

Narrative & Technology

Summer 2017 | Assignments & Instructions

Commonplace Book (CPB)

The commonplace book is a reading technology that came into popularity as early as the Early Modern era and persists in a variety of forms today. In simplest terms, it's a reading log, a place to record excerpts and examples from texts that strike you as interesting and relevant, and that might be useful in some future conversation, essay, lecture, or other form of public utterance. Traditionally, excerpts were organized by themes considered "common" to human experience and values, like "honor" and "beauty." After about the 19th century or so any notebook containing textual scraps and notes was called a commonplace book – but we're going to try out the more traditional rendition. For your personal commonplace books for this course you will:

- **Choose or design an organizational mechanic based on the themes and concepts you find interesting and relevant for your own work in this course.** You may try a system we read about, or come up with your own.
- **Log excerpts, bits of dialogue, examples, or even images or sketches that you feel correspond with your chosen themes of interest from the texts we read in this course (and beyond!).** *Keep in mind that because we're working from primary sources, the excerpts are often going to be examples that demonstrate a theme or concept, they might not be "about" that theme or concept directly.* Aim for 2-4 passages per text. Excerpts/examples should have sufficient depth and breadth for you to remember the context and for me to see why you might have filed it where you did. *Please date each entry so both you and I can keep track of how consistently you're using it.*
- **Bring your commonplace with you to class.** We will often use them to launch discussions or composition experiments, and we'll occasionally talk about your progress with it. Someone might also say something in discussion you'd like to log, or we might encounter something in a text that you missed and want to track, so it's good to have it at-the-ready.

On the second-to-last day of the term (Monday, June 19th) you'll turn in your commonplace books to me for final evaluation with a one-page introduction (double-spaced) on your use of it (which you'll turn in on Courseweb). *Make sure your name is clearly written on the inside of your notebook!*

Commonplace Books will be evaluated primarily through diligent and thoughtful use. Even if this style of note-taking isn't ultimately for you, I want to see that you gave it a good try, and that you put some thought into developing a system that could (in theory, if not in practice) work for you. Robust and appropriate use of the CPB will qualify for the full 10% of this portion of the grade. Occasional minimal entries (e.g. if a text we've read together has only one excerpt logged from it, or excerpts are too short) lowers eligibility to 8%. Occasional missed entries (e.g. no entries from a text we've read are included) reduces eligibility to 7%. *Frequently* missed or pithy entries lowers eligibility to 6%. Students who rarely or never post in their commonplace books will not receive credit.

Weekly Writing

Each week you will write three-to-four double-spaced pages that you'll turn in to our "Assignment Dropbox" on Courseweb by Saturday at 11:59pm. If you need more space feel free to take some liberties with length, but *quality is more important than quantity*. **There will always be at least one required element for everyone to do. Most weeks how you use your remaining pages will be up to you.** I offer options as potential places to focus your attention, but if you want to pursue your own direction that's fine, so long as it is clearly responding to the week's work. Feel free to run ideas past me first, if that helps. Your projects should not just repeat things said in class---they should add to, expand, complicate, or question discussions. Include things you thought of after class, didn't get a chance to say, or were thinking in response to homework tasks or supplemental resources you want to bring to the table to discuss.

Weekly writing will be evaluated primarily on appropriately identifying a focus for the project that responds thoughtfully and robustly (as much as possible within a few pages) to the week's focus, thoughtful use of any outside sources and case examples (when called for), and a willingness to take risks and experiment. Letter grades, in general, correspond to the criteria outlined on the syllabus.

Note: If you suspect that you will not be able to meet the Saturday deadline for any given week please talk to me as soon as possible. Remember, as relayed on the syllabus, I do not accept late work, but I am open to short extensions if you speak to me in advance.

WEEK 1: NARRATIVE & TECHNOLOGY

This week the (seemingly simple!) purpose of your weekly writing is to continue to expand on our key terms.

Everyone should write a one-page description of the organizational mechanics and principles you decided you want to try out for your commonplace book, and a discussion of the themes and concepts you'd like to track. Include at least one image from what you've done already with your CPB. Offer a rationale for why you think this strategy will work for you, and how it corresponds to or differs from your natural thinking process and/or note-taking strategies. *One thing to keep in mind: new themes or concepts to track may emerge over the next several weeks of the course, so make sure the system is constrained enough to help you stay organized, but flexible enough that you can add new themes as they come up.*

Some options for your remaining pages:

- A working definition of the word "technology" that you like (resist dictionary definitions)
- A working definition of the word "narrative" that you like (resist dictionary definitions)
- An expanded meditation on the ways in which technology and narrative intersect in the technologies you interact with/make with on a regular basis (perhaps narrowed to those you use as a student/intellectual, or those you use in your personal life, or those that are central to a hobby)
- What story do the technologies you use/interact with tell about you?
- A meditation on analog and digital technologies and their influence on narrative in your own life
- A meditation on the purely analog technologies in your life
- An exploration of the technologies of the page and screen are important to your discipline/major

WEEK 2: TECHNOLOGIES OF THE PAGE/WRITING MECHANICS & DEVICES

We've been reading texts that exploit and explore technologies of the page (e.g. paratext and typography) that became possible at or after the advent of print media, that become even easier with word processing and computer-

based composition (with those conventions built-in to formatting and writing modes). This week's short essays are an opportunity to explore that further, try out, and think more about technologies of the page.

Everyone should write a one-page rationale as an introduction and meta-commentary on the rest of your pages, connecting what you wrote to our collective thinking and discussions in-class.

Some options for your remaining pages (choose one, or an option of your own design):

- Write a scene, flash-fiction, lyric essay, or long-form poem exploiting a single textual/technical device for *narrative impact* (not the footnote, since we've spent a lot of time thinking about that in *The Mezzanine*).
- Write a short essay where you discuss some research you've done on a single textual device, and its impact or potential for narrative and story-telling.
- A short essay where you exploit a small handful of textual devices enacting and discussing them (in the mode of *Diagrammatic Writing*).
- Spend more time with a passage or two from *The Mezzanine* and/or *Diagrammatic Writing* and attempt to draw out some implications regarding technologies of the page and narrative/movement from those case examples.
- Bring a passage from *The Mezzanine* or *Diagrammatic Writing* into conversation with another text that makes use of paratextual and/or typographical devices. This may be another literary or poetic work, or could be an example of written work from your field of study or some other text. You may or may not want to reflect under the thematic/conceptual topic heading you filed the passages under in your commonplace book. *Note: we'll think about web-texts coming up, so focus on books/journal articles/things that are or are meant to be read as printed pages.*

WEEK 3: WEB TEXTS/HYPERTEXT/FLASH WORKS

This week we've been expanding our thinking about technologies of the book and page to technologies of the web and computational media. In your writing this week, think through this transition and the relationship of web/computational media affordances to earlier technologies of writing.

Everyone should write a one-page rationale as an introduction and meta-commentary on the rest of your pages, connecting what you wrote to our collective thinking and discussions in-class.

Some options for your remaining pages (choose one, or an option of your own design):

- Create (or at least start) a narrative web-text, taking advantage of the affordances of composing for the web. You need not make a website or web pages if this is not your expertise, there are plenty of platforms (like blogs, wikis, etc.) that would enable you to write robust web texts without knowing how to code. To turn these into Courseweb, provide me with a link or html files.
- A mimicry of a chapter from *Vanishing Point* from the position of your own experiences, trying out the stylistic choices Monson makes and meditating on the same topic from your own perspective.
- A plan/design/scheme for a flash poem. If you have the expertise, try and make one. If you don't, plan the kind of flash poem you would want to create, or the printed page version of your kinetic poems.
- An interpretive analysis of a web-text and the ways in which the affordances of the web contribute to what the text can do, and how narrative may or may not be a part of that.
- An interpretive analysis of a moment or moments from *Vanishing Point* and the companion website, as a meditation on the relationship between the two settings and works.
- Bring another web-text, hypertext, flash media, or other computational media to the table and discuss it considering our discussions this week.

WEEK 4: ROLE-PLAY, STORY-BOARDING, & INTERACTIVE NARRATIVES

Everyone should write a one-page update on your use of the commonplace book, attending to how you've used it to support in-class discussion and/or your weekly writing projects, and update me on how it's evolved over the course of the term. Include at least two images you've taken from your CPBs to demonstrate your points.

Some options for your remaining pages:

- Further develop your storyboard with screenshots from your gameplay, annotating frames with plot points, dialogue, etc. Introduce your story board with a 200-word statement/rationale for your approach and decisions.
- Imagine you are setting up a role-playing scenario in your chosen game for long-term gameplay. What rules, constraints, and conditions would you need to put into place to create the narrative and character you want to experience unfold through your gameplay? What would you need to build or do to further develop your character(s)? You may imagine this for long-term solo gameplay or multi-player, if your game accommodates it. You may want to include images from your gameplay to establish visuals from what you've been able to do already.
- Use [Twine](#), [Quest](#), or [Inklewriter](#) to write (begin to write) an interactive story.
- Offer an interpretive analysis of the mechanics of the video game you've been playing and how they contribute to the narrative potential (and limitations) of the game, and the player's "authoring" potential in-game.
- Offer a comparative analysis between the game we played together in class and another interactive narrative game, thinking critically about your experience as the player and your capacity (or lack of capacity) to impact the narrative and how it unfolds.

WEEK 5: REMIX & REPLAY

Note: This week's writing project is your final project proposal, and is due MONDAY by 11:59pm rather than later in the week, so I can read and evaluate it and you can get going in earnest on your final projects. See below for further details on the final projects.

Proposals should offer a rationale for why the project you're proposing represents the culmination of your thinking this term, citing discussions, projects, questions, etc. from your work to support your focus. Proposals should clearly identify who your intended audience is, and how that chosen audience might change how you attend to your topic and project differently than the weekly writing throughout the term. Include any logistical questions or concerns you have that I might be able to respond to and help with.

Final Project

Your final project is an opportunity to create an extensive and polished project you're proud of, inspired by or developed from work you've tried out earlier in the term, due **Wednesday, June 21 by 11:59pm**. *Extensions cannot be granted for final projects.* **Your final project should stand on its own.** Aside from the rationale that will introduce your project, it should not reference anything your audience wouldn't have access to without being a member of this class. Plan for roughly 8-10 pages, or the equivalent, depending on your mode and method.

Some options for your final projects:

- A fully developed short story, long-form poem, non-fiction essay, or lyric essay that takes on and exploits a paratextual or typographical device or hypertext. This may be a revision of an earlier piece, or a new one.
- A fully developed commonplace book rationale with sample pages. Perhaps in the style of John Locke's argument-through-enactment of his commonplace book practice.
- A fully developed interactive game created in [Twine](#), [Quest](#), or [Inklewriter](#).
- A fully developed roleplaying scheme for world-making and character development in a game of your choice, for the purposes of recruiting other players to join you. Attend to the rules and constraints you must impose for gameplay that are not already game mechanics. Use gameplay screenshots as illustrations.
- A fully developed story-board of a full scene/act/story using screenshots from gameplay.
- A 10- to 12-page analytical essay on one of our shared course texts offering an expanded argument on the relationship between, and the functionality of, narrative and technology in that work.
- A 10- to 12-page analytical essay on a text, technology, artifact, tool, or game that *could have been* a text or tool for this course using the analytical skills and concepts learned in this course
- An analysis of a common genre of text in your home field/discipline/academic major using the key concepts from this course to understand textual and rhetorical conventions and mechanics.
- A collection of transformative constraints and experiments using the same base text
- Sometime entirely other that you imagine being useful for personal or professional purposes, that takes advantage of something you've thought about through this course.
- A project of your own design inspired by the work and thinking you started this term

Introductory Rationale

Write this last. 500-700 words double-spaced should be sufficient. Your final rationale should *teach me how to read your final project*. It should reference the work of this course that contributed to your project and purpose. In addition, you should reflect a bit on the class, what you thought of the experience and our experiments, and how you'll take the thinking you started this summer into other contexts. *Reference specifics. Discussions, projects, activities, workshops, texts, peers' contributions, one-on-one meetings, etc.* You may choose to imitate earlier works from this course that have served as notes/annotations/instructional works (e.g. Ander Monson's "How-To" chapter), perhaps those you enjoyed but are not otherwise employing in your final project. *Take this component of your project seriously. It should not be an afterthought.*

Presentations

On the last day of class you'll each offer an informal presentation to share your final project with the rest of the class. Bring in some way of visualizing your project, either with a couple of slides or an excerpt, a piece to read, some actual component of the project you can share and let the rest of us experience.