular event or idea in detail. Or as an excuse to describe something unique about the ways in which you engage worlds (or words), the ways your particular mind works. Look for things “only you can say.”

☐ For more ways to enter into this assignment, consider Experimental Geography. Rather than beginning with childhood objects, the pieces in this collection describe made objects and orchestrated events (from adult artistic/academic perspectives). Describing this kind of object in detail also elicits reflection on relationships, including those between ideas/ideals and the material world.

☐ Think beyond the bounds of professional writing. You might begin by thinking about a favorite story, essay, poem, or song---what elements make it engaging and/or memorable for you? What happens if you think of your object as a character? Do you want to really set a scene, give a feel for a place? Or is it the people you associate with your object that make it memorable; do you want to spend your words giving readers a sense of them? Don’t try to do/say everything. Pick a specific object-oriented relationship to focus on.

☐ Your final draft should be at least 600 words. It may be as long as you like, as long as it is composed with care. I should get the sense that you have both revised and proofread.
PART 2 (draft due Jan. 23). Your main job in this part of the proposal is to convince me that the issue you’ve selected is a public issue of consequence and that you have the potential to carry out the project(s) at hand in relation to this issue. How you organize this part of the proposal is up to you. I encourage the use of specific, descriptive section headers and bulleted lists. However you organize, you should provide:

I. A List of Potential Interventions. Each project that you complete this semester will have a slightly different goal, but you should imagine them as parts of a whole that aims to do something to promote some kind of action. In other words: who is your writing for? And how might it change their lives/the lives of others? Consider: what rhetorical means are available to someone advocating for change? Which means will you make use of? If you identify increasing awareness and/or providing information as a goal, explain how it is that increased awareness is desirable in relation to your chosen issue.

II. A Preliminary Research Plan. Describe how you will undertake the work your project requires. What resources do you already have at your disposal, and what do you plan to learn/do between now and the end of the term to help make your final project a rhetorical success?

- What kinds of information do you plan to make available through your compositions? You don’t need to know exact answers to this, but you should be able to think and talk through the scope and type of information you hope to have presented by the end of the semester. Will you need to learn new technical skills in order to share this information effectively?

- Where will you look for reliable information on your issue? Know some specific websites, databases, institutions, and people you can access (including on Twitter or through other social networks) to find out more. You may want to talk to a librarian for help with this.

- How are you qualified to do this research? How (in addition to continuing to do traditional research) might you become more qualified? You do not need to have specific qualifications or a background that includes personal/professional experience with an issue to work on that issue in this class. Indeed, some of you may find it most useful to take this class’ project as an excuse to learn about something you simply wish you knew more about. But you do need some way of answering the ethos question—how will you convince your readers that you are a credible source on your public issue? If you have relevant personal experience, how will you wield it? (See Rhetorical Toolbox, p. 40-1.) You might also use this space to address any problems or limitations you expect to face.

III. Some Historical and Rhetorical Context. Begin researching the background of your public issue. This should be the most substantial part of your proposal. Whom does it affect? What is at stake for these people? Where and when did it arise? What other places are implicated—either in big ways or small ways? Has it spread or changed in nature over time? Why has there been recent interest in it? Who else is talking about your issue, and what are they saying? What, if anything identifiable, is the current talk accomplishing? What material infrastructures are involved? What social networks or social norms are at work?

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR COMPOSING PART 2:

☐ You may want to revisit the “Invention Questions” from The Rhetorical Toolbox reading (p. 38) as you think through what you want to say about your issue.

☐ Your final-for-now draft should be at least 700 words. It may be as long as you like, as long as it is carefully composed. I should get the sense that you both revised and proofread.
David Byrne suggests that “The very best” infographics are those that “engender and facilitate an insight by visual means – allow us to grasp some relationship quickly and easily that otherwise would take many pages and illustrations and tables to convey.” Your job in this, our second project, is to craft one neat, revised infographic. It should take at least four pieces of information relevant to your issue, bring them together in a meaningful way, and include a provocative header/title.

Alongside this complete infographic, you’ll submit two concepts that you began work on but didn’t fully realize. These “draft objects” can be hand-drawn mockups if that’s how you brainstorm; they can be totally unrelated to each other, or they can be two very different visualizations of the same information. One of your draft objects may be a rough in-process version of your final graphic; one should be something you experimented with and then decided not to use. Again, they should not be overwhelmingly similar to each other (for instance, the same infographic made using two color palettes; two charts that show different statistics but are otherwise identical).

GUIDELINES FOR COMPOSING:

☐ Your infographic(s) should aggregate information from several different places, and they should show you experimenting with several ways of presenting information visually.

☐ As long as you are presenting information, data, or knowledge and paying attention to graphic elements, I’ll count what you’re doing as an infographic. However, sorting through other people’s answers to the question “What is an Infographic?” might be helpful to you. Beyond considering the resources listed on Courseweb and our blog, you might consider this blog post from Ross Crook, which distinguishes between data visualization, information design, and editorial infographics (any of which would be appropriate for you to create): http://columnfivemedia.com/what-is-an-infographic/

☐ In terms of technical execution, your infographics may not (yet) live up to your expectations; that’s okay. Nevertheless, they should aim for clean, visually striking design that makes your information easy to understand and interpret. This means selection of a coherent, thoughtful color palette, attention paid to typography, consideration of the associations people are likely to make when they see certain styles of graphics, and time spent trouble-shooting or considering potential misreadings (and then re-designing to help prevent those misreadings). It means playing up the human visual system’s propensity for pattern recognition.

☐ Your infographics should include citations that indicate where you got your info from. Alternately, you may submit a separate explanatory note that gives credit where it is due and explains your use of sources. It is generally a good idea to verify information, so one set of statistics well might have multiple sources behind it. Remember: it is also important to give credit to the sources from which you borrowed photos or graphic elements.

☐ Your final infographic and two draft-objects should be submitted to me as .pdf files. Alternate file formats are acceptable, but only if you contact me in advance to make sure I can open your files and you make a case for why the alternate format makes more sense. You’re welcome to submit non-digital artwork, but only if it is polished and professional and you have a plan for how to digitize later (for potential inclusion on your group website).
Consider *Smashing Magazine’s* dos and don’ts:


**SOME NOTES TO HELP WITH THE TECHNICAL PART OF COMPOSING:**

Start wherever you’re comfortable. Look through the applications that came loaded on your computer that you never use. Do you already have image editing software? Do you use something like CAD in your major that you might be able to “misuse” to create a cool infographic (or part of one)? Is your data super geographically focused---might ArcGIS or the Google Maps API help you make something relevant and visually enticing?

There’s nothing wrong with starting from a template or using a relatively common program. However, there is a huge difference between using a program’s defaults and using custom settings. If something’s customizable and you choose not to customize it, that sends a message to viewers (who may use the same software and recognize this as laziness, even if that’s not what it is).

The PCs in the basement labs in the Cathedral and the Macs in the library (are all supposed to) have the Adobe creative suite loaded onto them. Some of you already know your way around this stuff. If you don’t, you won’t become an expert in this class. But you might teach yourself just enough that its marketable. Or you might want to check out the free alternatives to Photoshop introduced here: [http://gizmodo.com/5974500/10-photoshop-alternatives-that-are-totally-free](http://gizmodo.com/5974500/10-photoshop-alternatives-that-are-totally-free). Consider blocking out an hour or two in which you don’t expect yourself to get anything done beyond getting a feel for the software. Find and read some online tutorials (or watch some on Youtube). Practice making.

Unless you are already adept at using a particular design software, there’s a good chance that you’ll want to use or at least try out several different things.

For instance, Microsoft Excel *does* make it really easy to take ‘raw’ numbers and create a wide variety of graphs and charts. Take advantage of this, if it makes sense for the info you’re working with. However, you may find that after creating charts in Excel you want to copy them into another program---one where it will be easier to move them around, make them overlap, stylize them, and/or add text or graphics around them. Save versions as you go---a draft that seems unsatisfactory now might look much better tomorrow.

Similarly, Adobe Photoshop is a great pick for a lot of layout things; it handles text decently well, and gives you a lot of creative control. Besides, you may want to include highly stylized pieces of photos in your infographic, which would make it a really intuitive choice. But creating accurate charts and graphs in Photoshop is not easy----so you might let a tool like this help you: [http://ceagon.com/tools/charts](http://ceagon.com/tools/charts)

Check out this list of tools/resources from the Daily Tekk blog (a couple highlights below):


- There’s a good chance that a design professional would use Adobe Illustrator to create a series of infographics. This tutorial isn’t geared toward the most recent version of the software, but it does provide step-by-step instructions that are relevant and easy to follow. It also serves as a reminder that, whatever you want to make, you can probably find a tutorial out there to help you…

In this course, you will not be writing exclusively from what you now know (even if you know a lot); you’ll begin with what you know and conduct research to help refine and further your understanding. You’re being asked to join in an old tradition, one of interpretive reporting, which is different from writing editorials or simply releasing facts; according to Prof. Curtis MacDougall in 1938, interpretive reporting meets a “demand on the part of an intelligent reader to not only know what is happening, but why it is happening, and how what transpires fits into the general political and social pattern” (as cited in Griffen et al, Interpreting Public Issues, Ames: Iowa State UP, 1991, p. 14).

Successful projects will go beyond the surface of the issue. In other words, you’ll learn a lot from your research and your project will teach others. Good projects will be not just knowledgeable about but also respectful of the communities experiencing the issues at hand, and they will push toward some kind of change. They will marshal many different kinds of sources to tell a story about the issue and will tell the story in a convincing, thought-provoking way. If you’re “doing research right,” you’ll change your mind about something at some point during the semester. If your topic really is timely, there will be new developments while you’re working on your project that you need to take note of.

* Our reading load will be lighter than normal for an upper-division class—this is because I expect you to be reading about your issue both widely and regularly. Keeping a resource log is a way to track this “extra” time put in.

**Some Practical Notes:**

- You may collect your resource notes by hand in a notebook, keep them in an organized word file, or use a reference management program; you will be expected to bring your resource log to class on certain workshop days, to post highlights on the blog, and to show your log to me at a couple key points during the semester.

- Aim to add at least three good resources to your list each week. You should often add more.

- You should always take down the information necessary for a full citation (MLA, APA, or Chicago is fine, as long as you’re consistent).

- Come up with a plan for how you’ll annotate your resource list. What will be most usable for you later on? What might help others navigate your list?

- Create a tentative organizational system now—before you really start researching. This can mean collecting headers, keywords, or tags. Part 2 of your proposal might serve as an organizational skeleton for your log.

- Part of the idea is just this: when you run across a great human interest piece related to your issue while looking for statistics to create an infographic, don’t just assume you’ll remember it later when you’re working on a blog post about the face of your issue. Make some notes about the article. Who was it by, and who was it about? What made it stand out? Why might you or others want to return to it?

- Failure to keep up a log will have a noticeable impact on your participation grade; it will make projects more difficult to complete, and it will leave you scrambling to create a public resource page at the end of the term (something that should be quick/easy).
As you decide where to search for materials, what to read, what to log, and how to log:

Consider what you’ll need to support your own development as an expert on your issue. What topics related to your issue do you want to have covered by the end of the semester? Are there particular genres of writing in which you want to have read relevant samples? What kinds of statistics would it be responsible for you to know? Do you need to do additional reading in order to know what those statistics mean? Are there particular blogs, authors, groups of authors, or organizations that it would be responsible for you to follow all semester long?

Consider what resources someone using a website about your issue might need or be interested in. These might be more or less specific than the types of resources listed above. Are there emergency services relevant to a community you’re writing about that it would be useful to have quick access to? Specific local organizations that someone might want to volunteer for after your writing inspires him/her to get involved? Reputable sources that corroborate some of the things you’re saying? Or detail issues related to your issue but beyond the scope of your project?

Places to begin researching some public issues, by category:

Health issues:
Kaiser Family Foundation: http://www.kff.org/
The Commonwealth Fund: http://www.commonwealthfund.org/

Information politics:
Creative Commons
Electronic Frontier Foundation
Pew Internet and American Life Project
Code For America http://codeforamerica.org/
Center for the Study of the Public Domain (Duke Law): http://www.law.duke.edu/cspd/

Social justice / human rights:
Southern Poverty Law Center: http://www.splcenter.org/
Human Rights Campaign: http://www.hrc.org/
Amnesty International: http://www.amnesty.org/
Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania: http://drnpa.org/
Kiva (corporation): http://www.kiva.org/

Environmental issues:
Sierra Club: http://www.sierraclub.org/
Greenpeace: http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/en/
Monterey Bay Aquarium: http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/

Local Pittsburgh issues:
Marcellus Shale Protest: http://www.marcellusprotest.org/
Public transportation, Pgh Port authority: http://www.portauthority.org/paac/default.aspx
Bike Pittsburgh: http://bike-pgh.org/
As an affinity group, you're responsible for creating and then regularly adding to a group website. *This is a project that will continue to evolve right up until the final days of the semester.* You might think of this as the kind of informational website that an advocacy group or a non-profit would sponsor.

* I suggest you begin with an existing content/blog management system—I like the flexibility of Wordpress, but past students have told me that they find Wix easier to customize; I've also heard reasonably good things about Weebly. Before you make a final decision, ask yourselves: What are your goals as communicators? How will one of these platforms help you achieve them and/or get in your way? How well does this site handle various media? Once you've picked a platform, you'll also want to ask these questions of individual themes.

* One element of your site must be a blog that makes it easy to feature/identify multiple authors. There will be other elements by the end of the semester, but we'll begin here.

* Each group member should author *at least three substantial, content-driven blog posts* relevant to his/her individual topic before the end of the semester. These are due at blog launch (9AM on Feb. 25), at 9PM on March 2, and at 9PM on March 16.

* In addition, you're each responsible for engaging in online conversation(s) about your group mate's posts. This means posting at least two comments during the week after posts go up AND responding to comments that others make with regard to your writings. In between official blogging deadlines, I strongly encourage you to post extra comments and less substantial posts (things like media or cool links with a few sentences of explanation) as you're moved to do so.

* Before February 25th's soft launch, you should also have:

  (1) A custom-designed banner (header) or sidebar or footer that explains to readers what your blog/site is all about;

  (2) An about page or multiple about pages that say(s) something about who you are and why you're worth engaging in relation to the topics at hand;

  (3) An imagined space set aside and-or a tagging/category-oriented system that will allow you to post and organize feature content later---you might choose to post (pieces of) your infographics as either a feature or a placeholder. Think toward wanting to share links, media, and informational resources.
Choice, variety, and reflection are among the things that I value when looking at collections of work, and this group blog/web-design project is no exception. You should be talking about:

**Design elements.** Color, typography, layout, balance of elements, etc. Credit will be given in this category for thoughtfulness and deliberate rhetorical decision making (i.e. is it clear you are thinking about how the design choices you make might impact an audience).

**Content.** For now, this means content of blog posts/comments/introductory materials. Later, it will also mean smart revisions/adaptations of work done toward other projects that helps them fit into the new setting of the website (where appropriate), making smart decisions about inclusion and exclusion, providing ligatures between projects, taking care at the sentence-level and in terms of organization within individual features. Remember: visuals have content too. Not every picture has the same kind of impact; the stats and sentences included in an infographic matter, not just the graphic’s design.

**Integration of Design and Content.** Making content and design work together in a smart, cohesive way that appeals to a particular public (a particular audience or audiences). Do think of the website as a project of its own---pay attention to how it functions as a whole, not just how it functions as a repository for individual projects/posts. Some points in this category are reserved for going above and beyond. Anything your group does on/for your website that really wows me can be credited here. It is worth noting that “extra” conversational work you do on your group blog may also bump up your participation grade in the class.
For this project, you should **conduct at least one substantial, pre-planned interview.** You may choose to conduct more than one interview or to conduct one formal interview and to collect little clips (say: answers to a single question) from friends, family, or acquaintances to help support your main story. Think about Metzler's tips and about what happens when or if there are places where it might be appropriate and useful for you to ask the question, “Can I watch?”

In order to use someone’s voice and/or image, you'll need a **release** form of some sort---explore the web for examples that seem suited to whatever you’re going to produce. Creating this document is part of the project. When you come to conference next week, you should have this and a list of questions to show me.

Rather than me dictating the form of your project, you should select a form that is well suited to (1) your issue or a portion of it, (2) your skills as a composer and/or skills you’d like to develop, and (3) the medium of the web. A revised version of this project will very likely become a centerpiece of your final website (you can password lock this content so that only your classmates and I will see it, if privacy requires).

**THIS PROJECT REALLY CAN TAKE ANY FORM YOU WANT.**

**HERE ARE A FEW IDEAS OF THINGS I WOULD BE EXCITED TO SEE:**

- **A traditional 2000-3000 word profile or feature article** that draws on your interview(s) in a significant way, accompanied by photos and/or very brief audio or video clips. You might think about this in the context of narrative journalism and look at Bob Baker’s Newsthinking blog for some inspiration: [http://www.newsthinking.com/ten-hurdles-to-narrative-journalism/](http://www.newsthinking.com/ten-hurdles-to-narrative-journalism/)

  Alternately, you might imagine this a sequence of shorter articles---perhaps six 500-word blog posts that you would run as a weekly column on an established website (or as a way of establishing a website), each with an accompanying image or two.

- **An audio essay** *(suggested length: 5-8 minutes)*. This should be more than “just” straight audio recorded during your interview. You might find it helpful to watch Ira Glass talking about storytelling “for the ear:” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loxJ3FtCJJA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loxJ3FtCJJA)

- **A documentary video essay** *(suggested length 4-7 minutes)*. Everything that goes for an audio essay goes here too, but you also have visual storytelling techniques available to you. Beyond looking at examples of short videos posted by newspapers (like the *Life, Interrupted* series), you might check out *TriQuarterly* ([http://www.triquarterly.org/](http://www.triquarterly.org/)). They have published a range of both essays and things they call “cinepoems” that might help you think of techniques to try out. There’s an interview on their engagement with the form here:[http://www.northwestern.edu/newscenter/stories/2013/07/the-video-essay-celebrating-an-exciting-new-literary-form.html](http://www.northwestern.edu/newscenter/stories/2013/07/the-video-essay-celebrating-an-exciting-new-literary-form.html)

- **A photo essay**. In order to satisfy the multimodal requirement, this might make extensive use of captions, find itself accompanied by a transcript of an interview (or part of one), have an introduction/conclusion/article/series of micro-articles attached to it, or appear with a brief audio clip (or a few brief clips).
I'll try to provide tech resources as you need them—you may need to ask and/or come to office hours with files for us to look at together. As for software: iMovie is a decent option for basic video editing if you either have a mac or don’t mind using one in a lab. Premier (Adobe’s video editing software) is available on the same lab computers as Photoshop and Illustrator. If you're working with audio, **Audacity is an excellent free audio editor**: [http://audacity.sourceforge.net/](http://audacity.sourceforge.net/)

**You can borrow recording equipment** (audio and video) from CIDDE (equipment list here: [http://www.cidde.pitt.edu/technology/technology-loans](http://www.cidde.pitt.edu/technology/technology-loans)). You will need to plan when you expect to need equipment; you also need to print this form and have me sign it as your faculty sponsor:

[http://www.cidde.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/Student%20Equipment%20Loan%20Permission%20Form.pdf](http://www.cidde.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/Student%20Equipment%20Loan%20Permission%20Form.pdf)

**TIPS FOR GETTING GOOD AUDIO.**

1. Have a primary AND a backup recording device for the interview.
2. Interview the person in in a quiet place without a lot of background noise.
3. Place the microphone close enough to the person to capture his/her voice well.
4. Test your recording and microphone placement before launching into the interview.
5. Do not drag the interview on too long; doing so disrespects the time of your interviewee, plus it makes your editing job more difficult.
6. If you’re recording the interview over skype, your audio will not be as good. But you can record using outside programs such as Jing or Audacity or Garage Band, and/or using an external recorder.

**WRITING FOR THE EAR.** Below is a set of principles for writing for writing audio essays of any length, offered by the Stanford linguist and radio-essayist Geoffrey Nunberg (via Jonah G. Willihnganz, Stanford University).

1. Fix the listener in a particular time and place
2. Use concrete examples as often as possible, especially those that encourage identification
3. Signpost regularly: replace visual cues with aural cues, esp. with voice
4. Quote others sparingly, but use actualities (taped interviews, performances) freely
5. Be informal, conversational, but not flippant or careless—every word must count toward the point you are developing
6. Posit an “ideal listener” for your piece
7. Use short sentences and lists
8. Vary your inflection

**SOME EXTRAS:**

**LAST GUIDELINES:**

- While your final multimedia project may take any form you like, it should be clear that it was a major creative undertaking—one that required as much time and thought as a traditional 2000-3000 word feature article (if it doesn't take that form).
- You should expect to write a debrief in which you explain the rhetorical choices that you made and anything else I might want to know about your compositional practice.
In their introduction to *The Where, The Why, and The How* (Chronicle Books, 2012), Jenny Volovoski, Julia Rothman, and Matt Lamoth say, “We hope that by reading this book, you’ll learn some interesting things, but also enjoy reflecting on the mysteries themselves.” This is a bold double-goal. Your job in this, our final project before you turn your full attention to your final feature/website/revisions, is to create something that invites in the same kind of readers and readings that this weird book imagines.

How do you craft a text so that a reader will enjoy reflecting on a mystery? What counts as a mystery? How can one balance trying to get “the feeling” of wonder into the text while still teaching readers something about the issue at hand? These are just a few questions you may need to grapple with as you formulate your own where, why, or how project. Of course, you might also produce a when project or a who project.

**A Few Additional Guidelines:**

- While there is a lot of flexibility in terms of specifics, your project should consist of two parts---one visual, one verbal.

- Your project should take a specific question as its title. This question should suggest a mystery that “can’t be entirely explained in a few mouse clicks.” This might be a scientific question for which several seemingly credible or plausible answers have been suggested. It might be a more philosophical question about which an informed reader could easily be “of two minds.”

- The text you create should show you writing as an expert for an audience of curious non-experts.

- This text should be brief and very well edited. 350-500 words would be appropriate. You may adopt either a more scientific voice or a more poetic voice in your writing. Do try to approach the style of the piece in a way that is slightly different from your usual writing style—whatever that may be.

- The visual you create may be a visualization or an illustration, but it doesn’t have to be. We’ll talk about the wide range of things that might be acceptable in class. Collage or re-mix of existing materials is fine, but you shouldn’t just use an image that someone else created.

- You should turn in your project in whatever format is best suited to its content. You may do this in person in class on the 3rd (if you’ve created original artwork), as a file via Courseweb, or by using Courseweb to send me a link to a specific section of your website.

- As usual, you should expect to write a debrief (approx. 300 words) in which you explain the rhetorical choices that you made and anything else I might want to know about your compositional practice.
Your final project will not be a portfolio that includes everything you produced this semester (even if you choose to make a portfolio-style website). But it should represent an entire semester’s thought work—what you learned from each of our projects should be in evidence. That might happen through execution of a technical skill or simply through avoidance of something you tried out that didn’t work for you.

Things that satisfy this project’s requirements include:

☐ Production of a feature article or a feature multimedia piece that explores an aspect of your issue that you did not have a chance to explore earlier in the semester. Use the interview project as a rough guide when thinking about the size of the undertaking. Any form that would have been acceptable for the interview project is also acceptable as a final project. (Again, a 3000-word article’s effort.)

☐ Two dramatic revisions/re-imaginings of projects from earlier in the semester. A dramatic revision probably means keeping an idea/form but creating nearly 100% new sentences and/or graphics. Alternately, it might mean imagining a whole new form; for instance, turning your audio essay into a traditional textual piece. Or taking a short piece and making it into a polished feature. (Two-ness negotiable)

☐ Creation of a smart, comprehensive website devoted to your issue. This must showcase at least eight substantial pieces of content. If these are versions of projects and/or blog posts from earlier in the semester, they should be revised and (where your intended audience suggests that this is advisable) adapted to the new rhetorical situation created by your website. I should see lots of new little pieces of content (original header images, new “about” texts, resource pages, links to relevant media with descriptions, etc.).

☐ I am open to the idea of a collaborative final project. This could mean extending your affinity group website, working on something that really takes advantage of social media’s conversational capacities, or crafting a collaborative feature relevant to multiple people’s issues. You should be able to make the case for why your project will be different and more engaging as a group project; for example, in the time available to us, a group might be able to produce a longer, more professional video or audio essay that lets viewers/listeners encounter more sides of an issue. A collaborative project should be pre-approved by me.

* Rhetorical decision making and integration of form and content are two big things that I value when looking at these projects. We’ll have a conversation as a class about how the 15 points available to you for this project will be allocated. Some credit is reserved for a careful, detail-oriented debrief on both the project itself and how it fits into our semester’s work and/or writing for the public more broadly defined; you’ll get more details on the debrief.

Next Tuesday: Please bring three ideas for potential final projects. These should be typed out (and printed—you’ll turn them in to me after workshopping). Even if you’re already leaning strongly towards one project, bring two back-up ideas. For each idea you should: have a proposed form, have a specific question or subject to organize around, and imagine an ideal audience. At least one of these three things should be a departure from the forms/subtopics/audiences you’ve worked with thus far.
**Writing for the Public**

**Final Debrief / Reflection Letters**

K. Banazek

Spring 2014

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**A Few Guidelines:**

☐ Your reflection letter should be 500-1000 words long and addressed to me. I will read this before grading your final project, so this is a chance for you to teach me how to read your work well. It is a chance for you to direct my attention to the things you’ve done the most work on.

☐ Take this as an opportunity to reflect on both your final project and your experience in the class as a whole.

☐ However you imagine it, this piece of writing should be taken seriously; it should be clear and thoughtful and say something about your experiences writing/composing this semester and why those experiences matter (or why you think they don’t; as long as you can be articulate about that position).

☐ I appreciate honesty more than I appreciate flattery. I appreciate specificity most of all.

☐ What went well? What did you struggle with? How did you move through difficulties as you worked to put together your website? What are you proud of (this may not be the work that is the “best” or most polished from an aesthetic standpoint)?

☐ If you say, “I learned x in this class,” point to a specific place where your work shows you making use of idea/skill x. Quote from yourself.

☐ Look back at assignment sheets from early in the semester, the goals offered on your syllabus, your blog posts, and early drafts of your work. Consider referencing specific moments from these documents in your letter.

☐ Consider also useful experiences that you had during workshops or conferences. What is going to stick with you from this class? (This could be a bulleted list of things not to do. It could be a list of things you now know that you don’t know---things that you want to spend more time with in the future.)

☐ If you’re not excited about writing a traditional letter, you might pick a metaphorical object to compare your website to. Or you might choose to think of this piece of writing as something like the editor’s message at the beginning of a magazine or as something like the writing that appears in a gallery brochure describing an exhibition.

☐ You should upload your reflection letter to Courseweb alongside your final project.